

From the Stoa to the Commune: Ancient Greek and Marxist Convergences in the Critique of Political Economy: A Heterodox Reading of Classical Thought

Dr. Ioannis Aznaouridis

Economist, Public Administration, General Staff of The Hellenic Army

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ABSTRACT

Despite the significant differences in historical, economic, and social context, the economic and social thought of Karl Marx exhibits fundamental points of convergence with ideas articulated by ancient Greek thinkers such as the Presocratics, Plato, Aristotle, the Sophists, and the Stoics. These affinities, though not always direct or systematic, reflect shared concerns regarding the nature of property, the structure of society, and the value of labor, as well as a critical stance toward forms of social stratification and economic power. The present study seeks to trace these convergences and to analyze the ways in which Marxist critique of political economy engages—explicitly or implicitly—with ancient philosophical approaches to labor, social organization, inequality, alienation, the historicity of institutions, and the ethical foundations of economic life.

Keywords: Marxist Political Economy, Classical Thought, Marx and Antiquity, Philosophy of Economy, Critical Theory. Historicity of Institutions.

1. Introduction

The “Stoa” and the “Commune” constitute two historical-philosophical symbols which, through a metaphorical synthesis, signify the intellectual connection and trajectory from ancient Greek philosophical thought to the modern revolutionary theory of Marx. The Stoa refers initially to Zeno's Stoa, that is, to Stoic philosophy, but at the same time symbolizes the broader domain of ancient Greek thought. In this way, it acquires a multivalent character, embodying rationalism, ethical grounding, the improvement of political and economic life, and the notion of human community. Correspondingly, the Commune refers directly to the Paris Commune of 1871—a historical moment that Marx perceived as a prototype of the future socialist state, a symbol of revolutionary rupture, the abolition of private property, the establishment of popular sovereignty, and the implementation of historical materialism (Badiou, 2021a; Kouvelakis, 2021).

Marx engages with the ancient world not as a continuator but as a critical transformer. Through the lens of material history, he reinterprets philosophical categories born in classical antiquity, liberates them from their metaphysical foundations, and repositions them within the field of social practice. The convergence is more structural than superficial: it concerns the deep conviction that philosophy must interpret and transform society. Just as for the ancients philosophy was a way of life, for Marx it is a tool of emancipation. In this sense, Marxism may be read not only as a revolutionary critique, but also as the ultimate metamorphosis of ancient Greek political philosophy (Schuringa, 2025).

The purpose of the present study is to investigate philosophical and political convergences between ancient Greek thought and Marxist theory. The paper seeks to highlight how Marx, through a materialist reframing, first adopts and then transforms philosophical concepts from antiquity—such as community, ethics, reason, or political action—integrating them into a revolutionary project of social transformation. Through the symbolic framework 'Stoa – Commune', the paper proposes an interpretive bridge between two historically radical forms of thought, tracing a subterranean line of continuity in the radical critique of the economic and political system

2. Political Philosophy in Ancient Greece: Ethics, Community, and Economic Order

The political philosophy of ancient Greece emerged as a response to crises of reason and action within the city-state. From Plato to Aristotle, and through the Stoic tradition as well, ancient Greek philosophers sought to define "justice" not merely as a legal imperative, but as a moral principle of social order (Bhandari, 2002). At the center of ancient Greek political thought lies the *polis*(city), conceived as the embodiment of collective life, within which economy, moral virtue, and political justice converge (Vernant, 1982; Weiss, 2025).

Plato envisions an ideal society organized around the principle of complementary labor, in which social classes correspond to different psychic inclinations and serve the harmony of the whole (Plato, *Republic*, 369b–372e). Property is called into question—particularly for the “guardian class”—and economic inequality is viewed as a factor that corrodes political unity. Though grounded in metaphysics, Plato’s model suggests an early critique of economic stratification and exploitation as drivers of political decline (Reeve, 2006; Weiss, 2025).

Aristotle, more grounded in experience, defines the *polis* as a community aimed at living well (*eudaimonia*), and clearly distinguishes household economy (*oikonomia*) from the art of acquisition (*chrematistics*). The former is concerned with meeting the needs of the community, while the latter—especially when pursued as an end in itself—distorts the natural order of social life (Aristotle, *Politics*, I.8–10). At this point, Aristotle offers a critique that resembles an early

form of anti-capitalist discourse: money should not multiply for its own sake, nor should the pursuit of wealth replace moral virtue (Meikle, 1995a; Jagannathan, 2024).

At the same time, Stoic philosophy, centered on rationality and the cosmic order of reason, proposes a version of cosmopolitanism and moral equality, in which all human beings participate in reason and nature (Limaj, 2024). The Stoic ideal reveals an early conception of a universal community (*oikoumene*) and a rejection of artificial divisions based on social or class origin (Long & Sedley, 1987). Social justice does not arise from institutions of power, but from alignment with reason and the natural order of the world. Within this framework, the notion of community as a moral duty resonates with the Marxist idea of human solidarity beyond class alienation (Badiou, 2021b; Sherman, 2021).

