PART III

The Materialist Transcendence of Communicative Capitalism

Communication Society as Society of the Commons

Marxism is not just a critique, but also has a vision of a good society – a society of the commons. This chapter argues that a true communication society is a society of the commons. First, it introduces the idea of communication as societal commoning (section 12.1). Second, it discusses the foundations of Marxist ethics (12.2). Third, it outlines some aspects of the ethics of the commons and the communication commons (12.3).

12.1. Communication as Societal Commoning

The word 'communication' comes etymologically from the Latin words *communicare* and *communicatio*. *Communicare* is a verb that means that something is made into a common or is shared. It also means to inform someone. Class societies are societies where the means of production are controlled by one class. In a society of the commons, there is common control of society. In the economy, common control means common control of the means of production. In the political system, common control means common decision-making. And in culture, common control means that there is recognition of everyone. In such a society, humans communicate, decide, speak, own, decide, and live in a common manner so that everyone benefits.

A communication society that is truly communicative is not simply a society in which humans communicate or an information society where information is a key principle of organisation. In a true communication society, the existence of communication corresponds to its essence. In a true communication society, the etymological origin of communication is restored. It is a society of the commons in the sense of communication as sharing and making something common. Commoning is the key principle of organisation. A communication

society is a society that humans control in common. In such a society, communication is not just the production of sociality, but society's general principle. In a communication society, *communis* (community) and *communicare* (making something common) are identical. A true communication society is a society of the commons. It is a commonist society. Communications are in such a society commons-based, i.e. communication systems whose '*primary freedom* […] *lies in not being a trade*'.[1]

Democratic Communications

Democratic communications (= democratic communication systems) are an important dimension of a society of the commons. In the book *Communications*, Raymond Williams distinguishes between different forms of communication systems, namely authoritarian, paternal, commercial, and democratic organisational forms of the media.[2] Authoritarian, paternal, and commercial communications are organised and systemic forms of how instrumental reason is communicated. In authoritarian communications, there is political control of communication. In paternal communications, there is cultural control of communication. In commercial communications, there is economic control of communication. In authoritarian communications, the media are controlled, manipulated, or censored by the state. In such systems, the 'purpose of communication is to protect, maintain, or advance a social order based on minority power'.[3] Paternal communications are a particular form of authoritarian communications that have 'a conscience: that is to say, with values and purposes beyond the maintenance of its own power'.[4] Authorities try to impose moral values on audiences with the help of ideology. In commercial communications, control and authority is exercised via commodity logic: 'Anything can be said, provided that you can afford to say it and that you can say it profitably'.[5] Authoritarian, paternal, and commercial communication instrumentalise communication and humans in order to dominate humans and society.

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[1] Karl Marx. 1842. Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly. First Article. Debates on Freedom of the Press and Publication of the Proceedings of the Assembly of the Estates. In *MECW Volume 1*, 132–181, p. 175. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

[2] Raymond Williams. 1976. *Communications*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. pp. 130–137.

[3] Ibid., p. 131.

[4] Ibid., p. 131.

[5] Ibid., p. 133.

Democratic communications use the logic and rationality of co-operation. There is true freedom of speech that enables humans to speak. Democratic communication systems are 'means of participation and of common discussion'.[6] Williams envisions a cultural and communicative democracy, in which local community media, cultural co-operatives, and public-service media work together. He imagines 'new kinds of communal, cooperative and collective institutions'.[7] Williams argues that important means of production should be publicly owned and given for use to self-managed organisations, which need to make sure that there is a diversity of political opinion and that state control of opinions is avoided.[8] 'The idea of public service must be detached from the idea of public monopoly, yet remain public service in the true sense'.[9]

Instrumental communications stand in an antagonism to co-operative, democratic communications. In order to find out how democratic and co-operative a communication system is, one needs to ask how far and to what degree it is collectively controlled and advances critical reflection and critique. In order to weaken the capitalist control of communications, cultural class struggles are needed. In a socialist society, democratic communications are prevalent in the communication system. In such a society, 'the basic cultural skills are made widely available, and the channels of communication widened and cleared, as much as possible'.[10]

Williams criticises commercial communications in the following manner: 'All the basic purposes of communication – the sharing of human experience – are being steadily subordinated to this drive to sell. […] The organization of communications is then not for use, but for profit'.[11] The 'commercial has been steadily winning'.[12] The same tendency continues to exist in society today. Only cultural class struggles can question the corporate colonisation of the communication system. But why are communication commons the adequate form for organising communication? In order to provide an answer, we need to engage with critical ethics.

[6] Ibid., p. 134.
[7] Raymond Williams. 1983. *Towards 2000*. London: Chatto & Windus. p. 123.
[8] Raymond Williams. 1979. *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review*. London: Verso Books. p. 370.
[9] Williams, *Communications*, p. 134.
[10] Raymond Williams. 1958/1983. *Culture and Society: 1780–1950*. New York: Columbia University Press. p. 283.
[11] Williams, *Communications*, p. 25.
[12] Ibid., p. 137.

