

Rosa Luxemburg, the legacy of classical German philosophy and the fundamental methodological questions of social and political theory¹

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For Narihiko ITO sensei in friendship and deep respect

In the preparation of the 15th International Rosa Luxemburg Conference of 2007 in Tokyo I feel now that there begins a new epoch in Rosa Luxemburg research. This means to us Rosa Luxemburg researchers that we are bound, with our Rosa Luxemburg research, to overcome globalised capitalism and imperialism.

Narihiko ITO

In this dialectical, as is taken here, and herewith in the grasping of opposition in its unity or of the positive in the negative consists the Speculative. It is the most important side, but for thought power still not trained, not free, the most difficult one.

G. W. F. Hegel

Introductory Remarks

Luxemburg is one of the most interesting social and political theorists and activists in the Marxist movement of the 19th and 20th centuries in particular and one of the most important political theorists and activist in general. Her name is very popular. She personally enjoys great sympathy among almost all leftwing parties and groups and even among various schools of bourgeois academics. Curious it is, her intellectual and political work occupies however hardly the place in research and debates, which she deserves. Even among leftwing political movements broadly speaking her name is often reduced to not more than a mere popular symbolism.

In the 1970s and 1980s Luxemburg's work enjoyed great attention. But it was a very controversial reception and the controversy may be traced back to her famous phrase: "the freedom is always the freedom of the other thinking differently"². It is to be found in Luxemburg's marginal notes to her posthumously published paper on Russian socialist revolution from October 1917. This phrase was mostly used against Lenin and Bolshevism in general, and in the climax of cold war it was utilised against Soviet Union. But I think that this phrase was also used in many ways against Luxemburg's own fundamental thoughts. She was however attacked by various leading members of international socialist and communist

¹ This paper draws on my paper addressed to the 15th International Rosa Luxemburg Conference in Tokyo in April 1-2, 2007. I understand it as a contribution to methodological questions raised by István Mészáros' lucid and insightful paper: *A Key Problem of Method: Dualism and Dichotomies in Philosophy and Social Theory in Capital Epoch* in: *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, no 34, pp. 27-77. I thank International Rosa Luxemburg Society very much for giving me the opportunity to deliver this paper. I owe also many special thanks to Professor Narihiko Ito sensei for his generous support, without which I could hardly appear at the conference.

² Luxemburg, R., *Zur russischen Revolution*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 4, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 359 n3. (All translations used below are mine.)

movements. At the end in one way or another she was presented to the readership often as a champion of liberal representative democracy, so that Georg Fülberth seems to have felt it necessary, even in a very short paper, to emphasise that her critique of Russian socialist revolution was not formulated from a liberal parliamentary point of view but from a revolutionary socialist point of view.³ In that respect she shares almost the same destiny as Antonio Gramsci with his often misinterpreted conception of “civil society”. But neither Luxemburg nor Gramsci were liberals or social democrats in today’s sense. Luxemburg was one of the founders of Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and Gramsci was chair of the Communist Party of Italy (PCI). Confronted with this contradictory and fragmentary picture of Luxemburg’s intellectual and political work I try since 1980s to understand the cause(s) of this paradox. Soon I came to the conclusion that this paradox may be solved if her work is taken as a whole and this requires going back to the philosophical and methodological foundations of Luxemburg’s work.

Luxemburg develops her social and political theory, on the one hand, in criticism of her contemporary bourgeois philosophers and social and political thinkers like Neokantians, and, on the other hand, in debates with various theoreticians of social democrat movement at that time. In her criticism of her contemporary bourgeois thinkers Luxemburg sees her task in nothing less than in defending the scientific and philosophical achievements of revolutionary bourgeoisie. In her debates with various social democrat theoreticians she wants to defend and further develop Marxian theory. In this context she reformulates the fundamental methodological questions of social and political theory and endeavours to give answers from her Marxian point of view.

Luxemburg sees in revolutionary bourgeois philosophy and social and political thought two highpoints or culmination points. These are, first, Smithian-Ricardoean political economy and, second, Hegelian philosophy. In her post-revolutionary epoch after the French Revolution from 1789 and at latest after 1848 revolution in Europe bourgeoisie aims to destroy her own historical scientific, philosophical and cultural achievements. In her paper *Zurück auf Adam Smith* (“Back to Adam Smith”) from 1899/1900 she observes that as revolutionary social class bourgeoisie allowed and promoted “that impartiality in research, that ruthlessness with regard to consequences, that bold flapping of wings to [a] height [...] from where she [bourgeoisie] grasped with [an] ingenious look the inner connections of the mode of bourgeois production.”⁴ But, Luxemburg continues, in her post-revolutionary epoch, that is, after bourgeoisie seized the political power, bourgeois philosophers and social and political thinkers gave up their scientific and turned their look away from the research of general laws.⁵ In this connection she points to two tendencies among bourgeois social and political thinkers. The first group, which she subsumes under the heading of vulgar economists, is merely interested in the justification of isolated individual appearances. The second group gives up the research of the foundation of economy and declares that the task of science is the mere description of what have already become and individuals beings. What these two groups have in common is that they are not

³ Fülberth, G., *Luxemburg, Rosa*, in *Metzler Philosophen Lexikon*, J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Stuttgart, 1989, p. 484.