In general terms, ancient Greek political thought—though situated within pre-modern and often aristocratic frameworks—offers a conceptual system and set of criteria that resonate with aspects of Marxist critique, such as the rejection of unchecked property, the emphasis on the moral grounding of politics, the centrality of community, and the interrelation between economy and social justice. The Stoa, both as a philosophical school and a metaphorical reference point, emerges as an early site of critical reflection on political economy—one that Marx does not follow linearly, but rather transforms critically within the context of his revolutionary project (Schuringa, 2025).

3. The Foundations of the Marxist Worldview

The core components of Marxist thought—through which the world, history, society, economy, and human action are interpreted—form a unified framework for understanding reality. This framework is grounded in specific principles and concepts that constitute the Marxist worldview.

a. **Historical Materialism:** The history of societies is interpreted based on the material conditions of life (production, labor, technology), rather than ideas, religions, or moral norms (Marx & Engels, 1846; McLellan, 1971). *“It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness”* (Marx, 1859, *Preface*). Historical materialism¹ expresses the essence of the materialist conception of history, placing material production at the foundation of social development (Sidorov, 1980).

b. **Class Struggle:** The historically persistent and necessary conflict between exploiters and the exploited, which constitutes a driving force of historical development. This conflict unfolds

¹ Marx distinguishes between vulgar and historical materialism—a distinction not explicitly found in ancient thought, but one that finds analogies in the materialism of Democritus and Epicurus, the institutional-political analysis of Aristotle, and the Stoic worldview concerning natural order and one’s duty within the social whole.

between social classes with opposing interests, primarily between those who own the means of production and those who work with them without ownership. Historical examples include slaves and free citizens in antiquity, serfs and feudal lords in the Middle Ages, and proletarians and bourgeois in capitalism. Key features of class struggle include: the opposition of class interests, exploitation, alienation (the estrangement of workers from the product of their labor), the legitimization or concealment of class inequality by the dominant ideology, and the historical contribution of class struggle to social development (Poulantzas, 1974; Bottomore, 1983; Marx, Engels, 2005). The struggle between conflicting interests lies at the core of Marxist analysis of history and society, as social transformations are understood as the outcome of these conflicts (Marx & Engels, 1848).

c. Forces of Production and Relations of Production: The Forces of Production are divided, on the one hand, into Means of Labor (tools, machinery, factories) and Objects of Labor (raw materials, natural resources), and on the other hand, into Labor Power, that is, the human beings engaged in the production of material goods (Marx, 1867). Relations of Production are defined as the social relations connected to the ownership and use of the means of production - that is, whether one is an owner (capitalist) or a worker (Marx & Engels, 1848). Thus, the way production is organized determines the type of society. The intensity of class analysis stems from who owns the means of production. In the capitalist system, it is the bourgeoisie that owns the means of production and secures profit from the surplus value generated through the labor of others. In contrast, the working class lacks access to the means of production and is compelled to sell its labor power as a commodity in order to survive (Marx, 1867; Harvey, 2010).

d. Exploitation of Labor: Under capitalism, the worker is not compensated according to the full value of their labor. Their labor produces more value than what they are paid for. The difference between the value created by the worker and the wage they receive is called surplus product or surplus value. Specifically, the worker sells their labor power to the capitalist in exchange for a wage that covers only their basic needs (food, shelter, and the reproduction of labor power). This excess value is appropriated by the capitalist, who uses it for personal gain transforming it into profit, reinvestment, or capital accumulation (Marx, 1867; Sweezy, 1942; Mandel, 1976; Fine & Saad-Filho, 2016).

e. Alienation: In the capitalist mode of production, the worker experiences a profound form of alienation, as they become increasingly estranged from the product of their labor (which does not belong to them), from the very act of labor (which is performed under compulsion), from other people (whom they compete against), and from their own self (as they are unable to realize their true potential) (Marx, 1844; Fromm, 1961; Ollman, 1976).

f. Capitalist Crisis and Historical Transformation: Capitalism exhibits an inherent tendency toward collapse, generating internal contradictions (such as overproduction and inequality) that inevitably lead to crises. Thus, the transition to socialism is viewed as a historical necessity. The historical movement of society, driven by class struggle, tends toward the transformation into a higher socio-economic formation. The working class, as the revolutionary subject, is called upon to seize political power and abolish private ownership of the means of production, establishing a socialist society in which production is organized according to social needs rather than profit motives (Luxemburg, 1913; Foster, 2009a; Harvey, 2014).

g. Communism: As the ultimate goal of the historical trajectory described by Marxism, communism is defined as the establishment of a classless society based on common ownership of the means of production and the free development of all individuals. The state, as a mechanism of class domination, becomes obsolete and "withers away" (Engels, 1884). Social well-being is grounded in the principle: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" (Marx, 1875). The communist society thus represents the historical horizon of complete human emancipation—beyond alienation, oppression, and inequality (Marx, 1875; Engels, 1884; Žižek, 2009).

