

Marx the Cynic*

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1 Parallax in *Transcritique*

Kojin Karatani has persistently distinguished “ethics,” which are maintained in the face of others who do not share the same rules, from communal norms or “morality.” This stance remains unchanged even today. Ethics is founded on the absoluteness of asymmetrical relations and the daring to take an ex-ante facto “*salto mortale* [fatal leap],” while morality is only an ex-post facto “synthesis” based on symmetrical relations. He expressed this view, for example, in his *Transcritique*.¹⁾ He also argued that whereas ethics finds its transcendental (retroactive) origin in the perverse “drive” of the merchant and interest-bearing capital that live between communities, morality conceals such an origin and instead fabricates as its historical origin a balanced “division of labor” and a moderate “desire” under the industrial capital that hides within the community. But the question I had at the time has still not gone away. If, as Karatani says, ethics is founded on the “asymmetry” of exchange relations as the starting point for ex-ante facto “speculation” prompted by a perverse “drive [*Trieb*],” how can it be distinguished from blind capital? To use Karatani’s current phrasing, we may ask how the fourth mode of exchange D can be determined from the mode of exchange C (commodity exchange). Perhaps the answer ought to be that the former is guided by “faith” as a regulative idea. However, in Marx’s words, capital also takes “the cosmopolitanism of commodity owners” to be “the faith of practical reason,”²⁾ and credit which postpones the crisis of selling to the future forces capital to move endlessly.³⁾ If so, then it is the content of the “faith” of the regulative idea that should become the issue.

In “*Transcritique*,” Karatani indeed points out the following.

Kant admitted that being obsessed with metaphysics was sheer madness, and yet philosophers could not help but be mad in this sense.⁴⁾

On the other hand, however, he also writes as follows.

One who chose to live strictly according to the universal law of ethics would doubtless lead a tragic life in reality. If not for eternal life and God's final judgment, such a life would inexorably culminate in *absurdity*. It follows that Kant had to accept faith as a regulative idea at the same time as he rejected any attempt to prove it theoretically.⁵⁾

As Karatani says, in a chess problem, the belief that the king can be checkmated is the most important piece of information. In the same way, it is not the content of what is believed but having "ethical faith" itself (faith as a regulative ideal) that is the key to "ethics." However, since "credit" as a transcendental illusion supports capital and gives it impermeable and autonomous power, we must consider the fact that theoretical faith whose content is not questioned can be undermined by powerful and unprincipled capitalist credit. Therefore, while knowing that it is "sheer madness," we should persist in the "metaphysical undertaking" of filling in the content of belief. *Transcritique* was also unable to abandon its "theoretical attempt (metaphysics) to prove" local currencies. At the same time, however, Karatani does not forget to ridicule and "reject" such an obsession with metaphysics.

We should not be dismayed to find that Karatani himself has a gap between "what one thinks" and "what one does,"⁶⁾ or between "what one thinks (understanding) and what one really is (sensitivity)."⁷⁾ This "parallax" that runs through him is not something that can be deliberately planned from a transparent (ex-post facto) perspective but is rooted in his "external existence," and we should find in it "an undecidable dynamic self-criticism."

The potency to constitute this *reality* comes from capitalism itself. In this sense, communism would exist as a companion to capitalism's movement, yet as an oppositional movement created by capitalism itself. This should not be, in Kantian terms, a constitutive idea, "namely, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself," but a regulative *idée*, namely, an ideal which constantly offers the ground to criticize reality.⁸⁾

This minute but crucial difference between the two ideas should not be overlooked. But we cannot wholly abandon having any sort of "constitutive idea" either⁹⁾.

2 Parallax and Cracks

Karatani likens "pronounced parallax" to a "crack" in the natural world, and when I re-read "*Transcritique*" after the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011, I was reminded of the special meaning this has. Karatani points out that Kant launched his Enlightenment differently from Rousseau's and Voltaire's Enlightenment after the Lisbon earthquake of November 11, 1755.¹⁰⁾ While Rousseau and Voltaire ridiculed the Leibnizian notion of predestined harmony and tried to find

some religious meaning by claiming that the earthquake was punishment for human society's having lost touch with nature, Kant took an extreme empirical stance, eschewing religious significance and emphasizing natural causes. However, just as Swedenborg, a first-class scientist who would have nothing to do with psychotic delusions, at the same time predicted earthquakes as a "visionary," Kant also admitted that he was compelled to speak of the "dreams of metaphysics" rather than the "dreams of a visionary."

In this way, it must be said that what we need today is not to affirm metaphysics and ridicule ourselves for doing so (cynicism), but on the contrary to dare to affirm metaphysics even while ridiculing ourselves for doing so (Cynicism, sometimes referred to as "kynicism"). Rather than remaining in empiricism, abandoning theoretical faith, and hesitating to leap toward a future other (an attitude that is willing to secretly prostrate itself to the dream of capital = the metaphysics of capital), today it is necessary to dare to speak of a dream of metaphysics that is different from the dream of capital. What would such a dream be like?