⁴ Luxemburg, R., *Zurück auf Adam Smith*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/1, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 734.

⁵ Since Marx showed to the advantage of historical standpoint of working class in the fields of philosophy, history and economy, to bourgeois research the thread in these fields is cut off. The natural philosophy in its classical sense is over. Bourgeois philosophy of history is over. Scientific political economy is over. In the research of history shining in all colours, that is, the renunciation of the unitary explanation of the processes of history, has replaced every unitary theory unless there prevails unconscious and inconsistent materialism. Economy wavers between two schools, that of ‘historical’ and that of ‘subjective’, from which the one is a protest against the other, both are a protest against Marx, in doing so the one negates principally, to negate Marx, economic theory, that is, the recognition [Erkenntnis] in this field, but the other negates the only – objective – research method, which first raised political economy to science.” (Luxemburg, R., *Karl Marx*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, pp. 375-376.)

interested in the scientific explanation of the inner relations of seemingly isolated appearances. Few pages further down she asserts, because of this “today the slogan of bourgeois social sciences seems to be back. Back to Kant in philosophy, back to Adam Smith in economy! A desperate fall back on already overcome positions, which is a definitive sign of hopelessness, into which bourgeoisie ideally and socially already got. But there is no way back as well as in science and in the real development of society.”⁶

If we look at this passages from her paper *Zurück auf Adam Smith* carefully, you will recognise that she formulates here some of her fundamental methodological, philosophy and science historical principles and convictions. First, methodologically, she refers to impartiality as a fundamental scientific method. This methodological principle is accompanied by the science ethical principle of honesty. Second, she points to generalising method as an indispensable precondition for a scientific view of the issues we deal with. Third, she highlights that scientists have to work out the nature or inner connections of appearances being observed. Fourth, she points out that historical approach to society, philosophy, science, and social and political thought is absolutely necessary to have a scientific outlook. Fifth, what is implicit in all that is her deep conviction that from now on a scientific outlook can only be obtained from the point of view of working classes.

Now, these are some of the most important methodological principles Luxemburg refers to permanently as the foundation of her work. But unfortunately exactly these methodological considerations of Rosa Luxemburg have been neglected and this is, I think, was and is the cause of fragmentary and distorted reception of Luxemburg’s work in the last few decades. Surely Luxemburg did not produce a work that we can identify as her philosophical work in the specific sense of the term. She has also not left behind “philosophical note books” or “conspectus” to various philosophers like Lenin. Yet she was interested in philosophical and methodological questions more than we may expect. Even philosophical debates that were of interest only to philosophers by profession could not escape her look which was directed towards grasping the totality with all its complexities, inner relations and contradictions.⁷ She was involved in these methodological debates with many papers from a Hegelian-Marxian point of view.⁸ Her work offers therefore a lively mirror of the debates towards the end of the 19th

⁶ Ibid., 736.

⁷ Compare „Antikritik“, where she reports about a rather sophisticated debate on Kant’s „Prolegomena“. (Luxemburg, R., *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals oder Was die Epigonen aus der Marxschen Theorie gemacht haben: Eine Antikritik* in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 435).

⁸ To prepare her fundamental critique of Neokantians Luxemburg seems to have studied Kant and Hegel from primary and secondary literature. To her secondary sources we may count Plekhanov’s, Mehring’s and Lenin’s works. With regard to primary sources in Luxemburg’s work there are references to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* and to Hegel’s *Science of Logic*. To Luxemburg’s reception of Hegelian philosophy I will come further down. Let us first refer to those passages from her correspondence, where she explicitly says that she is studying and debating on Kant. In her letter Leo Jogiches from July 10, 1898 she refers to her correspondence with Bruno Schoenlank who was the editor in chief of the “Leipziger Volkszeitung” between 1894 and 1901 and who seems to have called Luxemburg’s book *Sozialreform or Revolution* a “Master piece of Dialectic”. (Letter to Leo Jogiches from September 24, 1898, *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 1, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1982, p. 204.) The subject of this correspondence seems to have been Kantian philosophy. (Letter to Leo Jogiches from July 10, 1898, in *ibid.*, pp. 170-171.) Just few days later (July 12-20) she writes to Lagiches that she borrowed some books from library. Among others she mentions Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. (Letter to Leo Jogiches from July 12-20, 1898, in *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 1, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1982, p. 173.) On August 3, 1898, approximately 3 weeks later she writes again and says that she is still debating with Schoenlank on Kant. (Letter to Leo Jogiches from August 3, 1898, in *ibid.*, p. 179.) There are two other letters to Kostja Zetkin, in which she debates about Kant’s aesthetic. In these letters she rejects to go into Kantian aesthetic, because she does not know much about it and she does not have time to study it. (Compare the letters to Kostja Zetkin from April 22, 1907 and August 18, 1908, in *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 287 and p. 375.) But we know from her paper *Tolstoi als sozialer Denker* (“Tolstoy as Social Thinker”) that she regards Tolstoy’s aesthetic much higher in rank than that of Kant. (Compare Luxemburg, R., *Tolstoi als sozialer Denker*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 251.)

