

RAES, K. (ed.), *Troeven en proeven van het marxisme; kritische opstellen over de actualiteit van Marx*. Gent, Masereelfonds, 1983.

One can look upon this reader on Marx and Marxism as a collection of papers on very different topics, deriving from different disciplines (which almost cover the whole range of the human sciences) and starting from very different problems. Still, there is one very clear motive to bring them together: every author starts from the conviction that a marxist way of tackling problems (even in the different disciplines, represented in this reader) is a valuable scientific approach. In addition, every author agrees on the fact that this doesn't mean that Marx's thought is complete and cannot be rectified or corrected. This critical way of looking at Marx and the belief that his thinking can be ameliorated is the one and only feature common to every paper. Hence, it is the only feature that makes it acceptable to put all the papers together in one reader. It is for example, not possible to reduce authors or themes to the same denominator by referring to one aspect of marxist theory, that is collectively refuted or accepted. As a matter of fact, every author, according to his own needs, stresses different aspects of marxist theory. Some of them have an

exclusive interest in the base and super-structure aspect of Marx's theory. Others start from the theory on labour value to make their point. Still other authors investigate on the meaning of concepts such as 'reproduction', 'exploitation', 'alienation' etc... Briefly, it is not possible to spell out one common problem or subject treated by the different authors, the only thing they have in common is a genuine good will to Marx. I did not give a full account of every paper the reader contains. This doesn't mean that the papers I left out of this review are not worth while reading.

*The transformation problem and the concept of exploitation* : The paper of the economist among the authors treats with the transformation problem. He tackles this problem as a purely formal-technical one and concentrates on the exposition of Marx's introduction of the production prices, of his suggestion for transforming these prices into labour values and of a survey of the main ideas that help solving the problem. In a clear and precise style he pins down the difficulties one has to face when handling the transformation task. Cuyvers, the author of the paper, didn't give a full account of every possible stand economists took up in connection with the transformation problem. He confines his inquiries to the following authors: Piero Sraffa (and his book 'Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities) and Michio Morishima (referring to several articles). I presume that both authors are sufficiently known to economists so as not to be obliged to reproduce their thoughts in this review. For those who know Dutch and who are not acquainted with the transformation problem and with the possible suggestions to tackle it, this paper of Cuyvers seems to me an excellent introduction. The rest of the paper concentrates on the question whether there are reasons to postulate beforehand labour values and, as a consequence, whether Marx's analysis of capitalistic society is still worth while. Cuyvers' point of view can be summarized as follows. Labour values have an analogous status as the prices of production. They are, the author says, "as both sides of one coin". They represent different long term movements within the same real world. The production prices represent the tendency of the profit rate to flatten out. The labour values represent the tendency of the exploitation rate to flatten out. Cuyvers wants to stress all the way long that the transformation problem and the solving of the problem isn't a purely theoretical problem stemming from the fact that working with labour values only represents 'an unnecessary detour' in the quest for analysing competitive prices. This means that he doesn't consider entities such as 'exploitation' and 'exploitation-rate' completely denuded of reality. But on the other hand he also wants to stress the fact that Marx's approach cannot be accepted without the necessary corrections. In addition to this he points out the fact that the problem of a historical dimension of the transformation problem is far from being settled. Here he agrees with Meek ('Is there a 'Historical Transformation Problem', A comment; In Economic Journal).

On the whole I can say that in the paper of Cuyvers the discussion about the right and wrong of Marx is developed on a purely formal level. His concept of 'exploitation' only refers to a very precise aspect of the whole theory of value. The connotation the concept has in labour movements is completely left out. This is not the case for the paper 'Wetenschappelijk socialisme versus etisch socialisme' (Scientific Socialism against Ethical Socialism) by Leo

