

exceptions where justice and good, however defined, are done. At the risk of sounding adversariously nihilistic, I must say these benefits seem little more than consolation prizes in a contest run, and won, by utilitarians.

The value of Cohen's work lies elsewhere. In a thoroughly lucid style, sprinkled liberally with metaphors, he successfully maps a sociological domain for the rhetoric of social control. This domain avoids the extremes of credulous acceptance and unilateral debunking. Similarly, Cohen carves out a domain for professional interests, ideologies, and cognitive passions (e.g., classification, testing) as endogenous sources of change. He therefore adds a set of important determinants of social control patterns that must be considered in conjunction with (and, I think Cohen would agree, not instead of) organizational prerogatives and fiscal or legitimation crises of the state.

Finally, Cohen persuasively documents the gap between the rhetoric of destructuring and actual patterns of contemporary social control. One may quibble with the specifics, or question whether a similar gap exists for other forms of deviance such as mental illness. One may also question the wisdom of directly locating social control words and deeds only in wider discourses rather than in specific economic and political conditions. But none of this diminishes Cohen's eloquent accomplishment. The lessons to be drawn from his work bear repeating: Don't believe (or disbelieve) everything you hear. Instead, treat words no differently from deeds, as sociological data. As Cohen admirably demonstrates, the central task then becomes to explore the ways in which rhetoric creates, and is created by, social structures and processes. ●

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Making Nonsense of Marx

Making Sense of Marx, by JON ELSTER. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985. 556 pp. \$49.50 cloth. \$15.95 paper.

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Two decades ago, radical and not-so-radical sociology vilified the reigning framework of structural functionalism first for its functionalism, for assuming that societies tend toward equilibrium, and second for its teleology, for assuming that progress ends with capitalism and the mission of the past is to bring about the present. Marxism provided ammunition to assault the ramparts of structural functionalism. The focus on harmony and persistence was replaced by a focus on conflict and change. The view that history ends with capitalism was replaced by a humanist critique of capitalism. Instead of the future being conceived as the perfection of the present, radical sociology projected a future beyond capitalism, in which its ills would be abolished.

From being a weapon of criticism, Marxism gained acceptance as a fully fledged framework within sociology. And now it has been tarred with the same brush that was used against structural functionalism. Marx and Marxism have been found guilty of functionalism and teleology. These old criticisms now come from new quarters—methodological individualism and, more narrowly, rational-choice models of human action. This criticism of Marxism has been most powerfully presented from within Marxism itself, receiving its most comprehensive form in Jon Elster's *Making Sense of Marx*. In this extraordinarily erudite and complex

book Elster accuses Marx of arguing from consequence to cause in two senses: a synchronic sense in which an institution (for example, the state) is explained by reference to its effects (reproduction of capitalism), and a diachronic sense in which a putative future (for example, communism) explains the past or the present (the mission of the bourgeoisie is to create the material and social bases of communism). Elster tries to strip Marx of this metaphysics, rescuing the only causality we can be sure of: the consequences of individual action. Methodological individualism is "the doctrine that all social phenomena—their structure and their change—are in principle explicable in ways that only involve individuals—their properties, their goals, their beliefs and their actions" (5). As Stinchcombe recently put it, macrosociology is sociology about millions of people.

Elster offers an impressive list of what has to go in Marx. Marx's economic theory belongs to the museum of knowledge. At the root of the problem is the labor theory of value which is "useless at best, harmful and misleading at its not infrequent worst" (120).

The criticisms are familiar, so why does Elster, a philosopher, feel compelled to offer his reflections on Marxian economic theory? The source of his irritation, it seems, lies in the ontological

claims of the labor theory of value. Since the only causal reality is individual action, he will have nothing to do with "underlying structures," essences (such as labor value) behind appearances (prices, profits, etc.). Indeed, he interprets the distinction between essence and appearance as one not of ontological level but of the mistaken projection of a local perspective to the global level. In this instance his methodological individualism appears to have become an ontological individualism—the only reality we can be sure of is the individual.

From the theory of capitalist production Elster moves beyond the economy to consider historical materialism, Marx's philosophy of history. Here he tries to construct the most plausible understanding of how the relations of production first promote and then fetter the forces of production and why the relations of productions have then to be replaced.

At root the problem again is Marx's teleology. Prior stages of history tend irresistibly toward rather than simply being necessary conditions for subsequent stages. This not only causes intellectual sloppiness and confusion but inspires such political disasters as Stalinism and the Red Guard:

We should retain the respect for the individual that is at the core of Marx's theory of communism, but not the philosophy of history that allows one to regard pre-communist individuals as so many sheep for the slaughter [118].

But there is another view of history in Marx that Elster claims is difficult to reconcile with the principle of the ineluctable development of the forces of production: history as the history of class struggle. The observation itself is nothing new but it does provide an opening for the methodological individualist (now game theorist) to shed light on the problem of collective action and the formation of a collective actor. Elster discusses the obstacles to collective action: the risks of going it alone (costs of unilateralism) and benefits to any individual of abstaining while others engage in collective action (the free-rider problem). On the other hand there are the possible gains to the individual from cooperation. These factors relate to the cognitive conditions of collective action.

