



## Book Reviews / Buchbesprechungen / Comptes rendus de lecture et aperçus

**Geng Yang**

### **Basic Theoretical Research** **on Marxist Philosophy**

**Springer, Singapore 2021**

This book, a translation of Geng Yang's 2013 book in Chinese, explores the groundbreaking views and insightful themes of modern Marxist philosophy, taking into account the most recent advances and significant developments in China. The book summarises and comprehensively presents past and current developments in Marxist philosophy. Renowned author Geng Yang also outlines a roadmap for future research in China, skilfully presenting a wide-ranging examination of the main theoretical challenges in the field of modern Chinese Marxist philosophy. The book will certainly promote interest in modern Chinese philosophy.

The author dedicated the book to the “thinker of the millennium” Karl Marx, the author of *Das Kapital* and the originator of Marxist philosophy. The author is inspired by both Marx and Engels in his writings, and believes that researchers of Marxist philosophy must be unbiased to truly understand the fundamentals of Marxist philosophy. The search for truth is a long and arduous journey, both an intellectual endeavour and a way of life. On the one hand, Marx can be a beacon for the human journey towards self-realisation and for a deeper and more thorough understanding of the world around us, given that Marx sees human activity as the basis for human liberation and human existence. On the other hand, Marxist philosophy offers a solution to the conflict between human beings and nature and between human beings and other human beings – the main aim is to set right the relations between man and nature, nature and society, and between rulers and ruled – and thus Marxist philosophy is a synthesis of philosophy and the reformation of the material world

whose worldview is anchored into science and rationality without which any perspective is insufficient.

The author of this phenomenal work wonderfully explains the various aspects of human existence, which he calls the “ontology of existence”. Marxist philosophy revolves around human existence, a philosophy that can therefore be called practical ontology. Advances in science, practice, and philosophy have highlighted the value of Karl Marx's practical ontology. According to the author, these developments in science did not contradict the modernity and contemporary applicability of Marxist philosophy. Lukács, the founder of Western Marxism, emphasised the revival of Marxist ontology with the aim to understand the world on the basis of existence. The author carefully dissects the impact of practise on the ontology of the existing world and human existence. All living beings undergo material transformation and interact with their environment to sustain their existence. Material production is the glue that holds together the social cohesion of society. However, material production is not possible without spiritual production, which in turn is a by-product of concept and awareness and theoretical, physical and spiritual products. Spiritual production is the fulcrum of all social productions, its production exercises full control over social organisms by maintaining the various relations. Social organisms cannot sustain themselves without reproducing, which is mainly a human production. Social life includes material production, spiritual production and human production. All three coexist in history and constrain each other, and each exerts a profound influence on society.

Later in the book, Geng Yang devotes an entire chapter to the practical foundations of dialectics. Dialectics considers theoretical thought by taking into account the history and achievements of human thought. Marx's materialist dialectics has its origins in Hegel's idealist dialectics, which is also called conceptual dialectics. The material dialectic can only

be understood if Hegel's conceptual dialectic is thoroughly examined. Marxist philosophy views human liberation as a process that revolutionises the world. The practical communist seeks to be the harbinger of change, heralding the dissolution and disintegration of the status quo. The abolition of the status quo and the prevailing order is seen as essential to human liberation. This is one of the most important ideological statements of Marxist ontology. The author also sheds light on the dialectics of the critique of ontology. Dialectics is the theory of contradictions, abstract contradictions. Dialectics deals with the relationship between thought and existence and between man the human being and the world. The real contradictions lie in the thinking of human beings. In the analysis of consciousness and the critique of ideology, the author addresses the relationship between man and consciousness and between language and consciousness. It's human existence that determines consciousness and not vice versa. The products of ideology do not perish through intellectual critique alone. Moreover, the author asserts that practice determines cognition and not vice versa. Real human activities form the basis of cognitive structures. Man demonstrates his cognitive achievements in society by using the language symbol system, i.e. writing, to achieve immortality. However, with the development of practical activities, human cognitive performance develops through social-genetic evolution over several generations. Each new generation produces new cognitive activities that build on the heritage of the previous generation. Interestingly, the main theme of Marxist philosophy is the realisation of the potential of the masses and human freedom. Human freedom and progress are linked to social development. The ultimate goal is to realise all-round and free human development everywhere. Social progress is a prerequisite for achieving this end. Every step of human progress is a step towards a world of freedom. Mao Zedong called human history the history of ceaseless progress from the world of necessity to the world of freedom. The goal of freedom does not lie in a distant, utopian future; rather, it can be achieved by resorting to feasible social practises.

