

Revolutions as disasters of misconceived political projects of social mutations*

Cătălin Mamali

Abstract: The study reviews the book *You say you want a revolution? Radical idealism and its tragic consequences* by D. Chirot (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2020) and, at the same time, advances a viewpoint on social revolutions based on Thoreau's imperative of the separation from evil. Why most social revolutions have dangerous and painful consequences while their promoters claim that the revolution will alleviate human suffering and will bring happiness? The study identifies more sources of the tragic consequences of revolutions than the radical idealism as suggested by Chirot. In contrast with the ideological, structural and individual violence of communist revolutions shaped by Marxist conception the study explores the value of Thoreauvian's heuristic for the achievement of peaceful, non-violent revolutionary changes. Self-reliance is assumed to be a vital engine of peaceful revolutionary changes.

Keywords: radical idealism, social revolutions, Thoreauvian's heuristic, self-reliance, non-violent revolutions

* I expressed my gratitude to the unknown reviewer for his/her extremely useful critical comments and suggestions and to Monika Poradecka and to Dr. Marcin Jan Byczyński for their much needed and relevant editorial work.

** Independent scholar, Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry, University of Iowa, USA
catalin.mamali@loras.edu

Living in Romania was, however, a very crucial experience for me, because at the end of one year here I hated it here. Even though I had some good friends and I never overcame my anti-communism, and I'm not embarrassed by that. But, my whole social science education, particularly in graduate school, not all of it, but that which influenced me most, was actually quite Marxist. My teacher was a Marxist and still is, and a quite well-known one, Immanuel Wallerstein. And if I had chosen to go to, say, South Korea, to do my research, or to Greece, when the generals were in power, it's quite possible, but it's almost certain that I would have been a strong left-winger. Because I would have been so disgusted by the dictatorship, and by the abuse of power. But, because I was here, what I became was an anti-communist, and so that was very important.¹

The main question explored by the present study that is reviewing the book *You say you want a revolution? Radical idealism and its tragic consequences* by D. Chirot² and, at the same time, advances a viewpoint on social revolutions is: why most social revolutions have dangerous and painful consequences while their promoters claim that the revolution will alleviate human suffering and will bring happiness? The study identifies more sources of the tragic consequences of revolutions than the radical idealism. I identify the following sources: the use of violent means, the exacerbation of negative emotions such as rage and revenge, the use by the revolutionary elites of repressive agents of the former regime that are integrated in the new system, the conflict of political, financial and military interests between internal and external forces associated with a revolution, and the epistemic and moral poverty of the conception that claims to be at the heart of the revolution.

¹ Cătălin Mamali, "Interview with Daniel Chirot", *Psihologia Socială* 2010, No. 26(II), pp. 132–151.

² Idem, *You say you want a revolution? Radical idealism and its tragic consequences*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2020.

Political revolutions and professional revolutionaries

Human societies exist and evolve for longer and shorter periods in a state of relative well-being and peace according to their own standards. However, there are periods during which the societal pains, human suffering, injustices, oppression and daily misery reach levels felt and assessed as unbearable by most people of a given society. During such times most of the population is against the existing order and enraged by the existing societal state. These are periods that nourish the tendency toward a radical change, i.e., a change that is expected to achieve a better societal state, qualitatively different from the existing one. Such periods are favorable to the genesis and eruption of revolutions. The concept of social revolution still remains a subject of theoretical, political and practical controversies. Arendt³, analyzing the French revolution, advanced the general idea that revolutions generate a “new experience” that has practical, subjective, and ideological dimensions. The political program, usually, is expressed in a proclamation, declaration or political manifesto.

I consider that the concept of social and political revolution implies a few essential components. The concept of revolution involves a strong *rejection of the existing social state*. Above all, it indicates a general discontent toward the status quo and includes the hope, promises or project of a new and better state. The societal discontent is rooted in wide, relatively long-term, and deep social suffering at *material level* (misery), *justice level* (social resources and opportunities are unfairly allocated and wasted), *cultural level* (the language, religious beliefs, traditions are repressed or denied), and *moral level* (dignity and honor – the individual and collective beings are disrespected). The concept of revolution refers to *a struggle for political power* initiated by the discontent part of population against the dominant groups (internal, external or both). In its original form, this struggle is not just against a specific leader (emperor, despot, king, general secretary of a party, dictator) but against the power structure (military, economic, financial, secret police, legal institutions, cultural repres-

³ Hannah Arendt, *On revolutions*, The Viking Press, New York 1963, p. 27.

sion...) that supports the leader and the existing order. The revolutionary force aims to *dismantle the existing power structure* felt and assessed as overwhelmingly repressive and dysfunctional by the majority, which has been silent and politically powerless.

Ideological initiators and political leaders of revolutions advance more or less articulated visions on the future society and the means to achieve them, on the goals and means of the revolution. Conceptually, revolutions, as radical societal changes, lead to a *social mutation*. The variety of the radical visions and actions against a given social system are considered to belong to a wide spectrum with three major types:

- A. *Radical actions* that have mainly (even only) a *destructive goal* – the annihilation of the system – without any constructive changes. These actions are barbarian and motivated by hate.
- B. *Radical actions* and *visions* focused on the existing social evils, for instance foreign occupation, slavery, material misery and aim *removing the existing evils* considered to be rooted in human made errors, especially in legislative errors and malpractices. They do not impose or propose any systematic social project but strongly suggest the *use of non-violent means for removing the evil*. This type is best represented by Thoreauvian conception. Such revolutions do not aim to remove (kill) humans that enhance but focus on the removal of evil laws, institutions and practices.
- C. *Radical societal changes that are guided by a social and political project carried out by violent means*, usually inscribed in an algorithmic manifesto, and are marked by utopian drive. This type is best represented by the communist revolution conceived by Marx. Between type B and type C are many other types, which include also the transitions from communist order to the democratic and market order.

Revolutions imply a variety of social actors (discontent majority, political leaders, conspirators, and activists among others). Some political actors call themselves *professional revolutionaries* and expect substantial material social status benefits for being only *activists*.

Professional revolutionaries are a fluid category that emerges and multiplies in conflicting political situations, and times of real and fabricated societal troubles. Professional revolutionaries are ranging from ideological founders to political activists, from prophets of social change to bloody executors of political programs, from radical theoreticians to fanatics. They claim to serve the Revolution from various motives and interests, from class interests to clan interests, from financial interests to cultural interests, from ethnic and religious interests to self-declared concerns for other and otherness. Social revolutions emerged as a way of changing the existing miserable societal state and of reaching a promised better, even ideal state.

The variety of revolutions: major similarities and differences

The social appeal of revolutions and of their prophets did not vanish despite that most political revolutions generated bloodshed and social disaster. The revolutions are changing the balance between hope and despair, and between rage toward the existing power and trust in the emerging power. Revolutions change this balance but almost never deliver the promised state. In his fascinating book on revolutions and radical idealism, Daniel Chirot explores the features and dynamics of revolutions, the stages of the revolutionary transformations, and – as he makes crystal-clear – the tragic consequences of revolutions.

The central question of his book – expressed in its title – the comprehensive and persuasive inquiry developed by the author, and the answers and lessons offered by this work are just a few traits of this brilliant analysis. Chirot explores and assesses a wide variety of revolutions disclosing their common features and essential differences. This makes possible to depict the great success of American Revolution (1775–1783) and of the French Revolution (1789–1799) – including their comparison – and the obvious fact that they neglected major social pains, such as slavery for the American revolution and colonization for the French revolution, which lead to long term social convulsions in former American Colonies and in France. Chirot's book is focused on the dynamic of the catastrophic revolutions of the 20th century – the Com-

munist/Bolshevik revolution and the series of its political clones in many other countries, the “transformative fascist regimes”, and on some “anomalies” including the revolution initiated by Khomeini.

If we look at the similarities and differences between the American Revolution and the French Revolution, and those between the communist revolution directed by Lenin and the Islamic revolution conceived by Khomeini a set of historical facts are obvious but not analyzed in Chirot’s book.