Apostel, Jenny Walry and Jan Deconinck. The paper concentrates on the question whether the ethical dimension can be altogether dismissed from a socialist project. This question leads to a totally different approach of the concept "exploitation" from the one we find in Marx's economic analysis of capitalist society. The authors want to make clear that their problem is not completely independent from economic questions f.i. such as the transformation problem. This link between a purely objective and a more subjective approach of the entity 'exploitation' is given in an appendix to their paper. In this appendix the authors state their view in plain terms: however brilliant the contributions of economists all of them start from the presupposition that the consumer vector is known (with this consumer vector, they mean the labour value of the commodities workers need to reproduce themselves. Or, in other words: the necessary labour). This, the authors claim, is certainly not the case. And this means that economists miss a very important aspect of the process of class-struggle and in general of the process of change in consumption habits. For the authors the question of the possibilities in measuring the necessary labour becomes the central theme of their paper. This question is important in the light of their methodological stand, namely that in order to give a scientific status to a theory means you must be able to order or quantify those aspects of reality you want to investigate. It is not difficult to understand what they are driving at. They note the fact that the scientific status of Marx's socialism can be questioned solely on the ground of the use of an emotional, ethical term such as exploitation. This, they argue, is not very difficult, because if you want to measure the exploitation, you need to know, next to the amount of produced labour value, the amount of necessary labour that this produced labour value contains. They ask themselves whether it is possible to measure the necessary labour in the real world. In this same paper the fact is stressed that it is possible to approach the same problem from a completely different angle. In this approach we have to bear in mind the fact that workers rarely use the concept 'exploitation' in the way Marx did. They use it at the moment they feel that something is wrong with the way they are treated and paid. They use it in connection with a feeling of injustice, of repression and of humiliation. In the authors' view the workers' way of using the word has something to do with their specific appreciation of what is necessary to workers to reproduce themselves at a specific moment and at a specific place. This approach gives the authors the chance to put their problem differently. Now, they can ask themselves if it is possible to calculate the necessary labour starting from a subjective, but rather widely accepted idea of what people need to reproduce themselves.

The following step consists in clarifying the exact meaning of 'necessary labour'. First of all they want to stress the fact that a notion as 'labour' is not easy to use as a measuring unit. In the first place it is difficult to compare the activity of different workers. Secondly, labour is not an abstract entity, not a homogeneous entity and there doesn't exist a generally accepted way to compare different kinds of labour. Secondly they draw attention to the fact that it is not at all evident what is the meaning of 'necessary'. Referring to Marx they insist that 'necessary' can mean either to reproduce the individual worker, or the collective worker, or the collective worker viewed over 'n' generations. They retain the last interpretation, but they also insist on the fact that this interpretation must not be transformed into a 'bourgeois meaning'. Which we

do when we implicitly accept, that the reproduction of the collective worker over a certain number of generations also means the reproduction of the whole social formation, including the existing relations of labour themselves.

I cannot agree with this. I think that this last meaning, which is qualified as a bourgeois-meaning is an interpretation we can reconstruct from Marx's work. The authors themselves enumerate the different components Marx wanted to be taken into consideration when speaking of necessary labour. Now, Marx's taking into account of the changing psychological and the changing sociological needs of individuals in a historic context and in connection with a changing economic structure, implies their bourgeois interpretation of the term 'necessary labour'. Because, this also means, that in Marx's view the wish to change the existing relations of labour, in a given society, only emerges in the case that the existing and accepted needs cannot be fulfilled, and, that the existing social formation clearly hinders the development of an economy that obviously has better chances to fulfill the existing and accepted needs, for a greater number of people. Hence, taking this into account, one could say, that what the authors call a bourgeois meaning of 'necessary labour' can be found in Marx's theory.

To accept this unusual way of looking at the contents of the consumer vector, means that I have my doubts about Marx's division of labour into productive and non-productive labour. This also means that I have a new problem if I want to make the concept 'necessary labour' operative. This new problem consists in finding the criteria to distinguish between labour needed to assure the working of the economic base of a society on one side and the real usurpation of labour value as the result of relative power on the other side.

The authors don't follow this reasoning, they insist on the importance of the subjective idea of what is considered necessary to live and on the position of power and repression that makes usurpy possible. The authors don't follow this reasoning. They insist on the importance of the subjective dimension of the concept 'exploitation' as the result of a change in the consumer vector through history. They ask themselves which are the methods to measure this change. What I am suggesting is that possibly the subjective appreciation of workers of the concept 'exploitation' is influenced by a subjective appreciation of the amount of necessary labour needed to uphold a particular way of life. I could still put it differently. Although working with a subjective approach to the concept of exploitation, the authors refuse to take the same attitude toward the concept 'necessary labour'. Hence, they don't ask themselves whether workers have a different appreciation of what has to be included into necessary labour to reproduce the collective worker over 'n' generations, given a particular consumer vector. As a result, the authors concentrate on giving good reasons to believe it is possible to develop instruments to measure the amount of labour particular to the fulfillment of the needs at a given moment and in a given society, but they omit to ask the question, why so many workers accept the idea that the reproduction of the social relations is part of the necessary labour.

