RETHINKING MARXISM VOLUME 16 NUMBER 4 (OCTOBER 2004)

Subjects of Justice?

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In Global Economy, Global Justice, *George DeMartino calls us to imagine a new international order, one in which the global marketplace supports rather than undermines social justice. Courageously and inventively, DeMartino takes on neoliberalism, moral absolutism, cultural relativism, and theoretical quietism, outlining a number of just and feasible international trading regimes. What we are asked to supply for ourselves is a vision of the politics and subjects of this new order. This is a challenge that we can happily take on, given the hopeful, practical, and well thought out platform provided by DeMartino.*

Key Words: Global Economy, Politics, Subjects

Reading *Global Economy, Global Justice* prompted me to ponder the elements of courage. What came to mind immediately were boldness of vision, greatness of intention, unwearying effort, and confident modesty—a list that somehow seemed pallid and incomplete. What was it about the book that brought me to this quixotic philosophical exercise? Just about everything, from its topical focus to its moral stance to its poststructuralist epistemology. *Global Economy, Global Justice (GEGJ)* addresses the question of whether a global market economy is compatible with social justice, defined as making it possible for each person to live a full and satisfying life. It answers this question in the affirmative, showing how social justice might not only be compatible with but actually produced through market interactions. With a Social Index Tariff Structure (SITS), for example, countries would win greater access to export markets by expanding worker rights and fostering income equality, instead of being "penalized with diminishing competitiveness and capital flight" for such achievements, as might be expected under a neoliberal trade regime (DeMartino 2000, 224). Thus market incentives would begin to work toward justice rather than fostering a race to the bottom.

As I finished the book I added nonavoidance (of hard things) to my list of elements of courage. Here's just a partial enumeration of the hard things *GEGJ* takes on.

(1) First of all, the book critically examines neoliberalism, perhaps the dominant discourse framing and shaping social existence today, so from the outset it seems to confront a monumental adversary. But it also moves well beyond critique to affirm a workable model of social justice that is consonant with a globally integrated market economy. In its pages we are offered the possibility of a global market regime that does not enshrine growth or maximization and that recognizes competition as

ISSN 0893-5696 print/1475-8059 online/04/040355-05

DOI: 10.1080/0893569042000270843

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

something that can be worked with to deliver outcomes we might desire. The market is declawed in George DeMartino's vision, and globalization is constructed in a humane and humanitarian image—providing a benign and even nurturant alternative to the neoliberal vision of the survival of the most efficient. Under DeMartino's tutelage we stray from neoliberal automatism of efficient markets producing optimal outcomes into the normative groping-ground of everyday politics, and we do it with a minimum of fuss. We see clearly that it's not about whether markets and globalization are good or bad, but about what kinds of markets and globalization we want to create.

I realized after reading this part of the book that a sense of proportion is perhaps the principal ingredient of fearlessness. Whereas I'd been imagining neoliberalism as a giant, DeMartino makes relatively short work of it; he's not David but it's not Goliath; it's not bite-sized but it's his size.[1] DeMartino confronts the neoliberal order as his appropriate and commensurate adversary, and we feel that the opponents are well matched; he can argue with it on its own terms but confront it on *his* grounds—normative grounds. We feel glad that he's doing a huge job for us while recognizing that for him it's not so huge. This is just how he works.

(2) On the way to its destination *GEGJ* takes on the longstanding debate between moral objectivism and cultural relativism, exposing the way that the former relies upon presumption and assertion (undermining the "objectivity" it claims as its ground) while the latter rests on untenable, unpoliceable, unmaintainable boundaries between isolated cultural units. No group can claim that its culture is the only true one (the arrogant moral objectivist extreme) and none can claim that its is pure and uncontaminated, not to be touched or judged by another culture (the extreme of cultural relativism). Every community has ambiguous, arbitrary, and shifting boundaries—cultural purity is always already violated, and interaction is unavoidable: "*we* have always already acted upon *them* (and vice versa)" (141; emphasis in the original). Once again the issue is how we interact, not whether.

(3) There's a third difficult issue, not directly dealt with in the book but unavoidably present, and that's the logical possibility of espousing particular policies if one is working within an antiessentialist framework. Again this one is confronted head on in DeMartino's work, if not explicitly in this text. DeMartino is operating within an antiessentialist framework of "overdetermination" in which everything is understood as contingent and context-dependent. Thus when one espouses a policy initiative, one has no necessary guarantee or even probable sense of its outcomes. Should we then avoid policy processes, refuse to advocate particular policies, hesitate to prescribe, because of incomplete knowledge and the inevitability of unintended consequences? Unwilling as he is to accept the political quiescence implied by an affirmative answer to these questions, DeMartino traces the hesitancy they evince to an unwitting essentialism that creeps into overdeterminism in practice. While the

1. Actually, his straightforward and methodical (though not unexciting) approach reminds me of that familiar practical advice to those embarking on large projects: "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time."

overdeterminist epistemology asserts that theory can never faithfully reflect the real world, those who refuse to involve themselves with policy because of its unpredictability are caught up in their fidelity to the overdeterminist "reality" of ceaseless change and infinitely complex causation (DeMartino 1992).

I could go on with this list of difficult issues that *GEGJ* refuses to step away from, but I'm anxious to get to the things that made the book difficult for me as a reader, the things that forced me to react, reflect, and finally to change. I'll explain myself by using the example of SITS, which would require a major accounting effort on the part of every country involved in international trade.

