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DIALECTICS AS IMMANENT CRITIQUE. OR, DIALECTICS AS BOTH ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY WITH A PRACTICAL INTENTION

ABSTRACT

This response to Asger Sørensen's paper *From Ontology to Epistemology: Tong, Mao and Hegel* is made on the basis of a reflection on the author's intellectual development with special reference to the idea of 'dialectics'. This development is mainly composed of three periods, in which the author formed his strong antipathy toward dialectics as a mere tool of power (in the 1970s), learnt to understand the importance of 'dialogical logic' in providing conceptual tools for human knowledge of a type of reality which is both objective and subjective – human practices (in the 1980s) – and attempted to understand the 'dialectics of rationalization' by integrating 'dialectics' in the Western tradition of Critical Theory with the Chinese tradition of 'dialectics' systematically interpreted by Feng Qi (1915-1995) since the 1990s.

KEYWORDS

dialectics, ontology, epistemology, Mao, Hegel, critical theory

At first I was both surprised and flattered to see my name placed alongside the names of Mao and Hegel in the title of Asger Sørensen's paper *From Ontology to Epistemology: Tong, Mao and Hegel*¹, in which he criticized my conception of dialectics as a case of the conception of dialectics found in the tradition "from Dao to Mao", which is, in his view, not only different from but also inferior to the conception of dialectics he himself inherits from, among others, Hegel. And then, after reading the whole paper, I was both guilty and grateful. I am guilty for the fact that the author probably does not know sufficiently the relevant work done by professional Chinese philosophers, especially in the last decades, and for this fact I am at least partly to blame, since I have not done enough to inform the author who has been my great friend

1 Cf. Asger Sørensen, "From Ontology to Epistemology: Tong, Mao and Hegel", in Sørensen 2019: 157–178.

for many years since we met for the first time in May of 2007 in Prague. But I am also grateful to him for giving me the opportunity to know more about the contemporary relevance of an old philosophical concept like ‘dialectics’, and to make more reflections upon my understanding of the meaning of this concept and its broader implications.

1.

It is both true and false, or, to put it in a less ‘dialectical’ way, it is half right and half wrong when Asger Sørensen said that “Tong was formed intellectually during the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s, i.e. through the thoughts of Mao Zedong” (Sørensen 2019: 158).

On the one hand, I went through the whole process of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) first as a school pupil, and then as a state-owned farm worker. When I was a middle-school boy from 1970 to 1975 I was taught to criticize our teachers, and to criticize a teacher of mine, for example, for being ‘idealist’ (versus materialist) because he encouraged us to repeatedly read classical texts so that a ‘sudden enlightenment’ would finally come. At that time we were also asked to criticize our ancestors, to criticize Confucius, for example, for being ‘ill-minded’ in making the otherwise totally innocent remark that he was going to teach his pupils four subjects: letters, ethics, devotion of soul, and truthfulness. During the period in which I was a state-owned farm worker from 1975 to 1978, I spent four and a half months from late 1975 to early 1976 as a member of a ‘training class for workers, peasants and soldiers’ sponsored by the municipality authority of Shanghai, which was close to the so-called ‘Gang of Four’ headed by Mao’s wife. In this training class our task was to prepare and then deliver a course on Marxist philosophy over radio and TV under the guidance of a group of professional philosophers who were then not politically trusted enough to be allowed to teach the course themselves. And then came a fact that provides the strongest support for Sørensen’s view of my intellectual socialization – in early 1976, when I was 17 years old, I was giving a radio lecture and a television lecture on the same subject of “the law of the unity of opposites”, which is the first law of the dialectical materialism, with a quotation from Chairman Mao as the title: *The Philosophy of the Communist Party is the Philosophy of the Struggle*.