12.2. Foundations of Critical Ethics

The Human Being's Social Essence

Aristotle defines essence as a 'primary thing', one that is 'not articulated by attributing one thing to another'.[13] The essence of something is 'the substance which is peculiar to it and belongs to nothing else'.[14]

Communication is not automatically good. It can be embedded into both good and evil practices. A fire brigade communicates when saving lives. Terrorist suicide bombers communicate when organising their killings. Communication exists in all social relations. It underpins all social relations. Its purpose is the organisation of social relations.

Psychological studies have shown the existence of what is called the '9-month revolution': Babies start behaving socially because they experience care and recognition. As a consequence, they identify attachment figures to whom they relate.[15] Care, solidarity, co-operation, altruism, and recognition are essential aspects of human development. Violence in contrast harms human development. Society and human beings cannot develop without care and co-operation, but they can develop and only truly develop without violence. Marx formulates this circumstance by saying that the 'individual is *the social being*'.[16]

Co-operative reason and instrumental reason are the two most fundamental logics of society. Instrumental reason dominates in class societies. A level of co-operation is needed in all societies, which makes co-operation society's logic of essence. Instrumental logic and action instrumentalises humans in order to foster domination and the benefit of some at the expense of others. The logic of co-operation aims at creating benefits for all and the collective control of society.

Herbert Marcuse argues for a Marxist understanding of essence: 'A theory that wants to eradicate from science the concept of essence succumbs to helpless relativism, thus promoting the very powers whose reactionary thought it wants to combat'.[17] Society's truth does not automatically come into existence. This truth is immanent in society as such because humans desire a good life

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[13] Aristotle. 1999. *Metaphysics.* Translated by Joe Sachs. Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion Press. § 1030a.

[14] Aristotle. 1933. *The Metaphysics: Books I–IX.* Translated by Hugh Tredennick. London: William Heinemann Ltd. § 1038b.

[15] Michael Tomasello. 2008. *Origins of Human Communication.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

[16] Karl Marx. 1844. Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. In *MECW Volume* 3 (pp. 229–346). p. 299.

[17] Herbert Marcuse. 1936. The Concept of Essence. In *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, 43–87. London: Free Association. p. 45.

and are only guaranteed an individual good life if everyone can lead a good life. Although tensions are often present between different exploited and dominated groups, they have a common interest in overcoming oppression and establishing a society that benefits all. Their interests are also variegated because the oppression of each group has particularities and is contextualised. Emancipatory politics therefore needs to act as unity in diversity in the interests of the oppressed.

Whereas working class politics stresses unity and solidarity, new social movements politics has often foregrounded the differentiated experiences of domination and differentiated contradictions of social struggles. The result was the rise of identity politics that has often ignored class politics. The new capitalist crisis of 2008 and rising inequalities have shown that class politics remains highly relevant and that identity is related to class.[18] Markers of identity such as disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, location, socialisation, gender, education, religion, health, and age are connected to ownership, production, distribution, and consumption.[19]

Hegel argues that the essence of something is often different from its appearance and existence. Something is true if its existence and its essence correspond to each other. Herbert Marcuse has built Hegel's notion of essence into his Marxist theory. He argues that essence has to do with the possibilities of humans and society. A true society realises these possibilities. The possibilities of humans and society depend on the status of the productive forces, political power, culture, the level of productivity, ownership structures, etc. The essence of humans and society has to do with what they can be.

Critical ethics has to do with what can exist and what should exist so that toil, misery, and injustices can be minimised, and human capacities and the satisfaction of true human needs can be maximised.

Co-operation

A society is false if it does not realise the potentials it has for creating benefits for all. Alienation means that humans are not in control of the conditions of their existence. In an alienated system, society and humans

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[18] Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser. 2019. *Feminism for the 99 Percent: A Manifesto.* London: Verso. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek. 2000. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality.* London: Verso. Vivek Chibber. 2013. *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital.* London: Verso. Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth. 2003. *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange.* London: Verso.

[19] Hardy Hanappi and Edeltraud Hanappi-Egger. 2018. Social Identity and Class Consciousness. *Forum for Social Economics*, DOI: https://doi.org /10.1080/07360932.2018.1447495.

are alienated from their essence. Realising humans' and society's essence requires the abolition of class, exploitation, and domination. Marx's works point out that ideologies should be demystified and that the potentials of humans and society need to be realised through political action in order establish a co-operative society.

