

PANAGIOTIS NOUSOS

ABR. ELEUTHEROPULOS
The «griechische Theorie des Werdens»
and the periodical *Die Neue Zeit*

I

The critique of Plekhanov (1908: 68-79) is often cited as an early indication of the degree of estimation in which the theorists of the 2nd International held the radical views expressed by Abr. Eleutheropulos (1898, ²1900) concerning the relationship between philosophy and economics. In his concise explanation of the fundamental problems of Marxism and particularly in his attempt to support the position that «the materialist concept of history» («die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung») can provide the necessary introduction to all social theories which lay claim to the status of sciences, Plekhanov discusses the effect of technology on the evolution of «ideology» (that is, religion and philosophy) in ancient Greece.

The positions of Eleutheropulos, who tends to interpret the history of ideas (Ideengeschichte) solely in the light of the influence of the class struggle, are contrasted with those of A. Espinas, who went no further than to analyse the «state of the forces of production» and overlooked the contribution made by other «factors» (the class struggle, the «psychological factor»). The interpretative direction of Eleutheropulos is seen as having been formed under the direct influence of the historical materialism of Marx and as been summed up in the proposition that philosophy express the «Lebens-und Weltauffassung» of its age. Of course, such a view could also be attributed to Hegel, for instance, who treated every philosophical system as the «ideational expression» of its time. In Eleutheropulos, however, the development of philosophy is not determined by the circulation of the «absolute Idea», since each historical period is characterised, above all, by the economic situation corresponding to it. In other words, as the economic base of society alters, its «ideological superstructure» («ideologische Überbau») alters with it. To the extent, of course, to

which economic development leads to the division of society into classes and to the struggle amongst them, the «Lebens-und Weltauffassung» of a given period is not uniform: it is diversified in accordance with those classes and modified depending on the «position, requirements and efforts of those classes on the course of competition between them».

According to Plekhanov, this view expressed by Eleutheropoulos undoubtedly deserved greater attention and approval, and could be described as «a triumph for historical materialism, which is applied to one of the ideologies far removed from economics». Immediately afterwards, however, he adds that the Greek philosopher did no display any particular skill in handling the dialectical method, and as a result oversimplified «to the worst possible degree» the problems which concerned him, arriving thus at solutions which were exceptionally one-sided and, for that reason, highly unsatisfactory. The examples which Plekhanov cites are the elevation of Xenophanes to the status of «representative in philosophy of the aims of the Greek proletariat» and of Heraclitus, correspondingly, as the mouthpiece of «the aristocratic reaction to the revolutionary aims of the Greek proletariat». Eleutheropoulos makes no attempt to go into economic life of ancient Greece in any depth, and appears to be unaware of the complexity of the «process by which ideology evolves».

This unhappy undertaking was accompanied by Eleutheropoulos' «alleged» attempt to «correct» historical materialism by stressing that the economic relations of any specific people are a mere expression of the «essential reason» («Notwendigkeitsgrund») for that people's development. However, this process is repeated on an individual level, since the content of the «Lebens-und Weltauffassung» of a people is a product of: a) that people's character, b) its needs, and c) the specific personalities of its reformers. More specifically, philosophy meets the requirements of its age in accordance with the personalities of the philosophers. His proposition, which Eleutheropoulos entitled «die griechische Theorie des Werdens», arises from a «rather poorly-digested and badly-drawn outline» of historical materialism. Indeed, when an attempt was made to apply the theory, it became apparent how far removed from the thought of Marx it was. Plekhanov concludes his critical comments by clarifying the position of historical materialism towards the role of personality in history; he quotes extracts from one of the letters of Engels and notes that personality belongs to the realm of the «coincidences» which have no

effect on the «median line» of the intellectual development of mankind, which proceeds in parallel with the economic development of humanity.

II

Plekhanov was perhaps too hasty in dealing with the analyses of Eleutheropulos, which in his eyes appeared to declined from radical economism into the subjectivisation of history. This, he fails to ascertain the conditions and causes of such vacillation, which he ascribes to Eleutheropulos' singularity in wishing to present himself as the successor to Phaleas in the formulation of a Greek theory of «Werdens». However, regardless of this horizon of expectations, the young Privatdozent attempted at the same time to outdo Zeller as a historian of ancient Greek philosophy putting forward a «genetic» view of the «principium» («Prinzip») of the «philosophical system», and Pöhlmann as a historian of the class struggles in ancient Greek society. The need to rename the «materialistic concept of history» and convert it into a Greek theory of «Werdens» was derived both from the specific concern with the philosophical thought of the ancient Greeks and from the expediency of forming the «critical system of philosophy» mentioned in the general title to his *Wirtschaft und Philosophie* - one which would be clearly within the orbit of Eleutheropulos' sociological interests and was intended to dispel the «imaginary» image of the ancient world.