On the other hand, I started my formal study of philosophy after I entered East China Normal University (ECNU) in the spring of 1978, at the age of 19, as one of the first college students after the national college entrance examination was resumed as a result of the stopping of the so-called ‘Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’ in October 1976, symbolized by Mao’s wife’s arrest less than one month after the death of Mao, who not only launched the ‘Cultural Revolution’ personally but also took it as one of his two major life achievements, the other one being the overthrowing of the Nationalist Party and the establishing of the People’s Republic of China. That is to say, although it is largely true that I “was formed intellectually during the Cultural Revolution in the

1970s, i.e. through the thoughts of Mao Zedong”, it is equally true that I was educated philosophically in the post-Cultural Revolution period first by the thoughts sharply critical of Mao, when I was an undergraduate and graduate student in China from 1978 to 1984, and then by the thoughts that had hardly anything to do with Mao, when I was a doctoral student and a visiting scholar in Europe and America as well as a university lecturer/professor whose major task is to teach courses on Western philosophy, including the tradition of the so-called Western Marxism, from 1985 on.

2.

At ECNU my major teacher was Feng Qi (1915-1995), one of the most important Chinese philosophers of the 20th century. Among his philosophical achievements, a book titled *Dialectics of Logical Thinking* and a three-volume book titled *The Logical Development of Ancient Chinese Philosophy* are most relevant to the topic discussed here.

Feng went to Yan’an, the base area of the Chinese Communist Party where Mao stayed together with the headquarters of the Party in September 1937, after he was admitted to Tsinghua University, one of the top two universities in China then as well as now, in order to take part in the struggle against the Japanese invasion. He not only met Mao in Yan’an but also was deeply impressed and inspired by Mao’s speeches and writings of that period. In July 1939 Feng Qi left Yan’an for Kunming, where Tsinghua had been merged with Peking University and Nankai University into the legendary Southwest United University. In that war-time university Feng resumed his undergraduate education, which was then followed by his graduate education under the guidance of the three arguably best professional philosophers of China in the 20th century, Jin Yuelin (1895-1984), Feng Youlan (1895-1990) and Tang Yongtong (1893-1964). To make a long story short: Feng Qi was not only a well-trained professional philosopher with a solid knowledge of Mao’s thought, he was also a philosopher who managed to construct his own philosophical system after the Cultural Revolution on the basis of his deeply critical reflection on the intellectual and cultural roots of the ‘Revolution’, including the philosophical tradition of China “from Dao to Mao”, in Sørensen’s words.

According to Feng Qi, dialectics should be understood from a perspective integrating ontology, epistemology and logic. For this view he argued by referring to Lenin’s remarks in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, which was highly regarded by philosophers of Feng Qi’s times as an authoritative resource for developing or introducing interesting ideas that could not be found in the official textbooks of Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism that can be traced back to the version confirmed by Stalin in 1930s. It is true that Feng Qi, in a way that is typical for Chinese philosophers of his age, talked a lot of ‘objective dialectics’, referring to the objective world as a totality of dialectical developments of things of all kinds. But he, unlike other Chinese philosophers at that time, paid much more attention to epistemology (he called his

philosophical system one of “epistemology in the broader sense”), and regarded dialectics as a kind of logic that is developed on the basis of, rather than in opposition to, formal logic. And dialectical logic in this sense is also understood as the summing-up of the development of human thinking. His book *Dialectics of Logical Thinking* was not formally published until 1996 (Feng Qi 1996), as the second volume of his *Three Treatises on Wisdom*, one year after he passed away, but it was one of our major textbooks in mimeograph when I was an MA student from 1982 to 1984, and was widely circulated and frequently referred to among philosophers in and outside of Shanghai at that time. The book was composed of two parts, and we at that time compared its first part to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, since it is about the dialectics of “the process of logical thinking”, and compared its second part to Hegel’s *Logic*, since it is about the dialectics of “the form of logical thinking”. Here is the English abstract that I wrote for the book when it was published in 1996 by the ECNU Press:

According to the author, dialectics is inherent in our logical thinking (including what he called ‘ordinary logical thinking’), and undergoes a process from a relatively spontaneous stage to a relatively self-conscious or self-reflexive one. The task he set for himself is to make reflections on the process and to inquire systematically into the forms of logical thinking which has reached the self-conscious stage (its categories and laws) and into its methods. (Feng Qi 1996: 5–6)

