

PHILOSOPHIA

PHILOSOPHICAL QUARTERLY OF ISRAEL

VOL. 9, NOS.3-4

JULY 1981

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

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THEMES IN SOVIET MARXIST PHILOSOPHY. Selected articles from the Filsofskaja enciklopedija; edited and translated by T.J. Blakeley. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1975, X + 224 pp.

Given the great expansion of Soviet studies in philosophy during the last twenty years, the appearance of this collection of articles selected and translated from the *Filsofskaja Enciklopedija* of 1960-1970 by Blakeley is certainly timely. In the eyes of the Soviet philosophy establishment, however, Blakeley's work at Boston and his collaboration with Bochenski at the Fribourg Institute of East European Studies has always been highly suspect. This volume, with its surprising absence of research papers in the philosophy of natural science will do little to dampen any hostile flames and may well be regarded in some quarters as an attempt by bourgeois scholarship to break up the unity of the materialist outlook. Many keen students of philosophy, grateful for what limited translation there is of Soviet philosophy studies would find it hard to accept this kind of judgement. In any case, the absence of natural science is to some extent compensated for by an interesting paper on *Matter* in which Bibler and Ovcinnikov present a neat exposition of the history of classical and modern materialism followed by sets of short propositions indicating the approach of dialectical materialist philosophy towards understanding the nature of the atom. Although informative, the analysis seemed to me to lack the sparkle of a philosophical imagination. For example, the authors more than once declare that the external and internal properties of the atom are resultant of motion and change but nowhere attempt to investigate these potentially complex and exciting processes... The brevity tantalises and ultimately disappoints.

The volume opens with a paper by Ljaxoveckij and Tjuxtjin that examines what for Marxists is the basic question of philosophy — the relationship of thought to being. When tackling problems of philosophy, the authors argue, the question of the relationship of thought to being and consciousness to matter can only be expressed in two different though interconnected forms, ontology and epistemology. With the materialist ontology, thought is a product of being and therefore consciousness a function of matter. In the materialist theory of knowledge, however, matter and consciousness are separated as mutually exclusive phenomena although the authors stress that the Marxist theory of 'knowing' the world contains a 'concrete grounding' of its intelligibility in the shape of reflection and the mechanisms of sensation and logical knowledge; therefore "no ontology without epistemology". The problem of a materialist theory of knowledge and the effect of ideology is then treated to a brief historical excursus from Hegel, through Rousseau and Plato and back to Engels, who the authors maintain, was the first to understand that the character of any philosophical system was necessarily shaped by how its creator defined the relationship of thought to being. In this assertion at least they err as Marx himself gave thought to this question in researches connected with his Doctoral Dissertation directed at Hegel's philosophy many years earlier. The paper ends with a short, typical lunge at what is described as the third force philosophical neutrality of Russell, Carnap, Wittgenstein etc. that has declared the Marxist understanding of the basic problem of philosophy to be *pseudo*, going their own ways in language and logic. 'Third path philosophy' the authors argue, does not eliminate the Marxist understanding and positioning of the question but provides an idealist answer to it. Its concern with man, no matter what form that concern takes, is always reducible to the more important and basic premise of human thought — truth, truth which itself forms the basis of how the question of man and his relation to the world around him is to be solved. This is indeed a concise paper although readers will naturally recognise that its polemical form necessarily places it within the ambit of political philosophy.

Well over half the papers collected in this volume were written by Spirkin, in particular, those examining aspects of Dialectical Materialism and Consciousness. He also shares a paper