century and at the beginning of the 20th century on methodological and science theoretical questions. This is also the reason, as I think, that makes her work an indispensable source of these debates and for grasping her position in these debates. In addition, I think it would not be correct to look for ‘pure’ philosophical works to qualify Marxist theoreticians like Luxemburg as philosophers, because they are not only interested in developing pure philosophical works but also in putting philosophy into practice. In short, I mean that there is a fundamental philosophical conviction behind the whole work of Luxemburg’s we have to take into account if we want to consider her work as whole. Her debates were directed above all against Kantian and Neokantian philosophers in social democracy movement. In these debates she defends the achievements of Hegelian philosophy and Marx’s theory.

“The cutting weapons of Hegelian dialectic”

If one looks at the index of Luxemburg’s *Collected Works* published by Dietz Verlag Berlin for Hegel may think that there are only few references. This may give the impression as if Luxemburg as social and political theorist was not concerned much about methodological and philosophical questions. However, she was interested in methodological more than any other theoretician of German social democracy. Her references to Hegel’s philosophy for example concern the heart of Hegelian philosophy. They all refer to Hegel’s conception of contradiction which involves his conceptions of motion, change and development. I mean they point to those elements of Hegelian philosophy, which Marx called the “rational kernel”⁹ of Hegelian philosophy in the “Afterword” to the second German edition of *Capital*. Probably bearing in mind the widespread cultural decline theories in Germany at that time, Luxemburg points out in *Accumulation of Capital* that the great philosopher Hegel said that contradiction is the moving force that drives further.¹⁰ According to Hegel the contradiction is the ground of motion and this ground is immanent in things. In other words, as opposed to Aristotle, for example, Hegel regards the source of motion immanent grounded in things as well as in relationships. If we search for the sources of change, according to Hegel, we have to analyse the nature and relations of appearances before us instead looking for some mysterious forces in the ‘kingdom of heaven’ as Aristotelian conception of “unmoved mover” may imply.

It is this conception of motion by means of which Hegel wanted to introduce dynamism in to the fixed mode of thought of ‘either-or’ dualism in European philosophy. One may criticise the form of system Hegel offers but one has also to bear in mind that he defines right from the beginning of his *Science of Logic* permanent motion as absolute – permanent motion including jumps in nature, society and in culture. The drive, that is, the motion, says Hegel, is “a negative which entails a positive direction.”¹¹ As you see Hegel defines here the most important concept of dialectical philosophy. It means that things have to be considered as unities of positives and negatives, that is, as unities of opposites. In other words, things have to be considered as unities of identity and non-identity and in relation to one another. According to Hegel this is the truth of things, which expresses itself also in their concepts and it was this recognition (“Erkenntnis”) that allowed philosophy to make a step forward.¹²

⁹ Marx, K., *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, vol. 1, in *Marx Engels Werke*, vol. 23, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p. 27.

¹⁰ Compare Luxemburg, R., *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals: Ein Beitrag zur ökonomischen Erklärung des Imperialismus* in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 719 and *Die Akkumulation des Kapitals oder Was die Epigonen aus der Marxschen Theorie gemacht haben: Eine Antikritik* in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 451.

¹¹ Hegel, G. W. F., *Wissenschaft der Logik*, vol. 2, in *Werke*, vol. 6, eds. Moldenhauer, E. und Michel, K. M., Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M, 1993, p. 73.

¹² Ibid.

However, Hegel says, “[i]t is one of the fundamental prejudices of logic and widespread imagination hitherto as if contradiction was not an essential and immanent determination like identity. Yes, if one speaks of hierarchy and if both determinations would allow considering them separately, then one has to take contradiction as deeper and more essential determination, because identity compared to contradiction is the determination of the simple immediate, of the dead identity, but contradiction is the source of all motion and livelihood; only if insofar something entails contradiction it moves, has drive and action.”¹³ It is this conception of contradiction that Luxemburg called the “cutting weapon of Hegelian dialectic”.¹⁴

The bourgeois call for “back to Kant in philosophy”!

Historical approach and perspective as method of research and presentation is for Luxemburg an indispensable prerequisite, which must be met if the object of research should be grasped appropriately as many sided as possible, if its nature, internal and external relations, its becoming and passing away should be explained and critically presented. Luxemburg stated this idea explicitly in her paper *Karl Marx* from 1903. To the question ‘what is the Marxian theory?’ she replies: it is “in its most general outline the historical recognition of the historical way which leads from the last antagonistic, that is, on class contradictions based form of society to communist society which is built on the principle of solidarity of the interests of all its members.” She continues: in Marxian theory the “historical research method makes up the perpetual part.”¹⁵