It could be a view of humanity (transcendental subjectivity X) which resolves the antinomy¹¹) of the thesis "There is an identical ego" and the antithesis "There is no identical ego," or it could be a system of governance (social state) which resolves the antinomy¹²) of the thesis "There must be a center" (authority) and the antithesis "There must not be a center" (freedom). But at the same time, what is needed more than anything else today is a way of understanding Epicurus' "deviant nature" (materialism)¹³) that is different from the Aristotelian teleological view of nature (rationalism) and the Democritean mechanistic view of nature (empiricism). Karatani, who was not afraid to talk about the "dream of metaphysics" in his book "The Structure of World History" (2010) in search of a concrete form of the fourth "mode of exchange D," "association," and "world republic," having begun to explore the Ionian school in "Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy" (2011) undoubtedly owes a great deal to the external coincidence of the earthquake (the Great East Japan Earthquake). At the same time, however, it should be said that Karatani's external existence and dynamic self-criticism have been steadily spinning a "dream of metaphysics" from the start.

3 Making Counterfeit

In terms of "deviant nature," however, Diogenes of Sinope is more suggestive to me than Epicurus and the natural philosophies of Ionia. Diogenes is famous for calling himself a "citizen of the world" (*cosmopolites*) when Alexander the Great asked him who he was. Still, this is not the same as a world citizen following the trend of global capitalism (what Marx called "cosmopolitanism of commodity owners"). Diogenes also belonged to the old cynic school, which was despised by the people as "dog-like" (*kynicos*), and his rise to fame in Athens can be traced back to his experiences in Sinope when he engaged in "counterfeiting" while serving as a director of the mint. The oracle that Diogenes

received from Apollo had a great deal to do with this counterfeiting. In the first place, the prophet did not inspire Diogenes to make actual counterfeit gold currency. At the time, Sinope (the present-day Turkish port city of Sinop) was under pressure from the Persian Empire (and its puppet Cappadocia), while Athens was its home city. Diogenes, the mint director, was persuaded by his staff to seek the counsel of Apollo, and the divine message he received in response was “*Parakharattein to nomisma*” (alter the value of your currency). Taking advantage of his position, Diogenes debased the counterfeit currency engraved with the portrait of the Cappadocian governor that was widely used in Sinope and left a chisel mark to endorse it as the real thing, planning to discredit the fake Cappadocian currency from within by issuing it in large quantities. Reversing Gresham’s Law that “bad money drives good money out of circulation,” he enacted an elaborate plan to destroy the original counterfeit money using counterfeit counterfeit money.¹⁴⁾

But the meaning of the oracle is ambiguous, because behind the message “you should debase the money,” we can also hear the message “you should change the portrait on the coins.” In fact, “*nomisma*” means not only money but also the state (and its institutions and practices). Diogenes undertook this elaborate process in order to recapture the legitimacy of the state as well as the legitimacy of Sinope’s money. He then went beyond that, however, and questioned the value of money and the state itself. “Change the value of money” is thus a call to realize what Foucault calls “an other world” (*un monde autre*) in this world by inverting the value of all *nomisma*.

This anecdote about Diogenes that fascinated even Foucault at the end of his life is overwhelming in its power.¹⁵⁾ In the same way that Socrates examined the wise men of the world and revealed their counterfeit nature, Diogenes (a “Socrates gone mad”) walked the crowded streets of Athens saying “Are there no human beings here?” and upended (*parakharattein*) the conventions (*nomisma*) of the world to expose their fictional nature. Similarly, when the self-sufficient “true life” prevailing in Athens was pushed to the extreme, it was reversed into a completely dissimilar “other life” (*vie autre*) lived by slaves and dogs. Diogenes thrusts this contradiction in the face of philosophical orthodoxy. But his appeal lies in his willingness to go beyond this cynical attitude and bring “an other world” into this world. In this oracle, we can sense a political nature that goes beyond the ethics of “know thyself.”

What Diogenes meant by “citizen of the world” was a person who inverts the values (*parakharattein*) of the conventions of the world (*nomisma*), placing themselves at the boundary between the inside (*oikonomike*) and the outside (*caperike*) of the polis, between public people (*daemosios*) and private people (*idios*). The decisive boundary that ends the state of disordered value is the position of the “dog,” which places itself in the boundary area between *nomos* (artificiality) and *physis* (nature). Here “an other life” or “animal nature” that is placed in opposition to *nomos* in this world is “self-sufficiency.” However, this “self-sufficiency” does not mean living according to animal instincts. *Physis*

(animal nature), which is the basis of self-sufficiency, is not in contradiction with *logos* (reason) but is nothing more than cutting down the necessities of life to a minimum, approaching the way of being of the gods who do not need anything, and trying to reach the state of *ataraxia* (absence of worry). Of course, it is possible to dismiss this as impossible. For Diogenes, however, what prevented him from being self-sufficient was conservative philosophers such as Aristotle who stood on the side of the state (*polis*), which in turn was established by letting “demand” (*creia*) go unchecked and filling it with “money” (*nomisma*). However, Aristotle himself considered legal customs (*nomos*) and nature (*physis*) as complementary and emphasized the importance of “nature.” He also emphasized “self-sufficiency” as a virtue for citizens. Therefore, Diogenes’ plan can be interpreted as examining Aristotle’s philosophy (and by extension the philosophical orthodoxy it represented) and revealing that pushing it to its extremes leads to contradictions. In other words, he sought to expose the original counterfeit by creating a counterfeit of a counterfeit.

But Diogenes did not only contradict and discomfit traditional philosophy by pushing it to the point of the scandalous reversal of “true life” into “an other life” (animal life). He also attempted to reframe this “other life” as the possibility of a different sovereign life and link it to the waging of the battle to bring about “an other world.”