4. Discussion

The thought of Karl Marx, shaped within the dramatic social and economic context of the 19th century, is regarded as a quintessential product of modernity. However, it is not severed from the classical philosophical tradition; on the contrary, it incorporates, critiques, and reinterprets fundamental concepts of ancient Greek thought (Chitty & McIvor, 2024; Schuringa, 2025). Marx himself studied ancient philosophy extensively -particularly Aristotle- and his use of categories such as *essence (substance)*, *species*, *form*, *praxis*, and *teleology* signals a reflective engagement with the classical world (Levine, 2021a). A comparative examination of the two frameworks reveals both radical differences and striking affinities in the way they conceive society, labor, and freedom (Lazarus, 2022).

4.1 The Prefiguration of Dialectical Materialism

Marx's materialist approach, although philosophically grounded in a radical break with Hegelian idealism and influenced by Feuerbach, also engages -albeit indirectly- with Presocratic thought (Liu & Wei, 2024; Yang, 2024; Schuringa, 2025). Heraclitus (544–483 BCE) viewed reality as a continuous flow, constant transformation, and conflict of opposites, elements that are also embedded in Marxian dialectical materialism (Heraclitus, 2001). The notion of dialectic as the driving force of historical development, which Marx adopts and inverts from Hegel (Koložova,

2022), finds its philosophical precursor in the Heraclitean principle that ‘war is the father of all things’ (Heraclitus, fr. 53 DK).

Marx was also significantly influenced by Democritus (460–370 BCE), whom he studied extensively in his doctoral dissertation on the difference between the Democritean and Epicurean philosophies of nature (Marx, 1841/1983). Democritus was a foundational figure in developing a materialist, causal, and atomistic view of the world (Johnson, 2024), an interpretation that Marx transposes to the social realm. Although he ultimately transcends Democritus’s atomism, Marx adopts the notion that reality is constituted by a material base, conceived not as a static collection of elements, but as a dynamic relationship of social and productive structures (Bailey, 1928).

Marx’s historical materialism is based on the principle that the material conditions of life -that is, the productive forces and the relations of production- constitute the foundation upon which social institutions, ideologies, and forms of consciousness are built (Marx & Engels, 1970). In a break with the abstract idealism of modern philosophy, it continues the causal naturalist approach of Democritus, while simultaneously enriching it with historicity and sociality, placing the human being as an active subject and labor as the mediating force between matter and history.

The fundamental premise of historical materialism—that matter precedes the idea (Marx & Engels, 1846/1970), stands in direct opposition to Platonic ontology, in which the Idea transcends empirical reality and holds ontological primacy. In contrast, both Democritus and Epicurus (341–270 BCE) regard matter as the original and foundational substance of the world (Bailey, 1928). Marx, fascinated by Epicurus, recognizes in him a forerunner of the worldview that links freedom with natural knowledge, remarking notably: 'Philosophy finds in Epicurus the liberation from religious fear through the material understanding of the world' (Marx, 1841/1983, p. 55).

The connection between Marxist materialism and pre-Socratic philosophy highlights a worldview grounded in material primacy; however, the political dynamism of this perspective is more fully expressed in the theory of class struggle, where the material base determines not only ontology but also the structure of society.

4.2 Class Struggle and Political Conflict

Marx’s theory of class struggle is founded on the premise that the history of all societies is a history of class conflicts (Marx & Engels, 1848/2010). According to the author of *Capital*, classes arise from the relations of production and are in opposition due to irreconcilable material interests. The conflict between the bourgeoisie and the working class serves as the driving force behind historical change and the transition from capitalism to communism (Cassidy, 2025).

Although the concept of class struggle as a historical-materialist paradigm is original to Marx, analogies and anticipatory elements can be found in ancient Greek philosophy. Greek thinkers—particularly Plato and Aristotle—recognized the existence of social divisions and conflicts, although they interpreted them within different conceptual frameworks (De Ste. Croix, 2023).

Plato, in the *Republic*, refers to the division of the city into "two cities" -that of the rich and that of the poor (*Republic*, 422e)- a statement that reflects his awareness of social oppositions. His ideal city (*platonian polis*) aims to bridge these divisions through education and the allocation of roles based on natural aptitude rather than wealth. Despite its utopian dimension, the Platonic *polis* acknowledges the existence of conflict and seeks to overcome it through a hierarchical yet just order (Plato, 2004).

For his part, Aristotle in the *Politics* acknowledges the division of society into rich and poor and analyzes *stasis* (civil strife) as an inevitable consequence of inequality (*Politics*, Book V). The philosopher does not deny the conflictual dynamics of society but seeks to balance them through the middle class and political virtue. Whereas Marx views conflict as a creative force leading to emancipation, Aristotle regards it as a threat to political stability (Aristotle, 1996). Particularly interesting is the ancient Greek concept of *stasis*² not only as a natural phenomenon of political life but also as an expression of injustice and a demand for political change. Historians such as Thucydides (3.82–83) vividly depict the violence and upheaval that social conflict entails (Thucydides, 1996). Marx incorporates the idea of *stasis* but infuses it with a materialist and historical orientation, recognizing conflict not as an occasional political event but as a structural component of social relations (Das, 2023).

