

As concerns the main contents of the new book by prolific Danish philosopher and social scientist Asger Sørensen, they are certainly relevant and urgent, for they constitute an articulate critical reflection upon the grim reality of avoidable human degradation and suffering within the capitalist order, as well as upon their callous and hopeless acceptance therein, all of which are important features of contemporary social life worth thinking about and, possibly, acting against.

Building upon a variety of essays written independently of one another and published individually elsewhere on previous occasions (e.g. the prestigious scholarly journal *Philosophy & Social Criticism*), the book is internally diverse, but it is neither contradictory nor overwhelmingly heterogeneous. Rather, the book's structure is sensibly and comprehensibly open, for it comprises:

(A) An introduction, a presentation and an interlude that, somewhat redundantly but very usefully, lead the reader into the rich intellectual panorama to follow, highlighting above all: (1) the common conceptual threads linking together the two subsequent, admittedly uneven parts; (2) their being the result of a single process of intellectual growth and maturation lasted many years; and (3) their more or less direct impinging upon the Continental school of thought known as Critical Theory, to which the book's author claims to belong himself.

(B) A first part, entitled "Economy" and focussing on the classic social thinkers Émile Durkheim and Bataille, whose reflections provide a profound and complex theoretical backdrop for the correct understanding of the axiological significance of the emancipatory movements emerged in capitalist countries in our young new century (e.g. the *Occupy Wall Street* movement in the US, the *Indignados* of Spain, etc.). Although admired and mined for important insights in existing realities and problems, neither classic social thinker is idealised and extensive criticism of their views, especially Bataille's, is offered too;

(C) A second part, called "Dialectics", covering a much wider spectrum of intellectual sources in all senses, i.e. disciplinary, geographical, historical and linguistic. It is also a more complex section, which requires closer attention to detail and serious efforts of synthesis in order to appreciate how the different notions of dialectics explored and explained in its five chapters (i.e. Aristotle's, Hegel's, Marx's, Bataille's, Tong Shijun's, Mao's, and the Frankfurt School's) can be combined together so as to shed light on contemporary capitalism, its many woes and their possible solutions;

(D) A postscript that expands upon and integrates (A), developing a critique of key-aspects of liberal and neoliberal political economy, especially Ricardo's doctrine of comparative advantage and the macroeconomic practical manifestations of the Austrian school of

economics in pre-2008 developing countries and in post-2008 Europe, under the banner of austerity. Somewhat disconnected from both (A) and (B), it is *per se* a very interesting piece of intellectual reflection, and one that should appeal to open-minded economists as much as to social scientists at large and philosophers.

Noteworthy and original is the book's attempt to give a better-contoured and more positive shape to the notion of *cultural Marxism*, which has been used very loosely in contemporary social discourse and, typically, with an almost taken-for-granted negative connotation. In this manner, the book can be useful both to the friends and to the foes of the broadly humanitarian, democratic and socialist (i.e. *not* liberal, as the book's author vehemently states in his postscript) cultural tradition that goes under this name and that the book's author identifies, investigates, interrogates and invigorates. Whether trying to promote it or to demote it, both sides can benefit from having a conceptually more refined version of it to dissect, debate and disagree upon.

From a scholarly perspective, the book is verily informed and informative. If anything, it is scholarly thorough and thoroughly scholarly. Its main arguments are sensible and sensibly constructed, but a reader unfamiliar with the classics of philosophy and of social thought that are so frequently referred to therein is unlikely to be able to grasp such arguments with ease, if at all. The spectrum of ideas and ideologies presented and toyed with in the book is immense, even if inevitably partial, and what is presented and toyed with is done so in a competent, intelligent and perceptive manner, as well as in an articulate, meticulous and subtle one. The overall style of the book is plainly academic. Positively clear and professionally tailored, no reader will find thrilling passages, stimulating wit or spiritually inspiring prose to ponder upon. Yet, it is unlikely that any reader but an academic one will purchase the book and read it.

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