The author comprehensively analyses the excesses of the Western bourgeoisie's hegemony and overwhelming control over world markets and how they affect developing countries like China. He rightly points out that the Western bourgeoisie, with the power it's acquired through the exploitation of world markets and the commercialisation of production, has invaded China and colonised most of the world. This western bourgeoisie forced developing countries like China by force to

adopt a capitalist mode of production and thus successfully established a capitalist world system. In the modern world, the industrialised countries exploit the cheap labour of the developing countries to strengthen their hold on the means of production, make their products more affordable and increase their global sales. The Western bourgeoisie keeps the developing countries in debt by lending to the emerging countries at high interest rates. To this end, it uses its monopolistic arms such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In the first half of the last century, backwardness and progress flourished simultaneously. About ninety per cent of industry consisted of individual agriculture and traditional handicrafts. A meagre ten percent of industry could be classified as modern. This modern industry employed about three million workers. These two strands of the modern and the old economy existed in parallel. This was Chinese productivity in the first half of the last century. These two forms of productivity affected China differently. There were two possibilities for China's future development. Either the adoption of capitalist relations of production or the establishment of socialist relations of production. This dichotomy produced two Chinas. This is due to the capitalist contradiction of productivity. China was for a long time an island state cut off from the rest of the world. It was forcibly pulled onto the path of world history by the Western capitalist nations. During this pull, Western capitalism established new industries in China, destroyed the pillars of feudal economy and involuntarily gave a boost to the development of Chinese capitalism. On the other hand, the capitalist nations made common cause with the Chinese feudal elites to contain the flourishing of capitalism in China. China's economic future is determined by two factors: the nature of the world's relationship with China and the course of world history.

Certainly no book is complete without its justified criticisms. This book is not without its weaknesses either. First, the book was persistent in presenting the economic classes as bourgeois and proletariat. On the contrary, the class structure today is more complex and diverse, as it's become unclear who exactly belongs to the proletariat and who to the bourgeoisie. The middle classes thrive everywhere, and where they are "bourgeois" to the lower classes, they are called or treated as "proletariat" by the higher classes. Secondly, the author has not mentioned that benign nature of capitalism in the 21st century and that the state social security system can also protect workers. Despite these minor shortcomings, author Geng Yang deserves credit for putting together this wonderful book. This ex-

ceptional work is recommended for students of philosophy, Marxism, Chinese studies, scholars and all interested readers, it is characterised by a clear presentation, a well-structured outline and meaningful discussions and will certainly a valuable addition to libraries.

**Yingli Han**

### **Dragan Jakovljević**

## **Das Selbstvertrauen der Vernunft und die Sokratische Methodik**

### **Leonard Nelsons kritische Philosophie heute**

**ISK [ICK], Podgorica 2021**

Dragan Jakovljević' jüngstes Buch *Das Selbstvertrauen der Vernunft und die Sokratische Methodik. Leonard Nelsons kritische Philosophie heute* geht auf kritisch-analytische Distanz zu seinem Gegenstand: der Philosophie Leonard Nelsons. Diese ist der Versuch, an den eigentümlichen Kantianismus Jakob Friedrich Fries' anzuknüpfen. Eigentümlich ist dieser Kantianismus deshalb, weil er quer zu den großen Strömungen des Badischen und Marburger Kantianismus liegend eine rationalistische Philosophie zu etablieren suchte, die von einem psychologischen Faktum ausgehend ein philosophisches System zu errichten trachtete. Damit war die Kritik der zeitgenössischen Kantianer vorprogrammiert. Jakovljević erörtert mehrfach und differenziert in seiner Abhandlung die Einwände Ernst Cassirers (z.B. 112). Nach dem Gesagten dürfte auf der Hand liegen, dass sich Nelson dem Psychologismusvorwurf aussetzt – die Kritik Husserls an Nelson wird indessen von Jakovljević nur am Rande erwähnt und von Jakovljević nicht geteilt. Im Gegenteil: er lobt Nelsons Mut, in psychologischen Untersuchungen mehr als nur einen genetischen Nutzen zu sehen (119–120).

