

Value, Rationality and the Environment

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Today most people on the Left are aware that ecological damage, and the threat of ecological disaster, are among the foremost contradictions of capitalism, second only to the impoverishment of the Third World. In addition to ecology in the strict sense, the damage done to the material environment of our everyday lives proceeds, subjecting us, I believe, to an all but irresistible debasement of our personal, aesthetic and political attitudes (of which more below). For myself, I have been made acutely aware of this damage since moving to Southampton: the claustrophobia (for a non-motorist) of a city cut off on its landward side by a motorway; the new urban motorway, cutting a swathe through Swaythling and decapitating St Denys;¹ the destruction of any unity in the City Centre by hard-to-cross roads, car parks, and self-enclosed shopping malls; the University's plan to destroy the local haunts of wildlife at Lord's Wood by siting a second campus there; and the local press regularly bringing news of fresh instances of planning blunders, planning oversights, and 'constructive co-operation between public authorities and private enterprise'.

It is commonly thought that there are few resources in the classics of what I still insist on calling 'scientific socialism', for explaining and remedying these harms. Some socialists, like many non-socialist Greens, have adopted instead a hostility to science, to reason, and to the dominion of humankind over nature. In this paper, I want to suggest that one of Marx's central distinctions – between use-value and exchange-value – can provide the basis of the theory we need. However, I do not limit myself to the use of these terms in Marxist political economy. To the production of use-value and of exchange-value, there correspond two kinds of practical rationality, which have their effects in morality, aesthetics, politics and science, as well as economics.

The production of use-value and of exchange-value

Marx's *Capital* opens with a distinction between use-value and exchange-value. Every commodity is a use-value, i.e. 'a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind' (p. 125). Use-values are 'the material content of wealth, whatever its social form may be' (*ibid.*). But

not every use-value is a commodity, since not all have exchange-value:

This is the case whenever its utility to man is not mediated through labour. Air, virgin soil, natural meadows, unplanted forests, etc. fall into this category. A thing can be useful, and a product of human labour, without being a commodity. He who satisfies his own need with the product of his own labour admittedly creates use-values, but not commodities (p. 131).

Marx notes that

In English writers of the seventeenth century we still often find the word 'worth' used for use-value and 'value' for exchange-value. This is quite in accordance with the spirit of a language that likes to use a Teutonic word for the actual thing, and a Romance word for its reflection (p. 126n).

I am tempted to adopt this terminology, but resist on the grounds that one can talk about concrete objects as 'use-values', but hardly as 'worths'. And Marx himself uses 'use-values' to refer to the things themselves, rather than the values they possess by virtue of their relations. They are use-values by virtue of their objective properties, though the discovery of these properties is 'the work of history' (p. 125).²

Use-value, Marx tells us, is the qualitative aspect of value. This does not of course mean that use-values cannot be counted or measured. But no quantity of one use-value can be equated with a quantity of another. The question 'how many bottles of beer are worth the same as one Bible?' is senseless in use-value terms: the uses are different, hence their worth incommensurable. Yet in the market they will be exchangeable in a definite ratio, mediated by money. In this connection, Marx quotes Aristotle more than once: to the effect that different goods are naturally incommensurable, and made artificially commensurable by money (*Capital*, p. 151; *Ethics*, pp. 120–21); that 'twofold is the use of every object. ... The one is peculiar to the object as such, the other is not, as a sandal which may be worn and is also exchangeable' (quoted *Capital* p. 179n); and he refers to the two

distinct arts generated, for Aristotle, by this use-value/exchange-value distinction: economics, the art of procuring use-values for the household or the state; and chrematics, the art of money-making (*Capital*, pp. 253–54). It would be in the interests of accuracy if the economics departments in most universities were re-styled ‘Departments of Chrematics’.

On one matter, however, Marx criticises Aristotle: for Aristotle, the commensurability necessary for exchange is made possible simply by the artificial device, money. For Marx, this is only surface appearance. At bottom, exchange-value expresses ‘value’, the quantity of labour-time embodied in the product. There are contexts in which I would want to defend Marx’s theory of value but, for the purposes of this paper, I don’t need to. Just as Marx often gives examples in which a price expressed in money stands in for labour-based value in the point the example illustrates, so we can bracket off the price/value distinction for the present purpose, and hence avoid having to take sides in the controversies between neo-Marxist and paleo-Marxist economics.