Society's development is based on a dialectic of necessity and chance. Society's structures determine its space of possibility, the potential developments of society. This is an aspect of necessity. But it is not predetermined what potentials are realised by social practices, which is an aspect of conditioned chance. Society's structures condition actions. Marx advances a critical, emancipatory ethics: He argues that humans should struggle for the realisation of society's and humans' co-operative essence. Marx puts an emphasis on processes of societalisation (*Vergesellschaftung*). Societalisation as political process means the creation of the commons and co-operative structures. Marx sees human essence as societal and co-operative, which is why he, for example, writes about of 'the return of man from religion, family, state, etc., to his *human*, i.e., *social* existence',[20] the 'complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e., human) being',[21] 'the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real *appropriation* of the *human* essence by and for man'.[22] Marx's categorical imperative stresses the need to overthrow domination and exploitation in order to create a true society.

Marx advances an ethics of co-operation. Co-operation is opposed to competition. By co-operation we understand a social process in which humans act and communicate together in order to make a joint use of resources, learn together, feel comfortable and at home in society, and create benefits for all. Co-operation is the *most important moral principle*. Competition means that individuals or groups benefit at the expense of others by making use of structures of inequality. Capitalist society is a society that institutionalises the competition between capitalists, the competition between workers and capitalists, competitive politics, and competitive culture and everyday life.

Co-operation is inclusive, whereas competition is exclusive. Co-operation includes humans into ownership, access to resources, decision-making, and the public sphere. Whereas co-operation aims at satisfying everyone's basic needs, competition only results in the satisfaction of particular needs of the dominant class. Whereas competition alienates, co-operation is society's essence. Hegel observes that essence means that 'things really are not what they immediately show themselves. There is something more to be done than merely rove from

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[20] Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, p. 297.
[21] Ibid., p. 296.
[22] Ibid., p. 296.

one quality to another, and merely to advance from qualitative to quantitative, and vice versa: there is a permanence in things, and that permanence is in the first instance their Essence'.[23]

A society can exist without competition. But a society without a certain level of co-operation cannot exist – it isn't a society. If human existence is purely built on competition, then we have an order of egoists who'll sooner or later kill each other. According to Hegel's reasoning, a true society is a co-operative society because co-operation is society's essence. A co-operative society is a participatory democracy. Co-operation as an ethical principle of society does not come from outside society, it is not imposed by doctrines or ideology, but stems from society's immanent logic.

Development psychology and evolutionary anthropology confirm the assumption that co-operative work is part of the human being's essence. Michael Tomasello argues that '[h]uman collaboration is the original home of human cooperative communication'.[24] His work shows that co-operative work not only distinguishes humans from animals, but that the logic of co-operation is also at the foundation of how small children learn to communicate and to talk. Tomasello found out that helping others and sharing are important human features that manifest themselves in shared intentionality, where humans together define goals and co-operate in order to achieve these goals which encompass offers to help, requests for help, offers to share, norms of co-operation, shared goals, communicative intentions, joint attention, common ground, co-operative reasoning, and communicative conventions.[25] Tomasello also shows that love, care, and communication are essential for child development. His work indicates that co-operation is essential to human life, whereas the logic of domination alienates humans from their essence.

Co-operative ethics criticises exclusion, domination, and exploitation. These are principles that do not correspond to society's essence. Such a critical ethical approach questions commonly accepted ideas and subjects them to critical reasoning. It questions the simplicity of one-dimensional thought and wants to advance complex, dialectical thinking. Competition and, along with it, exploitation and domination can only be overcome by a form of political transcendence, i.e. by social struggles that aim to realise the immanent potentials of humans and society.

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[23] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. 1830. *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences: The Logic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. § 112.

[24] Michael Tomasello. 2008. *Origins of Human Communication*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. p. 343.

[25] Ibid., chapter 3.

Ubuntu Philosophy

Marx's critical ethics boils down to the '*categorical imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being'[26] because humans are social and societal beings who can only lead a good life in a good society when everyone is enabled to lead a good life. Ubuntu philosophy is based on a comparable ethical imperative.

Mogobe B. Ramose argues that global capitalist competition justifies the killing of others in a literal sense (the death of humans, the death of jobs, and economies if corporations decide to relocate) and a metaphorical sense (the outcompeting of opponents on the market).[27] Put another way, we can say that capitalism is a metaphysics of death. Ubuntu philosophy in contrast advances 'the principles of sharing and caring for one another'.[28] Because 'motion is the principle of be-ing, the forces of life are there to be exchanged among and between human beings'.[29]

Ubuntu is 'the basis of African philosophy'.[30] Ubuntu as '*African human-ness*' is based on the insight that a human being is human through other human beings.[31] Ubuntu is the insight that my 'humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours. […] We say, "A person is a person through other persons." It is not, "I think therefore I am." It says rather: "I am human because I belong. I participate, I share." A person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are'.[32] To be a human 'being is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them'.[33] Ubuntu advances two principles that can be found in almost all indigenous African languages (expressed here in Northern Sotho language/Sepedi):

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[26] Karl Marx. 1844. Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction. In *MECW Volume 3* (pp. 175–187). p. 182.