This historical approach applies also to philosophy and philosophy implies necessarily history of philosophy. It reflects in its development and in the development of its categories the history of society. In other words, according to Luxemburg philosophical combats mirror also class struggles. These struggles are also often expressed in slogans. The bourgeois slogan “back to Kant in philosophy” comes from Neo-Kantian philosophers¹⁶ many of whom were also members of Social Democrat Party of Germany and attacks above all Hegelian conception of contradiction, which works further in Marxian theory of revolution. Luxemburg shares with many other Marxist theoreticians like Plekhanov, Mehring and Lenin the view that this is an indirect attack on Marxism. In her unique paper *Hohle Nüsse* (“Empty Nuts”) (a good documentation of the history of the reception of Marxian theory in German) she says: “Since from Hegel philosophical roads lead just unavoidably to the most dangerous robber caves of Feuerbach and Marx there remained to the bourgeois philosophers nothing but annul Hegel from the history of philosophy simply by a command and let science jump back ‘to Kant’ by a magic gesture.”¹⁷

Hegel defines his philosophy, on the one hand, in relation to Kantian philosophy and, on the other hand, in relation to traditional metaphysics which still thinks in fixed either-or dichotomies. Already in the preface to the first edition of his *Science of Logic* Hegel accuses Kant of empiricism because Kant, according to Hegel, wants to destroy metaphysics as such. This is to say that Hegel wants to rescue metaphysics despite of all his criticism and integrate it

¹³ Ibid, p. 75.

¹⁴ Luxemburg, R., *Aus dem Nachlaß unserer Meister*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p. 137.

¹⁵ Luxemburg, R., *Karl Marx*, in *ibid.*, p. 377.

¹⁶ Compare Lehrke, W., *Neokantianismus*, in *Europäische Enzyklopädie zu Philosophie und Wissenschaften*, ed. Sandkühler, H.-J., Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg, 1990, pp.549-561; Sandkühler, H.-J. (ed.), *Marxismus und Ethik*, Frankfurt/M, 1974.

¹⁷ Luxemburg, R., *Hohle Nüsse*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/1, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 490.

into his dialectical philosophy.¹⁸ This difference between Kant and Hegel has important implications for their approach to epistemological issues. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant declares that the thing in itself or nature of things is not recognisable.¹⁹ Epistemologically speaking Kant falls at latest at this stage into absolute relativism and turns knowledge claims into an subjectivist (arbitrary) issue. This leads him to the phenomenological statement that dialectics is a “Logic of Appearance”²⁰. This binds Kant to the fact that he remains in his epistemological concerns on the surface of the objects to be recognised. Hegelian philosophy, on the contrary, aims at recognising the nature of things, which wants to take into account also the particularity of things. According to Hegel things must be recognised with regard to their nature, internal and external relations, with regard to their becoming and passing away. He wants thereby to grasp things as a unity of identity and non-identity.

Epistemologically Luxemburg defines herself more or less explicitly in this tradition of Hegel and of course of Marx when she states for example in her paper *Noch eine Lehre von Zabern* (“Another Lesson from Zabern”): “[i]t was always the pride of our party - a real child of Marxian spirit - that she did not stick to the surface of appearances but in her work of enlightenment she reached into the deepest roots of social relations.”²¹ Luxemburg criticise here explicitly mere phenomenological approaches and suggests that to explain appearances in their entirety our epistemological ‘look’ must penetrate into their nature and we have to explain the issues concerned by bringing to the fore their internal and external relations.

Bourgeois science as opposed to Marx and Luxemburg wants to overcome Hegelian dialectic by an imaginary ‘salto mortale’ and go back to Kant. It must therefore fight against any philosophy that claims that things can be recognised in their entirety. It ends up as a consequence in the case of Eduard Bernstein, for example, in the dualistic swing of thought of ‘either-or’ and other fixed dichotomies, because he says “valet to dialectics”.²² In the case of subjectivist theory of political economy it creates nothing but chaos, without a system, spirit and brain.²³ This leads consequently to the miserable situation where “research - like a ostrich bird with its head in sand – buries itself in between small fragments of appearances in order not to see more general relations and to work merely for the needs of everyday life.”²⁴

In this way the bourgeois science declares the “timidity of empirical feeling to the only principle of the research method”²⁵ and undertakes an “industrious atomising work”. This approach creates a picture of social life that lets appear social relations like in a mirror that is broken to thousands of pieces. In her paper *Im Rate der Gelehrten* (“At the Council of Intellectuals”), in which she attacks Werner Sombart’s misuse of Marxian theory, she says: “this atomising work” is for bourgeois scientists “the safest way to dissolve theoretically all general social connections and to let disappear ‘scientifically’ capitalist forest behind many trees.”²⁶ However, to do this, bourgeois scientists have to get rid of the Hegelian ‘burden’. But according to Luxemburg this is as vain as trying to stop time and progress of history, because generally speaking in science as well as in the development of society there is no way back. As

¹⁸ Hegel, G. W. F., *Wissenschaft der Logik*, vol. 1, in *Werke* 5, eds. Moldenhauer, E. and Michel, K. M., Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1993, p. 13.

¹⁹ Compare Kant, I., *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. Timmermann, J., Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1998, pp. 337-377

²⁰ Compare for example, *ibid.*, p. 405.

²¹ Luxemburg, R., *Noch eine Lehre von Zabern*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1990, p. 386.