Granted this, I may describe my project as distinguishing the type of rationality inherent in economics from that inherent in chrematics, and in each case generalising the type beyond this particular use; and suggesting that it is the chrematistic type of rationality which is the principal enemy of the environment. But of course the two types of rationality do not hang in a historical vacuum. In both pre-capitalist and socialist societies as defined by Marx, the motive of production is the procurement of use-values. In capitalism it is the augmentation of capital, which for each individual capital means maximising monetary returns and minimising monetary costs. There are two aspects to Marx’s case against capitalism: that it is exploitative, and that it is irrational *in terms of use-value rationality*. The environmental destructiveness of modern capitalism is an instance of this irrationality in use-value terms – an irrationality inherent in what is usually called ‘economic rationality’ (i.e. chrematistic rationality).

Chrematistic rationality

In the passage on chrematics, Aristotle mentions that, while use-value production has a limit (enough bread to feed the city is enough bread to feed the city), ‘riches, such as chrematics strives for, are unlimited’ (*Politics*, quoted *Capital*, p. 253n). It is surely no accident that the conception of happiness upheld by Aristotle is a conception of something which has certain attainable (with good fortune) necessary conditions, which conjointly are sufficient conditions – and if happy, what else can we need? By contrast, an influential group of moral theories indigenous to capitalist societies regards human desires as infinite. A finite being with infinite desires looks like an evolutionary mistake. Why is such a conception so widespread?

The structure of the reasoning is the same in (for example) utilitarian ethics and in chrematics. Its features are (1) mathematical calculability, which in both cases requires

qualitatively different goods to be translated into commensurable quantities; in order to achieve this, (2) a value external to the object valued is postulated; a value which is of the same kind in the case of all valued objects, and which confers their value on them. In the case of chrematics, money; in the case of utilitarianism, pleasure-and-the-avoidance-of-pain (the hyphens are necessary, otherwise it becomes obvious that two qualitatively different values are already involved). This externality, by at once atomising and homogenising all goods, both licenses quantifiability and abolishes limits. It also imposes a sort of tunnel vision on the practitioners of this kind of practical reasoning. This is obvious in the case of chrematistic. Only those effects of the production process which are saleable are the product; only what costs or brings in money goes into the calculation. Hence environmental effects, among other things, are invisible.

What of utilitarianism? Let us first consider its symbiosis with chrematistic in modern times. Jevons’ *The Theory of Political Economy* makes use of utilitarianism in a way which looks like collapsing the two into a single system, while making ultimately untenable distinctions between the two. He includes pleasure and pain among the fundamental concepts of his science, and appeals to the authority of Bentham for treating a ‘moral science’ (i.e. a social science) mathematically. Yet in one way he is on firmer ground than Bentham – or would be if he recognised the limits circumscribing his own discipline. For he recognises that pleasure and pain cannot in themselves be measured; but ‘their effects’ can – i.e. quantitative transactions in a money economy. And indeed these can be measured. But Jevons shows no inkling of the values lost to view by this approach – and not because of any pretence to value-neutrality. Jevonian chrematics is both frankly prescriptive and pretty close to claiming *a priori* necessity:

Although ... the beneficent results of Free Trade are great and unquestionable, they could hardly be proved to exist *a posteriori*; they are to be believed because deductive reasoning from premises of almost certain truth leads us confidently to expect such results, and there is nothing in experience which in the least conflicts with our expectations (p. 88).

One and a half million Irish people’s lives sacrificed on the altar of Free Trade through the export of grain during the potato famine might have been thought *a posteriori* evidence enough against it, but a dogma claiming to be ‘almost as self-evident as are the elements of Euclid’ (p. 90) can hardly lay itself open to such refutation.

Jevons feels the need to point out the relation of economics to ethics (pp. 91–93), and adopts the following position: he accepts the modification of utilitarian ethics in terms of ‘higher’ pleasures which ought to take precedence over lower ones, and in its name rejects Paley’s dictum ‘pleasures differ in nothing but in continuance and intensity’ (p. 92). How then can his purely quantitative discipline operate with pleasure and pain, rather than simply with money values? His answer is:

It is the lowest rank of feelings which we here treat. The calculus of utility aims at supplying the ordinary wants of man at the least cost of labour. Each labourer, in the absence of other motives, is supposed to devote his energy to the accumulation of wealth. A higher calculus of moral right and wrong would indeed be needed to show how he may best employ that wealth for the good of others as well as himself (p. 93).