[27] Mogobe B. Ramose. 2003. Globalization and *Ubuntu*. In *The African Philosophy Reader*, ed. Pieter H. Coetzee and Abraham P.J. Roux, pp. 626–649. London: Routledge. Second edition.

[28] Ibid., p. 643.

[29] Ibid., p. 643.

[30] Mogobe B. Ramose, 2003. The Philosophy of *Ubuntu* and *Ubuntu* as Philosophy. In *The African Philosophy Reader*, ed. Pieter H. Coetzee and Abraham P.J. Roux, 230–238. London: Routledge. Second edition. p. 230.

[31] Ramose, Globalization and Ubuntu, p. 643.

[32] Desmond Tutu. 1999. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. London: Rider. p. 35.

[33] Ramose, The Philosophy of *Ubuntu* and *Ubuntu* as Philosophy, p. 231.

1. *'Motho ke motho ka batho'* – To 'be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane respectful relations with them'.[34]
2. '*Feta kgomo o tshware motho*' – 'if and when one is faced with a decisive choice between wealth and the preservation of the life of another human being, then one should opt for the preservation of life'.[35] '[M]utual care for one another as human beings precedes the accumulation and safeguarding of wealth'.[36] A 'life worthy of the dignity of the human person is paramount in ubuntu philosophy'.[37]

The 'invocation of the *ubuntu* human rights philosophy is a credible challenge to the deadly logic of the pursuit of profit at the expense of preserving human life'.[38] Ubuntu's principles are also based on the insights that 'the individual human being is an object of intrinsic value in its own right', which implies human dignity, i.e. that a human being 'is truly [human] only in the context of *actual* relations with other human beings'.[39] The implication of human dependence on each other and of the unity of being human is the principle of human equality.[40]

   Based on the notion of critical ethics, we can next deal with the critical ethics of the communication commons.

12.3. The Critical Ethics of the Communication Commons

The Commons

The realms of communications and digital media are shaped by an antagonism between commodification and commonification. From a critical point of view, we need to ask in this context: *Why is it morally important, desirable, and good to advance the communication commons?*

   By communication commons, we not only mean communication as a common process of sharing information (to make information common), but also

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[34] Ramose, Globalization and *Ubuntu*, pp. 643–644.
[35] Ibid., p. 644.
[36] Mogobe B. Ramose. 1995. Specific African Thought Structures and Their Possible Contribution to World Peace. In *Kreativer Friede durch Begegnung der Weltkulturen,* ed. Heinrich Beck and Erwin Schadel, 227–251. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. p. 249.
[37] Mogobe B. Ramose. 2015. On the Contested Meaning of 'Philosophy'. *South African Journal of Philosophy* 34 (4): 551–558. p. 557.
[38] Ramose, Globalization and Ubuntu, p. 644.
[39] Ramose, Specific African Thought Structures and Their Possible Contribution to World Peace, p. 246.
[40] Ibid., p. 247.

democratic communications, as pointed out by Williams, where humans have common control of the conditions and means of communication.

Yochai Benkler defines the commons as contradicting exchange on markets.[41] His definition differs in this respect from the one provided by Elinor Ostrom.[42] According to Benkler, the commons are 'radically decentralized, collaborative, and nonproprietary; based on sharing resources and outputs among widely distributed, loosely connected individuals who cooperate with each other without relying on either market signals or managerial commands. This is what I call "commons-based peer production"'.[43]

Michael Hardt and Toni Negri argue that the natural and the social commons are the two primary forms of the commons.[44] They subdivide the two main forms into five kinds of commons: the common of the earth and its ecosystems; the communicative and cultural common that involves cultural products such as ideas, images, and codes; commonly produced physical goods created by co-operative work; the common of rural and urban spaces, where communication, culture and co-operation takes place; and the common of social services that organise education, health care, housing, and welfare.[45] Hardt and Negri argue that in contemporary capitalism, there is a massive extraction of the commons, which includes the extraction of resources from data, data mining, social extraction from real estate markets and urban spaces, and financial extraction.[46]

In contemporary societies, we can find a variety of communication commons. Examples include public libraries and community centres that provide access to books, newspapers, magazines, computers, and the Internet without charging for it. Community networks (e.g. Freifunk in Germany) are computer networks that are controlled and owned in common and operate in local communities. Free software is software that can be executed, analysed, distributed, and changed by everyone under the condition that the same licence is used on resulting software products. GNU, Linux, and Mozilla are well-known examples of free software. Wikipedia is the most well known and most widely used WWW-based commons project. It is an online encyclopaedia whose articles are common knowledge. Wikipedia is co-operatively edited by volunteers and is a not-for-profit organisation. It uses a Creative Commons licence. Creative Commons is a licence that enables the re-use and re-mixing of content. One

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[41] Yochai Benkler. 2006. *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

[42] Elinor Ostrom. 1990. *Governing the Commons. The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[43] Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*, p. 60.