4 Deviant Nature

According to Foucault, with the Socratic “care of the self” (*epimeleia heautou*) as a turning point, subsequent Western philosophy on the one hand regarded proper care of one’s self to be care of one’s “soul” and created a Platonic path that leads to “the other world” (*l’autre monde*) through the contemplation of it. On the other hand, it also created a Cynical path that leads to the practice of “an other life” in this world, asking what kind of life is a “form of life” in which one engages in care of the self.¹⁶⁾ According to this classification, Plato emphasized emancipating the ideal (the other world) from the sensory (this world connected to the body) based on the “dualisms”¹⁷⁾ of the real world and the illusional world and of reason and sensibility. In contrast to this, Diogenes can be said to have denied such dualisms and sought a path that would reconcile truth and life in this world.

When it comes to nature, Plato can be seen as having separated matter from motion as something that cannot move itself and must be moved by God, while in contrast Aristotle inherited the Ionian philosophy of nature and admitted the “self-motion of matter.” According to Aristotle, therefore, motion was to be found in a cause inherent in matter. But as Karatani points out, due to Aristotle’s emphasis on formal cause and final cause rather than material cause and efficient cause, “God” is found again as the ultimate cause of motion.¹⁸⁾ This is consistent with Hideya Yamakawa’s point that the proportional formula <God: Human = Human: Animal> was at the root of Aristotle’s view of the world.¹⁹⁾

However, what this proportional formula (the analogy of the beast) means is that it is man, not God, who finds in nature the objective cause that is convenient for him, and that God's viewpoint is merely invoked to justify the control (domination) of nature from the viewpoint of such a creator. Aristotle's "God" is an "anthropomorphic God,"²⁰⁾ and the proportional equation in question reveals Aristotle's "anthropocentrism" insofar as it has man as its proportional middle term. The disconnect between the real world and the hypothetical world found in Plato is found more strongly in Aristotle between man and nature (beast), and the dualism must be said to have been left unchanged.

Furthermore, the proportional formula also shows that Aristotle's *physis* is an extremely unnatural "teleological view of nature." Nature itself has no purpose, so it is often influenced by chance occurrences that cause it to deviate from its usual path and produce malformations. However, Aristotle believed, based on the biological model in which the adult is the realization (*energeia*) of what is latent in the germ (*dynamis*), that formal cause and final cause direct the growth of the organism as "that which comes before."²¹⁾

Although this can explain the continued existence of the same species, there is no room for deviance or malformation. According to Karatani, it was not Aristotle but the natural philosophy of Ionia (and Epicurus) that dared to deny formal cause and final cause and found the self-moving ability of matter in deviance and malformations by emphasizing material cause and efficient cause.²²⁾ And it is also clear that Diogenes' "animal nature" is related to this.

5 Primitive Resemblance

For Aristotle, the "ultimate purpose" is, after all, the "state" (*polis*), which precedes individuals in nature, and is the "perfect reality" (*entelecheia*) that other communities, such as homes and villages, should aim for.²³⁾ Moreover, although he said the "best state system" for him was an intermediate state system that eliminates extreme democracy and powerful oligarchy,²⁴⁾ this is a community of citizens as people who are "similar," rejecting non-citizens in advance as "different." It is only "representative of the conservative ideology of landowners who stick to their vested interests."²⁵⁾ The justice established there is also the state's justice that only covers those who have citizenship, and cannot be described as universal justice.

In "*Nicomachean Ethics*," Aristotle divided justice into "general justice" and "particular justice," and in discussing this particular justice thematically, he distinguished "distributive justice" and "corrective justice." The most relevant of these categories to the maintenance of the polis community is "distributive justice." But while this "distributive justice" seems to satisfy the principle of "self-sufficiency" in the sense that it is distribution according to each individual's nature (geometric proportion), it contains factors justifying a kind of meritocracy or "classness."²⁶⁾

It is sometimes pointed out that while Marx universalized "arithmetic equal quantity exchange" in

modern society based on the equality of essence, or, more precisely, homogeneous labor, Aristotle sought the possibility of “geometric proportional exchange” in line with the reality of ancient society not reliant on such a concept of “homogeneity” but only on “proportionality,” that is, the relationship between people. However, this “proportion” itself has a specific “unified scale” running through it, and this scale is nothing other than a narrow hierarchical order that barely manages to emerge in the place where those who are dissimilar, that is, non-citizens, are excluded. The seemingly horizontal “proportionality” of the distributive justice of <A: B = C: D> (A and B are citizens who share national affairs, C and D are things like public goods) conceals the vertical analogy of <God: Human = Human: Animal> at its basis. It should be said that even if it is an *analogia*, it is only a “relative similitude”²⁷⁾ that is established on the premise of a “homogeneity” particular to a very limited species.

When contrasted with this view, Diogenes’ attitude can be seen as trying to put not only citizens and non-citizens but also humans and animals on the same plane without disconnection. What can be found there is a bottomless “primitive resemblance” or a universal “homogeneity as a genus” that far surpasses a narrow “homogeneity as a species.”