The dynamics of class conflict, as described by Marx, are rooted in the deeper structure of the relations of production, which determine social position, power, and access to resources. To understand this conflict, it is necessary to examine how the production process itself is organized.

4.3 Organization of Production

In its conception of the elements and relations of production, Marxism retains a materialist approach. The elements of production are divided into means of labor (tools, machines, factories), objects of labor (raw materials, natural resources), and labor power. The relations of production are determined by the ownership of the means of production and create class distinctions between those who own them and those who sell their labor as a commodity (Marx, 1867; Marx & Engels, 1848; Harvey, 2010; Kosík & Thompson, 2022). This structural analysis

² Internal political upheaval, civil strife

explains the unequal distribution of power and wealth in capitalist societies, where the bourgeoisie extracts and appropriates surplus value from the exploitation of the working class.

The above line of reasoning can engage in dialogue with ancient Greek philosophy, especially with the works of Plato and Aristotle.

Plato, in the *Republic*, proposes a strict division of society into classes (rulers, guardians, producers), based on each individual's "nature." The producers -those who labor to meet the material needs of the city- have no access to power, just as workers under capitalism have no access to the means of production (Schofield, 2021).

Aristotle, in the *Politics*, acknowledges the importance of labor and production for the sustainability of the city, but grounds the legitimization of inequality in his theory of "natural slaves", individuals whose natural destiny, he argues, is to work for the benefit of others (Desmond, 2020; Höffe, 2021).

Marx rejects this naturalization of social relations. For him, the relations of production are not eternal or natural but historically determined and therefore subject to change. Whereas the ancient philosophers interpret the worker's position as static and intrinsic, Marx sees it as a result of the structure of production relations. The laboring subject is not condemned to subjugation; it can become a revolutionary agent capable of transforming society through the abolition of exploitation (Meiksins Wood, 2020).

The structure of production relations, as analyzed, leads to specific forms of power and wealth distribution. However, for Marx, labor is not merely a position within the economic system but also a crucial site of alienation, potential emancipation, and exploitation.

4.4 The exploitation of labor

Marx highlights labor as an essential determining factor of human existence. Labor is not merely a means of survival but a form of expression and realization of the human essence (Marx, 1844; Marx, 1867; Fromm, 1961). Paradoxically, a similar view can be found in Aristotle, particularly in *De Anima* (DA, 412a–417b)³ and in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1098a–1098b), where "energeia"⁴ (activity in accordance with eudaimonia⁵) is linked to the fulfillment of human

³ "On the Soul", a foundational philosophical treatise exploring the nature, faculties, and functions of the soul, particularly in relation to perception, intellect, and life processes.

⁴ For Aristotle, energeia is the active realization of a being's potential – its full expression in accordance with its nature.

nature through action. The key difference is that, in the classical world, manual labor is considered inferior and assigned to slaves, who are not regarded as full citizens but as “speaking tools” (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253b). It is viewed as a lower form of activity, lacking the contemplative element, and therefore unworthy of full political life (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1254b–1255a). In contrast, Marx elevates labor to a central domain of both alienation and potential liberation. The theory of surplus value grounds the concept of exploitation. The difference between the value the worker produces and the wage they receive—the surplus value—becomes profit, investment, or capital accumulation for the capitalist (Marx, 1867/1990; Mandel, 1976; Fine & Saad-Filho, 2016).

This conception can engage fruitfully with ancient Greek philosophy, which, although unfamiliar with the notion of wage labor in its capitalist form, offers significant tools for understanding the economic and moral function of labor.

It is worth recalling that Aristotle, in the *Politics* (I.1257a–b), distinguishes between *oikonomia*⁶ and *chrematistics*, considering the former as the production of goods to meet needs, while the latter—especially *unnatural* chrematistics—leads to the pursuit of wealth as an end in itself. This distinction anticipates the Marxist critique of capital accumulation, in which labor becomes alienated and is incorporated into a mechanism for generating surplus value for private gain (Sweezy, 1942,). At the same time, the notion of necessity and compulsion in labor is also present in Plato and Aristotle who view labor for survival as inherently inferior, deprived of political and moral freedom (Aristotle, *Politics*, I.1254b; Plato, *Republic*, 369b–d). For Marx, the worker’s freedom to sell their labor is merely formal, since in practice the necessity of subsistence forces them to submit to the conditions of the market (Marx, 1867/1990).

This dialectic culminates at the level of the social distribution of surplus. Whereas in ancient Athens surplus (such as taxes or war spoils) could be redistributed for the common good (Ober, 2015), in capitalism surplus value is privatized, reinforcing inequality and the concentration of power. Thus, Marxist theory offers a critical account of the economy, in which surplus production is not neutral but socially biased. Finally, the Socratic and Cynic challenge to the market as a domain of justice (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, I.2.58–61; Diogenes Laertius, VI.2–6) finds ethical affinity with Marx’s critique of wage labor as an unequal exchange disguised by a formal equality.

