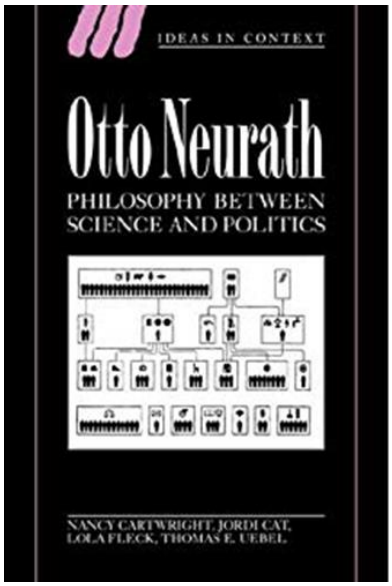
Otto Neurath & Red Vienna: Mutual Philosophical, Scientific and Socialist Fecundity

A Basic Bibliography (in English)

Patrick S. O'Donnell (2020)





Apologia

The Aim of General Emancipation in Socialism: Otto Bauer and Rudolf Bahro

Socialism generalizes and instantiates democratic means, methods, and processes in the everyday life of the masses by way of both formal and informal education which is intrinsic to what Rudolf Bahro once defined as "general emancipation." The seeds for same were planted in the soil of Austro-Marxism, as in this passage from the leader of the Austrian Social Democrats, Otto Bauer, in 1907:

"This revolution in the consciousness of the masses will be consolidated by the everyday praxis of socialist society, which gives the masses for the first time the power to determine their own destiny, to decide by free discussion and resolution their own future, and thus make the development of human culture a deliberate, intentional, conscious human act. It will be made possible by socialist education, which will provide every individual with the cultural objects of the whole nation and indeed a good part of the whole human race. Only in this way can the

individual be liberated from the traditions of restricted local circles, broaden his views, and be enabled to establish his own ends and make an intelligent choice of the means to those ends."

* * *

The following is from the chapter, "The Present Conditions and Perspectives for General Emancipation," in Rudolf Bahro (David Fernbach, trans.) *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* (London: NLB, 1978):

"*Today it is general emancipation that is the absolute necessity*, since in the blind play of subaltern egoisms, lack of solidarity, the antagonism of atomized and alienated individuals, groups, peoples and conglomerates of all kinds, we are hastening ever more quickly to the point of no return. This is something we must be aware of before we ask *how* it is possible. [….]

The general emancipation is … the liberation of individuals from all socially determined limitations on their development, which necessarily had to have the outcome of their exclusion from participation in the determination of general affairs, from the conscious bringing about of social changes. [….] General emancipation will promote first and foremost the conditions for the *activity* of appropriation to become universal. It is accomplished to the extent that men and women are positively placed in a position to appropriate creatively the social totality—or to put it another way, to make subjectively their own the quintessence of the overall cultural achievement that mankind has so far produced or reproduced (i.e., handed down). It is a condition for this that social life in general, and in particular the process of production, including its informational superstructure, is organized in such a way that everyone can acquire all the individual abilities that correspond to the general level of the existing productive forces and the system of social regulation. Here it already becomes evident that the conditions for general emancipation go far beyond the provision of material means in the narrower sense. The major 'means of development' becomes more and more the organization of the social whole as such. It is in this field above all that the objective basis for the 'development of individuals into complete individuals' must be created. [….]

Today we have for the first time in history a really massive 'surplus consciousness,' i.e. an energetic mental capacity that is no longer absorbed by the *immediate* necessities and dangers of human existence and can thus orient itself to more distant problems. Previously, the scarceness of the means of satisfaction and development that are necessary for production and reproduction of the highest intellectual faculties always counterposed educated elites and uneducated masses. [….] [Now, however,] technology demands educated masses and at the same time brings about the conditions for liquidating individual underdevelopment and

subalternity. The problem is to drive forward the 'overproduction' of consciousness, so as to put the whole historical past 'on its head,' and to make the idea into *the decisive* material force, to guide things to a radical transformation that goes still deeper than the customary transition from one formation to another within one and the same civilization. We are now facing, and what has in fact already begun, is a *cultural revolution* in the truest sense of the term: *a transformation of the entire subjective form of life of the masses*, something that can only be compared with that other transition which introduced humanity into class society, by way of patriarchy, the vertical division of labor, and the state. In this second cultural revolution man will found his existence on his consciousness, on the 'highest mode of existence of matter,' and concentrate on the social organization of this noosphere so as to regulate his natural relationship anew from this point of departure. [….]