The comparative approach of American and French revolutions reveals a few basic similarities and differences. The American Revolution aimed to remove the *external oppression* (the rule of the British Empire) while the French Revolution has been directed toward *internal oppression* (monarchy). The American Revolution has been against *a systemic oppressive rule* with economic, military and moral consequences. However, its leaders did not personalize the conflict (did not identify individual enemies who have to be annihilated). The governing body of the French Revolution *identified specific enemies* (individuals and social categories) and ordered their brutal extermination. Of course, there are exceptions. For instance, Marquis de Sade⁴, well known for his sadistic mentality, has been in strong conflict with former representatives of the monarchic system as it was his mother in law but he refused to put them to death when he, as member of the revolutionary tribunal, had the power to. This is puzzling because before the revolution the relationship between Sade and his mother in law has been one of reciprocal hate and threats. The American Revolution allowed later on, even cultivated the *development of good, and friendly relationships with its former enemy* – the British Empire. The French Revolution enhanced *hostility toward the representatives of the former regime*, toward their status, symbols and values. More, the French revolution unleashed and used terror. Both revolutions have been against monarchy and for the republican and democratic values and structures. Both revolu-

⁴ Marquis de Sade, *Correspondences du Marquis de Sade et de ses proches enrichies de documents, notes et commentaries par Alice M. Laborde*, vol. I–XII, Slatkine, Genève 1994.

tions have been *against the aristocratic and autocratic ways* and *for the meritocratic and democratic ways*. Both revolutions *left out huge social debts, major unsolved social pains*. The American Revolution neglected the sufferings of the Indians (the autochthonic population) and the slavery. The French Revolution neglected the external oppression of the French colonies that implied, in some cases, the support of monarchic rule in the colonies. Both revolutions had *a national character* that aimed toward freedom from an oppressing system (external for the American Revolution, internal for the French Revolution) of similar ethnic and religious identity. Did the shadow of the British world power status enter into the American collective unconscious mind? Did the authoritarian way, specific to the monarchy, survive within the French collective unconscious mind under various forms including the support provided by many French intellectuals to the Soviet way?

There are basic similarities and differences between the revolutions lead by Lenin and by Khomeini. Lenin's revolution and Khomeini's revolution included during their germinal stages a preparation period that developed within a well-established democratic and market society far away from their own countries. For Lenin the choice has been Switzerland while Khomeini's choice has been France. Both leaders used the freedom provided by these societies to work out their conspiracy, and to develop their political support, program and networks. Paradoxically the democratic society offered a fertile ground for the growth and maturation of the plans and support system of brutal authoritarian revolutions. If Lenin's communist revolution has been atheistic, anti-monarchic (anti-tsarist), and politically Marxist it is evident that Khomeini's revolution has been religious, anti-monarchic (against the shah) and politically Islamist. Both have been, in their first stages, supported by many people in each country. While Lenin's revolutionary program had an explicit international goal in tune with the Marxist call to proletarians across the world to unite themselves, Khomeini's revolutionary program has been national with an implicit support for those of the same Islamic religion who are located in other countries. The revolutionary core of Lenin's program is patriotic-less (apatrid) and internationally oriented while the revolutionary core of Khomeini's program is patriotic, and eth-

no-religiously oriented. Lenin did not belong through his social and cultural position to the vast category of the oppressed people while Khomeini belonged through his social and cultural (inclusively religious) background to, at least, one of the oppressed and discontent major social categories.

If Khomeini's revolution surprised many experienced politicians – despite some guesses of scholars who had direct experiences in many authoritarian regimes⁵ – then the Mexican anomaly poses other difficult questions that are expressed and answered by Chirot. One of these questions regards the relation between a "coherent radical ideology" on one hand and repression on the other⁶. Mexican revolution, which broke out in 1910 within the context of social discontent created by a stolen election, despite the high levels of repression that marked its trajectory is different from the 1917 Communist (Bolshevik) Revolution. During it was "never anything as sinister or all powerful as Lenin and Stalin's Cheka, OGPU, NKVD, or KGB. The tragedy, at least as widespread killing went, ended after 1929"⁷. If this is true in the case of revolutions rooted in radical ideologies it might be useful to ask what happened in the case of the profound social changes (revolutionary changes) that have been produced by Mandela's revolution that ended the apartheid and was not followed by a dictatorship. Is the change enhanced by Mandela's vision and actions an anomaly? Mandela knew very well the Marxist writings being, at the same time, deeply attracted, at least for instrumental reasons, by Gandhi's non-violent perspective⁸. Chirot does not consider Tutu's and Mandela's brilliant, peaceful, and truthful approach to societal pains and political power.

Chirot's synthesis on *revolutionary extremism* proposes a model that includes internal causes (i.e., causes that are within a given political system, nation, region at a given

⁵ Johan Galtung, *Johan fără țară: Străbătând lumea pe drumul păcii*, Tiparg, Pitești 2015.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 73.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Nelson Mandela, *Long walk to freedom. The autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, Little, Brown & Company, New York 1994; idem, *Conversations with myself*, Picador, New York 2011; Desmond M. Tutu, *No future without forgiveness*, Doubleday, New York 1997.

time, including its power structures) and external influences (such as foreign interventions, colonization, contact with other cultures). The model contains four distinct stages⁹: a) how the radicals come to power; b) how a repressive apparatus is built and institutionalized; c) the radical utopianism; d) and gradual slide into corruption that is associated with what Chirot called with other occasions *moral bankruptcy*¹⁰.

The interplay of material causes and the emotional forces within the birth of revolutions

The social ignition that might lead to a revolution has many sources, some being unpredictable. However, it seems that the social ignition needs, at least, the following factors: a social event (lost war, sharp economic decline and material misery, unprecedented and unjustified killings of innocent people, the brutal treatment of moral opponents to the regime, a terribly mishandled natural disaster or pandemic, for instance) and the accelerated growth of negative social emotions such as rage, and urge for revenge. Sloterdijk¹¹ advanced the concept of *rage capital* that helps the understanding of the functions of negative emotions in political struggle. Radical ideas that support violent means are interconnected with powerful negative emotions – rage, hate, revenge, despise – that have uncontrollable social trajectories especially when they are spreading among the discontent masses. The rage capital is stimulated, cultivated and managed by the leaders of social uprisings and revolutions. Usually, the social ignition is associated with explicit and clear targets (tsar's despotism, foreign occupation, material misery, slavery...). I think that the political leaders face the *moral dilemma* of resorting either to *moral competence*¹² or to *immoral competence* that is based on the divorce between the moral values of goals and means.

⁹ Daniel Chirot, *You say you want a revolution?...*, pp. 10–11.

¹⁰ Daniel Chirot, *Modern tyrants. The power and prevalence of evil in our age*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1994.

¹¹ Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and time. A psychopolitical investigation*, Columbia University Press, New York 2006.

¹² As defined by Georg Lind, "Moral judgment competency and education in democratic society", in: P. Weingartner, G. Zecha (eds.), *Conscience: An interdisciplinary view*, Reidel, Dordrecht 1985.

Immoral competence means the ability and will to reach desired goals by violent means and successfully presenting this strategy as legally and morally justified.

Chirot's inquiry reveals that whenever the *Olson's blockage* is disregarded, even dismissed by those in power (establishment), then catastrophic consequences are emerging under the pressure of various forces of societal change. Chirot reminds to the experts and laypersons the significance of what he calls Olson's blockage¹³ (see *The rise and declines of nations; Economic growth, stagflation, and social rigidities*). Olson posits that when those in power refuse enacting necessary reforms for solving societal pains then crises emerge and revolutions and horrific consequences become more likely.

The repressed societal change demands feed the anger, rage and hate that are emotional forces frequently associated with revolutions. When these destructive social emotions are erupting, the *previous cultural homeostasis* (as Damasio¹⁴ defines the concept) collapses and many beneficial personalities and groups become victims. Such tragic consequences turn into victims even those who rationally anticipated the dangers and conceived peaceful solutions. Chirot refers to Condorcet's and La Fayette's destinies. These paradigmatic cases are sources of bitter historical lessons and warnings. Chirot deals with hard questions expressed in an impressive mode. For instance, he asks: *How could Nazism's ideological nightmare succeed so well?* One of the causes identified by Chirot is the neglect by politicians, intellectuals and common people of the ideas expressed, sometimes written as programs, by fascist leaders¹⁵.