²² Luxemburg, R., *Sozialreform oder Revolution*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/1, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 439)

²³ Luxemburg, R., *Zurück auf Adam Smith*, in *ibid.*, p. 736.

²⁴ Luxemburg, R., *Karl Marx*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p. 376

²⁵ Luxemburg, R., *Aus dem Nachlaß unserer Meister*, in *ibid.*, p. 295.

²⁶ Luxemburg, R., *Im Rate der Gelehrten*, in *ibid.*, p. 388.

I have already pointed out she thinks that the development and progress neither in society nor in science can be stopped.²⁷

Against bourgeois epistemological scepticism and agnosticism and in all colours shining eclecticism and poverty of theory, Luxemburg puts forward the concept of contradiction and epistemological optimism that includes scientifically founded and examining critical theory of knowledge. The claim that we cannot give up the concept of contradiction Luxemburg formulates in almost all her writings but more explicitly in her book *Einführung in die Nationalökonomie* ("Introduction to Political Economy"). Probably bearing in mind widespread cultural decline theories at that time in Germany, she says: "Society as a whole gets involved permanently in contradictions. But because of this it does not get destroyed, on the contrary, it gets exactly then in motion where it gets stuck in contradictions. Contradiction in social life dissolves itself always in development, in new progress of culture. The great philosopher Hegel said: 'the contradiction is the force that moves forward'. And this motion in permanent contradictions is the real way of development in human history."²⁸ In her paper *Zurück auf Adam Smith* she concludes: "The most inner nature of bourgeois mode of production, its real mystery can only be explained if it is considered in its development, in its historical limits."²⁹

However, if Hegel is ignored in the history of philosophy this would result in the destruction of the capability and the possibility of cognition and recognition as such. If this is the case we can explain neither history of society nor the development of history of thought because they develop permanently in contradictions. If we give up the concept of contradiction we would stand before a big chaos. Therefore, Luxemburg's slogan against the bourgeois slogan "back to Kant in philosophy" can only be further in philosophy with Hegel on the way which already Marx opened up with his materialist theory of dialectics.³⁰

We must however not take that what Luxemburg says here in its narrow sense. When Luxemburg says further with Hegel in philosophy on the way that has been opened up by Marx she means by that that achievements of Kantian philosophy as well as the whole cultural achievements of humanity including that of bourgeoisie must be rescued, because the call of bourgeois science for going back to Kant in philosophy and to Smith in political economy is not just a call for their revival. It rather means the destruction particularly of those elements in their theory, which go beyond their historical limits. This means for example the destruction of the fact that Kant recognised that there is thing in itself, though it cannot be known. Furthermore it was Kantian who put the concept of contradiction with his antinomies on the agenda of modern philosophy, though he did not solved them. Neokantian turn in philosophy wants to destroy all these by trying to develop a purely subjectivist-idealist philosophy. Subjectivist turn in political economy means the destruction of objective theory of values and labour theory of value in Smith's and Ricardo's political economy. In her critique of Bernstein and other Neokantians Luxemburg illustrates how they end up in a philosophy of moral harmony when they give up Hegelian dialectic and in her critique of Werner Sombart and all sorts of subjectivist schools in political economy she shows how they want to destroy the objective theory of value and labour theory of values. Luxemburg states in her paper *Stillstand und Fortschritt im Marxismus* ("The Standstill and Advance in Marxism") that she sees therefore the duty of working classes and her duty as an intellectual of these classes in the defence of the historical achievements of

²⁷ Luxemburg, R., *Zurück auf Adam Smith*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/1, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 736.

²⁸ Luxemburg, R., *Einführung in die Nationalökonomie*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 5, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 719.

²⁹ Luxemburg, R., *Zurück auf Adam Smith*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/1, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 734.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 736.

bourgeoisie: “the culture of bourgeoisie must be defended against vandalism of bourgeois reaction [...] to create those social *conditions* of free development of culture”³¹.

Marxian Philosophy is the successor of Hegelian Dialectic

I quoted above those writings of Luxemburg’s, which are explicitly devoted to defend and apply Marxian philosophy and theory of science. This is justified by the fact that Hegel formulated very similar critiques of the dominating Kantian and all sorts of empirist philosophies of his time.³² Almost all ideas which Hegel formulated in this context went in one way or another into Marxian philosophy. Bearing this in mind, Luxemburg’s critique of bourgeois theory of science and philosophy reads at the same time as a defence of Hegelian and Marxian dialectic. The commonness of the fate of Hegelian and Marxian philosophy is under German social democrat intellectuals by no one better expressed than by Luxemburg. After having read her science theoretical and philosophical writings one wants almost to say that Hegelian and Marxian philosophies are going to be defeated altogether or they are going to win altogether.

