

## Book Reviews

Rudolf Wolfgang Müller: *Geld und Geist, Zur Entstehungsgeschichte von Identitätsbewusstsein und Rationalität seit der Antike*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt/Main 1977, 423 pp.

The diversity of elements contained in Müller's book might very well startle a sociological purist: how can problems of classical philology, ancient history, ethnology, psychiatry, philosophy and epistemology form a consistent whole? The answer is that these elements are bound together by the critique of political economy – not only as a 'social theory', but as a science of the social content and socialization of human being and thought.

The central problem in Müller's text is the explication of the relationship between the *social formation* and the *'mode of thought'*. This level of generality of the problem, however, does not imply excessive generality or abstraction in the analysis. Neither is it a question of the study of the 'humanization of the ape' – the birth of thought as a characteristic of the species – nor even of an outline of a general history of thought (ideas). Rather Müller is concerned with the elaboration of 'self-evident' propositions concerning the mode of thought and with locating and specifying the social basis of its 'general characteristics'. Or, as the author himself formulates his project: 'inwiefern bestimmte, uns selbstverständliche Grundformen des rationalen Erkennens, ja dieses Erkennen überhaupt als "theoretisches" Erkennen in der Sphäre der Zirkulation von Waren bzw. Geld begründet sind' (p. 16). In a sense, Müller is writing a 'metahistory' of science or scientific thought as a reflection of the development of commodity production.

Although it is certainly an exaggeration to speak of a research tradition proper in connection with this social formation/mode of thought problematic, one might make cautious reference to singular 'classics' in the field. Müller himself critically discusses the old Frankfurters', Horkheimer's and Adorno's 'principle of exchange' and grants them a certain pioneer status (p. 201). According to Müller they succeed in posing the question but their resolution, due to its culture-critical formulation, falls short of the mark.

It is strange, nevertheless, that Müller almost completely by-passes Alfred Sohn-Rethel, who has been studying this problem for some time. He is mentioned

only once in the book, and then as a mere 'echo' of Horkheimer and Adorno (p. 193). However, Sohn-Rethel's 'transformation problem' – a concept he himself uses in his latest book *Das Geld, die bare Münze des Apriori* (1976) – is very reminiscent of Müller's similar presentation: how does a social 'real abstraction' which is consummated in the form of money act as a 'thought abstraction', that is, as a precondition and augur for the development of an abstract mode of thought.

Compared to Sohn-Rethel's elaborations though, Müller's book is many times more consistent and coherent. Müller does not fall prey to Sohn-Rethel's error of constructing a universal social-historical framework for his social-formation/mode of thought problematic based on the general results of historical materialism – Sohn-Rethel, in fact, connects his 'transformation problem' to a general conception of the division of manual and intellectual labour. In addition, Müller presents a much more refined analysis of the real abstraction/thought abstraction relationship and its levels of development. With Sohn-Rethel the study of this relation is largely left on the level of tautologies and assertions. Nonetheless, Müller's presentation is not without its problems.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first, which we might call a broad politico-economical introduction, analyses the relationship between the development of commodity production and the genesis of the 'bourgeois subject'. The central theoretical development (Ableitung) in this section is the historical-logical transition from commodity to money and especially the analysis of the various forms and levels of the development of money, arriving finally at 'money as money'. As a 'real object' money is an 'existant social abstraction' according to Marx, that 'real abstraction' which determines the bourgeois subject in its most general form while at the same time providing the necessary prerequisite for an *abstract self-identity*, i.e. an '*abstract mode of thought*'. The bourgeois subject, then, is conceived only on the basis of the independent circulation of money when it becomes a concept in reality, i.e. 'real abstraction' and as such the basis for the development of an abstract epistemic relation (Erkenntnisbeziehung) (p. 64).

Nevertheless, Müller doesn't abandon his definition of the 'bourgeois subject' at the level of abstract identity nor does he stop at indicating the preconditions for an abstract mode of thought. He carries his elaboration to its conclusion in the capitalist, the concept of bourgeois subject in its 'full meaning'.

In the second section Müller investigates the connection between the 'individual identity' and 'categories of rationality' and further develops a 'purely' cognitive subject-object relation into a theoretical and 'scientific' epistemic relation. In a sense, Müller rejects a teleological conception of man's innate search for 'truth' and the knowledge of 'the essence of things'. Even this mode of human striving which has usually been viewed as eternal must, according to Müller, be seen as socially specific: with the development of commodity production a 'purely theoretical connection between subject and object' becoming both possible and essential (p. 141).

With the aid of the categories of the bourgeois subject's abstract identity and its corollary, the abstract mode of thought, Müller moves on to an examination of the

subject-object concepts of Hume and Kant, arriving finally at the 'metalevel' of abstract thought, logic, and at the analysis of the logical categories of 'identity' and 'contradiction'. This transition to the history of philosophy (logic and epistemology) is explained on the one hand by the fact that 'the capacity for abstraction, "the principle of rationality"' is basically the same in the intellectual activity of the merchant – whom Müller calls the 'classical prototype of the bourgeois subject' – 'and in that of the philosopher, albeit that it does not manifestly serve the same purpose' (p. 136). Secondly, on the other hand, 'the development of the life process (Lebensprozess) drawn into the social sphere by value is sedimented in the history of philosophy and reveals itself there in a clearly independent form' (p. 143). The remainder of the section is dedicated to a critique of Piaget's 'genetic' rationality theory, as well as of Horkheimer and Adorno.