with Kedrov on Science and one with Kopnin, Losev and others on the subject of Dialectical Logic. Spirkin's opening paper on dialectical materialism incorporates a study of its history and logic, its character and value as a scientific mode of thought and its worth when set against contemporary bourgeois philosophy. The tenor of Spirkin's article can be gleaned from its first page, reading at times like a set of Cultural Revolution cracker mottoes. If metaphysical materialism, as Spirkin suggests, suffers from inconsistency and bias, then his analysis of the revolutionary materialism of Marx and Engels strongly suffers at times from the desire to turn a potentially sophisticated and highly valuable means of analysing and understanding social and scientific processes into a quasi political pamphlet. For example, in his account of the origins of dialectical materialism, Spirkin argues that "the establishment of Marxism was prepared by the Lyon riots, the Chartist movement and the Silesian uprising". This kind of gross oversimplification has no value at all for the serious student of Marxism. Again, Spirkin repeatedly emphasises "the great methodological importance" of 'diamat' "for the study of the emergence of life and of the laws of its development and of the emergence of man, and for the study of higher neural activity" etc. but he never seems to tell us *how* the Marxist method can be useful. It is always only a matter of *why* but never *how*, and the usefulness of the Marxist method is never explained. The whole piece is a chocolate box of appetising assertions that turn out to be display dummies. The most interesting section of the paper, I think, is his examination of the relationship between dialectical materialism and contemporary bourgeois philosophy. John Paul Sartre and French Stalinism notwithstanding, existentialism is characterised as the last word of bourgeois philosophy... a philosophy of despair. Taken altogether, it is obvious that the various subjects of this paper have been treated in outline form resulting in a shallow handling of perspectives; although informative, the ultimate effect of this kind of cursory examination of complex problems is to disappoint although this is not to deny any pamphleteering value. Marx himself, I suspect, or Lenin for that matter, would not have regarded this paper as a serious scientific or philosophical study of their materialist outlook. Spirkin's paper on Consciousness provides an altogether more valuable insight into Marxist philosophy. As the awareness of being, the Marxist theory of consciousness is central to the prime objectives of knowing and changing the world. Beginning typically with an account of the importance of consciousness in the history of philosophy and its individual mode of treatment by various thinkers, he contrasts the brain and 'the objective world' as material bases of thought and makes this objectivity the shoulders on which the world of man's consciousness rests and his place in the social firmament begins. The short section on the structure of consciousness and self-consciousness was pleasantly positive. Instead of an attack on Bruno Bauer that I had half expected, I found a short, useful section on the place of self-consciousness in the structure of human thought seen from a marked psychological perspective and revealing the influence of this field in the philosophical appraisal of mental activity by Soviet scholars. The work of Secenov, a founding father of 'materialist' psychology comes to mind in most of the later sections of this paper. Even more impressive was the neat and clear treatment of the emergence of consciousness and its biological prerequisites. In just over two pages, Spirkin supplies a theoretical basis for the separation of human thought and its mechanisms from the animal psyche using man's purposeful labour and the development of his speech and communication from lower to higher modes of consciousness to provide a socio-biological framework for the history of his social evolution, the final product being a social consciousness. The piece is well worth reading.

From the Marxist point of view, and we are here examining *Soviet* philosophy, the final section of this paper dealing with social consciousness is of great interest. Reading through it, I recalled a sentence from *The German Ideology* where Marx, speaking of production, comments, "as individuals express their life so they are." Nowhere in the section is any

reference made to the material productive forces of society and the structure of social relations i.e. social classes, that in classical Marxist theory provides a basis for the development of social consciousness... instead, Spirkin speaks of hereditary factors and human culture. What is missing, strangely enough, is the question of economics and it does seem that the subject under discussion is treated in a spirit of *thoroughgoing idealism* rather than any 'scientific mode' of historical materialism. I make no apologies for hurling clichés back to their place of origin but in this case, the *thoroughgoing idealism* is more suited to Spirkin's treatment of this key aspect of Marx' thought. Nonetheless, his paper merits close attention as much for its inherent theoretical value as for the fascinating contradictions it contains.