Incidentally, the fact that Diogenes imitated Socrates and remained as a *xenos* (foreigner) in the border area without quickly leaving Athens can be seen as having had a positive effect on his discovering “primitive resemblance” and “homogeneity as a genus.” Karatani shows how thinkers such as Pythagoras and Plato, who left their polis and moved from one place to another, by moving around distinguished another place as the “other world” and unknowingly ended up reinforcing the notion of “dual worlds” by attempting to build an ideal society that is not influenced by sensibility. He says that on the contrary thinkers like Heraclitus, who never left his birthplace Ephesus, can see a logos that transcends the law of the polis and a cosmopolitan way of being that searches for universal “common things.” This is the case because “what he calls logos is to be realized in the polis” and “the federation of such poleis forms a cosmopolis.” On the contrary, “if such poleis do not exist, a cosmopolis must come to resemble a world empire.”²⁸⁾ As Alexander’s world citizen state (world empire) also presupposes a hierarchical order between Macedonians and the people of other nations, there is no choice but to say that it is the “hyper-delusional expanded interpretation”²⁹⁾ of the vertical *analogia* hidden by the polis of his mentor Aristotle. Diogenes, on the other hand, tried to alter (*parakharattein*) both the polis and the world empire from the border between them. However, it should be noted that instead of giving up the polis in exchange for the creation of “the other world,” he tried to find a universal “common thing” that transcends the law of the polis, preferably through a reorganizing of the polis into “an other world.”

6 Mode of One-way Exchange

It is said that Diogenes openly engaged in “begging” (asking to be given something) with whomever

he met without fear of running into people who lived in the polis. Moreover, he regarded this as a “mission.” Here we can find a moment of self-sacrifice³⁰⁾ which tries to bring about “an other world” that goes beyond the practice of “an other life” through self-control. To the extent that Diogenes’ “self-sufficiency” is accompanied by an unnatural asceticism and involves begging (depending on others), it must be said to be a contradiction. However, this itself attempts to highlight and amplify the contradiction of Aristotle’s “self-sufficiency” that depends on slave labor. In the same way, Diogenes’ aim in tirelessly practicing the disgraceful and self-deprecating “begging” without any sense of obligation or attempt to return the favor was not only to deride (*parakharattein*) the current state of “charity,” but also by doing so to provide a foundation for the ideal exchange relationship between “begging” and “charity” in the polis.

For his part, the form of exchange that Aristotle envisioned did not converge on distributive justice. In addition to this he mentioned corrective justice, and while describing these as the two types of justice also brought up reciprocal justice. But this did not constitute a third type. Reciprocal justice generalized the problem by adding the condition of mutual heterogeneity not only in the case of human beings but in the case of things as well, thereby addressing the difficulties inherent in “geometric proportions” in general, such as the difficulties of scale selection and quantification which also pervade distributive justice, on a more abstract level in order to look for a clue to their solution.

The clue to solving these problems he found there was that the typical relationship between different people is made possible by the equality of goods and the comparability of goods, which further requires that “all things be weighed by some one thing.”³¹⁾ This “one thing” can be seen as an externally set intermediary (*meson*), but also as the “equivalence of essences” (*axia*) that belong to different goods, which Aristotle eventually replaced with money (*nomisma*). Reciprocal justice is thus what is considered at a higher level in only one dimension in regard to the “reciprocal” (*antipeponthos*) justice that is equally valid for two-way exchanges and includes distributive justice (mode of exchange B), corrective justice (mode of exchange C), and “gift – return gift” (mode of exchange A). It also makes “some one thing” inevitable, and sooner or later, this role is filled by *nomisma*. Aristotle seems to have understood the above.

It is indisputable that this explication of Aristotle’s should be contrasted with Diogenes’ conception of begging as a mission and his attempt to lead “begging/charity” toward a unidirectional rather than a bidirectional approach. In other words, the connection between “money” (*nomisma*), “demand” (*claire*), and “one thing” (*axia*) is a structural necessity derived from two-way exchanges and reciprocal justice, and the unidirectionality of “begging/charity” pursued by Diogenes is nothing but a wedge in this structure. But it is not easy to implement this approach in practice; that is why he referred to the divine. In other words, since all things originally belonged to the gods, giving charity to a wise man (Diogenes), a friend of the gods, is nothing but returning the goods in question to the

gods from whom they had come.³²⁾

7 Gold (specie) and Dog (species)

Aristotle did not privilege distributive justice in the polis, nor did he think that a proportional relationship between people would eliminate the concept of “homogeneity” in exchange. In a more abstract dimension of reciprocal justice, he clarified that all exchanges ultimately make “some one thing” essential. That is why Marx praised Aristotle as a “genius.” “Homogeneous labor” is just one possibility among various candidates to be the substance of value that serves as this “some one thing.” Nevertheless, here it should be acknowledged that while Marx regarded the historical limit of “slave labor” (inequality) found in Aristotle as the social limit of the polis (nation), in contrast Marx himself saw the commensurability of working hours beyond the framework of the polis as a sign of “equality” along with the universality of gold and silver.

Just as money develops into world-money, so the commodity owner develops into a cosmopolitan. The cosmopolitan relation of men is originally only a relation of commodity owners. The commodity as such rises above all religious, political, national, and language barriers. Price is its universal language and money, its common form. But with the development of world-money as distinguished from the national coin, there develops the cosmopolitanism of the commodity owner as the faith of practical reason opposed to traditional, religious, national and other prejudices which hinder the interchange of matter among mankind.³³⁾

Marx wrote that “ancient writers [Plato and Aristotle], who could observe the phenomena of exclusively metallic circulation, already took the view of the coin as a symbol or token of value,”³⁴⁾ and Plato’s “chartalism,” which took as its ideal money minted within the “national barrier,” is in perfect agreement with his theory of ideas or “dualism.”³⁵⁾ Conversely, the world-money that Marx placed in opposition to this kind of money is premised on the world market and is parallel to the cosmopolitanism of commodity owners, and if there is a kind of “world citizen” at which Marx was aiming at it must be one who overcomes this trinity of “world market, world money, and world citizens.”