This wouldn't be very important if they didn't relate their efforts to find methods for measuring real consumer vectors to the discussion of the ethical or scientific nature of Marx's socialism. Their paper starts by stating that the wish (or the lack of wish) of workers to change the existing relations of labour has something to do with their subjective appreciation of exploitation. They rightly insist on the fact that as long as we act as if the consumer vector is given,

we can by no means correct the subjective view on exploitation. Hence, we don't have real scientific arguments to develop the class-conscienceness of the working class. So, they concentrate on the problem of the measurement of necessary labour. Although this results in a more solid interpretation of the objective meaning of exploitation, it doesn't help to explain to the workers that they are exploited because, I think, the workers would fail to understand the authors' calculation of the amount of necessary labour. The subjective impressions workers have of the inevitability of the existing relations of labour, stand between the authors and a scientific argumentation to increase class-conscienceness. So, it is not difficult to understand that the authors conclude, that the ethical dimension cannot be left out of socialism.

*Ethics* : Taking a stand for socialism remains a question of looking at society from an ethical point of view, that implies a specific philosophical anthropology. This seems to be the conclusion of Apostel, Walry and Deconinck in the paper I reviewed above. This conclusion is still true, they say, even if we find the necessary methods to transform crucial basic-concepts of Marx's theory into measurable entities.

The reader includes another paper, this time by K. Raes, that develops an argumentation to prove, that Marx really did believe that ethical systems are intrinsically reactionary, that they slow down emancipation, that they are utterly prejudicial to the interests of mankind. This also seems to be the author's view. This point of view stems from the 6th these on Feuerbach, which implies that there is no fixed human nature. Because there is no fixed human nature, Raes argues, there is no moral system that can regulate conflicts between individuals, groups or classes of society. This refusal of ethical systems is the basis of Marx's thinking. Raes stresses the fact that Marx sees human nature as essentially open. To search for a human essence is, therefore, an impossible and unreasonable task. Marx doesn't uphold a naturalistic morality based on 'a human essence', he upholds a naturalistic axiology. The author explains, that a moral system based on a fixed human essence has to be selective; it fixes what is allowed and what has to be punished for ever. A morality that takes its origin in universal essential qualities of all human beings, cuts down on the different possible ways of developing personalities. This is the reverse of the intentions of Marx. A moral system, starting from an essence of human nature, must be repressive to those capacities and needs which aren't included into the chosen essence. Raes stresses the fact that in Marx's view it is this couple of 'capacities and needs' – and not abstract principles – that has to lead our judgement on the events in society. The author also stresses the fact that by taking the capacities and needs of human beings as a starting point, Marx explicitly makes clear, that we have to put them in opposition to the constraints on one hand, deriving from the biological-physiological basis of human beings and their ecological environment, and on the other hand deriving from the way human societies did develop in the past. I can easily agree with Raes, when he says that Marx explicitly rejected the possibility to describe mankind from the point of view of one, two or more general characteristics. I agree with Raes, that Marx insisted on the fact that human nature is an open nature. I still agree with the author when he says, that Marx insists on the fact that human beings only become human as a result of the creation of the means to realise different 'capacities and needs' they

bear with them. I also agree with Raes when he says that Marx qualifies as 'good' for mankind all the means which enlarge the possibilities for as great a number of men as possible to develop their own capacities and to satisfy their own needs. But all this is, in my view, not enough to state that society can do without a moral system. It doesn't prove that Marx didn't make a difference between right and wrong. It is not proven that moral systems only exist if we accept a fixed human nature with unchangeable features. The author himself gives enough arguments to doubt his affirmation that morality has to be banned. As a matter of fact, Raes introduces the difference between 'moral values' and 'a-moral' values. He says that Marx's a-moral axiology is based on a-moral values such as 'freedom', 'selfactualisation', 'public spirit', 'truth', 'creativity', 'love' etc... He stresses the fact that this is completely different from moral values such as 'right', 'faith', 'modesty', 'sincerity', 'generosity', etc... The difference between both sets of concepts lies, according to the author, in the fact that the a-moral values are not depending on normative rules. This is the case for moral values which exist solely in the presence of such rules. Apart from the fact that I have some difficulties in understanding how the author can disconnect in an absolute fashion both sets of concepts, it strikes me as very strange to state that 'old fashioned' moral systems are not based on a-moral values. We are immediately aware that all great religions make use of both types of concepts. So to pin down the difference between Marx's naturalistic axiology and moral systems, we have to accept the idea that Marx doesn't use (as a matter of fact, doesn't need) the set of concepts which the author describes as moral. Bearing this in mind we can look at what the author himself says about class-conscienceness on p. 214: 'The working class becomes aware, through its labour and confronted with the capitalists, of its own freedom and of the possibilities to realise this freedom by the abolition of the existing production relations. The class-conscienceness of the working class is the self-awareness of every worker that his destiny depends on *the solidarity* between workers.'