Eleutheropulos responded to the «pressing enigma» («Rätselgram») of philosophy up to that time in an excessively haughty manner, discovering «the connection between world-view and the existing social conditions» (21900: VIII) despite the fact that he himself had served in an «inner» understanding of the cognitive theories of Casimir von Kreuz (1895) and of the relationship between Kant and Plato on the problem of knowledge (1896). The shift in Eleutheropulos' interests and in the interpretative point of view with which it was connected can be seen in his attempt, in the framework of the «critical system» for philosophy, to provide a ground for ethics as a science and in particular to compose a «politico-legal treatise». Certain introductory remarks reveal his dedication to «the truth of the theory of evolution» as taught by the natural sciences and in «the facts of history», as well as his wish that philosophy should be given «a historical foundation which is healthy and grounded in the natural

sciences». This permitted him to distinguish himself as a critic of the historical process from the «committed preachers of social democracy», although his criteria were in no way affected by his decision that Marx's concepts were in complete accordance with the theory of evolution (1897: III, V/VI, VIII, V, 59).

III

Directly after writing the first part of *Das kritische System der Philosophie*, Eleutheropulos gave a course of lectures at Zürich University, in the summer term of 1897, on the relationship between philosophy and economics, taking the ancient Greek world as the field from which he would draw his examples. At this time, as can be deduced from «internal» and «external» evidence noted below, he was also following and utilising the debate going on in the German-speaking world over the interpretative range of the materialistic view of history. Inside the socialist movement, discussion of this topic was recorded chiefly in the periodical *Die Neue Zeit*, whose columns frequently played host to Plekhanov, as one of the very few philosophers it numbered among its associates (Steinberg 1967: 58).

In fact, Eleutheropulos' views attracted the particular attention of the periodical's editor, Karl Kautsky, as can be seen from the unpublished correspondence between the two men, in the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IISG) in Amsterdam¹. The reason for this written communication lies in the fact the periodical had published an article by Dr Phil. Stillich on Greek philosophy «vom Standpunkt der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung» (1898: 580-589). In the second issue for the same year, the editorial board of *Die Neue Zeit* (1898: 154) discovered that in fact they had on their hands a case of plagiarism from the university lectures of Eleutheropulos as plagiarism from the university lectures of Eleutheropulos, as confirmed by the publication of vol. 1 of *Wirtschaft und Philosophie*. Two letters had already been sent to Kautsky; in the first (of 28 March 1898), Eleutheropulos warned Kautsky of the plagiarism which Stillich, who had attended his lectures, attempted in a version of them that was brief and at the same time mistaken, announced the publication of the lectures under the title (slightly different from that

1. IISG, Archive K. Kautsky, DX 176 and 377, F 23. I should like to take this opportunity to thank L. van Rossum for allowing me access to this material.

finally used) of *Die Philosophie als die Lebensauffassung des Griechentums auf Grund des jedesmaligen gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse*, and asked him to include in the following issue of the periodical the attached article, «Die sogenannte materialistische Geschichtsauffassung und ihre Anwendbarkeit auf die Philosophie».

This text - which is a summary of the lectures in four densely written pages - went unpublished in accordance with the request expressed by Eleutheropulos in his second letter (dated 4 April 1898). Eleutheropulos did not want to take into consideration the comments made by Kautsky concerning some re-working of the text, being satisfied with the statement made by the editorial board of the periodical. Among points worthy of note, which were included in the published form of the lectures, is his conclusion that the materialistic concept of history may be seen as dealing with the « Notwendigkeitsgrund der Entwicklung im Leben der Völker» and, for that reason, stands in need of supplementation in the form of a history of ideas as «the work of individuals», which would allow the establishment of «die griechische Theorie des Werdens».

IV

It is not out of the question that Kautsky's comments, which for the time being have not come to light, may have tended in the same direction as the critique of Plekhanov, who could have been aware of Eleutheropulos' correspondence with *Die Neue Zeit*. Nonetheless, the young Privatdozent's insistence that the study of the activities of individuals be taken as a correction to the materialistic view of history, in a field in which conceptual probing does not presuppose direct connections to the collective framework of practical life, forms part of a broader procedure of enlisting a multiplicity of «factors» in understanding the individual facets of the historical process. The existence of more than one of these «factors» did not turn Eleutheropulos in the direction of a paratactic approach to them as understood by, for instance, Sombart (1896: 77) or even more clearly by Stämmler (1896), nor did he accept a dual causality each of whose aspects proceeded in parallel with the other and consequently independently of it.