Now if pleasures and pains are measured by their effects on the market, and higher pleasures *actually do* override lower ones in some cases, then the economist cannot abstract from them in this way. What the passage quoted suggests is that Jevons believes that 'higher' considerations may come into play in deciding what to do with one's money once acquired, while economic (i.e. chrematistic) rationality reigns untroubled by such considerations in the matter of acquiring the money. But in truth, by the time economic process is over and the moral one begins, the damage has been done. For the manner in which certain values are prevented from having economic effects is not that intimated in the last quote. It is rather that all effects of the production process that are extrinsic to the goal of augmenting capital are systematically excluded from consideration, however intensely pleasurable or painful they may be. Almost by definition, environmental values fall into this class.

In fact Jevons quickly forgets the limit he has placed on economics, and reverts to treating it as equivalent to the utilitarian moral calculus. Thus on p. 101: 'Pleasure and pain are undoubtedly the ultimate objects of the calculus of economics'; 'By a *commodity* we shall understand any object, substance, action or service, which can afford pleasure or ward off pain' such as birdsong, prayer, or scratching an itchy spot, no doubt – but when have these had measurable economic effects?

So far I have been looking at equivocations about the scope of economics: in one breath it claims the whole of practical reason for its kingdom, in the next it exiles higher values to the kingdom of ethics, which it has just annexed.

The next question is whether utilitarian ethics, despite its structural identity to this kind of economic reasoning, can restore the exiled values, and so offset the tunnel vision of production for exchange. I take it that the attempt to do so is precisely what is called 'cost benefit analysis'.

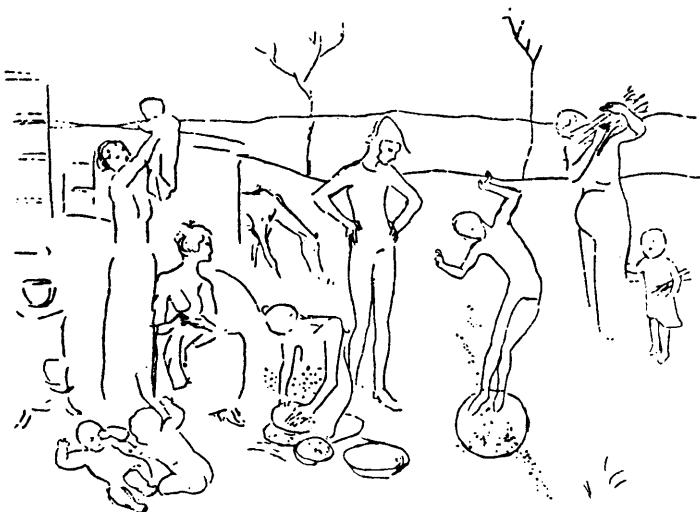
As an undergraduate, I attended a lecture on cost benefit analysis by a professor of economics. When costing an urban motorway, he told us, purely economic calculation would ignore the deaths it would cause. Cost benefit analysis rectifies this. But to do so it must solve the difficult problem of pricing the heads of the victims. The first suggestion is to measure the pain of death by its hypothetical economic effect: we ask how much money the victims would have given for the privilege of staying alive. Since the answer would be *all they've got*, millionaires and paupers figure quite differently in such calculations, and the siting of the end of urban motorways downtown is strongly indicated. An alternative would be to ask about the value to

the economy as a whole of the deceased, calculating this as: how much more would this person have contributed to the economy than taken out of it, had they lived an average life-span? This, we were told, had the consequence that the average woman over 25 had a price on her head – her death would count as a benefit, not a cost. These proposals were presented, of course, with some irony. But the implication was: nevertheless, if we are not satisfied with the monetary goals of pure economics, we must travel this road. Lives must be priced. And the truth is that there is no way of doing so that is not either offensive or arbitrary.

Of course, a decision must be taken one way or the other in such cases. And it is always possible to dress up one's decision as an assigning of numerical values. To say 'the value of lives is one thousand pounds each' is simply to say 'we won't let road accidents put us off unless the purely economic considerations are fairly evenly balanced'; to value them at ten million each is to say 'stuff your motor-way'. Just as, if after a night's revelling a fellow reveller greets you with 'where on a scale of one to ten is your headache this morning?', and you answer 'eight', you are not reporting a reading taken from an inner algometer, just saying, 'lousy, though I've had worse'.