Only by taking this passage, it becomes clear that Marx and Raes use both categories of concepts. They both use the a-moral value 'freedom'. It is not the use of this concept that is exceptional, it is the meaning Marx gives to the word that is exceptional: to be free means, according to Marx to be able to fulfill one's own capacities and needs). But even this unusual meaning cannot do without references to moral concepts. The moral concept is 'solidarity' that cannot be understood as anything else than a reference to a norm of behaviour. Marx, in his works, makes clear what 'solidarity' stands for, through the use of paradigmatic examples of this attitude, in the same way as 'old-fashioned' moral systems use such examples to make clear what sort of behaviour they approve. It is by way of examples that the meaning of words as 'faith', 'modesty', etc... becomes clear and give the population the means to act according to norms in view of realising the moral values. This is the same for Marx, when he is using the word 'solidarity'. The so-called a-moral value is explicated in exactly the same way as churches f.i. explicit 'love'. Moral values, norms of behaviour seem to exist within Marx's naturalistic axiology as naturally as they exist within a naturalistic morality. The existing of those norm-related concepts within Marx's thinking implies the existence of 'moral' judgement of men within Marx's thinking. If we want to insist on the a-moral character of Marx's thinking, we can do it by stressing the fact that Marx – as a result of his particular view on

the open nature of mankind — insists on the need to examine every time anew the contents of the rules of behaviour in the light of the changing possibilities to remove constraints, which make the realisation of capacities and fulfillment of needs uncertain or impossible. Hence, I cannot agree with Raes when he says that for Marx this 'a-moral' axiology has a strategic-motivational dimension and that the fight against capitalism has no need of 'moral' judgement or norms of behaviour. As far as I can see, it seems not necessary to exclude 'moral system', 'morality' and all the 'moral values' from our vocabulary to stay in line with Marx. On the contrary, it seems to me that Marx, by stressing the open nature of mankind,

1. gives a clear historical dimension to moral systems;
2. makes clear that new possibilities to remove constraints again and again ask for new normative rules in harmony with these possibilities;
3. creates a new kind of morality that is based on the insight that human beings have to fill in their own way of being a species;
4. makes it possible to define a morally bad attitude, without referring to fixed and absolute ideas. This morally bad attitude deliberately refuses to create the means, which allow a greater number of people to realise their own capacities and to fulfill their own needs.

With this approach Marx undeniably gives a new scientific dimension to moral judgement. His system asks for the study of existing constraints and shows the wish to investigate how to remove them. But nowhere this new scientific dimension suggests that people will stop acting in real circumstances with the help of moral appreciations, even if they are aware that these appreciations change in the course of history and even that they change in the course of one generation.

So we could round off this part of the review by referring to the point of view of Apostel, Walry and Deconinck, in suggesting that their moral dimension is in one sense indeed part of a wish to reach socialism, but that Marx did give a very specific meaning to 'morality'.

*The base and super-structure.* In his paper K. Raes insisted on the negative aspects of the old fashioned moral systems. He calls all of them reactionary, slowing down emancipation, prejudicial. This point of view reminds me of Marx in his early approach to the relations between base and super-structure. In this early view Marx insists on the fact that super-structural elements of society don't play any part in the evolution of a social system. Two papers deal with this aspect of Marx's thinking, starting from very different applications of the same scheme. The first author, L. Abicht, handles the 'base/super-structure'-scheme as a means to analyse literary work. The other author uses the same scheme when studying educational systems. Both authors agree that Marx himself did reconsider his own views on the matter in the course of his life. L. Abicht pins down this critical attitude of Marx by referring to Marx's own words in the 'Einleitung zur Kritik der politischen Oekonomie': 'There is no problem in understanding that Greek art and epic poem are linked to specific forms of society. The difficulty is, that this art still now offers esthetical pleasure and that in a certain sense, these works are an example, an unattainable norm.' Abicht states that in his view, Marx wants to stress the need for great art to include the 'great human values', which, in ordinary life, are alienated and