⁵ “Eudaimonia”, can be translated as “flourishing,” is the highest human good in Aristotle’s ethics, the fulfillment of one’s rational and moral capacities through virtuous activity.

⁶ “Oikonomia”: the ethical management of necessities for living, distinct from profit-oriented economics.

Exploitation, however, is not limited to the material inequality in the distribution of surplus; it reaches deeper existential dimensions. Labor, instead of being a means for the realization of human essence, is transformed into a source of alienation. This process of alienation is central to Marxist anthropology.

4.5 Alienation and Self-Realization

The concept of alienation in Marx describes a condition in which the human being—particularly the worker under capitalism is estranged from themselves, their labor, and other people, thereby losing the ability to actualize their own essence (Marx, 1844). Alienation is not merely economic but deeply ontological, referring to the disconnection of the individual from their very human nature, which is defined through conscious, creative, and social labor (Musto, 2021; Llaguno, 2023).

Although ancient Greek philosophy does not explicitly formulate a corresponding theory of alienation, we nonetheless encounter structurally analogous concerns regarding the loss of identity and human wholeness, especially when one fails to live in accordance with nature and reason (Musacchio, 2025). In Plato, the human being is called to live according to their true nature, that is, as a being who seeks the knowledge of the Good and the harmony of the soul's parts (*Republic*, 433a–444e). Failure to pursue this orientation leads to internal fragmentation, a form of 'psychic alienation' expressed as injustice and disharmony. Similarly, Aristotle defines the human being as a 'political animal' and a 'rational being' who achieves fulfillment through virtuous activity in community (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b–1098a). The non-realization of this nature—when one lives as a slave, in isolation, or devoted to non-virtuous aims—constitutes a deprivation of essence, that is, a condition of existential failure.

The fundamental distinction lies in the object and social conditions of self-realization. In Aristotle, fulfillment is achieved through the virtuous use of reason within the polis, while in Marx, it is attained through non-alienated, creative labor under conditions of social equality. Nevertheless, both traditions link human essence to activity, either as “*energeia kat' aretēn*” which means activity in accordance with virtue (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapter 7, 1098a16–18), or as labor as creation (Marx, 1844).

Since alienation under capitalism is rooted in the very structure of production, the concept of value becomes the philosophical and social foundation of this estrangement. The analysis of value -both economic and anthropological- thus reveals how labor is transformed from a creative force into a source of alienation.

4.6 The concept of value

Marx's concept of 'value' is not merely economic, but possesses philosophical depth, which unfolds in direct or indirect dialogue with classical Greek thought, primarily that of Aristotle. In the third volume of *Capital*, Marx himself explicitly refers to Aristotle as the first to grasp the problem of equality within the context of exchange, although, as he notes, «*the lack of the concept of value prevents Aristotle from solving the problem*» (Marx, 1991, p. 245)

In this context, the 'distortion' of use-value into exchange-value -a central theme in the *Critique of Political Economy*- could be seen as a kind of modern transcription of the Platonic or Aristotelian critique of *chrematistics*. Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, analyzes exchange-value through the lens of social recognition and necessity, distinguishing it from the 'natural' use of a good. This distinction reappears in Marx in the form of the opposition between use-value and exchange-value, establishing labor as the universal mediating factor of value (Heinrich, 2012).

The concept of 'substance' (*ousia*) found in Aristotle, understood as something underlying and causal, is reinterpreted by Marx in a materialist turn as the 'social substance' of labor. Value is not an inherent qualitative attribute of the product, but an expression of social relations of production (Postone, 1993). Here, Marx redefines the Aristotelian *ousia*, not as a fixed ideal substrate, but as a social relation embodied in labor. Thus, Marx's theory of value is not adequately understood merely as a transformation of classical political economy (e.g., Ricardo), but as a profound philosophical commentary on the conditions of human social existence. This problematic gains particular significance in light of ancient Greek concerns with just exchange and social order. In Marx, value is equally a field of critique: where equality in exchange conceals inequality in production—that is, conceals the exploitation of labor power—the philosophical conception of value becomes a tool of social deconstruction (Arthur, 2004).

Marx's engagement with ancient Greek philosophy, especially with Aristotle, is not historically exhaustive, but it is revealing of the internal logic of his theory. It thus becomes evident that the Marxian concept of value is not only an economic but also a philosophical construction, maintaining a creative dialogue with humanity's enduring quest for what is 'just' and what is 'worthy' (Levine, 2021b; Lazarus, 2025; Schuringa, 2025).

4.7 Justice as social equilibrium

Ancient political philosophy places justice at the center of the discussion concerning the good polity. In Plato, justice is not identified with equality but with harmony and the rational ordering among the parts of the city and the soul (Kraut, 2017). Aristotle, more of a pragmatist, distinguishes between distributive and corrective justice, linking the former to proportion and the

latter to the restoration of balance (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1131a–1132b). These ancient Greek conceptions of justice, though developed within pre-modern frameworks, provide theoretical tools for the contemporary critique of social order.