In other words, Marx’s intention was not merely to place gold and silver as world money in opposition to minted money, but to elucidate the mechanism of the “expression of value,” that is, how invisible value is expressed as price (the ideal form of gold) in the former. Also latent there at the same time is the opportunity for “similarity” (primitive resemblance), which is different from “representation” based on the concept of homogeneity. This is a view that is also in line with Diogenes’ “conception of world citizenship.”

Marx’s having hit upon “value” when working backward from commodity in his theory of value-

form was not, of course, an admission that “value” itself exists a priori. Where two-way exchange or reciprocal justice is established, “value” is “real” in a certain way and possesses an appropriate objectivity or validity, and it is therefore necessary to drag it out and put it on the table for discussion. Money, however, is not a mere representation = surrogate of “value.” It is only by borrowing the form of a concrete “use value” that invisible “value” manages to become “phenomenal” and “expressed” in the world. In other words, it can be said that value (soul) cannot exist independently from use value (body), much less control it completely, and the possibility of being counterattacked from use value (body) always remains. There is no change in this elemental composition even if a simple value-form develops into the money-form. A coat as a specific equivalent becomes universalized to gold as a general equivalent. There, too, the invisible “value” of commodities in their relative forms of value is short-circuited and mimicked in the “natural form” of gold, transcending categorical differences.

Unlike the case of a specific equivalent, it is no longer the case that any use value can take the place of a general equivalent. After confirming a deadlocked situation in which all commodity owners stare at each other while aiming at the position of a general equivalent (the so-called “Form IV” which is specific to the value-form theory of the first edition of “Capital”), Marx wrote, “In their difficulties, our commodity-owners think like *Faust*³⁶⁾: “Im Anfang war die Tat.” They therefore acted and transacted before they thought.” What was it they did, then, when they “acted” and “transacted”?

These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast. And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (Revelation 17:13 and 13:17).³⁷⁾

Here, Marx attributed the outcome of the “social action” of the unified expression of all commodities’ value to the “beast” rather than gold by excluding a fixed commodity. Marx stated that before the birth of precious metal coinage, nomadic peoples first developed the money-form because their entire property was transferable, emphasizing that livestock were “primitive money material” as well as slaves.

Gold and silver not only have a particular use value as commodities, such as filling cavities or serving as raw materials for luxury goods, but they also have a “formal use value”³⁸⁾ arising from their social function. The latter is the origin of the “method of enlightenment loved in the 18th century” – the “error of the coinage mark theory”³⁹⁾ – which insisted that value and use value are unnecessary for money. On the contrary, Marx finds in the beast, livestock, a residue of use value that is not fully controlled by value but resists it.⁴⁰⁾

8 Marx the Cynic

It was in fact not in his theory of value-form (Chapter 1) but his theory of exchange (Chapter 2) that Marx wrote what is described above. In the latter chapter, Marx compared commodities to the Cynics and emphasized aspects of use value rather than value, saying that as a “born leveler and a cynic, it [a commodity] is always ready to exchange not only the soul but the body, with any and every other commodity.”⁴¹⁾ After explaining how money cannot help resulting from commodities in value-form, he revealed the deception of “the petit-bourgeois socialism”⁴²⁾ which tried to abolish only money and to keep commodities (like the deception of trying to abolish only the pope and allow Catholicism to survive) and insisted on the inevitability of Money Fetishism. It was not that Marx considered “Money Fetishism” self-evident from the start. Along with explaining how relentless Money Fetishism was by exposing the deception of a cynical enlightenment (chartalism) that criticized money intellectually but approved of it in action, Marx discovered the cause of Money Fetishism in Commodity Fetishism, which forms the root of money, and asked how “commodities” came into the world in the first place. By emphasizing use value against value and action against logos, he simultaneously envisioned “an other world” different from this world that is dominated by commodities.

Of course, the hope of a simple social change cannot be drawn from this directly. It is said that Cynic originally meant “a person like a dog” who bites authority. But inevitably the tip of this spear will be pointed toward the Cynics themselves, who are forever criticizing the regime, and it will be transformed into a cynicism that defends the system. If so, then merely sending this back to Cynicism will only cause it to fall once more into cynicism. Indeed, Marx’s Cynicism always has the danger of quickly reversing into a cynicism that defends commodities. Marx having compared commodities to Cynics must be interpreted in this way.⁴³⁾

Therefore, it is necessary to limit intervention to a degree “in accord with nature”⁴⁴⁾ in order to not get caught up in the activist excesses of the subjective reason of modern times, and this alone should be considered the key to Cynicism. Like “an other world” at which Diogenes aimed as a self-sufficient world, the association at which Marx aimed was presumably a modest coexistence with slaves and dogs.

Casting a skeptical eye on the fact that the first export of nuclear power undertaken by the growth strategy of Abenomics, an approach exclusively committed to globalization, was to Turkey, an earthquake-prone region like Japan, and indeed to Sinope, a seaside city like Fukushima, what we must learn from this boundary of the “World Citizen” is not to “sneer” (cynicism) but the ancient virtue of “inaction” (Cynicism). From the beginning, we cannot expect something like Bitcoin to direct speculation. The Japanese government seems to have defined this as a “commodity” and not “money,” but the important thing is to question the essence of this “commodity” along with Marx.

