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# The Sydney George Márkus

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## About the author

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## Abstract

Due to circumstances that were not completely under his control, György Márkus lived his life in two halves. Residents of the academic scene in Budapest during the late 50's, 60's and early seventies are familiar with the brilliant young lecturer who captured the attention of all in those early years. Less well known is the everyday life of the exile as he and his family tried to rebuild their life on the other side of the world. This paper tries to capture something of the Sydney life of George Márkus and his impact in that new environment. It will go on to explore the version of philosophy that he produced in exile. A philosophical vision only too aware of the crisis of contemporary philosophy yet committed to this enlightenment project in these changed historical conditions.

## *The Sydney George Márkus<sup>1</sup>*

It's an enormous pleasure to return to Budapest after 20 years and I feel honored to be speaking to you today about my great mentor and friend György Márkus who I will hereafter refer to be his Sydney name George. I come to speak about the Sydney part of the lives of George and Maria. She would have loved to be here today but I'm sure she is with us all in spirit. Like Sydney, Budapest is a strikingly beautiful city. The only difference is that Sydney has beaches, wonderful beaches, but I have left them at the very best time of year to be here so highly do I regard my recently departed friend. If I have any reason at all to admonish him it is that George advised me many years ago not to worry about Hungarian; he said its only affinities was with Finnish and nobody else in Europe bothered with it. George lived the last 43 years of his life, approximately half of his life in the inner west of Sydney, and I suspect that many of you here today who knew the young György Márkus of the Budapest period would like to know a little bit more about the other Márkus, the one beyond his publications, which I'm sure his many admirers would have tried to keep abreast of. I was requested to speak about what I have learnt from George, how he has influenced my philosophical point of view and what do I regard as his most enduring legacy? Let me say this was an easy paper to write and there is much to say because I owe George a debt I can never repay and he was certainly the most significant intellectual influence on my views. But more than this, he possessed a character of the quality to match the richness of his intellectual gifts and mind. So in order to elaborate on these points I need to interpolate myself into the beginning of this paper, just enough for you to appreciate our initial association. I will then go to speak about George immense contribution to philosophy at Sydney University and to critical theory in Australia during this time. Finally I will discuss George's view of philosophy and his philosophical legacy in the contemporary context.

I met George in March 1978. I was a young philosophy student who had previously completed a not brilliantly successful Hons year a few of years before and I was on the look out for a supervisor of my post-graduate work. I was interested in

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the György Márkus Memorial Colloquium organized by the Institute of Philosophy, Research Centre for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, on December 3, 2016.

the Hegel/Marx relationship and just by chance had read Lukacs's *History and Class Consciousness*. At the time this book was virtually unknown amongst students in Sydney. During those years the Philosophy Department had split into two over the issue of teaching Marxism and feminism and the more radical students were in the Department that called itself the Department of General Philosophy whereas the more conservative philosophers inhabited the Department of Traditional and Modern. Marxism was a significant aspect of the curriculum of the former but this was a Marxism dominated by the figure of Louis Althusser who viewed "humanist Marxism" as the product of an immature Marx who had not yet attained the truly scientific standpoint that was to emerge from 1846. There was a widespread skepticism abroad in the early part of 1978 when news came that a "humanist", Hungarian Marxist was to be one amongst a number of appointments to be made to the Department of General Philosophy to cater to the large number of students who had chosen courses in the more radical department. Not too many students rushed George when he first arrived but as I had actually read Lukacs and been impressed, I was at least prepared to have a chat to see what he was like.

