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In the spring of 1991 Axel Honneth contacted me out of the blue, to ask if I would like to present a paper as part of the "Philosophy and Social Sciences" course at the *Interuniversity Centre* in Dubrovnik. Of course, I was keen to take this opportunity. Ever since my undergraduate days I had been interested in the critical traditions of Western Marxism, as well as in developments in contemporary French philosophy which seemed to propose – though often less explicitly – a similar critique of a modernity dominated by instrumental reason. I had also read works by members of the Yugoslav *Praxis* group, such as Gajo Petrovic. The Althusserianism which was all the rage in some circles in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s had never really convinced me.

The Dubrovnik meeting was a great experience. At that time the event had more the format of a 'course' than a conference, with one paper and extended discussion in the morning and another one in the afternoon, with a relatively small number of participants. We all sat around a large table in a classroom of the *Interuniversity Centre* during the day, and the discussions and arguments carried on well into the night, in the cafés and restaurants of Dubrovnik. I was impressed straightaway by the amiability and collegiality of the meeting, and met people who have remained friends and discussion partners ever since.

The following year the course had to relocate to the island of Ischia, in the Bay of Naples, because the outbreak of war in Yugoslavia, and the year after that – 1993 – we met for the first time under the aegis of the Czech Academy of Sciences, in the beautiful Villa Lana in Prague. In 1994 the meeting was scheduled for two weeks (which had been the tradition in Dubrovnik). Naturally, participants had to come and go during that length of time, and I was asked to oversee the second week of the course, since the directors had commitments which meant they would be absent. That was my baptism of fire. To be frank, the schedule was rather chaotic in those days, with speakers coming from so many different countries under their own steam, and it had to be re-organised pretty much on a daily basis. But I evidently did well enough for the directors to invite me to join them the following year. That

presented me with a great opportunity to invite younger left theorists from Britain, who up until then had not been well represented, to join the conversation.

The Prague "Philosophy and Social Sciences" meeting is not like other conferences. Because of the number of workshops with shorter papers, which complement the plenary sessions, the majority of participants are speakers as well as auditors, and this generates a uniquely participatory atmosphere. Threads of discussion continue from session to another, and one day to another, and there is always much friendly humour, as well as serious debate. I can recall many lively exchanges of views concerning the politics of race, feminism, moral contextualism and universalism, capitalism and democracy, the critical potential psychoanalysis, the theory of ideology, and the philosophy of nature, amongst many other topics.

Along with a number of other directors, I retired in --- to make way for a younger generation. I often thought of going back. It was not until 2015, however, that I found the time to return to Prague, where I was delighted to experience at first hand how the conference has gone from strength to strength, with participants now attending from an even wider range of places around the globe. Many original ideas and arguments, which subsequently find their way into print in the form of articles and books, are first tried out there. But if there is one theme I think the conference could most usefully turn its attention to in the future, it is practical socialist economics. The notion that the capitalist economy could be tamed by social democratic measures, however energetic, surely now belongs as much to the past as the twentieth century in which it flourished. Traditional social democratic parties are in long term decline, and new forces of the Left are emerging. But unless we can produce sensible, viable models of a socialist economy which respects basic freedoms, and of the role that markets should play in such an economy, all our sophisticated critiques will not come together in the image of a world which is possible – and not merely different.