9 Gift Exchange, Equivalent Exchange and True Gifts

When Karatani shows the idea of a new mode of exchange D at the present stage of history where the mode of exchange B (plunder and redistribution) and mode of exchange C (commodity exchange) dominate, he insists that mode of exchange D must be something that recovers mode of exchange A (reciprocity of gift and return) on the one hand and denies it on the other hand. This is because clan society, which was based on the principle of reciprocity, imposed the obligation (constraint) of reciprocal gifts (equality) on community members to limit the danger of wealth accumulation and class differentiation caused by settlement. Therefore, to restore freedom and equality, we should follow the pre-settlement hunter-gatherers and look back on the “joint deposit” (true gift) they made because they could not accumulate. Karatani says that simultaneous to the recovery of the mode of exchange A, the denial of A also comes to human beings as a compulsive “duty” beyond human will.⁴⁵⁾

In this context, the one-way “begging/charity” that Diogenes sought to have taken root in the polis can be interpreted as granting the freedom of “movement” that allows one to leave the community at any time without feeling an obligation to return charity. This is an important point.

Indeed, as Diogenes also sensed, the two-way “gift exchange” (mode of exchange A), which consists of gifts and return gifts, acts not only as a chain that binds people to the community but also as a powerful device that makes recipients take on debt and controls them as debtors. It can also lead to revenge by being a principle that encourages “retaliation” as well as “repayment.” It can be said that the code of “equivalent exchange” (mode of exchange C) released people from such communal shackles and feelings of indebtedness and broke the chain of retaliation created by the principle of an eye for one eye and a tooth for a tooth. But this is only how it appears. In a modern society in which people’s connections are getting weaker and individuals are isolated, and in which people, businesses, and even nations are surrounded by financial capital without exception, everyone is in debt and suffering from inability to repay with nowhere to turn for help. How should we draw out the possibility of “true gifts” (mode of exchange D) under these circumstances?

Indeed, both “forgiving” others unconditionally whether or not they apologize and showing “hospitality” to others whether or not they are close to us can appropriately be called ethics for others who do not share the same rules that go beyond a morality that only applies to our friends. However, is this not in fact a violent device that tries to control the other party by forcing a burden on them at a more fundamental level under the guise of a true gift?

In other words, as Nathalie Sarthou-Lajus points out, the borrower always has the consciousness of “debt” regardless of the intention of the lender.⁴⁶⁾ But at the same time, as she suggests, rather than a feeling of indebtedness over borrowing being connected to repayment, it can instead be connected to a “gift relay”⁴⁷⁾ in the form of the “joy” that has been gifted leading the recipient to give

a new gift to a different person. Taking this approach should allow us to devise a mechanism to eliminate the consciousness of “debt.” It is essential to be able to eradicate consciousness of debt through repaying not the person who had made the loan but a different third party, including society and subsequent generations. At the same time, however, it is even more critical that the opportunity for a true gift is assumed, that is, that there are certain debts that do not have to be paid back or can be paid back whenever it is possible to do so.⁴⁸⁾ It is here that one has the freedom to temporarily escape from communal norms and aim for a “new self,” while at the same time having the potential to reconnect with others. This is the view of mode of exchange D which resolves the antinomy “the gift exchange (mode of exchange A) is restored and at the same time the gift exchange is denied,” and the view of human beings (transcendental subjectivity X) which resolves the antinomy “there is an identical ego and at the same time there is no identical ego.

Of course, the above is possible only with the support of an appropriate social system. For example, the principle that Marx stated in “*Critique of the Gotha Programme*” (“From each according to his ability to each according to his needs”) is based on the principle of separating contribution and allocation in proportional relationships such as <contribution of A : ability of A = contribution of B : ability of B> and <acquisition of A : necessity of A = acquisition of B : necessity of B>. It is therefore implied that people do not suffer from unnecessary feelings of obligation. If we take this approach, the problem of objective measurability common to geometric proportionality is itself no longer an issue. However, a governing subject will inevitably be required to coordinate and correspond to the contributions and allocations that have been cut off at the individual level. When we think about it in this way, we cannot help but notice again the significance of having God, not man, the state, or the market, mediate the gift-giving mechanism. There is a high degree of uncertainty about whether contribution and distribution will be balanced in gift exchanges that are closed in a circle and in open gift exchanges that transcend generations. However, the device of “God” would make it possible to give at least a lasting certainty to this chain of gift-giving.

For example, in Islam, a donation (*infāq*) is regarded as a “loan to God” and is counted as a good deed.⁴⁹⁾ This is quite different from what occurs in Christianity, where human beings have committed an original sin and are born with a debt to God because of their redemption by the death of Jesus, and good deeds are considered its repayment. In Islam, of course, there is the idea that a creature is given life as an absolute gift from God. Still, it is a debt that is not only impossible to pay off but impossible to attempt to pay back, and human beings are supposed to obey the laws (*sharia*) that they must observe as servants of God in exchange for repayment of this debt. In this way, paradoxically, human beings are freed from their obligation. Furthermore, Muslims created a highly effective gifting system in this world because in the Qur’an good deeds were positively evaluated as loans rather than repayments, and it was concretely ensured that good deeds would be rewarded after death.