As a disciple of Jin Yuelin, who happens to be the founding father of the academic discipline of modern logic in China, Feng sharply criticized those who opposed dialectical logic to formal logic, and argued for the former’s consistency with, though superiority over, the latter. In my book *Dialectics of Modernization*, I presented Feng Qi’s view of dialectical logic in this way:

As a logic, dialectical logic is similar to formal logic in that its object of research are also forms of thought. The difference between these two kinds of logic consists in the fact that, unlike formal logic, dialectical logic discusses those forms of thought which are closely connected with the dialectical contents of thought [...]. The forms of thought which dialectical logic deals with are what Kant called ‘categories’, such as ‘quantity’, ‘quality’, ‘measure’, ‘causality’, ‘interaction’, ‘necessity’, ‘contingency’, ‘freedom’ and so on. These categories are forms of thought in the sense that they are used as the condition of thinking (or ‘the form’, in the terminology of Greek philosophy) to organize the cognitive materials such as sense-perceptions and unorganized statements (or ‘the matter’) into a statement or a system of statements. (Tong 2000: 123)

While Hegel regarded his system of dialectical logic as a systematic summing-up of the concepts or categories developed in the history of Western philosophy, Feng Qi tried to find a parallel between his study of dialectical logic and his study of the history of Chinese philosophy. We, Feng Qi’s students in the 1980s, therefore, compared his *Logical Development of Ancient Chinese Philosophy* to Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. I once presented Feng Qi’s view of the Chinese tradition of dialectical logic as follows:

According to Feng Qi, the categories studied by ancient Chinese philosophers include three groups: categories about 'class' (*lei*), categories about 'cause' (*gu*), and categories about 'principle' (*li*). [...] In the terminology of modern philosophy, the categories of the 'class' are 'identity-difference', 'quantity-quality', 'universal-particular' and so on; the categories of 'cause' are 'cause-effect', 'essence-phenomenon', 'form-content', 'substance-function', and so on; and the categories of 'principle' are 'reality-possibility-necessity', 'necessity-contingency-freedom', 'necessary law-prescriptive rule', and so on. These categories were all discussed by Chinese philosophers in a more or less explicit way as the conditions of dialectical thinking. Understood in terms of modern philosophy, these three groups of categories are connected with both the knowing activities and the known objects. In terms of the known objects, the first group is mainly related to the direct being of objects; the second to the grounds for them; and the third to the tendency and goal of the development of these objects. In terms of the knowing activities, the first group is mainly used in the stage of discrimination and description, the second in the stage of explanation and understanding, and the third in the stage of prediction and planning. Roughly speaking, these three groups of categories are parallel to three parts of Hegel's Logic: 'Being', 'Essence' and 'Idea'. In the history of Chinese philosophy, philosophers before the Qin dynasty contributed mainly to the study of the first group of categories, philosophers from the Qin and Han dynasties to the Sui and Tang dynasties contributed mainly to the study of the second group of categories, and philosophers from the Song and Ming dynasties on contributed mainly to the study of the third group of categories. (Tong 2000: 123–124)

Understanding dialectics as dialectical logic in the above sense, Feng Qi emphasized the philosophical importance of Mao's *On Protracted War* (1938) as well as Mao's *On Contradiction* and *On Practice* (1937), two books mentioned by Sørensen in his paper. In *On Protracted War*, according to Feng, Mao applied the law of the unity of opposites as the method of connecting analysis with synthesis, and he applied this method to criticize both those who yielded to "national subjugation" and those who expected "quick victory" – two opinions widely spreading in China when the War started – and to prove that the war, though a protracted one, must be won by the Chinese people. Here is what we may call Feng's 'rational reconstruction' of Mao's reasoning in that book, which includes the following three sections:

First, one should proceed from reality and objectivity, and comprehensively investigate the current situation and its history, in order to grasp the basis for further change and development. This basis is grasped as a result of investigating the original and fundamental relations of an object. The basis grasped in *On Protracted War*, for example, is determined by all fundamental elements that respectively belong to the Chinese side and to the Japanese side, and which contradict each other. Mao points out, in terms of military, economic, and political forces, that the enemy is stronger than us; in terms of the nature of the war, our war is a progressive and just one, while the enemy's is a backward and uncivilized one. In addition, compared with the enemy, we have greater territory, richer natural resources, a larger population, more soldiers, and stronger international support. Considering all these facts, the basis is formed for the prediction that the war will be a protracted one and the last victory will be won by China.

Second, one should point out various possibilities of development and disclose its necessary tendency through one's analysis of contradictions [...]. In *On Protracted War*, Mao discusses in detail how the contradictions between China and Japan will evolve, points out that there are two possibilities of the development of the war, national subjugation or liberation, of which the possibility of national liberation through a protracted war is a superior one. Mao remarks that war is a competition between the characteristics of the warring sides, and the contradictory movement of the war will proceed from the initial disequilibrium (the enemy is stronger than us) to equilibrium (both sides are locked in a stalemate) and in turn to a new disequilibrium (the enemy is weaker than us). The war, therefore, can accordingly be divided into three stages: on the part of China, the war will proceed from the stage of strategic defense through the stage of strategic stalemate to the stage of strategic counteroffensive. Mao concludes, 'This is the natural logic of war'.

Third, one should make it clear how the condition can be brought forth for the possibility favorable to the people to be realized and the revolutionary goal to be reached. The topic of the second half of *On Protracted War* is just 'how to do', namely, how the Chinese people should create conditions according to the law of war and how a plan should be made on the basis of this law, so as to win the last victory of the war and to reach the goal, namely, 'to drive out Japanese imperialism and build a new China with freedom and equality'. This requires that the people act on their conscious initiative, combined with natural logic, and a subjective endeavor to conduct political mobilization and make correct strategies and tactics in the war. Mao says, 'A possible change implied by the objective elements can be realized only if our politics are correct and our subjective attempts are made. At this moment, the subjective role is a decisive one'. (Feng Qi 1996: 657–658)

From the above presentation of Feng Qi's conception of dialectics and his interpretation of Mao's conception of dialectics, it should be clear that dialectics in Feng Qi's mind is important first of all because it is a method or a logic instead of an ontology, and it is different from formal logic not by ignoring the rules of formal logic, but by the fact that in dialectical logic 'forms of thought' are composed not of 'variables' but of 'categories'. Moreover, although the validity of dialectical logic in this sense depends on its status as a 'reflection' of the objective reality as well as the summing-up of the history of the human thinking, it should not be regarded as a passive reflection of the objective reality, not even a passive reflection of the dynamic development of the objective reality outside of human practices. On the contrary, the core of dialectical logic is to regard the objective reality as a totality of conflicting potentials or possibilities, whose meanings, directions and relations with each other are to be judged by relevant human beings with their practical interests and activities; and the value of the dialogical logic thus lies nowhere else but in providing conceptual tools for human knowledge of a type of reality which is both objective and subjective: human practices. Dialectics, in short, can be, and should be, both ontological and epistemological.

3.

After I finished my MA study with a thesis on ‘problem’ as an epistemological concept under the guidance of Feng Qi, I became a lecturer of philosophy at ECNU towards the end of 1984, teaching both Marxist philosophy and (non-Marxist) Western philosophy. In 1988 I was given a chance to spend one year at the University of Bergen, Norway, as a visiting scholar with Professor Gunnar Skirbekk. In the summer of 1989 I was accepted as a doctoral student there after I presented a paper titled *A Comparative Study of Popper’s and Habermas’ Conceptions of Rationality*, with Skirbekk as my major supervisor. In June 1994, I successfully defended my dissertation, on the basis of which the above mentioned book titled *Dialectics of Modernization: Habermas and the Chinese Discourse of Modernization* was published. In the introduction to this book I explained why I used the term dialectics in the title. In addition to using this term to express the classical meaning of argumentative dialogue, I used this term for the following two considerations:

On the one hand, modernization, like ‘Enlightenment’ in the minds of Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, is a process full of conflicts and contradictions. Habermas’s theory of modernity and modernization is a new reinterpretation of the ‘dialectic of modernization’, or, more generally, of the ‘dialectics of Enlightenment’. On the other hand, China has a rich tradition of dialectical thinking, and this tradition, as I will try to prove, can make positive contributions to a balanced and sound conception of modernization. (Tong 2000: 4)

At this stage, I venture to say, I attempted to integrate ‘dialectics’ in the tradition of Critical Theory in the West with ‘dialectics’ as interpreted by Feng Qi in China. Maybe this attempt did not succeed, as Sørensen’s paper seems to show, but my intention was to be engaged in a kind of ‘immanent critique’ with the help of the Chinese tradition of dialectical logic, with its most important legacies being the pair of concepts ‘*ti*’ and ‘*yong*’. Here are some relevant passages from a paper of mine summarizing the main arguments of *Dialectics of Modernization*:

Literally meaning ‘body’ and ‘use’, *ti* and *yong*, as philosophical categories, also mean ‘ground’ and ‘manifestation’. Closely related to these two categories are *Dao* and *Qi* literally meaning instrument. In traditional Chinese philosophy, corresponding to the understanding of *ti* and *yong* as ground and manifestation, there is a tradition regarding *dao* as *ti* and *qi* as *yong* or the tradition of *daoti qiyong*; corresponding to the understanding of *ti* and *yong* as body and use, there is a tradition of regarding *qi* as *ti* and *dao* as *yong* or the tradition of *qiti daoyong*. A major characteristic of traditional Chinese philosophy is a wide consensus among Chinese philosophers that *ti* or *dao* is inseparably connected with, even identical to, *yong* or *qi*.

These categories entered the Chinese discourse of modernity when a group of Qing officials, the so-called *yangwupai* (Westernizers) advocated the thesis of ‘Chinese learning as *ti* or substance and Western learning as *yong* or function’ in the second half of the 19th century. Within this thesis of ‘Chinese-*ti* with

Western-*yong*' the categories themselves underwent a fundamental change: the emphasis now is turned from 'the nature of things' to 'the nature of cultures'. *Ti* and *yong* were separate in objective embodiments and fused only in mind. And the relation between *ti* and *yong* was not only the relation between ground and manifestation and that between body and use. It was also the relation between what is regarded as a value in itself and what is regarded as an instrument in service of the value. (Tong 2001: 82)

I have to skip the complex discussions involved and go to the conclusion I derived from these discussions:

Though regarded as being decidedly refuted by reformist criticisms, the thesis of Chinese *ti* with Western-*yong*, especially the question it posed about the relation between value and instrument and that between tradition and modernity, greatly influenced the later development of the Chinese discourse of modernity. Because these two modern problems were posed in a pair of important categories in traditional Chinese philosophy, it became possible for the Chinese to think about these problems with the help of a philosophical tradition which is long, rich, and itself in the process of modernization in this century. The key point is to understand the relation between value and instrument and that between tradition and modernity in such a way that these relations are at the same time also the relation between ground and manifestation – their relations are thus not external, but internal. Different attempts to accomplish this made by thinkers from Liang Qichao and Liang Shuming to Mo Zongsan and Li Zehou have been a major part of the Chinese discourse of modernity in the last century. (Tong 2001: 83–84)

I would not claim that my efforts to bring the Chinese tradition of dialectical thinking in terms of categories like *ti* and *yong* to the 'discourse of modernity' in our times are perfectly fruitful, but I do think it's worthwhile to explore this kind of national tradition to advance the critical theoretical course of immanent critique of modern society at the international or cross-cultural level. One important lesson I have learned from the tradition of Critical Theory with which I started to identify self-consciously during my first trip to Norway or to any country outside of China, is that the core of dialectics is the idea of 'immanent critique'.

