

Walking on two Legs

The spirals of dialectics reconsidered

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Abstract

'Walking on two Legs' was the famous slogan of Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward campaign, which he initiated in 1958. It was planned as an alternative to Stalin's type of forced industrialization at the expense of agriculture. Industry and agriculture, the two legs, should both enable to move forward, to walk. Mao's campaign failed dramatically and led to his loss of power: One of the leaders whom he first promoted to solve the pragmatic problems of his campaign, Deng Xiaoping, after Mao's death in 1976 started to transform China into a new kind of capitalism. Mao's dream of basing socialism on individual voluntarism of party members combined with coercive policy measures administered by party soldiers had collapsed. Today, 50 years later, China's new capitalism enables the strongest accumulation of capital of all national economies, measured in PPP its GDP is higher than the GDP of the USA. But, of course, the initial problem of how to walk with the two legs (industry and agriculture) has not vanished.

Introduction

Consider the problem as a dialectic: Human metabolism first rests on agriculture; call this the thesis. Evolution of labour productivity enhancing division of labour leads to the emergence of cities as centres of industry; call this the anti-thesis. And as now can be clearly seen the third element in the slogan is a verb (!), 'walking', prescribing a procedure that synthesizes the two observed states of affairs, the nouns 'agriculture' and 'industry'. Remember: There are two observed states that evolve as contradictions (city¹ and open land), and one procedure named 'walking', which is meant to synthesize the contradictory observable elements. Every procedure encapsulated as a regime of political economy sooner or later is deemed to fail under its own weight. Mao's attempt failed in the seventies. It was replaced by a new procedure, which Deng Xiaoping nicely described by a new slogan: "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or yellow, as long as it catches mice". The 'cat' is the 'capitalist

algorithm'² with a Chinese face, a modified form of an old mode of production. From then onwards China's new capitalism could count as a new observable, a new thesis. While it definitely is different to Mao's project of 'walking', in most respects it is also different to earlier forms of synthetic procedures. A new thesis is never a return to the original thesis (as binary logic would have it), but always a new combination in Schumpeter's sense³. Dialectic dynamics are thus not circles, but spirals along the time axis.

A second example to consider as dialectic dynamics of observed contradictions enforcing a synthetic procedure concerns human consciousness. The first thesis is that human consciousness is a property of the biological unit of a human individual. But as a parallel anti-thesis humans can only exist as groups, as combination of different sexes and changing different classes. Thus, the consciousness of the individual - as well as the consciousness

of each group or class - is split into two parts, one concerning the individual unit and one concerning the group, the class or even the human species. The synthesizing procedures for this contradiction fall into two broad groups. The immediate needs to survive as a species make coordinated actions of individuals indispensable. Therefore, the first type of synthesis simply is the down-to-earth organisational result of what Charles Darwin [1] discovered as weeding out of the unfit⁴. The second, highly interdependent type of synthetic procedures concern the respective consciousness proper. To be conscious of a group, of a class or of total mankind⁵ is part of the anti-thesis, to be conscious of one's needs and anxieties in the immediate individual environment is part of the thesis [2]. The possible synthetic procedures of different groups are framed by their different cultural environment, they depend on the respective, specific historical paths [3]. The consciousness of ruling classes transpired as religion, as nationalism and lately as the capitalist algorithm; wars between these less and less local synthetic conglomerations linking individual consciousness with a group consciousness were unavoidable.

The name of the future synthetic procedures that could save the species⁶ is already there: globally working democratic mechanisms [4]. What science - the pivotal step forward after the dark ages of religion - still has to provide is their (preliminary best) design.

The second example has taken the first one closer towards human individuals, to the links via consciousness. The third example of dialectic thinking moves inside the human and social brain itself, towards thinking itself. In this domain the thesis has

a rather clear-cut form: We use abstract models to construct a thought concrete of what we experience [5]. The central property of any abstract model is that it remains a constantly valid description of the relevant future causality structure. As a consequence, the anti-thesis to the (model-) thesis is practice, which calls the thesis into question. Practice is always using some theory and theory can only be advanced by a practice that proves it (at least partially) wrong [6]. Therefore, doubt is the element in which this interaction of model-thesis and anti-thetic practice swims⁷. Its desired goal is to continue the continuing improvement of any preliminary (model-) thesis, a procedure driven by individuals representing knowledge accumulation of the species, a synthesizing procedure called science [7]. Scientific doubt evidently is the opposite of religious (or nationalist) belief, which is based on the attempt to cement a regulatory framework that secures a certain class domination [8].

'Walking on two Legs', what a universe of ideas opens up as soon as Greek-Hegelian dialectics are grafted on these trivial three elements! Mao Zedong's cultural revolution failed spectacularly. Mahatma Gandhi was driven to bitter cynicism when asked what he thinks of enlightenment. He answered, 'It would be a good idea.'. Nowadays, the US president calls for an outdated global cultural counter-revolution, a foreseeable collapse with tremendous collateral damage. Standing on one leg on a trembling ground, you will fall. Standing on two legs, you sooner or later will tip over and fall too. Only *walking* with your two legs - along the dialectic around the time axis - will give you a chance for flexible response, a chance to move on.

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1. Compare (Slim, 2021, pp. 171-204) and (Hanappi, 2009).
 2. Compare (Hanappi, 2013) for a definition of the capitalist algorithm.
 3. Compare (Hanappi H. and Hanappi-Egger E., 2004).
 4. Note that Darwin's book (Darwin, 1859) concerns the survival of the *species*, and not the survival of an individual.
 5. Marx had coined the expression 'man's species-being' ('Gattungswesen') claiming that capitalist exploitation was alienating workers from their class consciousness, see (Marx, 1844).
 6. The most dangerous challenge now comes from the looming climate collapse that badly needs a new combination of scientific progress and global democratic mechanisms, see (Hanappi, 2025).
 7. Note that this is exactly the classical position of René Descartes, (Descartes, 1637).

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