Of course, here it is possible to point out the contractual relationship between God and human beings, mediated by self-interest. But this is only possible with God, who is the creator of all things. It can also be interpreted that true gifts are preserved, at least in the human world, by allowing the production of surplus value only in the relationship with God. Moreover, there is no room for domination and subordination. This is the case because even if it takes the form of a gift from one person to another, a true gift system with God as the intermediary does not involve self-expression or a sense of superiority to others because the conscious intention of the giver is to make a contribution to God. If it does involve such intentions, it is invalid as a good deed. Nor is it necessary for the recipient to express gratitude directly to the donor because *infāq* is a gift from God. We do not make a fortune in this world for the honor of God. By investing in the way of God, it is possible that here ties mediated by God are also formed between Muslims and non-Muslims through *infāq*.

Of course, this is just one example. The Islamic economy, mediated by the invisible presence of God, has developed a profit-sharing system based on true gifts through the clever use of self-interest. It would be possible to maintain a balance between gift exchange and equivalent exchange based on the true gift in other ways. In the first place, the *salto mortale* in the exchange process is not undertaken while only aiming at money. The reality of merchandise exchange is a “sink or swim” situation in which linen (just like the proletariat) cannot maintain itself unless it sells itself unconditionally, whether for coats, tea, or coffee. In other words, it lies in absolute asymmetry and inequality. Money is nothing more than the trace evidence of the difference between the reality of such a substantial inequality exchange and the nominal equivalent exchange that will be set up later. However, by directing this *salto mortale* toward “God” instead of coats, tea, coffee, or money, it is not impossible to envision a gift-giving system based on absolute asymmetry, connected not by indebtedness but by joy. The possibility of the true gift is already hidden in the equivalent exchange we regard as self-evident. It is also what Marx tried to clarify in his discourse on value-form, as we have confirmed. The domination of human beings by value does not come from the natural laws of society but from the specific acts that we human beings engage in when we treat things as commodities. Of course, we “act and transact before we think” about what we are really doing in exchanges, but these actions are nevertheless changeable.

Notes

- * This essay is based on my article, “Kahei no kachi wo kaeyo: Nisegane dsukuri/Sekaishimin to shite no Diogenes [Change the Value of Money: A “Diogenes” as a Counterfeiter/World Citizen]” (Shiso, No. 1082 and 1083, 2014). There is thus some overlap with this previous publication. It is also an English translation of what was already published in Japanese under the same title (Gendai Shiso, Vol. 42-18, Special Issue on

“*Karatani Kojin no shiso [The Thought of Kojin Karatani]*,” Seidosha, 2014) by Akihito Imai, Natsuya Yuzue, and Asato Nakamura.

- 1) Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique*, trans. Sabu Kohso, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003, p.189.
- 2) Karl Marx, *A Contribution to The Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N. I. Stone, Chicago: Charles H. Keer Publishing Company, 1904, p. 207.
- 3) Karatani, *Transcritique*, p.219.
- 4) Ibid., p.46.
- 5) Ibid., p.52.
- 6) Ibid, p.138.
- 7) Ibid., p.141.
- 8) Ibid., p.217.
- 9) In my article “*Nise to Junsui: ‘Transcritique’ Oboegaki [Fakeness and Purity: A Memorandum on ‘Transcritique’]*” (Kokubungaku, Vol. 49, No. 1, Special Issue on “*Karatani Kojin no tetsugaku: Transcritique [The Philosophy of Kojin Karatani: Transcritique]*,” Gakutosha, 2004) I emphasized the opposite.
- 10) Karatani, *Transcritique*, p.45.
- 11) Ibid., p.50.
- 12) Ibid., p.180.
- 13) Ibid., p.162.
- 14) For a detailed discussion of this point, see Hideya Yamakawa, *Tetsugakusha Diogenes: Sekai shimin no genzo [Philosopher Diogenes :The Preimage of the World Citizen]*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 2003 and Daikoku, “Change the Value of Money.”
- 15) See Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth (Lectures at the College de France)*, trans. Graham Burchell, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- 16) Ibid., pp.246–247.
- 17) Karatani, *Tetsugaku no kigen [Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy]*, Iwanami Shoten, 2012, p.74.
- 18) Ibid., p.60.
- 19) Yamakawa, op. cit., p.214, p.340.
- 20) Karatani, *Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy*, p.62.
- 21) See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, vol.6, chap.1, 1025b20–30, *Generation of Animals*, vol.4, chap.4, 770b9–17.
- 22) Karatani, *Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy*, p.67.
- 23) Aristotle, *Politics*, vol.1 chap.2, 1252b27–1253a1.
- 24) Ibid., vol.4 chap.11, 1296a7.
- 25) Yamakawa, op. cit., p.353.
- 26) See Masao Yamashita, ‘*Hirei no shiso*’ to ‘*kaikyū no shiso*’ [‘Thought of Proportion’ and ‘Thought of Class’] “Contemporary Mathematics,” vol.9 (2), 1976.
- 27) Hara Shoji, *Hito wa kusa de aru- ‘ruiji’ to ‘zure’ wo meguru kosatsu [Human is Grass—Consideration of “Resemblance” and “Gap”]*, Sairyusha, 2013. This book refers to the “similarity” that supposes “difference” as “relative similitude” and the “similarity” that underlies “difference” as “primitive resemblance.”
- 28) Karatani, op. cit., p.86. In 2014’s *Teikoku no kozo [The Structure of Empire]* (Seidosha, p.91, p.93), however, he pointed out the affinity of Diogenes and Alexander the Great and the hostile relationship

between Aristotle and Alexander the Great.