The third section is in a certain sense 'empirical'. Müller attempts to 'test his hypotheses' concerning the relationship between commodity production and the abstract mode of thought with material from Vietnam – he examines psychiatric studies of Vietnamese – and from ancient Greek literature in which the genesis of the bourgeois subject is located in the transition from Homer's epic poetry to Archilochos' lyrics. This section acts more as an illustration than as an empirical 'proof', something which it is hard to imagine being fruitfully applied to a discourse of this type. This in part explains the lack of a 'grand synthesis' – it is compensated for by the 'Zusammenfassende Überleitung' located at the beginning of the third section.

Even though Müller's social-formation/mode of thought conceptualizations overstep those of Sohn-Rethel, many of the aspects of his 'Ableitung' as well as the development of its intermediary elements remain undefined. The nature of the social-formation/mode of thought linkage consequently lacks specification in the mode of presentation. Is the birth of the abstract mode of thought in the wake of the development of commodity production a question of an 'historical genesis' in the sense that a specific mode of social production subsumes or (in the final analysis) develops within itself the conditions for an 'abstract' and 'theoretical' mode of thought, as a kind of irreversible and in this sense historical event? Or is this sooner a question of a material-logical connection, in which the bourgeois subject, and with it abstract thought as a whole, disappears when the social formation – capitalist commodity production – which has been its source of renewal is dispersed? If this linkage is historical in the above sense, we can perhaps speak of the 'civilizing influence' of commodity production (analogically to the development of the productive forces in capitalism) on the development of thought, of human cognitive activity. But if the connection is 'logical' the abstract mode of thought assumes a meaning akin to 'false' or 'fetishized' consciousness. Or, then, alternatively, the 'pure' epistemic subject-object relationship will also be lost with the fall of capitalism and the consolidation of communist society.

It seems that Müller's conception corresponds rather to this latter, 'logical' alternative, but this is explicitly evident only on a general level, in the discussion concerning the 'form of identity'. The form of identity which is dominant in

capitalism expresses 'the unconscious socialization of labor via capital' as an *individual self-identity* (p. 214). In opposition to this form of identity, a 'collective identity' of social production evolves immediately and consciously 'which is not only the expression of a conscious union of producers but which also makes such a union possible' (p. 214). On the basis of this 'collective identity' develops a revolutionary consciousness which confronts the dominant form of identity of capitalism, but the epistemic relation of this revolutionary consciousness to the abstract and theoretical mode of thought produced by (capitalist) commodity production is unresolved. As a hint regarding his possible solution, Müller notes that the concept 'Marxist theory' is innately contradictory inasmuch as 'Marxist thought is characteristically the *critique* of independent elements of the superstructure of commodity society and is left, therefore, without an object when this superstructure disappears' (p. 30).

But when and if 'the superstructure' disappears and the preconditions for theoretical and abstract thought disappear as well, what will happen to natural science?

Müller's book is significant in its development of the intermediary elements in the social-formation/mode of thought linkage. Furthermore, for perhaps the first time the relationship between bourgeois subjectivity, rationality and the theoretical mode of thought are given a systematic treatment.

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**Klaus Ottomeyer:** *Soziales Verhalten und Ökonomie im Kapitalismus, Vorüberlegungen zur systematischen Vermittlung von Interaktionstheorie und Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*, Politladen, Erlangen, Gaiganz 1974 (2. ed. Focus-Verlag, Giessen 1976); *Anthropologieproblem und marxistische Handlungstheorie. Kritisches und Systematisches zu Séve, Duhm, Schneider und zur Interaktionstheorie im Kapitalismus*, Focus-Verlag, Giessen 1976; *Ökonomische Zwänge und menschliche Beziehungen. Soziales Verhalten im Kapitalismus*, Rowohlt, Hamburg 1977.

These three books by Klaus Ottomeyer (Freie Universität, Westberlin), which have appeared in as many years, are consecutive elaborations of the same project. His project deals with the creation of a theoretical framework for the social psychology of capitalism, in other words, for a Marxist theory of action.

Ottomeyer's main problem is to find systematic mediators between the economic determinants (ökonomische Formbestimmungen) contained in the critique of political economy and the regularities of human interaction behavior. In this attempt Ottomeyer is noticeably more sophisticated than a number of earlier West German presentations (for example, Peter Brückner: *Sozialpsychologie des Kapitalismus*, Frankfurt a.M., 1972). This is apparent on both main levels of his theoretical construction: in his understanding of the specificity of the critique of political economy and in his elaboration of the multidimensionality of interaction