Students of logic will find much to interest them in the paper on Dialectical Logic by Bogomolov, Kopnin *et al.* From the first sentence, the authors skillfully avoid the issues surrounding questions of spheres of operation by defining the subject as a "science of the most general laws of the development of nature, society and human thought". This gets round saying that dialectical logic is an evaluative method imposed externally on the laws of nature and human society while at the same time bypassing any commitment to the 'establishment' view of Kedrov, the well known philosopher of natural science. Kedrov's position, that the dialectic "in essence coincides not just with the so called subjective dialectic i.e. the dialectic of knowledge, but also with the objective dialectic, the dialectic of the external world" has raised much noise in the West. Writers have argued that a *dialectic of nature* is the viewpoint of Engels only and alien to the thought of Marx, forgetting that Marx himself not only gave his full approval to Engels' works on science but had in his youth written a study on Greek atomism arguing for an immanent dialectic in the materialism of Epicurus. I noted with much interest that in the short section examining the work of Soviet scholars on this subject, there was substantial disagreement over precisely this point.

The exposition of the historical appearance of dialectical logic is most instructive although it appears on a formal rather than an analytical level. Those acquainted with Marx' Classical studies and his strong support for Epicureanism over the Stoics will note the authors' judgement on the latter with some surprise. What, I wonder, would the young Marx have had to say, particularly regarding the surprisingly unfavourable contrasting of "Western" Hegelian philosophy with the Hegelianism of the 19th century "Russian revolutionary democrats" without the name of Feuerbach being even mentioned in this historical excursus? The latter appears only when the authors discuss the appearance of dialectical logic in bourgeois philosophy where after dumping pragmatism, existentialism and neo-positivism into the same cup of scorn, Hegel emerges favourably and Feuerbach merits a few critical lines in passing. Of particular interest in this paper I think is the fact that there is considerable contradiction of viewpoint in Soviet philosophy surrounding the definition and scope of dialectical logic. Sitkovsky, one of the authors, argues that it is only a part of the entire dialectical method itself concerned with the evolution of human thought as a reflection of social change. Rozin, however, maintains that dialectical logic is the essential epistemology *of the* dialectic — the working tool of Marxism. Kedrov's dialectic of 'nature' is neatly complemented by a recognition on the part of some Soviet writers of an existing dialectic in the structure of specific forms of thought such as concepts or judgements. This is indeed a special claim and readers who may be interested in the processes by which a dialectic within consciousness changes into a structure of human reason that retains the dialectical momentum as its essential content may refer to the works of Cereteli, Cerkesov and others.

The last three sections of the paper deal with the principles, structure and operating modes of the Marxist logic — the meat of the subject. As far as principles and laws are concerned, the paper reflects Sitkovsky's viewpoint. Natural phenomena such as the stars and the laws

governing their formation are placed quite outside the orbit of dialectics until the time when man himself comes to consciously act upon them to create change. It is only then that natural laws “become like logical laws” appearing in human thought as “the ideal image of objective reality”. To a great extent, this is the position of Lenin although Lenin claimed to be speaking for Engels. How far Engels himself claimed the existence of an autonomous dialectic within nature has of course, been a matter of considerable debate. The key question here is this — can nature, however complex or remote be separated from the practice of man when even his scientific reasoning and experiment is itself a part of the cultural practice of his age? Students of Soviet Marxism will find much to mull over in these sections. Striking to my mind was the coincidence of viewpoint between the *modern understanding of contradiction* as “the motive force of emergence” and the comment made by the young Marx in his Doctoral Dissertation of 1841 where, influenced by Bruno Bauer’s Hegelianised philosophy of self-consciousness, he refers to the swerve of the Epicurean atom from its straight line of motion and suggests that *repulsion* is the first form of self-consciousness. Also noteworthy is the firm reliance of the authors on Lenin’s own system of dialectical categories from which they break a Marxist and now Leninist logic down into sections about matter, essence and knowledge. Those well acquainted with Lenin’s philosophical studies will find little that is new here. However, the paper *is* interesting and written in a lively style. It certainly stands well above much of the hack work of today’s radical left.