- 29) Yamakawa, op. cit., p.214.
- 30) Foucault, *The Courage of Truth*, pp.278-279.
- 31) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, vol.5 chap.5, 1133a.
- 32) Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol.2, trans. R. D. Hicks, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1931, pp.73-75
- 33) Marx, *A Contribution to The Critique of Political Economy*, p.207.
- 34) Ibid., p.153.
- 35) For details see Daikoku, op. cit., No. 1083, p.51.
- 36) In “*Faust*,” the devil Mephistopheles is an illusionary being, and at the beginning of the story he appears in front of Faust in the form of a black-haired dog with flames. When Faust tried to translate John’s Apocalypse into German in his study and realized that it would be better to translate “logos” into “action,” the dog started to bark and began to transform into the devil. This ambiguity of barking dog and watchdog is essential. I am not sure if Marx was aware of this or not, but he emphasized the importance of use-value (act) to value (logos), quoting Faust and Revelation. It should be noted again that the criticism of cynical enlightenment (chartalism), which intellectually criticizes money but approves it at the level of action, is the subject of the exchange theory. Here it may be necessary to recall John Law, the model for Mephistopheles who was both a cosmopolitan and a counterfeiter.
- 37) Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol.1, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol.35 (New York International Publishers, 1996), p.773.
- 38) Ibid., p.100.
- 39) Ibid., p.102.
- 40) See Donna Jeanne Haraway, *When Species Meet (Posthumanities)*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Univ of Minnesota Press, 2007, p.18. In this book, Haraway seeks a true symbiosis between the species (human-kind) and species (species of organisms=dogs), not specie (gold=coin), through a heterogeneous encounter, and in doing so she is aiming to write “Bio-capital (volume 1).”
- 41) What is interesting is that Marx here seems to reinforce a similar logic by referring to Aristotle, who thought that the original use of shoes was their use-value rather than their exchange value (Marx, *Capital*, vol.1, pp. 95-96).
- 42) Marx, *Capital*, p.97.
- 43) According to Yamakawa, the Taoists, who are opposed to the Confucians, are closer to Cynics, and therefore translating “Cynics” as “犬儒” (犬: dog, 儒: Confucianism) in Japanese is a “basic mistranslation” (Yamakawa, op. cit., p. 27). However, if we understand that Cynicism (kynicism) has factors that could be easily turned into cynicism, “犬儒” may be a good translation that reflects this ambiguity.
- 44) Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason* [1983], trans. Michael Eldred, London, University of Minnesota Press, 2012, p.541.
- 45) Karatani, *Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy*, pp.138-139.
- 46) Nathalie Sarthou-Lajus, *Kari no Tetsugaku [Eloge de la dette (Philosophy of Borrowing)]*, trans. Yu Takano, Otashuppan, 2012, p.8.
- 47) Tomoji Yano, *Fusai no kyoiku to zoyo no kyoiku –‘kari no tetsugaku’ wo kyoiku kara kanngaeru [Debt Education and Gift Education – Thinking about Education from ‘The Philosophy of Borrowing’]*, “at Plus” vol.21, 2014, p.184.

- 48) Nathalie Sarthou-Lajus, *Eloge de la dette*, p.98.
- 49) The following discussion relies on Hideko Sakurai, *Islam kinyu-zouyo to kokan, sono kyozon no system wo toku* [*Islamic Finance – Gift and Exchange, to Solve the System of their Co-existence*], Tokyo: Shinhyoron, 2008.

Summary

As economic globalization progressed, Kojin Karatani began to set his sights on capital itself, and after *Transcritique* (2000), he began to speak openly about the idea of alternative modes of exchange. However, as long as capital takes “the cosmopolitanism of the commodity owners” as “the faith of practical reason” (Marx), in order to realize a true cosmopolitanism that enables the symbiosis of different species, it is necessary to differentiate it from the governing techniques of capital by giving a concrete image to a new view of humanity, a new mode of exchange, and a new governing technique rooted in the symbiosis with deviant nature. In this sense, this paper is an attempt to respond effectively to the above issues by likening today’s Karatani to Diogenes the Cynic (a world citizen as well as a counterfeiter) that Foucault emphasized in his last years.

In doing so, the main stage of discussion will be set in Marx’s theory of value-form. Marx pursued “exchange justice” based on homogeneity, while Aristotle’s “distributive justice” was based on the principle of “proportionality” which does not depend on homogeneity. However, underlying this proportionality was an anthropocentrism and hierarchical order that presupposed the exclusion of different species. Diogenes’ attempt to push Aristotle’s principle of “self-sufficiency” to the extreme was aimed at reversing it and disclosing “an other life.” However, his real aim was to go beyond such a cynical attitude and to bring about “an other world” in this world based on “primitive resemblance” (symbiosis between humans and animals).

These attempts are not only cynical about existing money and the state, but are also linked to Diogenes’ own “counterfeit” (*Parakharattein to nomisma*) in an attempt to establish a new mode of exchange. Diogenes’ goal of pure gift-giving, which consists of begging and charity, is also in line with Karatani’s mode of exchange D, which recovers mode of exchange A (reciprocity of gift and return) on the one hand and denies it on the other hand. These are the principles of what Marx called “From each according to his ability to each according to his needs.”

[付記]

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大黒弘慈「犬儒派マルクス」、『現代思想』1月臨時増刊号 vol.42-18「総特集：柄谷行人の思想」、84 - 99頁、青土社、2014年12月