I agree with Sørensen in arguing for "the predominance of theory over practice" (Sørensen 2019: 170) with regard to dialectics; but I want to argue for a conception of dialectics as a theory or as something epistemologically and methodologically important "with a practical intention", in Habermas's words (Habermas 1973: 1). That is to say, when I need to use the term 'dialectics' I am willing to give the so-called 'objective dialectics' or the so-called 'dialectics as ontology' an even more marginal place than Feng Qi would be willing to give: when we apply dialectical logic in studying various possibilities in reality and their relationships with each other, it is our practical concerns with these possibilities and their relations with others, rather than these possibilities and relations alone, that are of crucial importance. It is to a large degree our practical concerns that are the sources of values and standards by which we make our judgments about those possibilities and relations; and these practical concerns or 'human interests' very often also function as the basis or courses for changes

in reality: in it some possibilities are realized, some are ruled out, and some are turned into other possibilities, and so on, as a result of human involvement in reality through human practices. In this sense, although I agree with my teacher in comparing Mao's *On Protracted War* to Marx's *Das Kapital* as successful cases of the application of dialectical logic, I would argue that Mao's book seems to be closer to the application of dialectics in the above sense than Marx's book, since in *Das Kapital* the development of capitalism is understood both as a dialectical process and a natural one, which is quite close to Engels's controversial idea of 'dialectics of nature'. Saying this, however, does not mean that I support the idea of dialectics as something purely epistemological versus something purely ontological, again in Sørensen's words. In our application of dialectics in knowing reality, in my view, we should take reality seriously in the first place. A major reason why dialectics could degenerate into sophistry is that one ignores the rigid constraints of reality when one is applying dialectics to reality. Typically, for example, if in a Chinese movie you see somebody speaking in a meeting room of the importance of seeing things 'dialectically', he or she is most probably the most important person in the meeting. Dialectics is supposed to be demanding one to think 'both ways', or to avoid either being 'too much this' or being 'too much that', so it somehow would sound strange for a person who is not in the highest position in the room to speak this way. A tacit consensus in those circles where 'dialectics' is frequently used seems to be that only those in higher positions can decide for those in lower positions at *what* point one is 'dialectical', hence 'correct', or beyond *what* point one is 'metaphysical' (meaning anti-dialectical), hence 'wrong'. This is, in my view, the worst side of the version of dialectics that I was familiar with during the period of my intellectual formation: dialectics as a mere tool of power. One of the most important achievements of learning from the period when I was formed intellectually is my strong antipathy towards dialectics of this type.

But we should not give up dialectics as such just because it can take a form that is actually against the true spirit of dialectics, about which we can learn from Marx when he says that dialectics "is in its essence critical and revolutionary" (Marx, Engels 2004: 20), and we can also learn from Adorno when he says that "Dialectic's very procedure is immanent critique" (Adorno 1983: 5). Dialectics understood as 'immanent critique', in my view, is one of the major ideas of the tradition of Critical Theory, if not *the* major idea of this tradition. Adorno explained the meaning of 'immanent critique' in his study on Husserl and phenomenology: "It does not so much oppose phenomenology with a position or 'model' external and alien to phenomenology, as it pushes the phenomenological model, with the latter's own force, to where the latter cannot afford to go. Dialectic exacts the truth from it through the confession of its own untruth" (Adorno 1983: 5). To support this conception of dialectics Adorno then quotes Hegel: "Genuine refutation must penetrate the power of the opponent and meet him on the ground of his strength; the case is not won by attacking him somewhere else and defeating him where he is not" (Adorno 1983: 5). Here Adorno, or Hegel for that matter, seems to understand 'immanent critique' only with

regard to one's debating opponent. By comparison, Marcuse's understanding of dialectics in his *One-Dimensional Man* seems to be closer to dialectics in my mind as a key idea in the tradition of Critical Theory from Marx to Habermas: "If dialectical logic understands contradiction as 'necessity' belonging to the very 'nature of thought' (*Natur der Denkbestimmungen*), it does so because contradiction belongs to the very nature of the object of thought, to reality, where Reason is still Unreason, and the irrational still the rational" (Marcuse 1991: 146).