[44] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. 2017. *Assembly*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 166.

[45] Ibid., p. 166.

[46] Ibid., pp. 166–171.

version of it (NC = non-commercial) stipulates that re-use is only allowed for non-commercial purposes, which constitutes the foundation of an economic knowledge commons. Non-profit open access publishers release books and journals online without charging users for access and without a profit motive. In the case of books, they often also publish affordable paperback editions.

The Commodification of the Commons

Capital wants to subsume ever more aspects of society under its commodity logic. It wants to create new spheres of capital accumulation in order to prevent or postpone economic crises. Like all social phenomena, the commons are not automatically immune to the subsumption under capital. Peer producers can engage in the production of commons in a co-operative, solidary, altruistic, and social manner, but their work that creates commons can nonetheless be subsumed under capital accumulation processes in the form of free labour. For example, the Creative Commons CC-BY licence allows the re-use of knowledge commons for capital accumulation and thereby the subsumption of the commons under capital. In contrast to CC-BY-NC, CC-BY is a reactionary, pro-capitalist licence.

Digital capitalist corporations such as Facebook and Google have subsumed creativity, co-operation, openness, participation, and sharing under the logic of capital, which has resulted in the communism of capital. They base their operations on the free labour of users, who create content, data, metadata, social relations, and shared content. The platforms are free for anyone to use, which is gift logic. Nowadays, many companies crowdsource the marketing, development, and enhancement of their products via the Internet to consumers who conduct free labour. For-profit open access publishers release content as knowledge in common, but accumulate capital by so-called article/book processing charges paid by authors. These charges not only cover the production and publishing costs, but also increase the profits of open access capitalists.

Why Communication Commons are Morally Good and Politically Necessary

The Aristotelian philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre writes about the 'narrative understanding of the unity of human life',[47] which implies that humans are social, communicative beings. We have argued throughout this work that human production and communication are dialectical poles extending into

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[47] Alasdair MacIntyre. 2007. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory.* Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press. Third edition. p. 265.

each other. Humans produce communication and communicate in production. They are also producing, communicative beings.

There are some key features of language:[48]

1. Language enables justifications and reflection.
2. Language enables humans to respond and have intentions.
3. Language allows the envisioning of alternative developments and how to shape the future.
4. Language makes possible the telling of stories.[49]
5. Through language, humans can ask moral questions.[50]
6. Humans can advance their individual good and the common good by making use of reflection, anticipation, learning, judgements, the practical modification of judgements, and co-operation.
7. Co-operation is the common dimension of language's capacities.

Both communication and work are dimensions of production: When communicating, humans create sociality and meanings. In work, humans create goods and services that help to satisfy human needs and desires. But work and communication are not separate: There is a work character to communication and a communicative character to work. This means that there is a dialectic of work and communication that humans practice in their everyday life as rational beings. Human production is a co-operative social process, which is why it is also a communication process. Communication is a process of production in which humans produce sociality and share their interpretations of parts of the world. Communication and work can be found in all societies. They are universal features of humanity. Humans cannot always immediately fulfil all of their desires. They suppress and postpone desires, which enables work processes through which they try to reach the satisfaction of certain desires and needs.

Humans desire a good life. In order to try to reach a good life, they behave purposefully. Purposeful action is possible because humans are communicative, ethical, producing, rational, social, and societal beings. The desire to flourish and lead a good life is part of human essence. But given the social nature of society, humans cannot achieve a good life all by themselves, but only in co-operation with others.

Communication, community, and the commons stand in a dialectical relationship. Communication has the potential to produce common meanings of a community. In capitalism, capital and bureaucracy have subsumed the

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[48] Alasdair MacIntyre. 2016. *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity. An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[49] Ibid., pp. 26–27.

[50] Ibid., p. 225.

common good in order to advance particularism. In capitalism, only some can lead a good life, so the good life is not a common feature of class society and capitalist society. Class society's economic, political, and ideological system alienates humans and damages their lives. Human essence has to do with the commons. Human essence is made up by the features common to all humans that they need in order to live. The good life is a universal desire and need of humans that they cannot reach alone, but only in social, collective, and political processes. In order for the individual to lead a good life, all individuals need to be able to lead a good life, which means that a good society is needed. And a good society is a society that corresponds to its essence. A good society is therefore a society of the commons, where humans are in control of the economic, political and cultural conditions of their lives and where everyone benefits and can lead a good life. In an alienated society, humans do not control the cultural, political and economic conditions that influence their ways of life.