Marx does not ground his critique of capitalism in abstract moral standards of justice, but in the structural asymmetry of the relations of production, where apparent equality conceals class domination. Although he avoids the normative use of the term 'justice', he identifies in capitalism a structural injustice: the appropriation of surplus value by the capitalist class. This relation is unjust not in moral terms, but on the basis of the material conditions of production.

The worker is not compensated for the full extent of their labor power, and this structurally unequal relation is embedded in the institutions of the market and the state (Marx, 1867, pp. 340–376). The notion of balance and teleological fulfillment -both moral and social- which we find in the ancients, thus takes on a new meaning in Marx, in politico-economic terms: the pursuit of a society in which classes no longer exist and labor ceases to be coercive, becoming instead a form of creative expression (Basu, Orellana, 2022).

The concept of justice in Marx is detached from individual morality and linked to the overall reconfiguration of social relations. This fundamental critical shift forms the basis for the Marxist deconstruction of classical political economy.

4.8 From *oikonomia* to political economy and the Marxist critique of political economy

If we return to the Aristotelian distinction between *oikonomikē* (the art of properly managing the necessary goods for living) and *chrematistikē* (the pursuit of wealth/money as an end in itself) (*Politics*, 1257b), we understand that Aristotle grounds the concept of economic activity in necessity and self-sufficiency, that is, within a 'natural' framework, and not within the 'unnatural' deviation brought about by *chrematistics*, which threatens moral and political order. This threat arises from the fact that the means becomes an end in itself.

Marx notes this distinction in the first volume of *Capital* (1867), when examining the transition from the commodity as a bearer of use-value and exchange-value to the autonomy of money and capital as self-reproducing value (Marx, 1867, pp. 247–261). The form of the commodity leads to a world in which social relations appear as relations between things—something that bears moral-philosophical affinity with Aristotle's concern about the transgression of nature's limits. The 'fetishism of the commodity,' that is, the emergence of social relations as relations between things, constitutes a theoretical continuation of the Aristotelian concern with the excess of 'measure' and the deification of money as an end in itself. Marx explicitly refers to Aristotle in the same work, noting that the Greek philosopher intuited the difference between use-value and

exchange-value, but could not fully analyze it, as the division of labor in his time had not yet sufficiently developed (Marx, 1867, p. 151, footnote).

The Marxist theory of political economy, as developed in the 19th century, constitutes one of the most radical critical analyses of the capitalist mode of production. Although it is shaped within a distinctly modern historical and social horizon, it nevertheless contains philosophical and conceptual seeds that can be traced back to the ancient Greek philosophical tradition. The Marxist critique of political economy engages, explicitly or implicitly, with the philosophical approaches of the ancient Greeks, revealing a dynamic relationship not merely of influence, but of re-signification of philosophical concepts first formulated in the classical world (Pack, 2010; Sayers, 2011; Eich, 2022). Marx's critique of political economy is not exhausted in theoretical analysis; it becomes a tool for the practical overthrow of social relations, thus opening the field for revolutionary political action.

Marx's engagement with political economy is not a neutral scientific endeavor, but an act of critique aimed at changing the world. The philosophical and economic critique he develops is transformed into political action, where the concept of revolution functions as a modern analogue of virtue—not as individual fulfillment, but as the collective transformation of social being.

4.9 Political Action: From Virtue to Revolution

Ancient Greek ethics, particularly in Aristotle, is grounded in the concept of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and virtue, understood as a stable disposition that enables a free and virtuous life within the community. *Phronesis* and virtue are not merely forms of individual moral cultivation, but constitute the foundation for participation in political life—that is, in genuine practical wisdom that serves the common good (Nicomachean Ethics 1140b and Politics 1252a).

Similarly, in Marx, moral action is not detached from the social context, but is a deeply political act. Revolution is not merely a means of institutional change, but an expression of human dignity against alienation (Gilabert, 2020; Zanetti, 2022). Marx does not construct a moral system based on abstract principles; human 'dignity' and 'freedom' do not arise from normative axioms, but from the practical capacity of individuals to co-shape their social being, free from coercion and alienation.

Despite the absence of metaphysical foundations in Marxism -since Marx rejects any static or essentialist conception of human nature- the idea that the human being possesses an 'essence' repressed by existing institutions remains alive. However, this essence does not preexist as an abstract entity, but is formed and manifested through praxis, within the relations of production. The human being *is* what they do (Kondrashov, 2020; Nelson, 2024).

This perspective bears a strong resemblance to Plato's allegory of the cave: just as the prisoners in the cave, bound in chains, turn toward the shadows instead of the truth, so too is human consciousness under capitalism held captive by the appearance of the commodity form and by class domination. For Marx, alienated consciousness is not the result of intellectual error, but the outcome of material social relations that reproduce a false image of reality (Lukács, 1971; Feenberg, 2014).