As it turned out George and I had quite a lot in common. We were both book collectors and I had already started what has become a very large personal library indeed. Nowadays I only collect hardcover books and George has often chided me that I care more about the quality of the cover than what is between them. But in this respect I've never taken Márkus seriously as I remember the months he enthused over the first edition of Hegel's works he had acquired on one of his infrequent visits to Budapest in the mid 90's. Aside from this shared love of books, I also come from a long line of political dissidents. My great, great grandfather was an Irishman who had been transported to the colony of Sydney in 1842 because he apparently believed that property was theft and had been caught engaged in some personal acts of redistribution. As a young girl my mother worked at Karl Marx House, the location of the Communist Party bookshop in Sydney in the late 1940s just before the years when the reigning Liberal Party attempted unsuccessfully to outlaw communism in Australia. I came from a solidly working class family and was its first member to attend university. Given these shared affinities, I suppose we were fated to get on well and so it turned out. Our first conversation was typical of Márkus the teacher. He was friendly, kind and modest. Our discussion ended on a little debate about the philosophy of science, which George concluded with the remark that neither of us

knew much about it! Certainly the philosophy of science was not my specialty but only a few years later George would publish his great paper ‘Why There is No Hermeneutics of the Natural Sciences’ as the first number of the Cambridge journal *Science in Context*. This was the same modesty that surfaced every time George prefaced his remarks in class by saying “Of course. I’m not an X scholar” where the X could be anyone from Hegel, Kant etc.... any philosopher except Marx’. In any case, little was I to know it at the time, but this meeting completely changed my life. George supervised my PhD completed in 1986 and it was also through him and *History and Class Consciousness* that I first met my partner Pauline Johnson. At that time, Pauline was doing her PhD on Marxist aesthetics and also supervised by George. He clearly thought we had a lot in common and as it turned out he was right. George was also kind enough to come out of retirement to supervise our daughter Harriet’s PhD on Adorno. Unfortunately, he was not able to complete the job due to his final illness, but she did experience a few years of the Márkus magic!

My first class with George was an honours/post-graduate seminar on Western Marxism—Korsch, Lukacs and Gramsci—it was rather anti-climatic because this was supposed to be the occasion when the new “humanist Marxist” would be put to the sword by the young lions amongst the Althusserian post-graduate fraternity. However, no confrontation ever eventuated because few of these students had ever heard of Korsch or Lukacs and George simply kept the seminar discussion focused on the topic. While this lack of fireworks was a mild surprise, nor had I been bowled over by the experience. The dissection of student’s stumbling attempts to understand the early Western Marxists was not the best arena for Márkus to reveal the full range of his capacities. These came across most easily in the set lecture. From 1979, I attended all George’s classes at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels. But I remember very clearly the instant when I realised he was something really special. I had just started to sit in on his undergraduate courses. This one was on 17<sup>th</sup> Century Metaphysics—Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz. As was usual with George, his courses never got to the advertised end. He taught Descartes, a few lectures on Spinoza and that was it. But it didn’t matter. What really turned the lights on for me was the four hour-long historical introduction to this course. George ended this with a long Shakespeare quote on the crisis of the early modern world in his broken Hungarian accent. It was the panoramic grandeur of that lecture on the crisis of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. I recall that Janos Kis and György Bence spoke of very similar experiences. As a lecturer George

was sparing in the use of his own opinions: he would pack his narrative with quotes from the texts of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel or Marx and recreate the times, the theoretical frameworks and problems with which the great philosophers were preoccupied. George always let philosophy do the talking, even if with a strong Hungarian accent. He did occasionally mangle the conjugations of verbs in English. My favourite was “binded” for “bound” and he would often follow a statement with a “Yes, yes” encouraging his listeners to follow his argument! When, after many years, he finally ceased saying “binded” I remember thinking that something was lost and it never sounded as purely George ever again. However his Hungarian verbal peculiarities never impaired the clarity of his lectures. Someone said that Hannah Arendt could have spoken Sanskrit and this would not have impaired her prose clarity and I feel that George was the same. His long sentences packed full of rich noun clauses were the perfect vehicle to convey his philosophical meaning. George was always punctual. He would walk in briskly, open his attaché case, take off his watch, pull out a school exercise book in which the right hand side of the page had a fully written lecture and on the left hand side was his own personal additions and emendations, he would light a cigarette and he would be off for two hours with only a short five minute break between for necessities. Between 1978 and the end of his teaching career in 2001 George presented 22 different lecture courses. This was four a year and, in the first five years he taught at Sydney, he also presented the large first year ‘Philosophy and Society’ introduction to political philosophy as well. Of course, this is a staggering work-rate when one considers the quality of the lectures. However, I got the feeling that in the early days there was within George a backlog of teaching energy that exploded when he started teaching again at the beginning of his political exile that, in such a natural teacher, could hardly be contained. Amongst the courses George taught, his focus was German Idealism (he did many courses on Kant and Hegel), Marx and the history of Marxism, the philosophy of history and the history of modern philosophy. Although his Budapest reputation was built at least in part on his knowledge of recent developments in analytical philosophy he never taught Wittgenstein or some of the other analytical philosophers. He figured there were other colleagues who could teach these courses and he confined himself to the subjects he thought were needed and nobody else could teach. In this case, George’s exclusion from Hungarian intellectual life was an enormous gain for Sydney.

