Everyday Consciousness of Praxis

Sánchez Vázquez introduces his critique of everyday consciousness of praxis through reference to the latter's philosophical conception: the philosophy that has praxis as its central concept, as its cornerstone, is Marxism. Now, the philosophical concept of praxis does not develop on its own, but rather draws support from a long history of humanity and its intellectual doctrines (theories), and so we cannot conclude that it reaches its conclusion with the philosophy of Marx. In order to arrive at a true understanding of the relationship between theory and praxis, it is necessary to overcome the mystifying concept of praxis found in German idealism, in which praxis is always grasped only as human intellectual activity.

In terms of overcoming the ‘level reached by German idealism’, Marxism entails both a more developed consciousness of praxis as well as a more

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29 This chapter was written for this philosophical study for two reasons. In the first place, because our author also develops his work The Philosophy of Praxis (to which we refer most directly) on the basis of a double critique of two forms of self-sufficiency: the ‘practical’ and the ‘theoretical’. In the second place, our book should be of interest not only to philosophers, and as a result should not only refer to discussions among philosophers (‘why does knowledge need praxis?’), but must also be directed toward those who are not philosophers, toward friends and comrades in the struggle on the path toward an emancipated society, and thus we should not spare our critiques regarding this aspect either (hence: ‘why does praxis need knowledge?’).

30 The concept of ‘conciencia ordinaria’ that Sánchez Vázquez employs can be translated not only as ‘gemeines Bewusstsein’ [ordinary consciousness] but also as ‘Alltagsbewusstsein’ [everyday consciousness]. As a general rule, we use the second variant, which is slightly freer but also more common in German, and in favour of which Sánchez Vázquez also speaks with regard to the meaning of the concept of the everyday (see p. 107555). For a similar reason, his expression ‘ordinary man’ [literally, ‘der gemeine und gängige Mensch’] can be translated as ‘Alltagsmensch’ [everyday man]. In free expressions, the author of this book also used the terms ‘Alltagsverständnis von Praxis’ [everyday understanding of praxis] and ‘Alltagsverstand’ [everyday reason / common sense].

31 Sánchez Vázquez 1980b, p. 21. [Note to the English-language edition: in the English version of The Philosophy of Praxis, these words are simply translated as: ‘Having gone beyond German Idealism’ (Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 2).]
powerful theoretical connection to it. So we must overcome idealism, but this does not mean a return to the immediate and naïve perspective of everyday consciousness. This is not a question of returning to a pre-philosophical state or to a ‘vulgar or metaphysical materialist philosophy’ – to some degree stuck to ordinary and run-of-the-mill conceptions of the human being – and which ‘preceded the more developed expositions of Idealist philosophy (in Kant, Fichte, and Hegel)’.32 A developed concept of praxis is obligated, from a historical-philosophical perspective, to pass through and transcend its idealistic formulation.33

In order to overcome philosophical idealism, we thus need a more broadly-developed ‘philosophical theory’ and not ‘a dose of “common sense”’.34 To the contrary, such a theory would distinguish itself even more from everyday consciousness than does idealism. This is not just any philosophy, however, but precisely that which – based on its theoretical analysis of what praxis is – demonstrates the conditions that make possible the transition from theory to praxis.35 The importance of idealism in world history has been underestimated, as the theoretical foundation for a Marxism which has broken radically with it, but which has been heavily enriched by this same idealism.36 This underestimation is one of the reasons why, in various sectors, Marxism has found itself reduced to ‘the old materialism fertilised by dialectics on the one hand, or a materialist metaphysics which is little more than an inverted Idealism’.37

In internal Marxist debates, what interests Sánchez Vázquez is rescuing ‘a true conception of praxis’, which has been lost as much in ‘Hegelian deformations of Marxism’ as in ‘mechanistic, scientistic or neopositivist interpretations of Marx’s work’.38 But this rescue cannot occur through reference to everyday consciousness of praxis, but by destroying even the attitude that the latter determines;39 this is necessary not only to achieve a developed theoretical-philosophical conceptualisation of praxis, but also to propel every-

32 Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 2.
33 Ibid.
34 Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, pp. 2f.
35 Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 2.
36 See, in this book, the section ‘Praxis as the Basis for Knowledge (Thesis I)’ (pp. 134ff).
37 Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, p. 3.
38 Ibid.
39 Sánchez Vázquez 1977a, pp. 2ff. The ‘abolition’ discussed here refers above all to the attitude of everyday man. His consciousness, as Sánchez Vázquez says later, must be ‘overcome’ (ibid. In this regard, see the following extensive quotation in our main text).