

Andrey Maidansky, Discoveries in the Ilyenkov archive
Q&A from IFI webinar 13 January 2022

Семинар **International Friends of Ilyenkov** 13 января 2021
Discoveries in the Ilyenkov archive

Corinna

1. You have explained that Ilyenkov’s “Leninist Dialectics” was heavily censored. Does that mean that our edition we have in English is very different than he intended?

There is an oddly called manuscript “Materialism Militant – that means Dialectical”, from which a certain editor has compiled a book *Leninist Dialectics*. This book was commissioned to Ilyenkov by “Politizdat” publisher in view of the 70th anniversary of the publication of *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. Ilyenkov agreed, but suggested that his younger friend Grigory Vodolazov write it as a co-author. Vodolazov (by the way, he is still alive) was to write chapters on Lenin’s disputes with Bogdanov and the Machists on *political* issues, and Ilyenkov on *philosophical* issues.

However, Vodolazov did not meet the deadline. Ilyenkov’s archive retains the sixteen-page typewritten letter from Vodolazov, in which he says that he would like to explore Lenin’s disputes with *Plekhanov and the Mensheviks* as well. But this work will take a year or two. Vodolazov suggests that Ilyenkov should publish his *philosophical* part right away, and in the second edition Vodolazov will add his *political* part.

Ilyenkov’s manuscript “Materialism Militant” is a draft, 159 pages plus some inserts 19 pages. He didn’t have time to finish the work. There is an insert, for example, “The Legend of the Vampires,” criticizing socialism on Mars in Bogdanov’s sci-fi novels. Also, Ilyenkov was going to insert into “Materialism Militant” his pamphlet against Ukraintsev, the director of the Institute of Philosophy, whom he considered a modern successor of Bogdanov and the Russian Mahists. Overall, the book should have been much larger in size.

After Ilyenkov’s death, the editor of “Politizdat” took his drafts and made a book we know. It was the editor who gave it the title *Leninist Dialectics*. He threw something out, then added some linking phrases. After editing, Ilyenkov’s manuscript became a historical-philosophical essay. Meanwhile, Ilyenkov and Vodolazov wanted to write a book against “subjectivism” in the *present-day* communist movement. And Ilyenkov, personally, believed that the contemporary socialism, in both its variants – Soviet and Chinese, represented variants of “Bogdanovshchina”, i.e. Leftist social projects, practical voluntarism and subjectivism. Ilyenkov’s criticism against Bogdanov is a criticism of *contemporary society*. This main idea has practically disappeared from the printed version of his book. At least, I did not manage to discern it myself until I got to Ilyenkov’s home archive.

The English edition is a direct (and very good) translation of the Russian edition. And, of course, it is also very far from Ilyenkov’s intention.

2. Is there any correspondence or documentation in the archive about the agreement with New Park Publications to translate it into English?

No, there are no such documents in the home archive.

3. What new light has your work in the archive shed on Ilyenkov’s struggle with the authorities at the Philosophy Institute and how this related to the political changes in the USSR?

A few years ago I published that pamphlet by Ilyenkov against the Director of the Institute of Philosophy. He renamed Ukraintsev to either “Stubborn” (Упрямцев) or “Madman” (Безумцев). Ilyenkov drew evil cartoons of Ukraintsev in the wall newspaper of the Institute of Philosophy.

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Ilyenkov did not wage any other struggle than this satire, as far as I know. All the more so, he was far from fighting for political change in the USSR. This struggle was waged by liberal dissidents, whose views were completely alien to Ilyenkov. Although he surely would have wanted freedom of speech and the press in the USSR, too.

4. Is it becoming clearer exactly what made the authorities so angry? Was it because he said in his letter to the Central Committee (December 1967) that “it is quite clear for economists themselves that we don’t have the political economy of socialism”?

Authorities – which ones? The *higher* party authorities never pursued Ilyenkov. It wouldn’t take much for them to grind him down if they were really angry against him.

Ilyenkov, of course, had a mutual hatred with Ukraintsev and his team. They poisoned his life as best they could. But the two previous directors of the Institute of Philosophy, Kedrov and Kopnin, had been friends and associates of Ilyenkov.

