EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVES

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS, AND ANOTHER MARXIST PUBLISHING MILESTONE

This Special Issue, “Socializing Philosophy,” takes us directly to where we need, periodically, to go: to the roots of the Marxist worldview, and movement. Focusing on the human dimension, social and individual — as explained in detail in the Guest Editors’ “Introduction,” immediately following — gets us beyond the ever-present temptations of static, contemplative ontology/epistemology, with its artificial dualisms and unresolvable dilemmas. Philosophy thus becomes an inseparable component of worldwide scientific and political practice; without, indeed, being reduced to that practice or disappearing within it.

As always, our deepest thanks to the Guest Editors, Russell Dale and Justin Holt, for conceiving, inviting, corresponding, vetting, troubleshooting, and assembling — without all of which an issue of this sort could never take shape. Guest Editors of Special Issues always wind up saying “We didn’t know it would be this much work!” And, again as always, we invite readers to continue the conversations addressed in these exciting inquiries into aspects of the human social condition, in future issues. Recall also our “Call for Papers” for a Special Issue on “The Russian Revolution, One Century Later,” scheduled for (of course!) October 2017; see the details in our October 2015 issue (Vol. 79, No. 4).

Which brings us to — Volume 80, No. 1! This issue marks entry into our ninth decade of existence, a major achievement for a journal that is, to put it mildly, non-hegemonic in the capitalist world where we live. For those of us who have made Science & Society a major intellectual and political commitment, it has been exhilarating, at times frustrating, but ultimately something that we could not have gone without. We hope to say a bit more about this anniversary moment as the current volume year progresses.

D. L.
INTRODUCTION

Socializing Philosophy

RUSSELL DALE and JUSTIN HOLT

It is not clear to what exactly the term “philosophy” is supposed to apply. The European tradition tends to take the term “philosophy” as denoting a genus to which various species of philosophy are supposed to belong: ethics, political philosophy, metaphysics, epistemology, logic, aesthetics, philosophy of history, and so forth. In turn, each of these sub-disciplines has — again, by tradition — had its own historically varying folds of issues. But, what is the ground of these divisions? An appeal to “eternal philosophical questions” is still pretty common, in spite of general agreement even within bourgeois philosophy that there is no acceptable basis for such a conception. But, no doubt, the institutions that have maintained these neat sets of sub-disciplines and issues within “philosophy” have themselves been formed and informed not by “eternal questions,” but by the needs of those who created these institutions, that is, largely — to the extent we continue to restrict ourselves to European traditions of philosophy — the ruling classes of Europe and its later ideologically aligned offspring.

The Marxian tradition of action and thought is both a scuttling and a continuation of the European philosophical tradition. There is no uncritical continuity; there is no clean break. The meaning of the relation between traditions before Marx and Engels and what has come since has not been unambiguously stated, and it is doubtful that such an unambiguous statement is forthcoming. The Marxian tradition, after all, is not merely about what the correct thing to say is about such a matter, but rather is more focused on what are the material and historical needs of those who would escape the tyranny of capital. How the latter project should approach, or even whether it should bother to approach, the question above is not at all a completely settled and clear matter.
Nonetheless, we still speak of “doing Marxian philosophy” or “philosophizing within a Marxian framework,” and similar locutions. These are also somewhat vaguely defined, but we can be sure that we are not just referring to “eternal questions,” but to questions and thought that in one way or another are related to the historical, social, economic, and political reality that underlies our lives under capitalism, and the need for social change.

The essays in this special issue of *Science & Society* are all concerned with topics that somehow get considered “philosophical,” and yet clearly touch on other disciplines as well. Marxism tends to break down traditional boundaries as it challenges the interests that set up those boundaries; Marxist philosophizing all the more so, in fact, frequently challenging sub-traditions within the Marxist tradition itself. But, if there is a common theme to these essays, it is in taking the questions that they are concerned with and seeing them from a social and historical perspectives rather than, as is generally the case in bourgeois academic philosophy, from an asocial and ahistorical perspective.