But how should be this commonness in fate understood? Luxemburg defines Marxian theory as “a child of bourgeois science, but the birth of this child has cost the mother her life”.³³ Luxemburg’s highly dialectical metaphorical use of the terms , “mother” “child” and “life” is extremely interesting and indicates in what sense the relationship between classical bourgeois philosophy and science and Marxian theory should be taken, namely in the sense of Hegelian categories of negation (“Negation”) and abolition (“Aufhebung”). In the sense that Marxism negates bourgeois philosophy and theory of science but it rescues at the same time those historical achievements that are essential for further development of society, science and philosophy. Marxian philosophy is a child of bourgeois philosophy too. But it is particularly a child of Hegelian philosophy as the highest form of bourgeois philosophy. Referring to Engels’ pamphlet *Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie* Luxemburg defines the aim of philosophy to find an answer to the perpetual question of the relationship between thought and being. Engels suggests that the “great fundamental question of all, especially that of modern philosophy is about the relationship of thought and being.”³⁴ Following Engels’ assertion Luxemburg defines “the nature of philosophy as the perpetual question of the relationship between thought and being”, that is, the relationship of “human consciousness in the objective world.”³⁵

Luxemburg sees in the way how Marx replies to this question the most scientific answer that is possible and Hegel prepared the way for this. Hegel develops his *Science of Logic* as a criticism of Kant’s system. Hegel defines philosophy as grasping its time in thought. Philosophy originates in its time and brings an order into the seemingly dispersed material. It does this by recognising general laws in seemingly anarchic chaos.³⁶ This is definitely an implicit critique of

³¹ Luxemburg, R., *Stillstand und Fortschritt im Marxismus*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p. 367.

³² Compare for example Hegel, G. W. F., *Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie*, in *Werke*, vol. 2, eds. Moldenhauer, E. and Michel, K. M., Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M, 1986, in particular pp. 30-43 and *Wer denkt abstrakt?*, in *ibid.*, pp. 575-581.

³³ Luxemburg, R., *Karl Marx*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p.376.

³⁴ Engels, F., *Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie*, in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, vol. 21, Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1984, p. 274.

³⁵ Luxemburg, R., *Karl Marx*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p. 370.

³⁶ It is interesting enough that Luxemburg sees in Marx’s critique of political economy a similar goal and methodology at work: “[a]s everybody knows it was Marx who showed that anarchy is the law of the mode of capitalist production. However, Marx discovered also within this anarchy the specific laws which prevail against

Kantian philosophy. Hegel defines here thought as mirror of its time. He is very explicit on this in the “Introduction” to his above-mentioned work. There he criticises all concepts of logic - but in particular the Kantian logic - because they take the “material of recognition essentially as a ready world outside thought and start from the principle that thought is empty, as a form being outside the matter and comes to matter from outside the matter, fills itself with matter, consequently gains a content and becomes by this a real recognition.”³⁷ If recognition is conceptualised in this way, Hegel thinks that thought cannot go beyond itself, it will remain in itself. Its modifications would remain as modifications of itself, it would not get involved with its other, self-conscious determination would belong only to thought. In short, if we conceptualise thought as described above, that is, in the way of Kantian transcendental philosophy thought would remain within itself, without being able to go to its objects. The object of thought remains as a thing in-itself beyond thought.³⁸ We can hardly miss here Hegel’s critique of Kant’s philosophy. Hegel aims therefore to replace *Science of Logic* for Kant’s *Critique of pure Reason*, by means of which he wants to show how logic can go beyond itself and appropriate its object. That was also the aim of Kantian transcendental philosophy. But Hegel thinks that Kant failed to meet his goal because of his dualistic approach.

According to Luxemburg’s interpretation, Marx sees the same failure in Hegelian logic, which Hegel sees in Kantian transcendental philosophy. According to Luxemburg, Marx comes to this conclusion, on the one hand, after having studied Hegelian philosophy thoroughly, and, on the other hand, after having confronted his conclusions drawn from his studies with “questions of time and disputes” as Luxemburg used to put it. This differentiates according to Luxemburg Marx from other young Hegelians. Right from the beginning Marx seeks to answer the main question of philosophy about the relationship between being and consciousness. Luxemburg discusses this development of Marx in one her three papers entitled *Aus dem Nachlaß unserer Meister*. She describes how Marx, derived by an inner crisis or inner combats to solve the main question of philosophy and give an answer to the questions of human emancipation, starts his studies with the field of jurisprudence, continues with the critique of philosophy and politics and finally arrives at the critique of political economy. His critique of political economy is then the foundation (“Granitblock”) of his total critique of capitalist social formation, on which he builds his theory of scientific socialism.³⁹ The result of this development of Marx’s is the famous reversal of Hegelian system. Luxemburg points to two major debates which Marx went through to come to this result. The first debates concerns Marx’s critique of various Hegelian schools – in particular with young Hegelians. The second debate refers to his critique of various schools of socialism. As a result: “The language in which the questions of dispute are explored is already free from Hegelian manner; it is no longer about ‘spirit and mass’, ‘absolute critique and self-consciousness’, but it is about protective duty and free trade, social reform and state socialism and similar prosaic questions. Hegel is already turned from the head on the feet.”⁴⁰

Luxemburg refers here of course to Marx’s famous phrase of the reversal of the Hegelian system in the “Afterword” to the second German edition of the first volume of *Capital*. There Marx states: “[i]n its mystified form, dialectic became the fashion in Germany, because it seemed to transfigure and glorify the existing state of things. In its rational form it is a scandal

this anarchy and regulate the whole of economy.” (Luxemburg, R., *Im Rate der Gelehrten*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p. 384.)