The former directors of the Institute, Stalin’s academicians Fedoseyev and Konstantinov, saw young Ilyenkov as one of their subordinates. They were angry, of course, at some of his actions, which could cause displeasure of the ideological department of the Party Central Committee. For example, that scandalous case with the Italian edition of Ilyenkov’s book together with *Doctor Zhivago*. It should be understood that director Fedoseyev could not but subject Ilyenkov to an execution for this. It was in his power to fire Ilyenkov and morally destroy him, as he had previously destroyed many others. Fedoseyev was a disgusting character, a Stalin’s chain dog. However, Ilyenkov continued to work at the Institute.

Regarding the letter to the Central Committee “on the situation of philosophy”. We don’t know if this letter was sent. Even Novohatko, Ilyenkov’s graduate student and publisher of his works, did not know of the existence of the letter. And there’s nothing in this letter to greatly anger the authorities. The weakness of the political economy of socialism was evident (especially in comparison with Marx’s *Capital*). Everyone was talking about it, and I heard the same talks myself in the philosophy department. General Secretary Andropov said: “We don’t know the country we live in.”

5. I guess the answers to many of these are in Illesh’s 2016 book? Is there any chance of someone doing an English translation of her book with the archival material including “transcripts of faculty and party meetings and unpublished writings” (quote is from Bakhurst’s article *Punks versus Zombies*, included in Lektorsky and Bykova’s book)

Or perhaps you and Illesh could eventually do an interview with the IFI about it?

Elena Illesh sends her regards to us. She’s a little sick right now.

Indeed, the book you mentioned contains some very interesting documents from the 1950s. But we do not know if it is possible to translate this into English and if it makes sense to retell this material in an interview. I could provide an electronic text which can be translated in parts using DeepL.com (it’s the best Russian to English translator available today).

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**Gabriel Gustavo Núñez Pérez:**

What are the differences, if any, between the dialectical materialist philosophy typical of the Stalinist period and that after the 20th Congress, the role of Ilyenkov in both periods?

Soviet philosophy has always been a maidservant of ideology. But in different years the ideological pressure might have been stronger or weaker. From 1931 until Stalin's death in 1953, this pressure was so strong that living philosophical thought was preserved almost exclusively in aesthetics (Mikhail Lifshitz and Georg Lukács). After the 20th Congress there was about 8-10 years of relative freedom of philosophizing. This was the time of Ilyenkov's creative flowering.

According to Ilyenkov, Stalin crucified dialectics on a cross of "four features": everything in the world is interconnected, everything is constantly moving, quantitative changes are transformed into qualitative ones, and development is carried out through the struggle of opposites.

This "dialectical materialism" was a *mortified* philosophy. A philosophical corpse only. It hardly makes sense to compare it with Ilyenkov's dialectical logic as ascent from the abstract to the concrete.

From **Kyrill**:

[Are there topics Ilyenkov covers in the archived material that we don't have any record of him discussing in the published work, or whether he's retracing the same ground.](#)

Ilyenkov failed to publish a good half of what he wrote. But after his death all his major manuscripts were published (4 volumes were edited by Novohatko).

The materials, which are being published now for the first time in the *Collected Works*, are not Ilyenkov's most important works. Both his dissertations, for example, turned into books. But there are some fine reflections in these works that are absent in the books (especially in the second dissertation, on German classical philosophy).

Another example. Novohatko published Ilyenkov's major manuscript, which criticizes the socialism of Adam Schaff (another modern version of Bogdanov's "Martian socialism"). But Ilyenkov wrote *much more* on this subject. There is a whole folder of papers on Schaff, over 300 typewritten pages. It's the volume of a small book. There's a lot of important and interesting stuff there (although it's drafts, and many of his thoughts are repeated in several variations). By the way, there is still no English translation of Ilyenkov anti-Schaff criticism.

In general, no new sensational materials should be expected after what Novohatko has already published. Absolutely new texts – approximately 1 000 book pages (not counting dissertations), but these are mainly small papers written for himself, lectures, reviews of others' doctoral theses and so on.