SITS has the flavor of a solution to a particularly difficult puzzle, with some of the formality and unmotivatedness that attend an exercise or thought experiment. In its expository incarnation it has a wrapped-up feel; everything fits, all the elements are harmonized. As such I initially found it hard to stomach. I felt the fear of the "solution" that is the installed normative order in the fullness of its representation. Perversely the only thing I could think of, in the presence of its perfection, was the decay and dessication that would accompany its actualization. (In the face of perfection, the future can only be degeneracy.) I imagined the bureaucracy that would be have to be put in place, the huge data collection effort within each nation for accounting social achievements, the scope for fabrication and corruption, the legitimitized and illegitimate siphoning and squirreling of wealth by "lords of justice" who rival the "lords of poverty" of the development apparatus. But decay wasn't the only mode of degeneracy presenting itself to my overactive imagination. There was also what I've called dessication—a vast accounting apparatus marshalled to represent social justice, with numbers standing in for people, so distant from and distorting of the lived experience of being a person yet ostensibly geared toward improving that experience. The scary side of the proposal presented itself to me, the daily and dreary actualities of institutionalization, tainting the idealized representation quite massively.

But then I thought about what SITS would have to be, if it were to come into being. As an installed normative order, it would need to be the outcome of ethical and political practices, the practices of instituting and institutionalizing that constitute politics. So SITS can be seen as *one aspect* of a politics of global justice, *the outcome*, a new order of international trade, albeit in idealized form.[2] What we are missing in the book (and what it is not trying and should not be required to provide) are all the things leading up to that outcome. We cannot see the moments of emotional and moral investment in which a community is constituted, a global community that is both the inaugurator and the beneficiary of SITS; we cannot see the alliances, articulations, and becomings that are constitutive of a new order; we cannot see those moments of decision and identification in which subjects become subjectivated, transforming the potential energy of identification into the

2. The problem is that what is presented is an ideal, so actualization/realization seems a threat to it. Decadence and decay is its future/other.

commitment of identity.[3] Thus we cannot see what would vitalize and universalize the particularity that is SITS.[4]

This brings me to the second thing I stumbled over, which is the violence involved in universalizing an idea (like SITS) that emanates from a particular (and problematic) social location, in this case the West. At first I resisted this violence, unconsideredly considering it avoidable.[5] But I soon forced myself to acknowledge that it is the very nature of a contingent universal to emerge from a local particularity; such a particularity is universalized through political processes of identification and articulation, becoming the tent under which vast numbers of claims and positions and people are convened. Violence is a necessary aspect of this process; the universalization of one particular forecloses the possibility of others in the same social space. But this unavoidable violence is not what I wish to resist. Rather, my opposition is focused on the problematic ways in which certain universalizations have taken place.

Consider the post–World War II experience of "development," in which the particular experience of industrialization in a few countries of the West was enforced as the universal paradigm and trajectory for every country of the world, accompanied by a First World/Third World global imaginary in which countries were divided into sufficient and deficient and ranked in a row. Rather than opposing the idea of progressive and politicized economic change, opponents of development are primarily opposed to the ways that development has been enacted. Might development be less perversely destructive if it were not associated with a binary divide and a unilinear ranking? Might it be less corrupt and decadent if it had not been a screen for cold war ambitions and machinations? What if its failures were able to be spoken rather than requiring to be hidden? What if it were the terrain on which we actually attempted to build economies in both rich and poor countries, bringing what was learned in each to the other, working against the inevitable tendency to rank and privilege, recognizing the interaction and interpenetration of many types of economic activity in a widened field of economic possibility? Imagine practicing

3. I realized on reflection that I could have been imagining these moments of building rather than the moments of falling short/decay. And I began to see my degeneration fantasies as the failure of my imagination rather than the book's failure.

4. Readers of Butler, Laclau, and Zizek (2000) will recognize in this and the following argument the author's debt to Ernesto Laclau.

5. I initially framed this resistance in terms of "the impossibility of a global order" of the sort that DeMartino was trying to imagine. As I realized later, however, my resistance was emanating not only from my temperament and proclivities but from my own political project—which involves reading global order as global disorder in order to identify openings for what might otherwise seem improbable political initiatives. DeMartino's project is different; he wants to *build* an order rather than to have one forced upon him. The two positions on global order (impossibility versus necessity) could be seen as representing two stages of one political project—in which case one is not a legitimate critique of the other. Or they could be seen as two sides of a coin—in which case one is a critique of the other, but the difference between them is not resolvable.

Another type of objection comes from someone like Gustavo Esteva, who wants to preserve the pluriverse at the expense of a certain level of disorder/injustice. DeMartino represents the other side with respect to this type of project.

development with respect and humility.[6] Development is now a failed and hollowed-out project—its emptiness feeds corruption and cynicism. The panacea that was development has given way to the total disillusion that is the counterpart and natural outcome of a "perfect solution."

This historical example stands in stark contrast to the ongoing struggle of redefinition and recreation that DeMartino proposes for his imagined global regimes. Which brings us to the question the book leaves us with: "How do we create a just global order out of a local particularity?" The answer seems to be "as its subjects rather than its objects," engaged in a political process of instituting and universalizing. *GEGJ* reminds us (by their absence?) that subjects of justice are required for the institution of a just objectivity. Who is it that demands global justice? Who will choose a just global order, investing in its concept and enactment, (re)creating themselves in a new community? George DeMartino and his book are calling us into being.

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6. This is actually happening in the development bureaucracy, according to Peter Tamas (2003) who studies learning in development organizations, but the devaluation of the project has contributed to endemic lack of confidence and a subjective experience of incompetence.

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ISSN 0893-5696 print/1475-8059 online/04/040491-03

DOI: 10.1080/0893569042000270942
Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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