During those early years, George established his reputation as a towering philosophical mind: a rare combination of conceptual rigour and unmatched knowledge of the history of philosophy. One of my colleagues put this well when he said you will never one-up George Márkus on the history of philosophy and another senior colleague expressed a similar admiration in saying that it was like George had his own internal philosophical map or directory that allowed him to easily locate any position, to see how it stood in relation to all the others and very quickly permitted him to determine in an instant what its implications and problems were or would be. One of his great intellectual strengths was his *ex tempore* responses to seminar papers. With his prodigious philosophical knowledge and critical power he very quickly got to the heart of any topic. Typically, he avoided the easy course of simple external critique. Rather than opposing the speaker's assumptions he would allow these and think through the consequences of their own thinking with them. Few witnesses will forget his interchanges with Kolakowski and Rorty, along with many other major figures.

George also supervised a record number of students who have undertaken successful philosophical careers both in Australia and overseas. Such was the enthusiasm for his courses amongst his followers that I can recall an Honours seminar on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1979, which continued for months after the end of semester and only finished three days before Christmas. Students only rarely show such devotion but imagine how poor George must have felt to be teaching on 22<sup>nd</sup> December when the official semester ended in late October. The class even insisted that George should present the last paper on Absolute Knowledge. Beyond teaching, George also played a major role in the introduction of a strong and comprehensive history of philosophy stream as a compulsory part of the undergraduate Philosophy programme. Despite the split between two departments of Philosophy that sometimes made relations acrimonious, George was never a partisan figure. In departmental discussions he spoke in terms of the interests of philosophy and remained highly regarded across both camps. He respected the fact that he was still in some sense an outsider to the Australian philosophical scene. Nevertheless, both he and Maria were quite willing to assist early efforts in Sydney and beyond to broaden local theoretical perspectives. Along with Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér, their assistance helped the Melbourne journal *Thesis Eleven* to establish itself.

During his first decade in Sydney the only real reverse of fortune was the catastrophic accident to Gyuri. During a soccer game in 1986, Gyuri collapsed with a brain hemorrhage. Even during the endless weeks in hospital and countless medical visits, George's lectures never skipped a beat. They represented the only instance of normality as Maria, András and him adjusted to their extraordinary new situation and Gyuri's severe disabilities. The only external sign of this was that George did not publish anything for several years as he took his measure of this new crisis.

After George's retirement in 1998 he continued to offer a single course to postgraduate and Honours students for a few more years. Mobility issues for Gyuri since the accident have made travel very difficult. George and Maria have cared lovingly for him at home and continued to live in inner Sydney. Despite other professional offers since his move to Sydney George was reluctant to move again. For him, to have his life dislocated once was enough. During all these years he continued to work assiduously and published continuously in a vast range of journals.