Cinzia Arruzza’s paper discusses social reproduction feminism as a means to overcome ahistorical and abstract conceptions of gender oppression and capitalism. Social reproduction theory seeks a materialist and unified understanding of gender, race, and class exploitation, without recourse to dualisms of various sorts. It attempts to show that neither biology nor abstract economics, but the specific historic conditions of production, are what produce gender roles. Social reproduction theory avoids the problem that intersectionality theory suffers from: co-determination of race, gender, and class without an explanation of how these allegedly autonomous systems of domination and exploitation achieve unity-in-difference. Social reproduction theory is able to encapsulate domestic labor as socially necessary labor in distinction from formal paid labor, thus avoiding some of the pitfalls of the domestic labor debate. Arruzza defends the theory of social reproduction against criticisms of biological and economic determinism and of functionalism. Arruzza shows that the reproduction of capitalism is dependent on a gendered division of labor. This does not imply that social reproduction theory depends on functionalist explanation. Rather, forms of social reproduction are historical and not static; thus there is no genderless form of capital, since all forms of capital are historical.

Paul Gomberg’s paper shows that distributive justice is not possible in societies for which money acts as a universal means for each person to achieve their own conception of the good. In contradistinction to the notion of distributive justice, Gomberg argues for what he calls *contributive justice*, which allows people to earn respect from their contributions. Any society that utilizes money rationalizes differential holdings of money according to merit or luck. This means that members of any society which has
inequality in money holdings will hold those with less money in contempt. Even in a Rawlsian just society of equal citizenship people will be subject to differences in wealth and income. Equalization of wealth and income would make irrational the instrumentality of money. Money become useless when all activities lead to the same outcome, equalization of money holdings. Gomberg argues that the problems of a money economy make a transition phase from capitalism to communism that utilizes money contradictory with respect to individual motivation for action. Since distributive justice is impossible, Gomberg argues for a notion of the good that does not make money a requirement for individual advancement. This requires a conception of the good life based on our contributions to total social production instead of our individual extractions. Gomberg finds that a conception of the good life as contribution requires workplace democracy and an end to the division between complex and simple labor. A contributive conception of justice is based on the understanding that people’s contributions are a good, producing goods and services for others, and that these contributions are also a duty; without these contributions people’s needs would go unmet.

The essay by Aaron Jaffe investigates Marx’s reversal of the priority Aristotle gave to actuality over potentiality, especially as this pertains to humanity as a species. Aristotle gave priority to actuality not only for existing things (like you and me), but for essences as well (like the human species). Jaffe argues first that even Aristotle’s thought can allow us to look at an essence not merely as an actual form, but as a power to produce actual instances or realizations of a form. If this is right, then Aristotle’s understanding of essence can be seen as taking possibility or potentiality as being at least coeval with the form that, through activity, becomes actualized in time. It is this ability to take potentiality as infecting actuality that makes possible Marx’s reversal of Aristotle in pursuit of an adequate ground for social critique. If actuality simply has priority over possibility, then critique of this or that historical direction of human society is a meaningless non-starter, since what is determines what will be. But, if what will be is based as much on what can be as on what is, there is wiggle room for social critique. And, it is this, Jaffe contends, that is behind Marx’s reversal of Aristotle. Jaffe argues that Marx’s understanding of human essence is a matter of understanding the human capacity to create new and expanded possibilities. When this capacity produces diminished possibilities society becomes a locus of alienation. This can be seen in capitalism, as human potential is increasingly restricted within the bounds set by profit-maximization, regardless of whether human needs are met. Jaffe also argues that this conception of the equal primacy of potentiality and actuality is constant throughout Marx’s works and counters views that would create a break between Marx’s earlier “philosophical” writings and his later critique of political economy.
Karsten Struhl’s paper is a argument for a conception of human nature in Marx’s writing. He notes that it is common among some Marxists to disavow that Marx has a conception of human nature. Struhl recognizes and demonstrates that there are several passages in Marx’s corpus that can be read to support this view. Other Marxists argue that there is a conception of human nature in Marx, but one that is entirely historical. Struhl argues in contradiction to both of these positions that Marx has a “historical concept of human nature . . . grounded in a robust trans-historical concept of human nature.” The basis of his thesis is the conjecture forwarded by Marx and Engels in the German Ideology that humans produce their existence, and in this production they create new needs. Human acts of production and world transformation create a “second nature” where new needs have arisen that must be satisfied. Struhl mentions that this idea has been expressed by Aristotle and Marcuse, but Rousseau also uses the notion to great effect in The Origin of Inequality and in the Social Contract. As modes of production change, so does our second historical nature, while the means of this change is the trans-historic capacity of humans to produce their world. We all require food even if what we consider food is dependent on our point in history. This structure of trans-historic and historical allows Struhl to show another Aristotelian move in Marx’s ideas: the possibility of human flourishing. Human flourishing is Marx’s conception of communism as a universal ethic where people can achieve a full expression of their abilities and potentials. The basis for this universal ethic is trans-historic human nature, in particular our need to produce. Human beings’ desire to produce is in conflict with the surplus-value extraction requirements of capitalism, where freedom of expression in our laboring is contrary to reproduction of capital. The conception of communism is built around our natural antagonism to the strictures of surplus-value production. Struhl cites a host of supporting evidence that humans have altruistic tendencies in support of the view that humans are not naturally competitive, at least within a single society. Between societies there is the conjecture held by some anthropologists and biologists (such as E. O. Wilson) that humans are naturally warlike. Struhl counters this worry with the hypothesis that warlike tendencies may be a historic and not a trans-historic aspect of our human nature, a hope shared by Hume who thought our reason could make our sentiments more public and social.