Humans strive for a good life. Society's conditions either more enable or more hinder the realisation of the potentials of humans and society. The potentials of society and humans are not static, but develop over time and throughout history. If class and domination hinder the realisation of humans' potentials, then a good society can only be achieved through class struggles against alienation. A society of the commons is a society that realises the creation of the economic commons (wealth and self-fulfilment for all), the political commons (participatory democracy), and the cultural commons (voice and recognition of all). To realise a commons-based society, alienation needs to be overcome in the economy (exploitation), politics (domination) and culture (ideology). Praxis is the struggle for a good society, a society of the commons. The creation of a good society requires struggles that are informed by 'the *categorical imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being'.[51] If humans cannot live a good life and if there is no society of the commons, then humans are denied their full humanity. They are denied the realisation of the common goods that society and all humans need in order to be able to flourish.

Praxis is the practical struggle for the establishment of a society of the commons. Critical ethics is a form of consciousness and praxis that aims at the creation of such a society. Its aim is to support humans in collectively reaching the point where the 'struggle for liberation changes dialectically into freedom'.[52] In struggles for a society of the commons, individuals practice solidarity and organise themselves collectively and politically so that they can overcome

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[51] Karl Marx. 1844. Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. In *MECW Volume 3*, 175–187. London: Lawrence & Wishart. p. 182.
[52] Georg Lukács. 1923/1971. *History and Class Consciousness*. London: Merlin. p. 42.

separation, isolation, and alienation. 'Praxis becomes the form of action appropriate to the isolated individual, it becomes his ethics'.[53]

Social struggles need their own culture, which includes the creation and communication of stories that focus on how exploitation and domination damage humans and society, and how resistance can be self-organised. The communication of injustices and resistance is an important aspect of the self-organisation of protest. Protest includes the public communication of analyses, goals, and demands, and organisational communication within protest movements.

The means of communication support the organisation of cognition, communication, and co-operation. Communication technologies are an important aspect of modern society. In all societies, humans have cognitive needs (love, recognition, friendship, etc.), communicative needs (understanding others), and co-operative needs (working together with others, sharing, solidarity, etc.). The means of communication are means for realising these needs. But the means of communication stand in the context of society. As a consequence, they do not necessarily and automatically foster the common good, but can in the context of class and power structures also be used as means of exploitation and domination.

The economy is the realm of ownership and production. Humans want to live in an economy that satisfies their needs and allows them work through which they can fulfil themselves and have a purpose in life. Organising communication resources as capital and commodities yielding profit has two consequences:

1. Human labour produces commodities in class relations, which involves exploitation of humans and means that the immediate producers do not collectively own the products they create.
2. Organising use-values as commodities means exclusive access so that those who cannot afford to buy these commodities do not have access. Commodity logic results in distributive injustices.

Exploiting communication labour and denying humans access to communication products is an economic form of alienation that damages humans. The communication commons are not produced in class relations and are inclusive.

To foster commons in the realm of communications, it is not enough to foster commons projects. Political struggles against capital also need to be organised in the realm of communications. Capital that disguises itself as common (the communism of capital) also needs to be questioned. Organising communication commons within the capitalist economy faces the problem that most humans are in capitalist society compelled to sell their labour-power in order to be able to sustain themselves. The communication commons question and

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[53] Ibid., p. 19.

challenge the capitalist organisation of communication. But they at the same time put into question the wage-labour that is subsumed under communication capital. The consequence can be that commons projects turn into voluntary, self-exploitative projects, into which commoners invest lots of time but from which they cannot live. This is not a problem as long as they have other jobs that sustain them and communing is a hobby; but it becomes a problem if the unpaid time invested is so large that the commoners can only lead precarious lives. In order to foster commons that challenge capital, mechanisms are needed that allow commoners to achieve an income from which they can live. The resource question is therefore crucial for commons projects. Examples of mechanisms to tackle this issue include a basic income guarantee, collective funds, common/public-partnerships, participatory budgeting, and the channelling of corporation taxes into commons projects.

In the political system, collective decisions are taken that are valid throughout society. The legal system defines the freedoms, rights, and responsibilities of those living in a political community. We can speak of political alienation when (a) political decision making is controlled by particular groups' or individuals' interests so that others have no or less influence on the decisions taken, or (b) when political rights that enable participation in politics and human voices to be heard are threatened, limited or abolished.

In authoritarian political systems, political regimes censor the political voices of citizens so that participation in the public sphere is damaged or not possible at all. The political surveillance of citizens' communication and the use of imprisonment or terror against political opponents are also authoritarian political measures. The outcome is that the political system is centralised and organised in an authoritarian manner. Citizens' rights are limited or abolished. They cannot participate in political life and political decision-making. Economic power is also frequently used for limiting political participation. Capitalist corporations and rich persons can use their money, influence, and reputation to create a voice and visibility for their political interests in the public sphere. For example, they can purchase advertisements or news platforms. The power of capital is a danger to capital and the realisation of the common good in the political system.