George was an immensely talented man who, despite his enormous work ethic, did things fairly easily, except turning off tape decks at the break or end of lectures. These gifts provided him with a very balanced relation to the world and to others. This was both a gift of nature and the consequence of self-reflection. He was a very ethical, sensitive and decent man who also appreciated a joke. Long ago in raging against the fads of American culture, he bemoaned the social exclusion of the smoker and insisted that health was not his highest value. Given that he was a chain smoker, this was hardly news. However, he took the knowledge of his own terminal diagnosis bravely. He joked that he was an especially rich man because he had not just one cancer but three! He was never angry or self-indulgent but always welcoming, good natured and pleased to see visitors. During his last months I visited him almost weekly. His decline was very gradual. One Sunday in late June after his bed had been moved into his study he decided to say "goodbye" to me and we both said how important our friendship had been. George died in the bosom of his family surrounded by Maria, Gyuri and András.

John Burnheim, who was Head of the Departmental of General Philosophy when George first arrived, in his obituary summed up George's contribution in the following terms:

He taught many of us a very great deal and awakened us to new levels of understanding, but he left no set of theories or theses

such as describe the work of other outstanding philosophers. His work illustrates Wittgenstein's remark that if there were theses in philosophy everybody would agree with them. What he leaves behind is the good that he did to so many of us and to the philosophical climate in Australia.

This view suffers from its lack of familiarity with George's late writings but it does touch upon a real difficulty in making any final evaluation of the Márkus legacy. Another PhD student of George once lamented to me that to criticize George was to "wrestle with a column of smoke". What I took to be the meaning of this cryptic description was that it was hard to lay a hand on George's philosophy and this was because George never taught his own philosophy or at least not explicitly. His courses were always impeccable historical accounts of other philosophers informed by close acquaintanceship with the original texts and solid knowledge of the history of these works reception up to and including the present. Sometimes it did seem as if these lectures were the word of Absolute Spirit without any attempt by George to make this sort of claim for them. Thus the question arose as to where he was speaking from and was he saying anything in his own name.

This sort of difficulty is compounded by the fact that the major work of George's post-Budapest period remained unfinished. The large collection of essays that I urged him to publish and which finally appeared with Brill as *Culture, Science and Society: The Cultural Constitution of Modernity* (Brill, 2013) was only fragments of a much larger project that did not see the light of day. That George had to be urged to publish this collection gives some insight into his attitude in these matters. He once revealed to me that he had never submitted a paper to a journal. He said his practice was to finish things and wait until other asked him if he had anything to offer. Allowing for a moment of exaggeration, I believe this statement to be mainly true. Furthermore, George had such high standards that many things stayed in his drawer that other people would have happily published immediately. It is not for nothing that Agnes has called George a perfectionist. Such considerations explain why readers might be inclined to the view "he left no set of theories or these such that we might find in other outstanding philosophers". But to say exactly what his philosophical

testament is goes beyond the time we have today and already available for those interested in a previously published paper.<sup>2</sup>

George's post-Budapest project was primarily concerned to develop a theory of the cultural constitution of modernity in both theoretical and historical terms. He laid down the conceptual framework for the theorization of modern high culture across the cultural spheres and attempted to articulate this through an account of cultural pragmatics or cultural relations – author, text and public – in the domains of science, arts and the humanities. Of course, this project has its origins in debates within the Western Marxist tradition concerning the role of high culture, popular culture and the arguments for either their autonomy or co-option as an ideological support for existing power structures. As already mentioned, this was a project that remained incomplete but the clear outlines of George's intent are evident in the collected essays. Despite the historical embeddedness of this project, these essays resonate with a deep understanding of the historico-cultural terrain being covered and the conceptual issues at play. They open a field of exploration in the area of modern high culture – its internal relations, specificity and the interaction of its component elements-- that still remains largely unexplored.