Matthew Quest’s article is a study of the thought of C. L. R. James in his 1948 work Notes on Dialectics. James’ study focuses on Hegel’s Science of Logic, but it is not a study of Hegel’s “logical categories” or how Hegel derives these, but rather of the way in which dialectic can be used in emancipatory struggles. For James, the unquestionable starting point is the goal of a society of self-governing workers. From here the details of understanding where we are today and how we can get from where we are today to that goal is what
political struggle is all about. James struggled with contradictory tendencies in his thought with regard to how this would play itself out. On the one hand, he thought dialectics is not something that needs to be taught to workers for them to work out how to achieve their goals. Workers think perfectly adequately without such tutoring. But, on the other hand he didn’t at all take seriously major anarchist writers on social change. He thought that there is clearly a need for organization and retained the influence of Lenin throughout his work. Quest also contrasts James’ thought with that of Camus and Marcuse to shed interesting light on James’ concerns. James’ deep and fundamental concern for the liberation of the African American people also makes the study of his work of genuine interest today.

We also include two book reviews on philosophic topics. First is the review by James Trybendis of the book by Anahid Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity*, which is a phenomenological revaluation of the act and event of listening in the contemporary age of music consumption. Trybendis shows that Kassabian argues for a distributed subjectivity brought about by the ubiquitous presence of music in everyday life. Trybendis finds Kassabian’s idea to be interesting but argues that the theory does not connect with a critique of the various events of listening.

The review by Russell Dale (one of the editors of this issue) is of *Listening to Ourselves: A Multilingual Anthology of African Philosophy*, edited by Chike Jeffers, a collection of philosophic essays written in six different African languages and published along with English translations. The essays cover a large number of traditional as well as non-traditional philosophic topics, and they have a unique perspective which they bring to the discussions. Each of these essays, on the one hand, considers the struggles of peoples deeply affected by European colonization and, on the other hand, investigates how to sublate foreign domination and modes of knowledge that derive from traditional life.

The essays and book reviews assembled here all reflect the movement towards social and historical understanding of ongoing, concrete social issues and activity, and not a merely abstract, imagined speculation on alleged “eternal” philosophical problems. At the same time, they are distinct in their approaches and demonstrate a diversity of methods and concerns within contemporary Marxian philosophizing today. Each of the topics and issues in play here is richly deserving of continued investigation and incorporation into continued struggle.