³⁷ Hegel, G. W. F., *Wissenschaft der Logik*, vol. 1, in *Werke*, vol. 5, eds. Moldenhauer, E. and Michel, K. M., Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1993, p. 36/7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁹ Compare Luxemburg, R., *Aus dem Nachlaß unserer Meister*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, pp. 130-141.

⁴⁰ Luxemburg, R., *Aus dem Nachlaß unserer Meister*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p. 293.

and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature no less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.”⁴¹ To turn Hegelian dialectic into a “critical and revolutionary” weapon it had to be turned right side up again.⁴²

Luxemburg sees in this reversal of Hegelian system by Marx the scientific foundation for the search of human emancipation. In the last two and more decades the popular phrase, ‘Marx is dead’ returned on the agenda. This phrase is almost as old as the history of Marxism. But according to Luxemburg there is no surprise in this, because to declare that Marxism is theoretically overcome and that ‘Marx is dead’ is a life task of bourgeois intellectuals. However, says Luxemburg, “it is the dead Marx who still throws to the combating proletariat of the world the most fruitful efforts and guiding thoughts, and it is the dead Marx who, as a living, still walks around under the larvae of bourgeois social science with a victorious smile.”⁴³

Luxemburg is even not prepared to accept the even among social democrats widespread claim that Marxism was suffering from a crisis. Rather, she suggests that if there is an impression that Marxism was suffering from a seeming crisis this is, on the one hand, due to the slowness of “our movement” to discover and appropriate new aspects of Marxian theory, and, on the other hand, due to the premature state in the development of Marxist and proletarian movement compared to Marxian theory. “Only”, she says, “to the extent as our movement enters more advanced stages and poses new practical questions, it reaches into depot of Marxian theory to work out new individual pieces of his theory and to make use of them. If however our movement – as any practical battle – can long do with the old guiding lines of thought, though they have lost their validity, so this is due to the utmost slow progress in the theoretical utilisation of Marxian theory.”⁴⁴ She continues in the next paragraph: “[i]f we feel therefore in our movement now a theoretical standstill, so it is not because Marxian theory, by which we are consumed, were not capable of development or because it had ‘died out’, but, on the contrary, because we took from Marxian equipment chamber the most important weapons of thought, which were necessary for the state of battle hitherto, without herewith exhausting them; not because we outstripped Marx in our practical battle, but, on the contrary, because with his scientific creation Marx outstripped *us* as practical battle party before; not because Marx is no longer sufficient for our needs, but because our needs are still not developed enough for the utilisation of Marxian thought.”⁴⁵

Therefore, instead speculating about the crisis of Marxism Luxemburg suggests that Marxism will become practical the more proletarian movement improves and becomes realised with the development of socialism. Marxism, in other words, according to Luxemburg, is the most

⁴¹ Marx, K., *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol 1, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1954, p. 29.

⁴² In her letter to Leo Jogiches from January 25.-26, 1899 Luxemburg writes that she read in Russian journal *Russkoje Bogatstwo* (No 6, June 1898, and 7, July 1898) an article entitled “Materialism and dialectical logic” by N.G. (Ch. J. Shitlowski). The main thesis of the article according to Luxemburg is that dialectics loses its foundation if it is put on the basis of materialism. N. G. claims in other words that dialectic is possible only on basis of idealism. Now Luxemburg thinks that the whole argument of the author goes wrong, though the article is brilliantly written. (Compare Letter to Leo Jogiches from January 25-26, 1899, in *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol 1, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1982, p. 260.)

⁴³ Luxemburg, R., *Aus dem literarischen Nachlaß von Karl Marx*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p. 462.

⁴⁴ Luxemburg, R., *Stillstand und Fortschritt im Marxismus*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p. 368.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

developed form of science and philosophy. Hence following Engels' distinction between utopian and scientific socialism Luxemburg qualifies Marx's critique of capitalist social formation as scientific. Taken in its broad sense this means that according to Luxemburg social and political theory is founded for the first time in human history on scientific basis. It gives an answer to the question of what is the source of the development in human history, to the question of how changes take place in history. It shows how totality can be grasped, explained and critically presented with all its complexities, relations and contradictions. To do this all fields of social and political theory have to be related to production relations and philosophically reflected to understand their interdependence and relative independence.

Now, with the reversal of the Hegelian system "the solution to the philosophical conflict between thought and being, between material world and the process of thought" may have been found.⁴⁶ But Luxemburg poses the question whether with this reversal the Hegelian system is for all time overcome? No ways, says Luxemburg. On the contrary to many of her contemporary Marxists who reduced Marxian theory from a mechanical standpoint to pure economics Luxemburg suggests that a systematic Marxist philosophy has to be developed. In political economy Marx may have provided a more or less complete theory. But the most valuable part of his overall theory, namely his research method called materialist-dialectical theory of history, however, needs to be systematised und further developed. It is not a fixed theory. On the contrary it is a living theory of class struggles.⁴⁷ To develop Marxian theory we have to sharpen our thought permanently by studying Hegelian dialectic.