It would hardly come as a surprise to discover that philosophy sits at the center of George's analysis of cultural modernity. If this philosophy confronts the present crisis of living after the decline of the philosophical system this is largely the result of fundamental antinomies that underlie cultural modernity. One of George's key ideas was that the classic struggle between Enlightenment and Romanticism, which has remained so central to the self-understanding of modernity, has obscured the fact that neither of these cultural options has any prospect of succeeding in its own exclusive terms. Rather, he argues that it is in fact the paradoxical unity-the active competition between these two polar opposites for cultural hegemony that is decisive in perpetuating the dynamics that has sustained the tenuous balance of modern society. The critical and rational predilections of Enlightenment that stand behind the methods and practices of modern science and the enormous creative power of arts as paradigmatic forms of meaning creation act as complementary forms of compensation for the threatening one dimensionality of the dominant principle of the other. The

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<sup>2</sup> Antipodean Enlightenment: Márkus on Culture' *Critical Horizons* Vol. 14, no 2, 2013, pp156-180)

conflict between these options is not some incidental or transitory cultural quirk but essential to the antinomical nature of modernity itself.

George argues convincingly that it is just these modern cultural tensions that have seen the demise of the hegemonic role played by the philosophical system from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From this point on, the rough identity between philosophy and science was undermined by the growing functional power of the latter. Science pays for its functional successes with a loss of edifying capacity and its inability to explore values and meaning. In fact, its privileged status within the present seems to vitiate against reflective examination of the apparent irrationalities stemming from its own developmental process and its increasingly problematic relation to the social whole. Along with increasing cultural differentiation, pluralism and the conflicts engendered by them, the rapid increase in knowledge seems only matched by a growing incapacity to orientate ourselves in the everyday world.

A survey of philosophical prospects after the system leads George to view the leading contemporary philosophical options orientated around the question of “for or against science”. Those who maintain faith in the programme of unifying philosophy and science continue to prosecute the ideal of the ‘scientification of philosophy’. Yet this aim seems just as distant as it ever was, and to make things worse, the perspective which assumes an internalist account of contemporary science, lacks both a critical dimension and seems unable to address a whole range of questions related to the place of science in contemporary society and culture. On the other hand, those who are resistant to the allures of modern rationalisation, find themselves in the awkward position of giving voice to the excluded “other” but with nothing but philosophical means to articulate it. Márkus, like Habermas, groups these various strands under the rubric of postmodernism and maintains that despite all their revolutionary sloganising and determination to break with the old metaphysics, they suffer from the performative problem of being welded to a conventional philosophical armoury.

Márkus favours a third option that he designates as “orientative”. The crisis of philosophy is simply an element of much more profound break in cultural continuity that has left us quite uncertain about our ultimate direction and how to get there. In this situation what is required is “orientation” and this third position purports to provide it.

However, when we examine what this option offers us it becomes clear that Márkus offers much less than was previously supplied by traditional philosophy. In

this respect George seems close to Habermas post-metaphysical view of the role of philosophy. It continues to have a major diagnostic function: it can analyse and reconstruct the tradition of the present; it can illuminate the normative and factual pre-conditions of reigning practices and privileges. But having digested the hard lessons of Marxism in the twentieth century, Márkus maintains that the resulting social diagnosis must forego the presumption of totality and content itself with “totalisation” and only within a given culture and reliant only on the standpoint of existing potentials and chosen values.<sup>3</sup> While this understanding of the diagnostic function allows critical distantiation from certain taken-for-granted practical and cognitive assumptions, it is still very much constrained. The question of where we have come from is not one that it can answer on its own authority.

Márkus quite consciously deflates the traditional aspirations of philosophy with his skeptical, historicizing perspective. His understanding of the orienting function of philosophy has nothing to do with the construction of concrete utopias. While he requires the general existential paradigm to be interconnected with the articulation of a practical attitude to the present, he does not bestow on the philosopher any special capacity for utopian thinking. Unlike his close friend Agnes Heller, who attributes to the philosopher a utopian imagination as part of the job description, Márkus argues that academic professionalization has all but consumed any utopian imagination allegedly possessed by philosophers. He maintains that a rational defense of an orientating understanding of philosophy requires that the practical attitude be confined to “formulating an evaluative attitude to the collisions and conflicts imaginatively diagnosed”<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, this can no longer be conceived as positive knowledge. Connecting evaluation with facts is not a simple matter of inference but of cogent narrative, which renders the present and the future meaningful, as long as we adhere to certain chosen values and courses of action.