What Marcuse said here seems to me to be close to what Marx said in 1843 in a letter to Arnold Ruge: "*Die Vernunft hat immer existiert, nur nicht immer in der vernünftigen Form*" (Marx, Engels 1981: 345). Interestingly enough, this German sentence can be translated into English in two forms. In one English translation, the German phrase "in der vernünftigen Form" is rendered as "in a reasonable form" (Marx, Engels 2010: 143). In another English translation, it is rendered as "in a rational form" (Marx 2000: 44). The whole enterprise of the tradition of Critical Theory, in my view, is based on the assumption that reason has always existed, but it has not always existed in a rational or reasonable way. Considering the later developments of the tradition of Critical Theory at the stage of Habermas, whose idea of 'communicative rationality' is closer to 'reasonableness' than to 'rationality' in John Rawls' discussion of 'reasonableness' versus 'rationality' (Rawls 1993: 50), we can find quite rich contents in the conception of dialectics as immanent critique of reason embodied in various forms in the social and historical reality.

One point that is very important but not mentioned above is that dialectics as dialectical logic must be dialectical in the classical sense – or in its modern form of critical and argumentative communication – if we want to distance ourselves from those movie figures who talk about dialectics that I mentioned above. And that is one of the major points that attracted me very much when my Norwegian professor introduced me to Jürgen Habermas's work. Although Habermas talked about the "dialectic of rationalization" in a way that would remind one of his Frankfurt School predecessors' notion of "dialectic of enlightenment" (Habermas 1984: 380), that is, as a critical description of the one-sided process of modernization as rationalization, his critical theory of communicative rationality as a whole, in my view, is based on the conception of dialectics not only as immanent critique or "transcendence from within" (Habermas 1995: 146), but also as a theory with human interests in "changing the world" by means of discursively "interpreting the world", to use two phrases in a famous remark by Karl Marx. That's at least my understanding of the title of an interview with Habermas right after he finished his *magnum opus*, which happens to be the same as the title of a paper by Habermas published as early as in 1954, that is: "dialectics of rationalization" (Honneth, Knödler-Bunte, Widmann 1981; Habermas 1954).

What Asger Sørensen presents to me is indeed a very important question, which I take gratefully as a generous, though antagonistic, gift from my great Danish friend (Sørensen 2019: 159). I know that this question deserves a reply based on a more careful reading of his new book as a whole, among others. But unfortunately, what is said above is all I can possibly say for the time being.

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Tong Šidun

Dijalektika kao imanentna kritika. Ili, dijalektika kao ontologija i epistemologija s praktičnom intencijom

Apstrakt:

Ovaj odgovor na poglavlje Asgera Sørensen'sa *Od ontologije do epistemologije: Tong, Mao i Hegel* je formulisan na temelju refleksije o autorovom intelektualnom razvoju sa posebnim osvrtom na ideju 'dijalektike'. Ovaj razvoj se sastoji iz tri perioda, u kojima je autor razvio jaku antipatiju prema dijalektici kao jednostavnoj alatki moći (u 1970-im), i razumeo značaj 'dijaloške logike' u pružanju pojmovnih oruđa za ljudsko spoznavanje one vrste realnosti koja je istovremeno objektivna i subjektivna – ljudskih praksi (u 1980-im) – i pokušao da razume 'dijalektiku racionalizacije' integrišući 'dijalektiku' iz zapadne tradicije kritičke teorije sa kineskom tradicijom 'dijalektike' sistematski interpretiranom u delima Feng Čija (1915-1995) u 1990-im.

Ključne reči: dijalektika, ontologija, epistemologija, Mao, Hegel, kritička teorija