Diese kurzen einführenden Bemerkungen sind wichtig, denn es ist in den letzten Jahren etwas still um Nelsons Philosophie geworden. Jakovljević' Buch kann als deutlicher und lauter Ruf verstanden werden, der dazu geeignet ist, diese Stille zu beenden. Der Verfasser

hat sich bereits seit seiner 1988 in Mannheim eingereichten Dissertation mit Nelson befasst und gilt als ausgewiesener Kenner der Materie. Warum lohnt sich nun eine Beschäftigung mit Nelson oder genauer: Warum lohnt sich die Lektüre des vorliegenden Buches? Nelson war eine philosophische Persönlichkeit, die nicht nur originelle philosophische Gedanken hervorbrachte, sondern auch politisch dachte und agierte (13). Bedeutende Gelehrte waren Nelsons Schüler bzw. wirkten in seinem Umfeld. An dieser Stelle seien nur Kurt Grelling und Julius Kraft erwähnt. Letzterer wurde – wie Jakovljević betont – von Karl Popper geschätzt und rezipiert, neuere philosophiegeschichtliche und biographische Studien betonen den Einfluss des Werkes Nelsons auf Poppers eigene Ideen. Ferner wurde von Hans Albert seitens des Kritischen Rationalismus auf Nelsons Versuch, einen archimedischen Punkt der Erkenntnis zu finden, kritisch Bezug genommen. In diesem Zusammenhang ist auch Viktor Krafts kurze Einlassung auf die „Unmöglichkeit der Erkenntnistheorie“ zu erwähnen. Jakovljević ist diesem intellektuellen Umfeld verbunden und diese Verbundenheit ist in seinem Werk auf nahezu jeder Seite zu spüren: Sein Buch ist keine apologetische Exegese von Nelsons „epistemologischen Fundamentalismus“ (36, 100), sondern eine differenzierte Kritik von einer anderen, erkenntnistheoretischen diametral entgegengesetzten Seite her. Jakovljević macht also dem Fallibilismus durchaus Zugeständnisse, ist aber gleichzeitig darauf bedacht, dessen relativistischen oder skeptizistischen Konsequenzen aus dem Weg zu gehen (vgl. 123–125). Es ist dem Verfasser zugute zu halten, dass er sich damit die Sache nicht zu einfach macht und Nelsons Philosophie leichtfertig als veraltet und unhaltbar abkanzelt:

„Der Traum von der Metaphysik als Wissenschaft, ihrer Vorrangstellung zur Erkenntnispraxis positiver Wissenschaften, unbezweifelbarer Gewissheit, Unkorrigierbarkeit und Un austauschbarkeit ihrer apriorischen Grundsätze [...] ist weitestgehend ausgeträumt. Hiermit ist die Metaphysik aber zu keinem philosophischen Scheinproblem geworden. Ihre Depotenzenierung hat nicht zugleich zu ihrer Demission geführt.“ (154)

Jakovljević macht deutlich, dass anhand von Nelsons Werk die Frage „nach der adäquaten Auslegung metaphysischer Voraussetzungen unseres Weltverständnisses, ihrer Beziehung zur psychologischen Verfasstheit menschlicher Vernunft, sowie nach der Interpretation ihrer epistemischen Autorität“ erörtert werden könne und diese im Mittelpunkt seiner Ausführungen stünde (153). Diese Frage sei durchaus auch noch heute von Relevanz. Mit Nelson zu philosophieren und die Unhaltbarkeit seiner Position darzulegen eröffnet somit