Freedom, therefore, is not an individual or abstract condition, but a historical task concerning the abolition of alienating relations of production and the formation of a society in which consciousness is no longer determined by the domination of the commodity and class exploitation. Only then can the human being 'emerge from the cave', confront the truth of their existence, and exist as an authentic, socially free being (Feenberg, 2014; Roberts, 2017).

If the revolutionary act constitutes humanity's attempt to reclaim itself by transcending alienated forms of existence, then the question arises: what is the ultimate meaning of this movement? Is there a historical purpose that runs through the trajectory of emancipation? In this context, freedom and justice are not merely political demands, but perhaps also teleological constants of human history.

4.10 Teleology, Freedom, and Justice"

Marxist theory of political economy—particularly as articulated through the problematic of historical movement and social emancipation, contains conceptual and philosophical ruptures that recall classical Greek philosophical discourse. Although Marx develops his theory within the framework of modern criticism of capitalism, his fundamental conception of historical necessity, human freedom, and just social organization remains in dialogue -explicitly or implicitly- with ancient Greek thought (McCarthy, 2019; Vrousalis, 2021).

The idea that capitalism contains inherent contradictions -such as overproduction, inequality, and alienation- which lead to historical crises and transformations (Luxemburg, 1913; Foster, 2009b; Harvey, 2014), expresses a teleological logic of social history. This logic resonates with the Aristotelian conception of nature and the polis, where every being and every community moves toward the realization of its 'telos'—its entelechy (*entelecheia*)⁷ (Meikle, 1995b). Analogously,

⁷ Every being has a natural end, a purpose. Communities (such as the *polis*) have an end as well: to ensure the good life of their citizens. The movement toward this end is natural and teleological, it is not random or without direction. *Entelecheia* (ἐντελέχεια = *en* + *telos* + *echō*) is the final purpose embedded in the process of a being's development. According to Aristotle, all beings and human communities (such as the city) have a natural purpose, and their course through life is oriented toward the realization of that purpose, to be completed according to their nature. This final stage of completion is *entelecheia*.

Marxism recognizes in the historical development of society a dynamic progression toward socialism and, ultimately, communism—not as an arbitrary goal, but as a necessary expression of the contradictions within material reality (McCarthy, 1992).

The final form of this development -the communist society- is described by Marx as the condition in which 'the state withers away' and where 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' (Marx, 1875; Engels, 1884). Here, the notion of the full development of the human being resonates with the Aristotelian idea of *eudaimonia* as the realization of reason, capacities, and the social nature of the human within the *polis* (Sayers, 2011). The human being is not merely a producer of material goods, but a being with political, moral, and creative substance, and their social liberation presupposes the abolition of alienating structures. The Marxian principle 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs' (Marx, 1875) forms a conception of social justice that combines ethics and economics — much like in Aristotelian political philosophy, where justice is the virtue that regulates the distribution of common goods according to proportion, merit, and contribution (Arthur, 2004; Meikle, 1995b). Aristotelian political theory aims at a *polis* that ensures the just participation of all in common prosperity; similarly, Marx's communist polity envisions the abolition of all forms of class domination and the organic integration of production with social needs, rather than with profit.

Thus, the element of Marxist theory that describes the historical necessity of the transition from capitalism to socialism and ultimately to communism not only does not exclude the philosophical dimension, but constitutes a creative transformation of ancient philosophy within the framework of modern materialism. Marxism is not merely a socio-economic theory, but carries the legacy of an entire tradition of thought concerning what is just and what is worthy within the sphere of social becoming.

5. Conclusions

a. Although radically modern, Marxist thought has its roots in the ancient Greek philosophical tradition. The dialectical and historical materialism that emerges in rupture with German idealism enters into a creative dialogue with Pre-Socratic thought, highlighting the enduring significance of nature as a primary principle of existence, beyond the idealist supremacy of spirit. From the materialist ontology of the Pre-Socratics to Heraclitus' dialectical opposition and the causality of Democritus and Epicurus, a philosophical groundwork is formed in which the theory of historical and dialectical materialism gains depth and continuity. Through these currents of ancient Greek thought, Marx establishes a dynamic and historically determined theory of social

development, where matter precedes idea and labor emerges as the determining factor of historical change.

b. Both ancient Greek thought and the Marxian worldview share the need to interpret social conflict. The concept of *stasis* in Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle, and class struggle in Marx, reflect a shared awareness of the conflictual nature of society. However, while the ancient thinkers sought the political mitigation of tensions, Marx highlights conflict as the driving force of historical transformation—not as a deviation, but as an inherent feature of the historical movement of societies. Thus, conflict acquires a material and historical function, inscribed in the structure of productive relations. Marxist theory reinterprets it not as pathology, but as the motor force of social transformation

c. Labour, which was undervalued in the moral-political hierarchy of antiquity, assumes a central role in Marx—not only as a productive function but also as a condition for self-realisation. Here, labour as *praxis* constitutes a field of embodied creativity, not merely a necessity for survival. The concept of alienation, as the estrangement of the human being from their nature and the product of their labour, acquires both existential and social dimensions, replacing the ancient Greek concern with the absence of *eudaimonia* or justice with a materialist anthropology of creative activity. In Marx, labour is not only an economic function but also a field of dynamic emancipation, revealing the fundamental divergence of Marxist thought from the ancient Greek conception of social order."