The book reveals the consequences of the radical idealism in the case of communist revolutions – a topic approached in other works by Chirot. Indeed, Chirot's model of "a typological map of tyranny"¹⁶ developed in *Modern Tyrants* explains the genesis and functions of the combination between ideal-

¹³ See Mancur Olson, *The rise and declines of nations: Economic growth, stagflation, and social rigidities*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1982.

¹⁴ Antonio Damasio, *The strange order of things: Life, feeling and the making of cultures*, Pantheon Books, New York 2018.

¹⁵ Daniel Chirot, *You say you want a revolution?...*, pp. 74–75.

¹⁶ Idem, *Modern tyrants...*, pp. 170–171.

ism and certitude of those who call themselves “true believers”. The “tyranny of idealistic certitude” that is ideologically grounded is the fertile soil for the genesis of “godlike dictators” who flourished during and after the communist revolutions.

Chirot’s model on tyrants is a “typological map” while his model on revolutions is a developmental one focused on distinct phases of the revolutionary transformations. Revolutions, and clearly the communist revolutions with all their utopian promises, slide into corruption. This stage becomes more pregnant as the initial strong dictators, such as Stalin, are gone. What happens after they vanish physically? Chirot assumes that the growth of bureaucracy and a rigid ruling party are significant causes: “After Stalin’s death the terror mostly receded. Once bureaucrats running an economy are no longer threatened with removal for poor performance, and if on the top of that they are inadequately paid, the path is open not only to growing inefficiency but also to *corrupt practices that begin to infect all public services*. If, furthermore, there is a ruling party that tolerates no dissent or opposition, the ruling elite almost inevitably learns that it can take advantage of its power to enrich itself even if the economy deteriorates and the mass of the population suffers”¹⁷.

Obviously, corruption and bureaucracy are causes of the decline of the communist societies. Corruption is a social disease. However, this “infection” is not among the root causes of the disaster of the Soviet and European communist revolutions that disregarded the history of the national identity and dignity and the tendency toward self-reliance of the nations. Among the root causes of the economic, political and moral catastrophes of former communist regimes, as Leszek Kołakowski¹⁸, suggested, is that their ideologues and political leaders disregarded the history of their own people. Kołakowski posits: “imagine that a society could ever spring up entirely from a utopia (or indeed from a *kakotopia*) because it would amount to be-

¹⁷ Idem, *You say you want a revolution?...*, p. 112, italics added.

¹⁸ Leszek Kołakowski, “The Marxist roots of Stalinism, first English publication in *Stalinism: Essays in historical interpretation*”, in: idem, *Is God happy? Selected essays*, Introduction by A. Kołakowska, Basic Books, New York 2012.

lieving that human communities are capable of doing away with their history”¹⁹.

In periods assessed by the dominant group as prone to revolution the political leaders use different tactics to deflect the political attention and the anger from the main targets, to appease some social sufferings, and to fabricate scapegoats (foreign interventionists, traitors, corrupt members of the regime and so on). Sometime controlling tactics of the social rage capital are successful and the regime survives. The leaders able to manage explosive situations, very likely, possess manipulative skills – high Mach-²⁰ and high immoral competence, i.e. make many people believe that they take morally justified decisions while they use deceptive and violent means.

The communist and anti-communist revolutions: the existential importance of theoretical confrontations on their causes and future

A series of communist revolutions and the anti-communist waves within a bloody global context that includes the rise and fall of fascist regimes marked the 20th century. The historical facts regarding totalitarianism reveal that communist totalitarian regimes had a unique and much older program (since the publication in 1848 of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, from now MCP) than the fascist regimes. In most countries, the communist parties have been formed and reached the formal political power before the fascists parties. These facts invite questions about the causes and future of totalitarian societies. The questions are nurtured by the tendency that emerged just after the 1989 fall of the communist regimes in Europe to consider that the communist conception and ideology are valid and that the disaster has been caused by incompetent and evil political leaders. Intellectuals from different countries²¹. In Romania in 1981, for instance, Cassian expressed this view many times. She declared her love of communism: “I belong to communism with

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 93.

²⁰ Richard Christie, Florence L. Geiss, *Studies in Machiavellianism*, Academic Press, New York 1970.

²¹ Shlomo Avineri, “After the fall of communism. Capitalism has not won, socialism is not dead”, *Dissent* 1992, Winter.

what is the best in me, / ...with my love...” as she repeated during a meeting with Ceaușescu, and, in general, pleaded for communism and its dictatorial figures such as Stalin, stating “Stalin is the light”²². After 1989 she underscored that she never divorced the Communist Party. These intellectuals think that the anti-communist revolutions did not defeat the Marxist model that remains a viable alternative to capitalism. This representation has vital societal implications for political choices: should the Marxist model and its political program get new chances to be implemented by other political leaders in the same countries and other countries? The answer of the nostalgic communists is firm. Yes, the Marxist revolution deserves new chances. B. Sanders’s ideas, as a candidate, in 2016, to the presidency of the USA, are in accord with this trend²³.

Chirot makes a separation between Marxism and the long chain of bloody dictators²⁴ who implemented the political algorithm prescribed by Marx and Engels in the MCP. This is a surprise because Chirot had the chances to witness directly the communist realities, for sure those of Romania, and because his present book is published many years after Kołakowski’s landmark writings and critical analysis of communist ideology and revolutions. Actually, Chirot does not mention any work by Kołakowski or by some historic leaders of anti-communist dissidence movement such, as Havel, especially his ideas on the historical role of the powerless people, of those excluded by the formal political power²⁵. The urge

²² Nina Cassian, *Memoira ca zestre*, Colecția Tango, București 2010. Besides it a reproduction of the stenogram is provided by Emil Berdeli, “Nina Cassian, către Ceaușescu”, *Confidential Press* 2018, November 27. This is in line with Cassian’s political idols as proved by the poems dedicated to Stalin (*Stalin e lumina – Stalin is the light* – verses by N. Cassian and music by Vasile Popovici, Comitetul Așezămintelor Culturale de pe lângă Consiliul de Miniștri al R.P.R., București 1953). See also <http://www.facebook.com/> (Amintiri din communism).

²³ Bernie Sanders, *Our revolution*, 2016, <https://berniesanders.com/get-involved/our-revolution/> [accessed: 28.08.2021]; idem, *Our revolution: A future to believe in*, Thomas Dunne Books, St Martin’s Press, New York 2016.

²⁴ Daniel Chirot, *You say you want a revolution?...*, pp. 90–91.

²⁵ Vaclav Havel, *The power of the powerless*, M.E. Sharpe, Inc., Armonk 1985.

for self-inquiry and for the practice of one's own philosophy, major features of the Socratic way, was accepted and enriched by Thoreau as well as by Patočka and his disciple Havel. In Patočka's terms "truth can only be grasped in action, an only a being who acts effectively (which does not simply reflect an objective process) can enter into relation with truth"²⁶. Havel's conception²⁷ on the social functions of truth are in tune with this idea. Patočka, who had a major role in the elaboration of *Charter 77*²⁸ and died soon after his brutal interrogation by the communist secret police, advanced the idea that the *shakable status of the existing meaning* has at the same time a universal value and a non-violent character. Patočka's choicet is not directed toward an objective enemy. It is self-directed. For Patočka "shaken" is a creative and searching vibration; it is a necessary condition for the search and construction of meaning. Patočka's questioning orientation is essential for the responsible search of meaning that might lead to a "new project of life"²⁹. Without such essential inner individual changes the social revolutions are doomed to end in disasters regardless the new social and technological (social media) tools their initiators might have access. After the successful anti-communist revolutions in 1989 in Eastern Europe there have been a series of aborted revolutions.

While writing his essay (1975, see its publication in 2012) Kołakowski felt the need to refer directly to the relationships between Stalinism and Marxism. His questions have a wide horizon and regard the mode in which political declarations and projects, usually inscribed in political manifestoes and essays, might shape the social reality. Here are the questions triggered by his curiosity and the answers worked out by Kołakowski: "was (or is) the characteristically Stalinist ide-

²⁶ Jan Patočka, *La surcivilization et son conflict*, in: idem, *Liberté et sacrifice. Ecrits politiques*, translated by E. Abrams, Millon, Grenoble 1990, p. 160, italics added.

²⁷ Vaclav Havel, *Living in truth. Twenty-two essays published with the occasion of the award of the Erasmus Prize to Václav Havel*, edited by J. Vladislav, Faber and Faber, London 1986.