2) From **Andres Castanon**:

1. [What is socialism, the USSR and Stalin according to Ilyenkov?](#)

Ильенков считал, что сталинизм и маоизм – это необходимая и неизбежная ступень коммунистического движения. В остальных странах, где еще не был построен нормальный капитализм, коммунистическое движение принимает такие уродливые и бесчеловечные формы. Маркс называл это "грубым коммунизмом" [der rohe Kommunismus].

"Коммунизм в его первой форме является лишь обобщением и завершением отношений частной собственности... На первых порах он выступает как всеобщая частная собственность... Грубый коммунизм есть только форма проявления гнусности частной собственности, желающей утвердить себя в качестве положительной общности".

Ильенков стремился показать теоретическую основу этих "грубых", левацких форм коммунистического движения и в современном "лагере социализма", включая СССР. Отсюда его критика Богданова, Артура Кёстлера, Адама Шаффа, Мао.

Кстати, рукописи Ильенкова о философии Мао, впервые опубликованы в 4 томе Собрания сочинений (хотя пока что еще не все). В журналах эти рукописи подверглись жесткой цензуре.

Были удалены любые параллели с советским социализмом, даже параллели Мао со Сталиным. Редакторы убрали самое важное для Ильенкова – то, ради чего он вообще писал эти статьи.

2. Monism vs. pluralism: Ilyenkov affirms that everything is connected to everything through millions of mediations, or even that reality is fractured. How is this related with abstract definitions of monism? If reality is fractured and needs several sciences to be understood, how could we determine the limits of each determined science according to Ilyenkov?

Не уверен, что понимаю смысл выражения “reality is fractured”. Позиция Ильенкова была близка к Спинозе в этом вопросе: единая природа-субстанция проявляет себя в бесконечно разнообразных формах. Энгельс называл их “формами движения материи”. Каждая из этих форм – предмет особой науки.

Здесь есть еще один очень важный и интересный момент, связанный с выделением предметов разных наук в ходе *практической деятельности* человека. Этой теме посвящена книга ученика Ильенкова Льва Науменко “Монизм как принцип диалектической логики” (1968). На мой взгляд, эта книга стоит в одном ряду с трудами самого Ильенкова. По словам Науменко, прочитав ее, Ильенков сказал: “Теперь не страшно и умереть”. Имея в виду, что есть кому продолжить дело диалектической логики. К сожалению, Науменко посвятил свою дальнейшую жизнь карьере в журнале “Коммунист” и в партийном аппарате ЦК.

Мне кажется, Вы могли бы получить гораздо более конкретный и полный ответ на Ваш вопрос из книги Науменко. Это действительно великолепная работа.

3. In recent times, there has been a lot of debate about civilization. Is there a concept of civilization that fits with Ilyenkov’s concept of the ideal?

Я не нахожу у Ильенкова какой-то особой теории цивилизации, и затрудняюсь сказать, насколько Ваше понятие цивилизации соответствует понятию идеального у Ильенкова.

4. Ethology develops from the 70’s. Is it possible that Ilyenkov was not aware of the research on the cultures of some species of animals?

Сомневаюсь, что Ильенков штудировал литературу по этологии. Хотя он читал научно-популярные журналы, отдельные работы по зоопсихологии. В его рукописях есть комментарии по поводу опытов этологов Harlows and Suomi с изоляцией самки шимпанзе.

Что можно сказать абсолютно точно, так это то, что ничего “идеального” в действиях животных, по Ильенкову, нет. Он об этом писал черным по белому не раз и не два. *Идеальное есть форма общественного труда, “работы руки”, и форма устройства “государства”* в самом широком, платоновском смысле – в смысле человеческой цивилизации. Разговоры об “идеальном” в мире животных – это биологический фетишизм, если проводить аналогию с товарным фетишизмом в “Капитале”.

Do you know anything about the attached manuscript (TIF) translation into German (first page of 24). It’s been sent to us by a PhD student researching in Germany who can’t remember where he found it.

Yes, I found this manuscript in Ilyenkov’s archive and asked a friend to translate it into Russian. As a small investigation revealed that its author is Helmut Seidel, an Ilyenkov student from the GDR.