What conclusions should we draw from this description of Luxemburg's methodological and philosophical considerations for contemporary debates? I am going to point out three aspects which, I think, are in particular very relevant for contemporary debates in social and political theory. They all concern Luxemburg's approach to the relationship between theory and practice. First, in her paper *Theory and Practice* from 1909/1910 ("Theory und Praxis") from methodological point of view Luxemburg accuses Karl Kautsky of a formalist approach. According to this approach he gains his theory not from the study and analysis of reality but produces it from within "ad hoc"⁴⁸, that is, from his "pure 'imagination'"⁴⁹ and becomes alienated to the reality. Because of this formalism Kautsky viewed the world merely from European point of view and this led to Luxemburg's accusation that Kautsky is a "euro-centrist" as Narihiko ITO pointed out.⁵⁰ Luxemburg criticises here what philosophers call apriorism. Her critique of formalism can be applied to contemporary social contracts theories such as that of John Rawls and that of Robert Nozick, who produce their theories of justice from their "lively fantasy" as Luxemburg would have put it.⁵¹

Second, in her work *Social Reform or Revolution?* from 1899 ("Sozialreform oder Revolution") Luxemburg accuses Eduard Bernstein of substituting dialectics for a mechanical approach. This leads Bernstein to a theory of development of society without any subject. He adopts, in other words, in the best case an evolutionary moral theory of history rather than a theory of history of class struggles. This kind of approach to history and politics is very common among

⁴⁶ Luxemburg, R., *Aus dem Nachlaß unserer Meister*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p. 139.

⁴⁷ Luxemburg, R., *Stillszand und Fortschritt im Marxismus*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p.364.

⁴⁸ Luxemburg, R., *Die Theorie und die Praxis*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 387.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

⁵⁰ Ito, N., *Karl Kautsky und Rosa Luxemburg*, in *Wegweiser zum Gedanken Rosa Luxemburgs* („Guide to the Thought of Rosa Luxemburg“), Jungetsusha, Tokyo, 2007, p. 224.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 389. I have worked out some these aspects of Luxemburg's work in my paper *Rosa Luxemburg's Critical Realism and the Foundation of the Theory of International Relations* (Turkish), in *Praksis*, Vol. 11, pp. 49-82.

contemporary academics, so for example in Habermasian theory of communication. In socialist movements in Europe it is contemporarily one of the dominating approaches. But according to Luxemburg there are not only quantitative changes but also qualitative changes or jumps in history. This can be learnt from Hegel as well as from Engels. In her paper *Erörterungen über die Taktik* (“Explorations on Tactics”) Luxemburg recommends to Georg Gradnauer to read Hegel or at least Engels on the dialectic of quantity and quality. She says: “[h]as comrade ‘gr’ forgotten his Hegel, so we recommend to him to consult at least the splendid chapter on quantity and quality from Engels’ ‘Anti-Dühring’ to convince himself that catastrophes do not present opposition to development, but are *a moment, a phase*”⁵² of development.

Luxemburg’s critique of moral theories of history and politics should not be mistaken. She is not claiming for a moral nihilism as may be claimed of Nietzsche’s teaching. Rather, she says in her very short but wonderful paper *Kleinbürgerliche oder proletarische Weltpolitik* (“Petty bourgeois or Proletarian world Politics”): “[m]oral outcry against world politics plays in our protest movement of course a great role. But it will become a political factor only if it is accompanied by the *understanding* of historical laws of appearances, if it is directed not against the external forms but against the nature [of appearances], not against the consequences but against the root [of appearances], in a word: if it is a revolutionary outcry of mass which attacks like a storm capitalist social order.”⁵³ So what Luxemburg says in her critique of moral theories of politics is this: in capitalist society moral appeals to the sense of justice and so on will not help much. If we follow her advice we have to study and analyse carefully the contradiction of interests involved in the relations of production and recognise forces which have an interest in essential changes of these relations of production. And according to Luxemburg it is our indispensable duty from historical materialist perspective to recognise and rely on international proletariat as the only subject of this revolutionary change. “In its entire magnitude and revolutionary spirit the new work of Marx can also become only lively in fighting proletariat.”⁵⁴ It is only international proletariat that is capable of overcoming globalised capitalism and imperialism as Narihito Ito calls for. This revolutionary change will also bring the perpetual peace among nations humanity has been seeking for thousands of years. Let me finish my talk by quoting a passage from her paper *Was wollen wir?* (“What we Want?”): the “abolition of the total and the general domination of one nation over others will first possible with the abolition of capitalism and the introduction of socialist order which is based on solidarity of all humans and nations and not on combat and inequality between them.”⁵⁵

⁵² Luxemburg, R., *Erörterungen über die Taktik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/1, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 259. (Luxemburg’s italics)

⁵³ Luxemburg, R., *Kleinbürgerliche oder proletarische Weltpolitik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, pp. 30/31.

⁵⁴ Luxemburg, R., *Aus dem literarischen Nachlaß von Karl Marx*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1/2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1988, p. 474.

⁵⁵ Luxemburg, R., *Was wollen wir?*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1990, p. 55.