²⁸ Charter 77, *The Times of London*, January 7, 1977.

²⁹ Jan Patočka, *Heretical essays in the philosophy of history*, edited by J. Dodd, translated by J. Kohák Open Court, Chicago–La Salle 1975/1996, p. 61.

ology that was designed to justify the Stalinist system societal organization a legitimate (even if not the only possible) interpretation of Marxist philosophy of history? This is the milder version of my question. The stronger version is: was every attempt to implement all the basic values of Marxist socialism likely to generate a political organization that would bear the unmistakable marks of Stalinism?"³⁰ Kołakowski's answer is explicit: "an affirmative answer to both questions."³¹ The questions generated by Kołakowski have a universal value and concern the possible connections between the imagined social actions for removing societal evils that are inscribed in a political text that calls for practical answers to painful issues. Kołakowski's questions are precise and can be empirically tested.

Kołakowski belongs to a wider, creative and politically engaged group of Polish social thinkers who focused their work on the terrible conditions of the communist society and their political and ideological roots. For instance, L. Nowak developed a critical perspective on the discrepancy between the courageous actions generated by Solidarność Independent Self-governing Trade Union (NSZZ, Polish abbreviation) in Poland on one hand and the lack of a "clear social vision" that was unprecedented in the history of socialism was not matched by a conceptual framework produced by the intellectual elites³². According to Nowak the *solidarity of the nation and of the state* have been opposed by NSZZ Solidarność to the Marxist emphasis on class struggle and conflict of interests. Consequently, the need for the solidarity of the nation has been expressed by the speech-acts of NSZZ, inscribed on the banners of solidarity. Brzezczyń's synthesizing and inspiring study on Nowak's

³⁰ Leszek Kołakowski, "The Marxist roots of Stalinism...", pp. 93–94.

³¹ Ibidem, p. 94.

³² Leszek Nowak, „Cena braku perspektywy”, in: idem, *Polska droga od socjalizmu. Pisma polityczne 1980–1989*, K. Brzezczyń (ed.), Poznań 2011, p. 250, cited by Krzysztof Brzezczyń, "On courage of actions and cowardice of thinking. Leszek Nowak on the provincialism of the political thought of Solidarność", in: K. Brzezczyń, K. Paprzycka (eds.), *Thinking about provincialism in thinking (Poznań studies in the philosophy of sciences and the humanities)*, Vol. 100, Rodopi, Amsterdam 2012, p. 224.

view reveals that the chances for working out a novel social conception, which is much needed within the *societies enslaved by communism* (Nowak's syntagm), must include the following characteristics: *courage, tolerance, and capacity for modification*. Courage is necessary to accept the idealizing assumptions, which "paranthesize"/paraphrase practical knowledge about the effects of secondary factors on a given phenomenon and reveal the impact of the principal factor. Tolerance grants others the right to develop alternative philosophical perspectives. Finally, capacity for modification consists of incorporating principal factors from other philosophical orientations into the theoretical set of one's own assertions, where they are regarded as secondary factors"³³. Nowak suggests that novel ideas that can be quite radical will not become toxic if they remain open to other perspectives and are used with tolerance. This means also that "radical idealism", as understood by Chirot, becomes dangerous if it suppresses alternative radical ideas and rejects dialogue, inter-subjective testing and self-correction. The last feature is supported by the Gardenerian vision³⁴ on *synthesizing minds* that generate creative syntheses that enhance the chances to transcend conceptual and societal conflicts.

The work *You say you want a revolution? Radical idealism and its tragic consequences* resorts to valid sources and a huge bibliography that are efficiently and elegantly used. Surprisingly, Chirot does not refer to first hand sources generated by initiators and direct participants to the anti-communist revolutions in spite of the rich bibliography. The neglect of landmark and original theoreticians and courageous dissenters such as Kołakowski includes many other significant works of prominent anti-communist dissidents as Havel, Michnik or Patočka – to name just a few.

Chirot's book on revolutions explores the disappointment that followed the fall down of communism in European countries and resorting to works carried by Dragoș Petrescu, who

³³ Krzysztof Brzechczyn, "On courage of actions...", p. 221, italics added.

³⁴ Howard Gardner, *The synthesizing mind in politics and diplomacy*, 2021, <https://howardgardner01.wordpress.com/2021/02/08/the-synthesizing-mind-in-politics-and-diplomacy/> [accessed: 23.07.2021].

was the President of CNSAS (*Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității*), regarding the fall of Ceaușescu and the sequence of anti-communist revolutions³⁵, and by Kornai on socialist system³⁶. The questions of Petrescu's model are: "Why did those revolutionary events occur precisely in 1989? Why did the communist regimes in East Central Europe collapse in that particular order?"³⁷. Petrescu assumes that the 1989 collapse of communist dictatorships can be understood as a "reactive sequence" that includes "structural and ideological decay", "internal and external conjectural factors", "nation-specific factors related to the 'culture of the communist regime' and the political culture of the resistance against the system"³⁸.

Works that claim to explain the dynamics of anti-communist movements in Europe (1989) remain captive to major conceptual and practical errors of the Marxist orientation. One of the major causes of this conceptual captivity seems to be, in Nowak's terms, the low levels of tolerance and weak capacity of creative modifications. I think that the systematic disregards of major theoretical, practical and moral achievements in the area of revolutionary changes such as those advanced by Thoreau and Gandhi is enhancing this captivity.

Revolutionary alternatives: Thoreauvian and Gandhian conceptions and practices on non-violence and self-reliance

The attempt to grasp the meaning of *peaceful revolution* without considering the foundational work of Thoreau who, through his political heuristic, explored this avenue or to Havel's concept³⁹ of *existential revolution* represents, in my view, an epistemic failure. This omission is a sign of the author's at-

³⁵ Dragoș Petrescu, *Entangled revolutions. The breakdown on the communist regimes in East-Central Europe*, Editura Enciclopedică, București 2014, p. 114.

³⁶ János Kornai, *The socialist system: The political economy of communism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1992.

³⁷ Dragoș Petrescu, *Entangled revolutions...*, p. 12.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 335–340.

³⁹ Vaclav Havel, "After the velvet, an existential revolution? Interview with V. Havel by A. Michnik", *Gazeta Wyborcza* 2008, November 20.

titude toward such essential conceptions and experiences that are opposed to the Marxian perspective.

Knowing most of the previous works of Chirot, it makes sense to see if we encounter a similar disregard of such sources in the case of projects that deal with historic social changes. I will refer here only to the excellent book – named by “The New York Times” as 100 *Notable Books of 2015* – ***The Shape of the New; Four big ideas and how they made the modern world*** co-authored by Scott Montgomery and Daniel Chirot. One may ask the question why only four ideas that is more a quantitative interrogative than one of substance for the history of powerful ideas developed within the last 300 years. Without disregarding the quantitative side, it might help to see if there are within the same time-frame competitive ideas. There is no doubt that the ideas of Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and Jefferson and Hamilton shaped, in various modes and degrees, the modern world. The work engages into a necessary critique of the counter-enlightenment ideas and forces. The authors’ dialectical shift has high methodological value dissecting, based on substantial historical information, the trends of antimodernists, fascists, and religious fundamentalists.

Evidently, there are some other powerful ideas that have been prior or synchronic with Marx’s theory. One is that of ***self-reliance*** (Emerson) and its close relations with *Thoreau’s approach* to major societal sufferings (slavery, staying on the shoulders of others, or that of the repressed silent majority...). I think that Thoreau’s worldview, and his ideas on social change are not just opposed to Marx’s worldview but proved, during crucial historical events, to have beneficial practical consequences of revolutionary proportions. The fact that many Marxists of the first intellectual rank disregard the conception developed and experientially tested by Thoreau is unable to diminish the power of Thoreau’s conception to shape crucial world processes, as civil rights movements, shows that the societal impact of creative and moral ideas cannot be suppressed by their artificial marginalization.

Montgomery and Chirot state: “Let us not assume too quickly that the Marxism held today in reserve by supposed-

ly irrelevant intellectuals has no political future. It does⁴⁰. If one speculates about the future of Marxism, why the real historical impact of Thoreauvian ideas is neglected? If scientists, politicians and common people desire peaceful social transformations, why Thoreau's conception and practice are omitted?