This in turn requires a rethinking of what constitutes the “rationality” of this form of orienting thinking. Abandonment of the claim to positive knowledge is not emancipation from all the constraints of scientificity. As a theorized conceptual narrative, philosophy is required to fulfill disciplinary norms of conceptual clarity, logical consistency and empirical accuracy. Non-compliance with these norms is still

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<sup>3</sup>Márkus, G. ‘After the System: Philosophy in the Epoch of the Sciences’ *Culture, Science and Society: The Constitution of Cultural Modernity* op cit, p282

<sup>4</sup>Márkus, G. *ibid*, pp.282-283

grounds for refutation. These are the minimal conditions of rationality. However, even more important, is that the narrative be meaningful and satisfying, and for this to be so, it must be both plausible and relevant to our own lives. The maximal dimension of this reworked philosophical rationality consists in the existential relevance and plausibility that Márkus considers to be the real spirit of philosophy and its core aspect. While the demands of contemporary scientific fallibility cannot be ignored, the fate of a philosophy is ultimately decided on this maximal plane of existential satisfaction.

In formulating the new understanding of philosophical rationality “after the system” Márkus articulates the sense of paradox that permeates his understanding of modern culture as a whole. When required to answer the question: What does contemporary philosophy have to offer? He is quick to assume his minimalist, skeptical countenance and reply “little”. Orientation is ultimately an individual task and as philosophy occupies the terrain of the universal, it cannot even provide specific orientation but only “guide posts” towards it. In keeping with its minimalist concept of its rationality, it can provide faculties sharpened by critical questioning, reflective distancing and judgment. Yet, Márkus has already informed us that this is the “core” or “spirit of philosophy”. In another paper,<sup>5</sup> Márkus concedes that, after all, philosophy is more than its propositional content. This “more” turns out to be not just the machinery of critical questioning or logical argumentation but also narrative structures and speculative constructs.<sup>6</sup> In other words, both the minimal and maximal dimensions of rationality are indispensable to the philosophical task of orientation. The maximal dimension of Márkus’s philosophy is often hard to find. He speaks with such a weight of historical knowledge and intentional speculative constraint that his own voice is often hard to discern amidst the formidable scholarship and rigorous analytical acumen that is always in the forefront. Nevertheless, at various decisive points in this collection it very much comes to the fore.

Not surprisingly, this is most evident when Márkus defends his evaluative attitude on key issues of social and cultural conflict. A good example of this is his defense of Condorcet against Rousseau. Against the latter’s critique of progress, Condorcet upholds the rich dialectic of science and democracy, which, according to

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<sup>5</sup>Márkus, G. “Do Ideas have Bodies? Literary ‘Form’ and Philosophical ‘Content’ in Descartes’ *Holmi*(4)(1997): 507-518