d. The Marxist concept of value, although grounded in the critique of political economy, transcends narrow economic boundaries and emerges as a deeply philosophical conception. Through a creative dialogue with Aristotelian thought—particularly with the notions of essence, exchange, and justice—Marx formulates a materialist theory of social relations, in which labour is not merely productive activity but the foundation of human existence. The critique of value reveals the concealment of exploitation behind the appearance of equality and transforms economic theory into a tool for radical social reflection. Thus, Marx's theory of value serves simultaneously as analysis, critique, and a proposal for human self-realisation. The Marxist theory of surplus value analyses exploitation as the fundamental mechanism of capital accumulation, replacing the ancient Greek notion of labour as necessity with the idea of structural injustice.

e. The ancient Greek concept of the common good and of the polis as the space for the realisation of *eudaimonia* constitutes a political anthropology founded on virtue, participation, and autonomy. This conception finds an echo in Marx's vision of a classless society, where social freedom is not an individual privilege but a collective condition. Marx's statement that 'the free development of each is a condition for the free development of all' (Communist Manifesto,

1848, section II) transforms the ancient Greek moral-political horizon into a project of universal emancipation.

f. In ancient Greek thought, especially in Plato and Aristotle, justice is defined as moral-political harmony, an expression of the agreement between part and whole. In contrast, in Marx, it is transformed into a tool for analyzing the material contradictions of capitalist society. Harmony is deconstructed as an ideological façade that conceals relations of exploitation. While the ancients sought the preservation of social order, Marx highlights conflict as a condition for its overthrow. Justice ceases to concern balance and becomes linked to the historical possibility of emancipation.

g. The Aristotelian distinction between *oikonomia* (household management) and *chrematistics* (the art of wealth accumulation) reappears in Marx as a critique of the fetishism of commodities—that is, the concealment of social relations behind products—and of the autonomy of capital, the illusion that capital is independent of the labor that produces it. Marx's critique does not aim at the moral restoration of a 'natural measure,' but at the historical transcendence of the relations of production through revolutionary transformation.

h. Labor, value, alienation, justice, and social conflict emerge as fundamental concepts running through both traditions, with Marx redefining them within a materialist, historical, and revolutionary framework. The comparison does not lead to simplistic analogies but to a heterodox reading of classical thought, highlighting the timelessness of the fundamental philosophical questions concerning human existence, labor, and the political community.

i. The ancient Greek notion of virtue as the basis of political participation is re-signified in Marx as revolutionary praxis. It becomes an act of collective self-realization and liberation from alienation. Freedom is not conceived as an abstract ideal but as a historical and political task, through which the human being transitions from the illusion of commodity consciousness to authentic social existence.

j. The Marxist theory of historical movement and social justice maintains a philosophical dialogue with ancient Greek teleology, especially Aristotelian. Just as in Aristotle the polis aims at *eudaimonia* through virtue and justice, so too in Marx society progresses, through its contradictions, toward the free and just community of communism. Human freedom and social justice emerge as historical and moral 'ends' that reunite ethics with economics.

6. Suggestions for Further Research

The topic offers ample room for further research. Indicatively, the following areas are suggested:

- a. Comparisons between Aristotelian *entelechy* and the Marxian realization of human essence through productive activity.
- b. Possible analogies between the Stoic “divine economy” and the teleological necessity of History in Marx’s dialectic.
- c. How the Marxian concept of non-alienated labor reinterprets the ancient Greek ideal of *aretē* (virtue) and *eudaimonia* (flourishing).
- d. The transition from a cyclical/cosmic order (ancient thought) to a linear and conflictual conception of History (Marxism).
- e. From justice as order in Plato to justice as the abolition of class antagonisms in Marx.
- f. Plato’s cave as a prototype of alienation: life under a false light that conceals the truth of productive relations.
- g. Examination of Aristotle’s views on money (*Politics, Nicomachean Ethics*) and comparison with the concept of commodity fetishism in Marx.
- h. The moral dimension of exchange in antiquity versus the abstract exchange value in capitalism.
- i. The monistic materialist cosmology of the Presocratics (Heraclitus, Anaximander, Democritus) as a conceptual foundation for Marx’s dialectics.
- j. The difference between metaphysical alienation (Plato) and material/labor alienation (Marx).
- k. Knowledge, Experience, and *Praxis*: an examination of the Stoic notion of *praxis* and its possible convergence with Marxian concerns.
- l. *Politeia* and Commune: a comparative reading of Plato’s *Republic* and the concept of communist society in Marx.

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