Before looking to the future of Marxism let us look to its past and present. Marxism had and has a bloody history, not just due to the way in which violent dictators understood and used it, but also due to its intrinsic violent goals and means. Despite the fact that Chirot does not consider that Marxist radical ideology influenced the genesis of the long chain of bloody communist dictators, he accepts that "class warfare is evident in most of his writings"⁴¹. Marx and Engels rejected any opposition to the communist ideology developed by them. In contrast to this dogmatic attitude Emerson invited critical views on his own ideas. Thoreau criticized his master. There is no such instance in the relationship between Marx and Engels who jointly asked for the "most unanimous" conformity⁴². We like or we do not like it the Marxian algorithm (*MCP*) represents theoretical ideas and a political cooking book prescribing the way to carry out the communist revolution: this is a violent political algorithm. I think that some significant intellectuals who deal with political questions are in denial of the intrinsic value and practical consequences of Thoreau's ideas that are non-violent.

Self-reliance, independence and autonomy of the nation for achieving its self-selected goals that serve the well-being of all its people are essential criteria for assessing many revolutions that claimed to improve the human condition. The American Revolution is a paradigmatic model due to a cluster of essential features. Self-reliance, democratic values, freedom of religion and expression, and the axiom that all people "are created equal" that are explicitly expressed in the Declaration

⁴⁰ Scott L. Montgomery, Daniel Chirot, *The shape of the new: Four big ideas and how they made the modern world*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2015, p. 147.

⁴¹ Daniel Chirot, *You say you want a revolution?...*, p. 80.

⁴² See Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League", in: R.C. Tucker (ed.), *Marx-Engels reader*, Norton, New York 1972.

have universal value. *Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness* are essential values for democracy.

Some ideas of the Declaration, like self-reliance, are older among American genial thinkers. B. Franklin, a patriot, a politician, a diplomat, a scientist (not only in the area of electricity but one with innovative ideas for social psychology) made crystal clear during his long interrogation within the British Parliament that American people are ready to endure hard shortages in order to reach independence through self-reliance. Franklin has asserted the self-reliance, as a guiding principle, in persuasive terms⁴³. The symbiotic nature of the basic features of the Declaration reveals its innovative character: the goal of independence did exclude the substitution of an external royal ruler (despot, or system) with a national one – but it proposed a democratic system – based on free elections within the becoming process of a self-reliant republic that asserts and protects the human rights. It opened the way for a revolutionary Constitution and to the end of slavery.

The paradigmatic case of American Revolution that aimed to achieve the autonomy of a new nation and the dignity of its people invites a comparison with other revolutions both because its innovative nature and of its long-term success. I will stop briefly only to communist revolutions and to the anti-communist revolutions even if such a comparison might appear from a conformist viewpoint quite bizarre. The Soviet/Bolshevik revolution did not focused on the autonomy of a nation having instead an international goal, even globalitarian (i.e., totalitarianism at the global level) goals and ambitions. Despite its rhetoric on equality disregarded basic human rights and resorted to violence against internal enemies (class warfare). In contrast, the Chinese Communist revolution, which shared with the Soviet revolution the rules regarding the abolition of private ownership, one party rule, the use of violent means, and dictatorship, had a clear national character (independence against various foreign invaders) and toward self-reliance. Essentially, the rift between the Soviet commu-

⁴³ See Benjamin Franklin, “The Examination of Doctor Benjamin Franklin by the August Assembly, relating to the Repeal of the STAMP-ACT, &c”, in: idem, *Writings, Vol. 13: 1757–1775*, The Library of America, New York 1987, pp. 129–159.

nists and the Chinese communists during the 20th century (roughly during 60's and 80's) is due to the contradiction between the globalitarian and paternalistic orientations and ambitions of the Soviets and the assertion of the national autonomy and self-reliance of the Chinese. Nixon and Kissinger used efficiently this rift. Gardner⁴⁴ portrays Kissinger as a brilliant practical and theoretical synthesizer in the field of diplomacy. It might be useful to consider the role of Romanian diplomacy in the mediation of this relation between the USA and China, a role rather neglected nowadays. The Chinese struggle toward autonomy – mainly vis-à-vis the Soviet imperialism – has been considered to have an important value for international balance of powers. In hindsight, it seems obvious that the Western diplomacy grossly disregarded the potential of Chinese urge for increasing self-reliance that evolved historically on the Confucian vision of self-cultivation⁴⁵. In 1960's–1980's the Chinese economy, technology, financial and military resources have been assessed by experts as non-significant overlooking the potential ready to be unleashed by a comprehensive and relentless self-reliance orientation.

Lenin's communist revolution with explicit globalitarian goals cultivated a violent diversity and used it as “shock troops”. In *Modern Tyrants*⁴⁶ Chirot cites Shanin⁴⁷ and states: “Sailors, metal workers in St Petersburg, Latvian riflemen defending Lenin in 1918, and Poles, Jews, and Latvians in Cheka were the shock troops of the Revolution”⁴⁸. However, Chirot does not connect the critical dots that are historically connected. Diverse minorities that have been discontent with their existential situation have served the goal, political program, ambitions and actions of the Soviet Revolution, which

⁴⁴ Howard Gardner, *A Synthesizing Mind. A Memoir from the Creator of Multiple Intelligences Theory*, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2020; idem, *The synthesizing mind...*

⁴⁵ Jin Li, *Cultural foundations of learning: East and West*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012; idem, *Confucian self-cultivation: A developmental perspective*, University of Zurich, Zurich 2017.

⁴⁶ Daniel Chirot, *Modern tyrants...*, p. 113.

⁴⁷ Teodor Shanin, *The roots of otherness: Russia's turn of the century. Volume II, Russia 1905–1907: Revolution as a moment of truth*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1986, pp. 199–202.

⁴⁸ Daniel Chirot, *Modern tyrants...*, p. 113.

had an international nature of a globalitarian type. The use and abuses of minorities by despotic regimes is relatively widespread. For instance, the Ottoman Empire used this strategy that reached a horrific level during the Armenian genocide⁴⁹.

In contradiction with the internationalist and paternalist ambitions of Lenin's revolution the Chinese revolution, despite the work of Soviet propagandists within China, had a national nature and focused from the start on national independence, autonomy, and self-reliance. These distinctive features are among the causes that might explain why the Chinese revolution led, on long term, to economic efficiency, technological development and strong financial growth. In the Chinese case, the focus on self-reliance is enhanced by the ancient Confucian tradition of self-cultivation, despite the fact that Confucianism has been repressed for significant periods. Let us remind that Mao successfully tried to convince Western diplomats, including American diplomats, that the Chinese uprising was not a communist revolution but a national movement for independence⁵⁰. If the second part of the previous statement is historically true (the revolution ended the foreign occupation), the first part was, for sure, a mega-deception. Indeed the Chinese revolution was a national-communist revolution.

The Chinese society, with its combination between the communist ideology and the Confucian original worldview poses puzzling questions, which are not posed either by Soviet society or by European communist countries. How is it possible for an ancient and traditional worldview – such as Confu-

⁴⁹ Raymond H. Kévorkian, Paul B. Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens dans l'Empire ottoman à la veille du génocide*, ARHIS, Paris 1992; Raymond H. Kévorkian, *Le génocide des Arméniens*, Odile Jacob, Paris 2006; Fatma Muge Göçek, *Denial of violence: Ottoman past, Turkish present, and collective violence against the Armenians, 1789–2009*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015; Stefan Ihrig, *Justifying genocide: Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2016; Raymond H. Kévorkian, “The final phase: The cleansing of Armenian and Greek survivors, 1919–1922”, in: S.H. Astourian, R.H. Kévorkian (eds.), *Collective and state violence in Turkey: The construction of a national identity from empire to nation-state*, Berghahn Books, New York–Oxford 2020.