An admission of this kind is to be found in *Soziologie* (1904), in which Eleutheropulos was compelled to confute the critics who had accused him of «reducing philosophy to barbarism» - in other words,

of adducing its dependence on economic conditions (Glenos 1911: 56, 60). As early as the second edition of *Wirtschaft und Philosophie*, Eleutheropulos had stressed that his intention had not been to confirm the materialistic concept of history in the sphere of philosophy, but to comply with the philosophy of Hegel and with the manner of studying the history of philosophy which Zeller (1900: X) had proposed. Despite these assurances, which were clearly addressed to the conservative critics of his work who had put his career in jeopardy, the structure of Eleutheropulos' work remained the same, as did the socialist terminology which he employed («wirtschaftlichen Kämpfe», «die proletarisch-demokratische Bewegung», «der aristokratische Protest», «die Partei der Proletariat», etc.). Perhaps Eleutheropulos' confession (1931: 111) that when writing this book he was ridding himself of «the materialistic view of history» and was finding «other factors» in events may be true.

Indeed this distancing is to be seen in all his sociological works of the first decade of the century, in which he concludes that the material condition of social can offer only the «ablösender Reize» for the formulation of its intellectual atmosphere. A position of this kind might, in Eleutheropulos' view, not yet be contradictory to the point of view of Marx, Engels and Kautsky, respite the resort to the «allegedly ultimate» explanation of economic causes (1904: 122, 167). However, his criticism of the materialistic theory of history now set out from the point of view of a thinker who treated that theory as «a symptom of economic and political circumstances» and not as the product of «erudite research», although he himself gave a schematic account of its content in order to be able to confute it more easily. Thus the alleged «philosophical basis» for socialism is rejected because it falls into error in interpreting intellectual and ethical evolution «directly» out of economic conditions, denying that there are intellectual causes for evolution, and in understanding the historical process as «mere causation». Even Engels' clarification of the ethical causes of the historical process do not prevent a confusion between «generative causes» and «excitatory stimuli» (1908: 153-162).

Of course, even Eleutheropulos' immediately previous approach to the materialistic concept of history as realised in *Wirtschaft und Philosophie* also presuppose the strict social determinism of German social democracy and the corresponding linking of Marx and Darwin. It hints, more specifically, at a rigid use of the «Basis-Überbau» pattern which had been imposed by the handbook of social democ-

racy, the *Anti-Dühring* (1878: 25), with the assurance that «a way has been found to interpret the consciousness of man from his Being». On the other hand, the attempt to «correct» historical materialism by inserting other «factors» which motivate history brought Eleutheropulos on - though this is not stated - to the thinking developed by Bernstein (1898: 47, 35-39) concerning the boundaries of social predetermination and the need to discover, without running the risk of eclecticism, factors which are not «of a purely economic nature» and transcend the jurisdiction of «Produktionstechnik». Eleutheropulos, too, moved in the direction of eliminating the «monism» introduced by Plekhanov as a uniform philosophical foundation for Marxism - so as to combat positivism and the multiplicity of «factors» - though Eleutheropulos expands the definition of the «economy» so that it conveys the overall way in which a society is organised (21900: 3, cf. 1908: 162). Plekhanov, in his critique, did not notice this point and thus stretched the dualism of «economy» and «philosophy» to its utmost point.

In addition, there similarities between the analysis of «social psychology», which was understood as an intervening link between the «base» and the «superstructure» by both Labriola (1896: 543) and Plekhanov, and the identification of philosophy with «Lebens-und Weltauffassung» which acquired a specific dimension among a people which is the agent of the historical process as the «individual work» of philosophers (21900: 3,16/17). Lastly, Eleutheropulos' attempt to formulate a «scientific philosophy» (21900: 17/18, 1906, 1911) bore a certain relationship to Labriola's endeavours, which was of course in accordance with the unity of the «factors» in history, to remove the positivist distinction between science and philosophy which prevented the latter from taking part in the theoretical inquiry of the modern society (1895: 518. 1896: 565, 569, 617).

V

During his first years in Zürich Eleutheropulos was concerned with the interpretative range of the materialistic concept of history, and the views which he expressed on this subject placed him at the centre of this debate - as both judge and judged. Looking forward to understanding of the social terms for the birth of a «personal work» such as philosophy, he arrived at a particular version of the effect of the «factors» in history. The latent cohesion of these «factors» was

later replaced by a paratactic presentation of them, which permitted more strict criticism of the «one-sidedness» of historical materialism and at the same time pride in the re-appearance of a «griechische Theorie des Werdens».

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