The short paper on Psychology by Leont’ev and others is disappointing. Apart from the initial materialist definition of the subject and analysis of the emergence of its spheres of operation, the remainder is not much more than a cataloguing of the history of the field inside the Soviet Union and elsewhere. The early section reflects the difficulty for a materialist psychology in scientifically defining the objective parameters of psychological phenomena and the exact constitution of the field. The emergence of behaviourism was significant and facilitated the development based on the work of Secenov, Pavlov and Bexterev. At the same time, the historicist approach to the psyche, viewing it as the product of both human labour and social activity opened for research “a new form of psychic reflection — human consciousness”. This important connection of the psyche with a key concept of the materialist view of history firmly grounded Russian psychology after the Revolution in the philosophical premises of Marx’s materialism. The earliest work in this field was headed by Kornilov at the Moscow Institute. The possibilities of constructing a Marxist psychology attracted many brilliant researchers such as Vygotsky, whose theories suggested that the higher psychic functions were subjects of a historical development. Blonsky, on the other hand, formulated a dialectical approach to a genetic theory concerning the development of thought. The key work of Vygotsky, it is now recognised, provided Piaget with a basis for his earliest studies; it also provided the basis for an entire psychology founded on the premises of historical materialism established in the 1950’s by Leont’ev. The section dealing with foreign psychology is a kind of potted history and as is to be expected, the work of Freud is curtly dismissed. Students of the history of psychology will find this kind of surface eclecticism somewhat informative but certainly no more.

I read the paper on Historical Materialism by Konstantinov with Plekhanov’s *The Monist View of History* very much in mind. The latter, let it be said, is a *classic* of Marxism while the Soviet offering makes a frugal meal. Having said this, it does have the merit of reflecting *official* Soviet scholarship to some extent on the subject so providing an insight into the quality and theoretical direction of their Marxism. One of the most noticeable features of the paper is that the development of human society and the character of man’s social life is described in general terms as *sociology*, and ‘idealist’ or bourgeois sociology is contrasted with a materialist or Marxist sociology which in turn is regarded as the “science of the laws of

social development". With Konstantinov, Marxism becomes a materialist social science or a socialist science of society in which the moving force in the history of human organisation is the masses. Bourgeois sociology, on the other hand, is characterised as a discipline of individualism where causation in social phenomena and historical events of social moment are reduced to the handy work of single persons. Surprisingly, economic formations so important to Marxist theory such as the determination of the social structure by the mode of production is defined in terms of "general sociological laws". Equally surprising in this unconventional paper is an entirely unexpected and strong personal attack on Stalin who is blamed for Soviet losses and suffering early on in the Second World War as well as for developing a personality cult because of his isolation from *the masses*. A basis for the construction of communist social relations, Konstantinov suggests, is found in Khrushchev's famous speech denouncing Stalin. Readers may well wonder as I did about the author's position inside the Soviet Union today given the broad re-emergence of Stalinism in many walks of life there.

The real weakness of this paper is that very little attention is given to the theoretical development of both philosophical and historical materialism by Marx and Engels from 1844-1846. These two arms of Marxism hang loose and do not seem to be understood as a unity or general philosophical outlook that scientifically expresses the historical development and evolution of human society. The influence of Feuerbach in the growth of the Marxist theoretical outlook is quite ignored — a serious mistake as the foundation statements of historical materialism are first outlined by Marx and Engels in the Section on Feuerbach from the papers now known as *The German Ideology*. The final section of this paper on the reactionary character of bourgeois sociology, like so much of the piece, is a swingeing attack on the entire structure of modern sociology. Unhappily, it lacks depth and is of little value in consequence.