⁵⁰ Jung Chang, Jon Halliday, *Mao: The unknown story*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 2005.

cianism – to intermingle in so many ways with a 19th century worldview – such as Marxism – a conception claiming to be the only scientific conception on society that provides a universal valid program for the radical societal change? Does the spiritual and traditional formation of Chinese mothers of some of the major political leaders, including Mao’s mother as documented by Jung Chang and Jon Halliday⁵¹, influenced the mind set and the deepest believes of these leaders? I assume that such a possible influence played a significant role in the revival of Confucianism. How can Confucianism have such a powerful influence on the dynamics of Chinese society, not only along history but also during the communist rule? These questions become more puzzling if we consider views on revolutions as those developed by Huntington since 1991. Huntington, interested in what he calls “a global democratic revolution”, which is not conceptually elaborated, advances two theses that are contradicting each other. Huntington states: “Almost no scholarly disagreement exists regarding the proposition that traditional Confucianism was either undemocratic or antidemocratic”⁵². Huntington’s most important argument focuses on the role of merit within the military promotion system: “No one would describe a modern army as democratic because officers are promoted on the basis of their abilities”⁵³. Most armies, along history, functioned on the chain of command not on democratic vote. The merits and valor of soldiers are an essential part of the quality of any arm forces directed by the command chain. However, Confucianism is not focused on arm forces but on civil society, on its rules, moral standards, civic virtues, and ways of self-cultivation – aiming to preserve peace. Considering the role of religion in connection with the democratization process along history Huntington almost reveres his position on Confucianism and states: “Any major culture, including Confucianism, has some elements that are compatible with democracy, just as Protestantism and Catholicism have elements that are clearly undemocratic. Confucian democracy maybe a contradiction in terms,

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Samuel P. Huntington, “Democracy third wave”, *Journal of Democracy* 1991, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 24.

⁵³ Ibidem.

but democracy in a Confucian society needs not to be”⁵⁴. Huntington neglects that the Soviet communism as well as most of the European communist countries have been plagued by a *negative social selection* based on “healthy social origin” and party loyalty. Huntington neglects also a major feature of Confucianism represented by its conceptual and exemplar call for *self-cultivation*.

There is historical evidence that self-reliance is enhanced by self-cultivation, which implies a selection based on merits⁵⁵. The Chinese ancient tradition of examination played an important function in this process as Lin and Maxie⁵⁶ stress it: “You did not have to be a noble to hold a high position. To be assigned a job in high office in one of the many towns and villages, you had to pass the government exams”. Supporting this idea Gau⁵⁷ claims: “The influence of Imperial Examination System on individuals was obvious... the Imperial Examination System stimulated people’s initiative of learning, creating and forging ahead, increased the vitality of society and propelled the society forward... That was why, the classics represented by Confucianism went through the whole process of the socialization of individuals.” The communist rule obstructed the merits by the requirements of a “healthy social origin”, and loyalty to the system. Many who proved their gifts have been targets of destruction – as it happened during the appalling Cultural Revolution.

Why the American model had, and has such a tremendous potential for structural change and such a powerful influence? Because self-reliance, human rights and democratic values and institutions are at the core of this force. However, many revolutions did not reproduce and cultivate these components. The communist revolutions, through their ideological script, have been bloody, repressed the human rights, and rejected spontaneity. Nonetheless, self-reliance due to its fundamental function for reaching autonomy, is an engine

⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 30.

⁵⁵ Max Weber, *The religion of China*, The Free Press, New York 1951.

⁵⁶ Cited by He Gan, “Chinese Education Tradition – The Imperial Examination System in Feudal China”, *Journal of Management and Social Sciences* 2008, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 115–133.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 129.

of macro-structural changes. In order to reach its full potential self-reliance must work at all levels of social complexity from individual, to family, group and national levels. Thoreau believed that the duty of each person is to make sure that one does not stand on anybody else's shoulders. Self-reliance implies the potential of biological and cultural reproduction and development at group (family) level and the autonomy of a nation in relation to external providers of economic, technological, financial and human resources. Self-reliance does not exclude cooperation, and complex social interactions with external systems.

I assume that *if the tensions between self-reliance on one side and the state of human rights, democratic institutions and values on the other side are increasing then the cultural homeostasis of an entire social system might reach the threshold of a necessary transformation, of a revolutionary change.* Obviously, there is a major contradiction between the growth of self-reliance and any forms of dictatorship, of undemocratic institutions and values. Totalitarian societies within which the contradiction between self-reliance orientation and dictatorial and repressive structures increases nurture the pressure for fundamental changes. *Democratic societies that disregard self-reliance and become more and more dependent on external sources (economic, technological, financial, human potential) nurture the pressure of returning to the essential requirements of self-reliance but within a critical context and with high costs.*

The anti-communist revolutions starting with the Hungarian revolution of 1956, and going to most successful anti-communist revolutions of 1989 (Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland) had a national goal that aimed to restore autonomy, and national identity so much eroded by the Soviet rule and by internal communist rulers. Similar goals are obvious for other countries (Albania, Bulgaria and Romania) that due to their pre-1989 hard situations and some post 1989 errors missed important elements for the re-birth of civil societies.

The 1989 anti-communist movements across Europe, despite their healthy goals, the achievement of a historic reversal that made possible the transition to democracy and market economy, reveal a series of serious failures. These failures are connected with a powerful inertia of mentalities, net-

works and practices common to the communist era, and with a continuation of negative social reproduction. The removal of harsh dictators and brutal political regimes is an extremely hard process that many times is associated with hidden negotiations with actors who, formally and officially, have been supporters of the repressive system. Frequently this reality engulfed public opponents of the system, well-known dissidents as Krapfl⁵⁸ observed for the case of Velvet Revolution. If truth and redemption are necessary in any revolution in order to avoid revenge and to achieve reconciliation⁵⁹ then it is also necessary to avoid, and eliminate as much as possible violent practices used by previous regimes that are reproducible by the new power structure.

A show trial, which has been violent and with deadly consequences, that have been staged at the University of Bucharest in 1965 and its major actors might help to better grasp the danger represented by the inertia of communist mentalities and practices. A group of students (philosophy, psychology, and law), in 1965, expressed their discontent toward the election of Ceaușescu and the policy of the communist party. The students, labeled as “fascists”, were and accused of having habits practiced by Hitlerism. Their colleagues have been forced to condemning them during the trial. Within this context, a group of new students with healthy social origin (party activists and collaborators of the system) formed the core accusers. Some of them had powerful positions within the Party structure and became political leaders of the 1989 revolution and members in the revolutionary tribunal. The documents of the 1965 trial are not released even after 50 years⁶⁰. One of the palliative justifications of this blockage invoked some 40 years after the trial by Tismăneanu is “the rule of the 30 years” that does not allow access to the documents as men-

⁵⁸ James Krapfl, “The sacred and the Velvet Revolution”, *KOSMAS: Czechoslovak and Central European Journal* 1999, Vol. 14(2), pp. 51–64.

⁵⁹ Nelson Mandela, *Conversations with myself*; Desmond Tutu, *No future...*

⁶⁰ Cătălin Mamali, “A test for the collective memory: The 1965 proletcultist trial of the students from Bucharest University”, *Observer Cultural* 2015, No. 785.

tioned also in *Final Report on Romanian communism*⁶¹. This represents a tactical deflection from grave injustices.

The road toward moral liberation is hindered by an internal lack of courage and denial of the redemption need, and by international actors that are not interested in the moral health of the new power.

The Procrustean algorithm imposed by the MCP structurally marked the communist revolutions. Despite the wish of the founders of the communist dogma to set on the same page Darwin's theory and Marx's theory it is obvious that between the two, besides many epistemic differences, there is a major gap, an abyss that has been created by the MCP – as a guide for the praxis. Scientific ideas, theories, methods could be used for good or evil goals. Some scientists have intentions and actions to convert their theory into an algorithm of social engineering. Darwin neither wrote or proposed a *Manifesto of Natural (Social) Selection*. On the other side, Marx and Engels conceived the MCP. Thus, Marx and Engels trespassed a cognitive and *moral Rubicon* expressing an obvious attraction for a powerful political organization (ready to cultivate unanimity of thought and actions) – the terrible Communist Party to implement their ideas. Marx is neither Lenin nor Stalin and Darwin is not Malthus. However, Marx in cooperation with Engels, not with Stalin or with Lenin, wrote the MCP. Darwin did not write any manifesto for selection. The violent political algorithm dictated by the MCP, which is rooted within the Marxist conception and explicitly related to it, has been accepted and brutally applied by all communist leaders who came to power. Lenin, faithfully and consistently, applied it. Marxism's opposition to self-reliance is deeply intertwined with its hate against the peasants, the social category which, has through its productive activity and ownership relationship to the land high chances to be self-reliant. Marx, and in his footsteps, Lenin, Stalin, and so on hated the peasant⁶². Hatred against peasantry, a self-reliant social category, marked also

⁶¹ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Raportul Final realizat de "Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România"*, Humanitas, București 2006.