We must be clear about the psychological dimension of the problem of individuality in a supercomplex industrial society. The various spheres of life—work, education, domestic living, recreation—are separated to such an extent, and almost all activities so far depersonalized, even private relationships robbed of so many necessities, that alienation of man from man threatens to become the general fate. The misfortune of loneliness, of total loss of communication under the gigantic surface of abstract, spiritually indifferent functional activities, is encroaching ever deeper. We find lack of emotional connection even in the intimate contacts of the small family, this final residue of original communality. A mode of life that spells so much disharmony for the individuals involved may well be progressive according to some arbitrary criterion, but it does not offer any perspective of human emancipation. [….]

Our species can and will continue to improve its material base, but it must break with megalomania for the sake of its own survival and of the meaningfulness of life, it must learn collective respect for the natural order, which up till now it has managed to disturb rather than to improve. It must continue its ascent as a 'journey inwards.' [….] The development of the industrially developed countries in the last few decades has *proved* that the problem of general emancipation does not in any way consist in ensuring a sufficient material foundation in terms of means of subsistence. This certainly remains an indispensable precondition (though the necessary scope of this basis is probably more variable than we usually assume, when we fix our glance too narrowly on the actual present standard of our own society), and 'when you've covered your nakedness, you've got dignity'—*but not automatically*. The quantity and range of goods and enjoyments that intrude for consumption and distort the individual's deployment of his time, on the one hand by an increase in abstract labor, on the other hand by the passive reception of what has been 'bought for dear money,' can even end up blocking the sources of emancipation and producing a parasitic mentality. [….] What stubbornly proves to be the real problem of general emancipation is the alienation of individuals from the sources of the social

power that they themselves have produced; their impotence and lack of influence on their overall destiny that is still actually increasing, and the poverty of their relations of real communication…. [….]

[The *overcoming of subalternity,* the form of existence and mode of thought of 'little people,'] means the abolition of the traditional vertical division of labor, and the revolution of the entire orientation and structure of needs that is bound up with this. It proceeds by way of a radical change in all our customary institutions and modes of procedure in society and in the economy. *The overcoming of subalternity on a mass scale is the only possible alternative to the limitless expansion of material needs*. [….] The surplus consciousness which I already referred to, that free mental capacity which is no longer absorbed by the struggle for means of existence, is divide complementarily into two diametrically opposed phenomenal forms of social interest. They are both related to certain fundamental human social needs, which is why they generally compete with one another also in each individual consciousness, so that they divide individuals less than do [the] earlier antithesis into firm social groupings. Their struggle begins when 'one soul seeks to sever from the other' [from Goethe's *Faust*] in the individual consciousness.

The *compensatory* interests, first of all, are the unavoidable reaction to the way society restricts and stunts the growth, development, and confirmation of innumerable people at an early age. The corresponding needs are met with substitute satisfactions. People have to be indemnified, by possession and consumption of as many things and services as possible, with the greatest possible (exchange-) value, for the fact that they have an inadequate share in the proper human needs. The striving for power can also be classed with the compensatory interests, as a kind of higher derivative.

The *emancipatory* interests, on the other hand, are oriented to the growth, differentiation and self-realization of the [individual] in all dimensions of human activity. They demand above all the potentially comprehensive appropriation of the essential human powers objectified in individuals, in objects, modes of behaviour and relationships, their transformation into subjectivity, into a possession not of the juridical person, but rather of the intellectual and ethical individuality, which presses in its turn for more productive transformation.

This is a preliminary and very general definition. The emancipatory interests are as old as class society itself, as the exclusion of the working masses from a growing number of historically given activities, relations and enjoyments—even if these generally could not be broadly developed and socially manifested. There are recognizable barriers from which men have always sought to emancipate themselves, in order to obtain access to something, and appropriate something, that is conceived time and again in the ideas of freedom, joy, happiness,

etc., which no cynical irony can expunge. The inexhaustible possibilities of human nature, which themselves increase with cultural progress, are the innermost material of all utopias, and moreover a very real, and in no way immaterial material at that. They inevitably lead to the desire to transform human life."

* * *

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