suppressed. (The author, maybe as a consequence of the fact that he is concentrating on esthetic values, isn't at all anxious to explain what, the great human values are.) Abicht also stresses the fact that neither Marx, nor Engels did work out a complete theory on esthetic evaluation. He remarks that the other important marxist authors, such as Lenin and Trotsky, are only dealing with the question from a political point of view. The paper he represents, gives an argument in favour of a historical materialistic approach, taking into consideration Marx's remark on esthetic pleasure and looking for authors who try to analyse this. This leads him to introduce three authors: Goldman and his genetic structuralism, Caute and the Brechtian dialectic and Jameson with his 'metacomment'. It is, for me very difficult to judge Abicht's approach on Caute and Jameson as I don't know their work. The point Abicht makes, is the fact that Marx shows a remarkable criticism to his own earlier approach of phenomena of super-structural nature. The second author (D. Vandamme), by means of Stuart Hall's paper on the base and super-structure 'metaphor' gives even more impact to this aspect of Marx's work. He reminds us of the evolution of Marx's thinking: in his first view the economic structure is the only active component in the process of restructuring society, while later he comes to a more complex vision on the interaction of both base and superstructure (The 18th Brumaire), to end with the suggestion that on crucial moments non-economic aspects can take an active part in the formulation of 'solutions' to social problems (cf. the struggle for the reduction of the working hours in 'Das Kapital'). He stresses the fact that it is in 'Capital' that we find the idea of 'reproduction'. Althusser's use of the word comes, he says from Marx and from Gramsci. Vandamme gives an account of several theories on the formation of educational systems within capitalist societies, which are directly or indirectly based on the idea of reproduction as we find it in the work of Althusser. He wants to show that the use of Althusser's approach of 'reproduction' gives rise to very important criticism, which he reduces to the following aspects:

1. the fact that Althusser's approach of 'reproduction' concentrates on the logic of capitalism.
2. The fact that contradictory tendencies in the educational system cannot be elaborated.
3. The fact that class struggle is banned from the approach of the educational practice.

These remarks can easily be generalised to every application of 'reproduction' in the given interpretation. Vandamme wants to overcome this criticism by putting forward an interpretation of 'reproduction', that resembles much more Marx's descriptions in 'Capital III'. This implies that he makes the difference between a functionalistic approach of social phenomena and the functional analysis Marx makes use of. To make this point he refers to G.A. Cohen's propositions, from his work 'Karl Marx's Theory of History. A defence.' In this connection Vandamme stresses the fact that Althusser (and most of the authors who work with the concept 'reproduction') introduces an almost mechanical functioning of society. This is not the way in which Marx uses functional analysis on the basis of the fundamental contradictorial character of concrete situations. The mechanical functioning includes the influence of the contradictions of concrete situations on the way reproduction takes place. This is shown in the example of the reduction of the working hours. Vandamme



comes to the conclusion that reproduction has to be seen as a variable data, that can be influenced by class-struggle. He insists on the fact that in Marx's approach reproduction also means reproduction of that struggle. At last Vandamme wants to draw attention to the misunderstanding of that very important concept 'class-struggle'. He agrees with Stedman Jones that not only the outbreaks have to be viewed as 'class-struggle'. He adds that to take the outbreaks only into consideration corresponds with a vision of class-struggle that overestimates the moral dimension. Making the link — which Vandamme doesn't — with Marx's own 'new morality', this would mean that the wish to overthrow existing social relations, makes one blind for the real possibilities to remove constraints. The author's fear to fall for an 'old-fashioned' and therefore rigid and absolute judgement of 'good' and 'bad' workers, with the 'right' and 'wrong' attitudes is justified. But this, on the other hand, is not enough to state that every attitude of working-class people is relevant as to Marx's fundamental goal, 'free men in a free association'. I can agree that the study of every attitude of the working-class can shed a light on the understanding of the historical processes which led up to this moment. But to discard every form of appreciation of the attitudes workers (and others) show, cannot be understood in any other way as dropping Marx's wish to make a better society.

*And still other subjects:* Still three papers are left to be reviewed. One paper, by M. Michielsen, treats of the influence of marxism on psychology and concentrates on the Holzkamp group. Another paper, by R. Doom, deals with the position Marx and his epigones took in connection with colonialism in general and liberation movements in Africa in particular on the one hand and the influence of Marx on political movements now in Africa on the other hand. I don't give a full account of the contents of those papers because they are almost completely subject-oriented. Michielsen gives much more critical comments on the Holzkamp group than on Marx. Doom concentrates more on African movements than on the question of 'marxist' interpretations of these movements. They don't suit my purpose in this sense, that I started this review from the intention to look how the different authors were interpreting and applying basic concepts of Marx's theory.

This is certainly the case in the last paper. This paper, written by L. Apostel, treats on dialectics and alienation. The author's aim is to elaborate all possible arguments to prove, that it is possible to approach those difficult concepts from an analytic point of view. All through the paper he tries to create a dialogue between the dialecticus and the positivist, with the intention to make clear that the dialecticus is coping with real problems, but that to solve these problems we need a much finer and much more precise instrument than the one the dialecticus uses. To reconstruct this paper from a critical point of view would mean to write a new paper. With regret I left it out of this review and I wish and hope that the author himself can find the time to translate his contribution in English.