⁶² David Mitran, *Marx against the peasant*, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill 1951.

the Romanian communist leaders – Dej, Pauker and Ceaușescu. Communism, an over-centralized and one party system that abolishes the private ownership⁶³, is by its nature against any social category able to become self-reliant.

Marx searched for the historical objective laws. Despite that according to his view communism is an unavoidable outcome of these laws he considered necessary to create a political party to make it happen. This reasoning looks absurd and it is absurd. Marx was a strong believer in the power of the Party, of the Communist Party, the party with one single voice (“outmost unanimity”, as Marx and Engels demanded). Marxism envisions the Communist Party as the necessary instrument able to rush history to meet utopian expectations.

Chirot’s synthesis illuminates many aspects of revolutions previously neglected and places them in a new perspective that advances our understanding. Nevertheless, I think that there are also questions that could be approached in a more nuanced way. The diagnostic of Khomeini depicted as “a religious version of Lenin”⁶⁴ is well rooted and inspired. But both Lenin and Khomeini prepared their revolutions within the safe haven of Western democratic societies. Both Lenin and Khomeini received huge financial support and used (abused) democratic institutions to propagate their ideas and radical idealism. Chirot does not ask if they conspired against the social systems of their countries of origin and against the social system of the Western democracies. Could we say that their conspiring work hurts also the Western democracies? I think that the answer is yes.

Chirot appreciates Nehru (named “Gandhi’s disciple”⁶⁵) for achieving the independence of India. Nevertheless, he omits Gandhi’s non-violent struggle and role in India’s independence. The book avoids Gandhi’s revolutionary conception and praxis. There is tremendous evidence that Gandhi’s non-violent approach⁶⁶, which has been slow but sure

⁶³ Martin Malia, *Russia under Western eyes: From the bronze horseman to the Lenin mausoleum*, The Belknap of Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1999.

⁶⁴ Daniel Chirot, *You say you want a revolution?...*, p. 31.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, pp. 106–107.

⁶⁶ Mahatma Gandhi, *Non-violence in peace and war*, vol. I–II, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad 1948/1949; idem, *Collected*

has been essential for achieving India's independence. But beyond this societal goal the Gandhian strategy of peaceful social change includes a major goal that has been achieved without blood-shed: the successful struggle against the existence of "untouchables". Gandhi⁶⁷ by his own example treated untouchables, Christians, Muslims, Jews and atheists in a fair, non-discriminatory way. These Gandhian features, neglected by Chirot, are especially significant if we consider that Chirot treats issues of the long-term consequences of injustices in the Americas.

If we consider *the concept of radical idealism* as proposed by Chirot for explaining the tragic consequences of revolutions then the conception and practice developed by Thoreau and Gandhi strongly suggest that idealism, even in its radical forms, might not always be a cause of lethal consequences. For instance, Thoreau's conception to oppose evil laws, structures and institutions, such as slavery, in a civil, nonviolent way and to propose separation from evil at the costs of property, family wellbeing, and one's liberty and life is both radical and idealistic especially within the society of his time. Gandhian ahimsa (non-violent way) and its practice against the British rule for achieving India's independence⁶⁸ are radical and idealistic without nurturing tragic consequences. If radical idealism is rooted in high moral principles, carried out through non-violent means, and does not target enemies but evil laws, relations and institutions it can have positive consequences. When radical idealism is identifying social categories as existential enemies, aims to exterminate the individuals who belong to these categories, and uses violent means to arrive to power it necessarily produces tragic consequences.

Gandhi rejected the perverse proposal made by Trotsky's to join the Communist International⁶⁹. Why? Because between

works of Mahatma Gandhi, The Publication Division, Ministry of Education and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi 1958

⁶⁷ Idem, *An autobiography. The story of my experiments with truth*, Beacon Press, Boston 1957.

⁶⁸ Cătălin Mamali, *The Gandhian mode of becoming*, Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad 1998.

⁶⁹ Leon Trotsky, *Manifesto of the Communist International to the Proletariat of the Entire World*, in: P. Cormack (ed.), *Manifestos and declarations of the twentieth century*, Garmond Press, Toronto 1989.

Gandhian non-violence (similar to Thoreau's civil disobedience) on one side and the communist way on the other, as Gandhi stated in his answer to Trotsky's invitation for joining the worldwide communist organization there is a moral abyss. The "brilliant" Trotsky, as Chirot describes him⁷⁰, faithfully played the role of the Red Siren in the service of Communist International. Trotsky displayed a *high immoral competence* (i.e., capacity of dissimulating, deceiving and convincing others of the benefits of violent means supposed to lead to good goals) but failed to trick and capture Gandhi. The song of the Red Mermaid performed by Trotsky seduced famous European intellectuals. Gandhi was not. He was not a utopian: "I do not believe in short-term-violent-cuts to success. Those Bolshevik friends [we should not be fooled by the term "friends", Gandhi used it while writing to Hitler] who are bestowing their attention on me should realize that however much I sympathize with and admire worthy motives, *I am an uncompromising opponent of violent methods* even to serve the noblest of the causes. There is, therefore, *really no meeting ground between the school of violence and myself*"⁷¹.

The tyrannical ideologies might have or not political scripts (manifestoes), and might make or not explicit recommendations focused on the type of political. However, such ideologies that are, as Chirot's book eloquently argues, marked by a "radical idealism" claiming that they are the only one true road toward social salvation foster bloody dictators who strongly believe that they are "infallible" both because of their ideology and of their personal characteristics, to be "godlike". Lenin, despite the fact that Chirot claims that he did not live long enough to realize the consequences of communist revolution in what is historically known as Soviet Union, acted as a bloody dictator ("a bullet in the head" – was Lenin's preferred political solution). Why almost all communist leaders behaved in "godlike" manner and demanded that their decisions must be treated as such? Chirot argues that the *tendency toward deification of the leader* is powerful in the case of fascist regimes and in the case of political leaders that are called the "fathers of the land" – as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

⁷⁰ Daniel Chirot, *You say you want a revolution?...*, p. 17.

⁷¹ Mahatma Gandhi, *Collected works...*, Vol. 25, p. 424, italics added.

Chirot claims, on strong basis, that this tendency toward ‘deification’ of the political leaders is common for the communist regimes. However, Chirot pretends that the trend toward deification of political leaders is not grounded in Marx’s works: “But nothing in Karl Marx’s writings, and for that matter in Lenin’s, recommend it”⁷². I think that Chirot’s claim is challenged by historical facts. One is presented in this book (*You say you want a revolution?*). The author cites Eric Hobsbawm, a Marxist historian and a supporter of communism, who said: “The possibility of dictatorship is implicit in any regime based on a single, irremovable party...”. This is exactly what the *Manifesto of the Communist Party – MCP* is prescribing. Hobsbawm⁷³, unfortunately, with the occasion of 150 years celebration of the MCP’s publication renames it as the *Communist Manifesto*. Hobsbawm, by removing the concept of Party from his edition of the MCP created by Marx and his ideological friend – Engels, moved away from the original title and from the explicit intention of this political algorithm for providing a manifesto to the Communist Party. Chirot, in tune with Hobsbawm, who supports the Marxist conception on history⁷⁴, uses the title *Communist Manifesto*. The exclusion of the notion of PARTY (political vanguard, the unique ruling party) from the original title of the MCP is misleading. The notion Party is essential, as Marx has been explicitly proud that “our party” has now a manifesto. Re-naming of the original text facilitates an artificial separation between the horrific systemic violence carried out by the communist parties on one side and the MCP on the other. If a political program demands a unique party and dictatorship practiced by “a general secretary”, it is almost sure that the leader will be treated as irremovable during his life and his ideas will be treated as unquestionable. How far away is this from deification? Marx and Engels, in their writings, demanded “total unanimity”, declared that their social doctrine, the dialectical and historical materialism, is the only scientific perspective

⁷² Daniel Chirot, *You say you want a revolution?...*, p. 91.