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

him, in the long run provides the environment in which true morality can flourish.<sup>7</sup> Márkus dismisses Condorcet's illusions that science could 'on its own self-evidence' prove 'the general principles of morality.'<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, his own personal experience of totalitarianism convinces him that Condorcet's linkage between scientific advancement and the presence of broadly conceived democratic conditions' is anything but illusory and very much relevant.<sup>9</sup> Not surprisingly for somebody who suffered from the consequences of political radicalism on both right and left, Márkus treats the political and historical implications of ideas and values with utmost seriousness. His criticism of MacIntyre's flippant repudiation of the programme of Enlightenment rests ultimately upon a rejection of the world 'in which individuals are bound to some pre-given community, ascriptively attached to some customary form of life, and treat all others...as friends or foes.'<sup>10</sup> Against what he asserts must be MacIntyre's insincerity in implying he would turn his back on modern freedom, Márkus affirms the modern commitment to both dynamism and universality that 'cannot easily be renounced by us, here and now.'<sup>11</sup> But for him the defense of modern dynamism must also preserve the ethical moment that he associates with social democracy. For him, the greatness of Kantian ethics is not its subjectivism but its universal content. This is not pre-given in some existent community but posited as the willed end of the whole of mankind in a life that ensures the unity of virtue and happiness.<sup>12</sup> This awareness of the possible "other" deeply informs Márkus's ethics and is one of the most attractive and humane features of his vision. Towards the end of his great essay 'Beyond the Dichotomy *Praxis and Poesis* in which he again takes the side of modernity against Aristotle in viewing life itself as a production because "some kind of work constitutes—both normatively and in fact—a central element of the good life'.<sup>13</sup> He, nevertheless, repudiates the identification of life solely with individual achievement. While life for us moderns is 'both action and production, it is, of course, neither since it is largely a series of unpredictable events, neither produced nor initiated by us, but befalling us, in respect of which we can only react and

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<sup>7</sup>Márkus, G. 'Condorcet: Communication/Science/Democracy' Chapter `11 *Culture, Science, Society: The Cultural Constitution of Modernity* op cit, p.350

<sup>8</sup> ibid

<sup>9</sup> ibid, p.351

<sup>10</sup>Márkus, G. 'Beyond the Dichotomy *Praxis and Poesis*' *Culture, Science, Society: The Cultural Constitution of Modernity*' op cit, p.51

<sup>11</sup> ibid

<sup>12</sup> ibid, p.47

<sup>13</sup> ibid

counteract'.<sup>14</sup> In this paper written just before the accident that severely disabled his own son, Márkus not only recognized the sometimes decisive role that accidentality and brute contingency could play in any life, he also thought it crucial to a modern society that it consider 'what kind of social arrangements can ensure for all human beings that irrational concatenations of events do not deprive them completely of the possibility of giving meaning to their lives-- both in the sense of achieving some chosen goals and accomplishing something uniquely meaningful'.<sup>15</sup> The moral vision of the philosopher was already so entrenched that it aided the man to survive the most traumatic series of existential tests.

To some, the values central to Márkus's reconstructed rationality will seem either too moderate or too complicit: too well instantiated as the ideology of contemporary liberal democratic power and therefore not sufficiently radical to address the multiple crises that confront these societies in the present. He seems to admit as much when he concedes that the success or survival value of philosophical virtues like critical questioning and judgement, reflexive distancing from habitual worlds and the ability to take responsibility for choices made is not particularly high.<sup>16</sup> Yet, even today these values still retain a real critical edge: the fact that the contemporary world and its power structures constantly challenge them speaks both to their continuing emancipatory potential. Márkus is no pie-eyed optimist but he does see something of real value that is central to the European intellectual tradition, that despite its own self-determined limits, despite its antinomic constituents and all the obstacles it faces, is still worthy of our contemporary allegiance. Kis was correct to understand the work of George Márkus as the most sophisticated contemporary reconstruction of the Enlightenment.

George was an exemplary representative of enlightenment, not just in theory alone but also in practice -- as a man. He was one of the contemporary philosophical masters. To have been his student, colleague and friend was the greatest privilege that, in retrospect, seems almost unbelievable such was the good fortune that it involved. I learnt from George at close hand and in the most trying existential circumstances what it means to be a "friend of wisdom" in an epoch in which the latter seems nothing but a mere figment of ancient aspirations. I know most of you even after all

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid* p.56

<sup>15</sup> Márkus, G. 'After the System' *op cit*, p.284

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

this time will have treasured memories of him. Maria once said to me “George will never die”. While I’m sure such a statement would have horrified our great teacher of the paradigm of finite subjectivity, I’m sure that while we still recall such wonderful moments with him this will continue to be true!