Advancing participatory democracy with the help of political communication needs particular communicative projects. The goal of participatory democracy is that humans are included in decision-making and the public sphere, and that the skills and resources needed for meaningful political debate and decisions are made available to all.

In the cultural system, humans make meaning of the world and define identities. In the realm of culture, the human being strives to be recognised by others. Twitter is an online platform where humans aim to be recognised by others. But on Twitter, recognition is very asymmetrically distributed. Celebrities and brands have a high reputation and have the money and influence needed to

purchase recognition. They have more power to define what is meaningful to the public than others. The asymmetric distribution of recognition, visibility and voice is a form of cultural alienation. It creates a hierarchical culture dominated by influencers who disable the voice and recognition of others.

Using communication goods to advance the common good in culture means using them in ways that help everyone to be adequately heard, seen and recognised. Humans all want recognition, but they have different subjectivities. A common culture is not unitary, but one in which the unity in diversity of identities, lifestyles, and worldviews is achieved. Culture is only common when it both avoids a plurality without any unity (= cultural relativism) and a unity without plurality (= cultural imperialism).

A critical ethics that is inspired by Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx sees the struggle for the advancement of the communication commons as part of broader struggles for a society of the commons. Commoners are virtuous when they criticise, question, and struggle against economic alienation (exploitation), political alienation (domination), and cultural alienation (ideology). Virtuous commoners aim at establishing a society of the commons, commons-based communications, and commons-based social structures.

There is an inherent link between communication, the commons, and community. A true and fully developed communication society is a commons-based society, a community of commoners that fosters the common good by fostering the individual good and fosters the individual good by fostering the common good. In a commons-based society, there is a constructive dialectic of the individual good and the common good. An ethics of the communication commons needs to build on the general ethics of the commons. Fostering the communication commons is part of the struggle for a society of the commons.

12.4. Summary and Conclusions

We can summarise this chapter's main findings:

- A true communication society is a society in which the original meaning of communication as making something common is the organising principle. A society of the commons is an important foundation of democratic communications. Democratic communications are based on co-operative rationality.

- The human is a social and societal being. The societal essence of the human being includes co-operation. It is an essential characteristic of human beings that they have a quest for human flourishing and leading a good life.

- The commons are goods that all humans require in order to live a good life. The good life of the individual is only possible in a good society that enables the good life for all. Achieving a good society that benefits all

requires collective organisation of the common good. It also requires inclusive, co-operative communication.

Informational and Communicative Socialism

Socialist politics should engage with and not ignore communication politics. A good society needs to be a socialist and commons-based society, which includes the perspectives of informational socialism and communicative communism/ commonism. Marx, in contrast to Anarchists (Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, etc.), was convinced that communism cannot be established immediately after the end of capitalism, but that a transitional phase, in which the state but not capital continues to exist, is needed. Socialism is a political-economic movement that has its economic foundations in socialised aspects of the economy already within capitalism and has its political foundations in class struggles against capitalism and for socialism. Socialist politics should think of both public services and civil society as realms from where alternatives can emerge. The politics of informational socialism and communicative socialism should be based on some general principles.

There are ten principles of informational and communicative socialism:[54]

1. **Techno-dialectics:**
   Socialist communication politics avoids techno-optimism/techno-euphoria as well as techno-pessimism. Instead, it asks: How can technology and society be shaped in ways that benefit all humans, workers, and citizens and develop the positive potentials of society and humanity?
2. **Radical reformist communication politics:**
   Socialist communication politics is neither reactionary reformism that bows to bourgeois interests nor utopian revolutionary romanticism. It advances a dialectic of reform and revolution (radical reformism). It struggles for measures that bring about immediate improvements and at the same time advance the possibilities and resourcing of alternative non-capitalist projects and struggles for informational and communicative socialism. Socialist communication politics operates at the level of both political parties and social movements. It brings about their co-operation in the form of a politically co-operating multitude.
3. **United class struggles of communication workers:**
   Communication corporations exploit different kinds of workers. Alternatives to communicative capitalism can only emerge out of class struggles.

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[54] These ten principles were first published in the following article: Christian Fuchs. 2020. Communicative Socialism/Digital Socialism. *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 18 (1): 1-31, https://www.triple-c.at/index.php /tripleC/article/view/1149; reproduced with permission of the journal *tripleC*.