He then turns to the more remote determinants of collective action, including group size, distance between group members, turnover in group, degree of homogeneity, and technology—what Durkheim regarded as the ingredients of moral density. By treating these as unexplained social forces he is succumbing to methodological collectivism, the assumption that there are "supra-individual entities that are prior to individuals in the explanatory order" (6). Elster may claim that this is only a temporary expedient, but in practice it turns out

that whenever he explains a social phenomenon in terms of properties of individuals he is forced to invoke methodological collectivism. Is it then possible for methodological individualism to say something sociologically interesting without violating its own premises?

It is an old story that in taking individual interests as point of departure, rational-actor models have difficulty explaining the ubiquity of collective action and social movements. And in this respect Elster is ingenious in providing ad hoc explanations for collective action—iterated prisoner-dilemma games for capitalists and "externalities" for working-class action. While they provide a potentially helpful framework for posing the question, once more too much is left unexplained.

Indeed Elster more or less confesses the inadequacy of his solutions when he comes to the analysis of politics. Here he has to shelve his methodological individualism and assume that classes are constituted as collective actors. He shows how Marx's thought progressed from viewing the state as the instrument of the capitalist class to viewing the state as autonomous. But, Elster claims, Marx had no explanation for the autonomy of the state except that such an autonomy served the interests of the capitalist class. Elster finds an alternative "class balance" theory of the state more satisfactory, namely that the autonomy of the state emerges from the conflict between capital and labor.

In principle constituting capital, labor, and the state as three rational actors should lend some new insights into the relationship between politics and economics. In practice it reveals the limitations of game theory which has difficulty enough handling two actors, let alone three. But more important than the technical deficiencies of game theory are its conceptual limits. Elster defines class as "a group of people who by virtue of what they possess are compelled to engage in the same activities if they want to make the best use of their endowments" (331). Presumably the state has to be defined similarly. But this leaves out of account, or rather takes as given, the determination of those endowments, and the goals actors will seek. Game theory as such cannot explain preference orderings or distribution of endowments. Although Elster makes valiant attempts to show how outcomes of games may feed back and transform preference orderings, there is nothing systematic in this endeavor. They are illustrative and suggestive but don't point to that construction of a macro sociology from micro foundations. On the other hand, the beauty of Marxist theory lies in its conceptualization of class as a relationship, a relationship that simultaneously establishes endowments and goals of its members.

As a methodological principle and point of

departure game theory may be appropriate for the analysis of communism where people will enter into social relations voluntarily and where history is made collectively and self-consciously. In class societies where the central social relations precede individuals, history is made behind our backs. No amount of juggling with the concepts of force and coercion can escape the Marxian premise about the priority of social relations that are "indispensable and independent of our will."

It is true that under capitalism the arena of individual choice is continually expanding. We do have to choose employers, schools, television sets, houses, doctors, presidents, toothpaste, home computers and detergents. And because we are forced into such strategic action we tend to obsess about the uncertainties and differences in outcomes, with the result that the conditions that shape our choosing mentalities and the feasible sets are obscured or taken as natural and inevitable. Games are a response to and at the same time hide underlying social relations that we do not choose. To reduce explanations of social phenomena to individual strategic action is to fetishize effects, confusing cause and consequence, the very sin with which Elster charges Marx.

As a point of departure game theory and methodological individualism are the antithesis of the Marxian project. It is not surprising, therefore, that Elster's most profound insights on Marx have little to do with his programmatic formulations, and at times he appears to explicitly break with methodological individualism as when he asserts that social relations are prior to individuals (94-5). Even he occasionally succumbs to a "lack of intellectual discipline."

By the time Elster has finished, there is not much left of Marx. His theory of history, his economic theory, his theory of politics are all found wanting. The ambiguities of Marx are straightened out, the inconsistencies marked down as signs of confusion or wishful thinking. The intellectual struggles that Marx undertook in understanding history, in disclosing forces in the present that might hold the key to the future, in assailing different political antagonists and intellectual legacies are all smudged out. Rather than constituting Marx as an intellectual fighting on many fronts, whose social position was responsible for his "biases" and "passions," Elster disembodies the individual from his writings and constructs a fictive Marx. To that end he painstakingly collects quotes from the most disparate of Marx's writings, giving the same weight to obscure passages from *Theories of Surplus Value* and *The Holy Family* as to his published writings.

Perhaps this is the task of a philosopher: to purge inconsistencies and ambiguities. But such an endeavor does not make sense of Marx, who was

an economist, a sociologist, a historian, and a politician as well as a philosopher. To make sense of Marx's writings one has to understand them as an external conversation with other people's writings as well as an internal conversation with himself. Marx's dialogues with Hegel cannot be assimilated to those with Smith; to do so is to impose a false holism. Contradictions and anomalies in Marx's works arose while he was coming to grips with a changing and differentiated empirical world and challenging diverse intellectual currents. Moreover, these contradictions and anomalies have been the lifeblood and inspiration of the Marxian tradition. To abolish them is tantamount to abolishing that tradition.