The paper on Ethics by Drobnicki is especially instructive for its statements on communist morality and critical appraisal of pre-Marxist thought. Speaking generally, the latter is attacked for having separated the practical and theoretical sides of human conduct. Separated from the lives of *the people*, a bourgeois social consciousness, in consequence, can only be an abstraction from real life and be of little value to it. The Marxist ethic, it is suggested, grounds morality in the needs of human social life and the need to regulate human activity. The freedom of human beings is no abstract phenomenon here but practically related to historical laws, social relations and man's social development. Fine sentiments indeed — until one asks just who it is that performs the regulation or makes the interpretations of historical laws or the historical development of men. It must not be forgotten that the social morality of Lenin's party fell into the hands of Stalin and the practical social conduct of Soviet citizens was indeed judged in such abstract and mysterious phrases as "enemy of the people" or, "enemy of the working class". The ethics of the custodians, on the other hand, allowed a 'bureaucratic' stewardship' licence to practice the destruction of freedom of consciousness through medical malpractices on those who demonstrated any kind of a social conscience inside the Soviet Union. The bureaucracy has indeed bourgeoisified Marxist morality by splitting the social consciousness of a theoretical ethic from its practical side of social conscience and thus maiming any kind of a self-consciousness socially directed towards a morality in human conduct.

Of the remaining papers, Losev's piece on Aesthetics is a compact history of the field where neat statements on the work of various writers follow their names with a tedious regularity. Finally, it emerges that a Marxist perspective and treatment of literary ideas only develops after 1917 inside the Soviet Union. I for one find that a most annoying aspect of the laws of history is that they have only allowed a practical and theoretical expression of Marx'

thought to occur in no other place than a Stalinist or neo-Stalinist paradise. Reality is only rational inside the Soviet Union as in Hegelian Prussia.

The paper on Science by Kedrov and Spirkin, by contrast, is a somewhat more scrupulous effort. I could not but notice the opening evaluation of science as the highest form of human knowledge; many Marxists would disagree preferring to give this honour to philosophy. There is little in the opening discussion on the general characteristics of science that Western philosophers of science would disagree with and the declared aim and meaning of science — to know in order to predict and to predict in order to act — sounded just a little Comptean. The section on scientific method likewise seemed devoid of the materialist spirit. When so much could have been said about the conflict within scientific theory between idealist and materialist scientific method, especially in the sphere of physics, I found instead a prosaic setting out of modern methodology and a departure from practical objectives and considerations. Not unnaturally, the spirit bloomed when the authors turned to examine the social characteristics of science, chief of which is that vague concept, social practice. It is man's activity, they argue, that is the ultimate test of the truth or falsity of scientific knowledge. This fundamental premise of Marxist materialism indeed produces a parting of ways. Marx argued that men make history, but this statement is still a far cry from saying that human practice contains the tests for the truths of science, for as I see it, science, with the aid of social practice must reflect the discovered truths of natural phenomena. Through science, these truths can serve as an aid to the social practice of mankind. Part of the history that men make, however, is that of scientific thought and surprisingly enough, insufficient attention is given here to the historical struggle within science between idealism and materialism for the claim to the true understanding and reflection of the laws of nature. The key question — does nature herself contain the materialist logic by which the content of phenomenal forms develop — is avoided here. Philosophical questions such as the application of Marxist epistemology are exchanged for second order social science problems such as the social role of scientists with the seeming separation of an organic unity of philosophy and science so necessary to Marxism in favour of a drift towards the 'bourgeois social sciences'.

The whole essay will prove fascinating to the self-conscious and critically minded student of Marxism. If scientists like Kedrov fall by the wayside when they take up serious questions of philosophy and politics, it should not be forgotten that Western scientists often appear at their most naive when moving into the world of philosophy of science or else appearing to make political judgements of the social value and morality of science.

This collection of articles on Soviet Marxism makes fascinating reading. Written in a period of Soviet history that had seen the recent destruction of the Stalin legend, these papers nonetheless bear many of the scars of officialdom. The content of intellectual creativity is so obviously shot through with bureaucratic requirements that originated within and existed to serve past periods and the dry rot of a slavish formalism dies hard. Only when this parasitic worm is burnt out of Soviet life will the role of her intelligentsia be able to seriously direct itself, with all the resources of the natural creativity of the Soviet people — to the further development of Marx' materialism. Soviet Marxism, indeed, awaits its Lucretius.

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