Socialist communication politics supports the digital and communication workers of the world in uniting. In order to make this struggle effective, we need national and international trade unions that unite all different communication workers across branches, occupations, countries, corporations, cultures, etc. in one union of communication workers. Class struggles of communication workers are often fragmented. In order to fight global capital in general and global communication capital in particular, communication workers of the world need to unite, avoid and fight the ideologies of fascism, nationalism, racism, and xenophobia wherever they appear (including in communication networks), and develop strategies of international solidarity and joint struggle. Capitalism exploits different kinds of workers, including unwaged workers who produce the commons and social relations. Unpaid workers' interests are not best served by the demand for an individualised wage, but by the demand for a social wage in the form of a corporation-tax-funded, redistributive basic income guarantee.

4. **Collective control of the means of communication as means of production:**
   In digital and communicative capitalism, communication technologies such as computers, apps, software, hardware, data, content, etc. are means of production. Capital controls and commodifies communication resources. Where these resources matter in the context of labour, it is an important political task that workers demand, struggle for, and obtain the collective control of the means of communication as means of economic production.

5. **Break-up of communication monopolies:**
   Corporate communication monopolies centralise economic power and are a threat to democracy. Socialist communication politics argues for and works towards breaking up corporate monopolies. It neither favours national over international capital (or vice-versa) nor small or medium size capital over large capital (or vice-versa), but no capital, public goods, and common goods instead of capital.

6. **Privacy friendliness, socialist privacy:**
   Public and commons-based communications should respect users' privacy and minimise their economic and political surveillance as well as other forms of surveillance. Personal data collection and storage should be minimised to the data that is absolutely necessary. The surveillance capacities of the state should be redirected away from the constant surveillance of citizens towards the policing of tax-avoiding corporations and white-collar crime. An important task and demand is to criticise and demand the abolition of the surveillance of workers and the mass surveillance of citizens. Socialist privacy means that data collection is minimised, information and communication systems are designed in a privacy-friendly

manner, and surveillance is directed against powerful corporations in order to increase transparency of their economic and financial operations.

7. **Public service media and communications co-operatives:**
The struggle for socialism needs to be fought on the territories of public services, the state, and civil society. The political Left should struggle for three forms of collective communication services: those that are publicly operated or enabled by the state, those that are collectively owned by worker co-operatives, and those that are organised as public/commons-partnerships (partnerships of public institutions and civil society). Services that involve lots of sensitive personal data (such as political opinions) should ideally not be operated by the state in order to reduce the risk of the state surveillance of political opinions. Services that involve the need for high storage capacity can best be operated by public institutions and public service media. Practically speaking this means for example that there should be a public service YouTube and a civil-society based Facebook platform co-operative. The state should legally and economically enable public service media to create digital public services and digital public service corporations. Newspapers should best be operated as non-profit, advertising-free, self-managed companies. Press subsidies funded out of taxation should only be given to non-profit, advertising-free, non-tabloid newspapers. Alternative funding mechanisms for public service and commons-based non-profit, non-commercial media should be sought. They include, for example, corporation taxes, taxing online advertising and advertising in general, the licence and media fee paid by users of public service media, donation models, a digital service tax for large transnational digital corporations, etc.

8. **Democratic, public sphere media:**
The logic of communicative capitalism and the commodity form favours superficiality, high-speed flows of information and news, the personalisation of politics, tabloidisation, one-dimensionality, and partiality in the interest of the bourgeoisie. Alternatives decelerate information flows (slow media), foster informed political debate, learning through collective creation and participation in spaces of public communication that are ad-free, non-commercial, and not-for-profit. Such spaces enable both professional media and citizen media as well as the dialectical fusion of both. Socialist communication politics supports the creation and sustenance of media that have the potential to help advance critical, anti-ideological thought by fostering engagement with content that stimulates dialectical debate and opposes classist, fascist, racist, xenophobic, and sexist discourse.

9. **Political and protest communication:**
Communication technologies are not the cause of protests, rebellions, and revolutions, but an important part of protest communication. Socialist communication politics seeks to use communication technologies

to spread socialist politics to a broad public. Wherever possible, it supports the development and use of non-commercial, non-profit media for organisation and public communication. It aims to avoid creating 'alternative ghettos' of resource-poor alternative media that are based on precarious labour. For this purpose, a politics is required that focuses on channelling resources towards alternative media. Political education in schools and other educational institutions is also an aspect of political communication. Political education shall enable humans to critically reflect on society as well as foster complex, dialectical, and independent thinking.

10. **Self-managed, democratic governance:**
    Socialist communication politics believes in the necessity of, supports and advances the democratic and participatory governance of media organisations, so that the workers producing in these companies, and representatives of everyday citizens that are affected by these media's operations, participate in the decision-making process.

The ethics of the commons is political because it requires praxis and the struggle for alternatives to capitalism in order to make humans and society flourish and realise their potentials. The society of the commons transcends capitalism because it goes beyond the latter. Love is the principle of the society of the commons. Love and death are particular forms of transcendence. The next chapter focuses on these phenomena.