Elster makes nonsense of Marx. I now have to make sense of Elster. One can do this in two stages: by recovering what is sensible in his criticisms and then by situating his work. One can agree with Elster's criticism of teleology and functionalism without abandoning them for methodological individualism. Marx's philosophy of history may no longer be convincing, but it still supplies a distinctive agenda of questions. If communism is not inevitable, is it possible? That is, is it a feasible sort of society? Here Elster has a number of interesting things to say—all based on the contradictions of a society whose *raison d'être* is individual self-realization. And if it is feasible in and of itself, is it possible to get to that society? And if so, from what society is the transition possible? And how could such a transition take place? What are the possible futures of capitalism and state socialism?

Equally in Marx's theory of the state functionalism remains an essential point of departure. Following Cohen it is important to distinguish between functionality and functional explanation. Thus, it is one thing to claim that the state is functional for capitalism (that is, preserves capitalism), a claim that Marx and Marxists have made against those who do not see capitalism as a system riddled with conflict, contradictions, and crisis tendencies. It is another thing to explain how it is that the state preserves the capitalist system. Although you wouldn't know it from Elster's book, the latter question has provided the foundations for the debate over Marxist theories of the state.

If the methodological lesson we draw from Elster is that we should be more careful about causality, the substantive contribution must be his comments on and reconstruction of Marx's theory of ideology. He postulates a number of mechanisms to be found in Marx whereby individuals arrive at distorted pictures of the world. Being slave to their products, those whose main preoccupation is the creation of ideas believe that ideas rule the world; while others, because of their

miserable situation, are led to invent a transcendental being. These are the mechanisms of abstraction and projection in which the world is turned upside down. A second mechanism is wishful thinking found, for example, when one class tries to present its interests as the interests of all classes. A third mechanism, which Elster finds most original in Marx, is understanding the whole from the point of view of the part, the "fallacy of composition." Because they are not dependent on any one capitalist, workers think they are independent of all capitalists. [They do?] Capitalists think that the choice open to any one capitalist is open to all of them simultaneously, leading to the erroneous view that money generates profit independently of production.

Underlying Elster's many insights into the construction of ideology is the assumption of a "truth" against which to compare its distortions. Time and again Elster complains that Marx's passions led to biases of compromise, exhortation, and wishful thinking. He himself, on the other hand, presumably escapes bias and prejudice by clear thinking. As he portrays Marx so Elster portrays himself: abstracted from any institutional context. Methodological individualism resonates with a certain wishful thinking of intellectuals, that they can leap out of the social structure imprisoning everyone else. Methodological individualism becomes methodological dualism: workers and capitalists by virtue of their objective functions, preference ordering, and endowments develop distorted pictures of social processes while academics, if they don't succumb to the pitfalls of functionalism and teleology, are able to move toward truth. Such a dualism reflects the isolation

of academics from the world around them, constructing a global picture through the inversion of a local one (their own)—what one might call the fallacy of decomposition.

Elster falls victim to another of his own homemade ideological distortions, conceptual imperialism. Just as Marx charged bourgeois economists with universalizing the ideological effects of capitalism when they subscribed to methodological individualism, so I must lay the same charge at Elster's feet. Methodological individualism is no more applicable to the history of humanity than commodity fetishism.

Elster deludes himself that, in pronouncing what is of continuing interest in Marx, he has escaped history's prison. But there can be no innocent reading of Marx, no purified Marx. What is worth salvaging at any one point in time is dependent on the issues of the day and the social position of those seeking an answer. Every Marxist is interested in discovering what is true and important in Marx, but this is relative to the historical and social context; that is why there is a Marxist tradition. Truth cannot be reduced to correspondence with the facts and internal consistency but is relative to a tradition of thought.

Elster represents only one response to the ebb of social movements and the retreat of Marxism. He is embarrassed by what he regards to be the metaphysical baggage that is holding up the Marxist train. Yet in unloading the train he has left only a fragile shell, which bears ever less resemblance to the original model. Elster has a choice to make: Marxism or methodological individualism. ●

The Last of the Marxist Urban Sociologists?

Consciousness and the Urban Experience: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization, by DAVID HARVEY. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. 293 pp. \$22.50 cloth.

The Urbanization of Capital, by DAVID HARVEY. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985. 239 pp. \$22.50 cloth.

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David Harvey became a Marxist during the early 1970s. The first essays in his *Social Justice and the City*, published in 1973, were still written from a liberal perspective and only the second half of this lucid and powerful book was inspired by Marxism and political radicalism.

Marxism had begun to conquer urban research just a few years before Harvey's conversion to the new faith. Castells started to publish around 1968 in France; his *Urban Question* appeared in French

in 1972, and by the early 1970s his version of Marxist structuralism gained hegemony virtually overnight in France. In the Anglo-Saxon world, and particularly in the United States, Harvey was among the very first to understand the intellectual potential of this new trend. Harvey not only responded in time to the emergent Marxist challenge, but he did so with a great deal of autonomy.

Social Justice and the City was the best Marxist