He uses Ilyenkov's work and even his characteristic expression "beautiful ideal", so it seemed to me at first that **Ilyenkov** wrote this text. But the author's initials **H.S.** were found there in one place.

By the way, Ilyenkov, in co-authorship with Seidel and Naumenko, wrote a review of Lukács' book on the young Hegel in 1955.

## **Martin Persch**

### 1. Can we expect unknown works to appear?

I've already answered that question. The best works have already been published by Novohatko. However, not everything has been *translated* into foreign languages. In English and German, for example, there is still no book *On Idols and Ideals*. The first translation (into French) of the full original version of *Dialectics of the Abstract and the Concrete* is in preparation. It was published in Russian in 1997.

2. In one of Ilyenkov's essays on Hegel, he mentions parenthetically the "pessimism of the Frankfurt School". He does not draw any difference between Adorno, Horkheimer or Marcuse, and does not deepen the point. So the question is:

Are there any indications that Ilyenkov had access or studied the works of Theodor Adorno?

And perhaps more generally:

Can we see with which other philosophical/marxist traditions outside the USSR Ilyenkov was in touch or interested him?

I do not know how well Ilyenkov knew the works of the Frankfurt school. But he was very interested in Western Marxism and read quite a lot in German. His review of Ernst Bloch's book on Hegel and of Lukács' *Ontology* will appear soon in volume 6. His home library includes Karel Kosík's book *The Dialectic of the Concrete*, Adam Schaff's book *Marxism and the Human Individual* and something else.

There are no books by Adorno in the library. But in one article on Hegel, Ilyenkov speaks very critically about Adorno and Marcuse. You can also find something about their "negative dialectics" in Ilyenkov's English collection *Intelligent Materialism* (translated by Evgeny Pavlov), pp. 49–50.

3. The basic idea of "The Cosmology of the Spirit" seems to be expression of a "young" Ilyenkov. The later writings do not encounter themselves in any principle contradiction with the idea of cosmological communism described in the essay, but the reflection of such themes seems to have got in the background of Ilyenkov's thinking. So the question would be:

Are there any indications that Ilyenkov occupied himself seriously with other works of cosmism, like Bogdanov, or that he had any interest in such questions that we would today assign to "Science Fiction" (I mean serious Science Fiction, from a philosophical standpoint, not Star Wars or things like that).

Ilyenkov had read (or rather said *studied*) Bogdanov's writings, including his fantasy novels. He loved science fiction and dystopias. He was especially fond of stories about thinking machines, robots. He made an abstract of Karel Čapek's essay *On Inventors*.

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In his favorite journal *The New World* two reviews of sci-fi books are found, signed “Ed. Waldman.” I’m pretty sure that Ilyenkov is their author.

Finally, he wrote a fantasy story himself, which he persistently (but unsuccessfully) tried to have printed in *The New World*. There are *11 different versions* of this story “The Mystery of the Black Box. A sci-fi prelude” in the home archive. Ilyenkov will include it in his book *On Idols and Ideals*.

The riddle of *Cosmology of Mind* deserves a separate conversation. Not today, I guess. I managed to find a primary source – in Maximilian Voloshin’s poem “Paths of Cain” (written in 1920s, a hundred years ago). There is an amateur English translation. It’s very weak compared to the original, but it conveys the overall message.

Our world, “reasonable and cruel, was doomed by nature to decay,” Voloshin wrote, revealing his knowledge of the second principle of thermodynamics. Humanity, on the other hand, is considered as a creative anti-entropic force.

Self detonating Man, be dynamite yourself.  
Blow up the Earth like Universe’s hearth!  
Stronger swing! Throw your outmoded planet  
As a bomb into the starry worlds!  
Don’t wait until the frozen Earth  
Falls into lumps of mud.  
Make it blaze up and flare as a new Sun –  
a shaggy heart of the Milky Way.

Самовзрыватель, будь же динамитом.  
Земля, взорвись вселенским очагом!  
Сильней размах! Отжившую планету  
Швырните бомбой в звездные миры!  
Ужель вам ждать, пока комками грязи  
Не распадется мерзлая земля?  
И в сонмах солнц не вспыхнуть новым  
солнцем – Косматым сердцем Млечного Пути?