⁷³ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction”, in: *The Communist Manifesto. A modern edition. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Introduction* E. Hobsbawm, Verso, London 1998, pp. 1–31.

⁷⁴ Idem, *On history*, Abacus, London 1997.

on social existence, and that their theory expresses an objective historical trend even. Did Engels ever contradict Marx? Did Marx ever ask his followers and friends (inclusively Engels) to think critically and express their critique about his ideas as Emerson advised his disciples?

Marx and Engels wrote the commandments of the communist revolution (MCP). MCP is a political cooking book, a new “catechism” – as named in its incipient versions – revealing that the communist ideology and its political program have been conceived as a religious-like doctrine. This represents a way toward deification. Darwin, so much admired by Marx, never had the idea to write a manifesto of natural selection based on his theory and to name it a “catechism of natural selection”.

Chirot’s book reminds us that the fascist organizations instigated and used thugs. It seems that more democratic a society is, and better are its institutions smaller are the chances of the birth and use of thugs for solving political conflicts. The question is: did the communist revolutions resort only to industrial workers, peasants and some intellectuals or they did also use thugs? For sure they did. They used common law criminals (*criminali de drept comun*) in many ways, inclusively letting them free in order to increase the terror. However, besides these thugs the communist revolutions resorted to a special kind of thugs: *intellectual thugs* (some gifted, as Aragon who dedicated one of his poems to KGB). In Romania this category has been quite extensive. During Chirot’s visits to Romania, he might have had occasions to notice the existence of such terrible political actors, some of whom remained quite influential many years after 1989.

My main critical point in relation to Chirot’s outstanding work, which is a much needed synthesis on the consequences of revolutions, concerns the significance of *Thoreauvian ideas on inner and external revolutions*⁷⁵. Thoreau warned about the lethal dangers of external revolutions understanding that if the resistance to remove wide and deep societal sufferings is too strong even those that are searching for peaceful changes might be forced to use, as the last resort, violent means.

⁷⁵ Henry David Thoreau, *The reform papers*, edited by W. Glick, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1973.

Thoreau's view on external revolutions and his existential choice for the inner revolution is supported by his ideas on *action from principle*. Thoreau developed his ideas and practical method (civil disobedience) with the will to eliminate slavery – a problem discussed in your book. These are a few reasons why this excellent book on revolutions (*You say you want a revolution?*) surprises by totally neglecting Thoreau's essential contribution that is at the core of the question approached by Chirot's work. Thoreau identified major societal pains and searched for a non-violent way to solve them. He underscored the vital role of “action from principle” based on high moral values that consider humans and human relationships as goals never as tools.

The expectations regarding the power of the new-technologies that enhance the social networks for facilitating the success of social movements that aim revolutionary changes are not yet met. In many cases, the new technologies hindered the potential of revolutionary changes⁷⁶. The major problem of the negative effects of technological progress is, as Benayoun and Régnauld argue, is of a techno-ethical nature (*techno-étique* – concept introduced by the authors⁷⁷) that implies free, and responsible participation of each citizen.

If you say that revolutions rooted in radical idealism (as communists, fascists, Islamists revolutions) have tragic consequences why are conceptually ostracized Thoreau's and Gandhi's conceptions and praxis regarding peaceful societal changes? To strive theoretically, practically and morally for peaceful revolutions asks for creativity and courage. The warning of J.F. Kennedy⁷⁸ remains actual: “Those who make peaceful revolutions impossible will make violent revolutions inevitable.” President Kennedy's forecast, cited by Chi-

⁷⁶ Jen Schradie, *The revolution that wasn't: How digital activism favors conservatives*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2019.

⁷⁷ Yaël Benayoun, Irénée Régnauld, *Technologies partout, démocratie nulle part. Plaidoyer pour que les choix technologiques deviennent l'affaire de tous*, FYP Éditions, France 2020, p. 101.

⁷⁸ John Fitzgerald Kennedy, *Address on the first anniversary of the foreign aid program for Latin America, Alliance for Progress*, 1962, March 13, p. 21, Speech's text: <https://www.jfklibrary.org> (Digital Identifier: JFKPOF-037-026) [accessed: 23.07.2021].

rot⁷⁹, is in tune with Thoreau's vision but Chirot's approach to revolutions neglects Thoreauvian conception.

The tragic consequences generated by many revolutions, the aborted revolutions, the successful long-term non-violent civil disobedience, under various forms (India, South Africa, Denmark, the USA, some of former communist countries) as well as the research of revolutionary changes reveal again the value of Thoreauvian model. In his works⁸⁰ Thoreau explores the potential of ethical principles and action from principle – freely accepted by individuals – of becoming necessary conditions for major societal changes. Thoreau developed a political heuristic of civil disobedience which, according to him, might increase the chances of achieving a “peaceful revolution” able to bring solutions to structural problems created by unjust human actions, laws and institutions.

Thoreau's heuristic (Table 1) that stresses the vital function of internal changes, based on moral values and the use of civil, non-violent means focused on the problem not on political, class enemies becomes more important as the technologies that influence, control and even shape the world are advancing at a rapid rate. Digital technologies, including the social media, dangerously stimulate the utopian and radical views that revolutions can be ignited and lead to desirable outcomes even if the internal changes that require action from principle rooted and guided by high moral values at the individual and societal levels are not achieved.

All European anti-communist revolutions share an *unfinished business* together with the post-communist regimes and the Western democracies: they *failed to condemn legally and morally the communist regimes and ideology*. The **Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism June 2008**⁸¹ (signed by Václav Havel, Joachim Gauck, Göran

⁷⁹ Daniel Chirot, *You say you want a revolution?...*, p. 127.

⁸⁰ Henry David Thoreau, *Civil disobedience*, 1849, <https://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper2/thoreau/civil.html> [accessed: 23.07.2021]; idem, *The Variorum Civil Disobedience. Annotated and with an Introduction by Walter Harding*, Tavn Publishers, New York 1967; idem, *The reform papers*; idem, *Journal. Vol. 5: 1852–1853. Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1997.

⁸¹ Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism, signed on June 3, 2008, <https://www.praguedeclaration.eu/> [accessed: 23.07.2021].

Lindblad, Vytautas Landsbergis, Tseten Samdup Chhoekyapa, Pavel Žáček, Miroslav Lehký, Łukasz Kamiński, Michael Kißener, Eduard Stehlík, Karel Straka...) **was not adopted by EU**. This remains an epistemic, moral, political and pragmatic open wound. The resistance faced by the *Prague Declaration* suggests that action from principle has still a long way to go among key political actors and that the resurrection of the communist violent ideology, political program and networks represents a growing danger for freedom and democracy. Does it mean that a violent political ideology that is not condemned publically is able to maintain open and hidden supporters and perpetuate its practices? Does it mean that societies that are not able and willing to condemn violent ideologies might offer a climate for their reincarnation? Does it mean that within the leading institutions and main-stream media of EU and other democracies there is a structural bias in favor of communist ideology? The tragic experiences suggest that the answer to these questions is an unsettling yes. It seems that the historical societal learning is not yet well grounded in universal moral principles.

Table I. Thoreau's Heuristics of Civil Disobedience (CD)

Many **major problems exist in every state, government and community** – including **the inner frictions of the system**

CD focuses on **one category** of major social problem: **Human-made problems**, which make an **individual an agent of injustice to another**

Any individual agent of injustice might turn this into **a question of conscience** and **judge it** based on a valid **moral principle**

After the individual's conscience recognizes the injustice one has **a choice** engaging the **evil side and the good side of ones' self**:



Remain an agent of injustice for protecting: *one's children, family, property, one's well-being, to avoid jail even death.*



Disobey authority based on principle for protecting: *one's self-worth, one's conscience from being wounded and against its everlasting death.*



Acceptance of injustice: *One joins the majority who is in opinion opposed to injustice but **does nothing** to end it.*



Resistance to injustice: *ONE follows one's conscience acting from principle; then one becomes the "majority of one".*



Obedience to injustice; *maintains the injustice.*



One accepts all the costs of one's disobedience; **treats in a civil mode** the agents of injustice.



*These minimal conditions of CD that belong to the **inner revolution** can generate a **chain reaction** and a **powerful disobedient minority**.*



Then a **non-violent and peaceful revolution** that removes the injustice, its institutions and behaviors might be possible.

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