This is all leading to the point that, while utilitarian ethics may pick up some values that chrematistics ignores, it is still afflicted with tunnel vision. It picks up some non-money values, but only insofar as they can be forced into the same straitjacket as money values: mathematical calculability and the externality of value to object. This disqualifies utilitarianism from giving an adequate account of environmental ethics, since:

- (1) Where some value is in its inherent nature *not* amenable to mathematical calculations, the attempt to mathematise it will almost always devalue it relative to those values that can be quantified by some agreed procedure.
- (2) By treating values as external to the objects valued, the manner in which environmental goods are valued is falsified and trivialised. Let us take the example of Southampton University's plans for a second campus in Lord's Wood. The case against is best expressed as: Southampton is a better place to live with one Univer-



sity campus and one large wooded area inhabited by badgers, deer etc., than it would be with two campuses and no such area.³ That, I think, would gain fairly wide assent. But once the economic advantages of university expansion are pitted against the pleasure of walkers, the balance will look different. This is partly because professional calculators will always wave their hands at the vagueness of the latter; partly because, when the value of Lord's Wood is reduced to experiences in the heads of walkers, it is trivialised. When people enjoy Lord's Wood they are not enjoying experiences in their heads, they are enjoying Lord's Wood.

Aristotle's point about limited and unlimited aims is also apposite here. Universities and woodlands are both use-values, but universities are also economic agencies, and as such may have unlimited ambitions. Woodlands close to a city inevitably fall under the covetous eyes of powerful economic agencies, and have little power of resistance. Chrematistic rationality has powerful agents as its bearers – use-value rationality not so. Those powerful agents may acquire indefinitely large returns for their use of these woodlands; but a walk in the woods is just a walk in the woods. Bad rationality drives out good.

So far I have been considering chrematistic rationality as (a) a feature of the economic structure of capitalism – the *necessary* form of rationality for agents within that structure; (b) the reflection of this in economic theory, which identifies chrematistic rationality with practical rationality as such; (c) the generalisation of this view in utilitarian ethics. Two other features of chrematistic rationality are relevant to environmental ethics.

In the first place, it is embodied in the material environment which capitalism has built for us, and so comes to structure our lives willy nilly. It becomes the 'objective spirit' of our age, and so to a degree constrains our moral as

well as our economic practices. Our urban habitat is moulded by an obsession with economical use of time and space to produce an end product: a convenient interior to an individual housing unit. The end-benefit is isolated from its environment and history: to enjoy it, one has to forget its context in time and space. Behind double-locked doors, there is peace, clean electricity and high speed gas; venture outside and a judge just might regard you as an accomplice of your attacker. Thus modern housing areas invert the metaphor of the whitened sepulchre; inside, clean and neat and perhaps even comfortable; outside – ugliness, dirt, decay. Bourgeois housing developments express the same ethos in their privileged way: the ugly convenience of a house built round its garage, and the false rurality of developments that make the real countryside recede further and further. Transport policy expresses and enforces the same values. The self-fulfilling assumption is that travel is necessarily unpleasant, a mere interval, to be kept as short as possible, between being behind one set of locked doors and another.⁴ The public sphere is drained of value; it becomes the sphere of unpleasant means to ends outside itself, just like wage-labour. Its violence is then re-enacted for pleasure, with the obsessiveness of a recurring nightmare, in the safety of the private sphere. (Almost any other historical society, I think, would have been shocked speechless by the proportion of their time that the average modern spends watching images of slaughter, or reading accounts of slaughter, for pleasure.)

Finally, there is the effect of chrematistic rationality on science. Its homology with certain theories in the natural sciences has often been noted, but this does not impress me. The natural sciences are too well tested to be impugned by such considerations, and their results are morally and politically neutral. At most it may be that areas of reality which do not have the form of quantifiability and externality of relations have been under-theorised. But the way in which the sciences are applied is a different matter. That they are often applied in environmentally reckless ways is well known. I am among those who hold this to be the fault, not of science, but of its commercial or military use. But one feature of that use is interesting also from the point of view of the philosophy of science. The results of sciences are taken up and used *in an abstract state*. Instead of the sequence 'abstract science → concrete science (i.e. scientific knowledge applied to a concrete reality) → practically applied science', we get the abridged sequence 'abstract science → practically applied science'. Thus the knowledge that, say, irradiation inhibits certain processes of decay in organic matter gets lifted straight out of midstream science and applied commercially in food storage, in disregard to the way this mechanism interacts with others in the process of providing food for people. This is so taken for granted that it is not noticed what is happening: the product of science is being put to use before science has finished its work on it. Since this unfinished product has a market value, its inherently unfinished state is missed. Before a product of science can be a (positive) *use-value*, on the other hand, it must be the concrete knowledge of some concrete *use-value*.⁵



Use-value rationality

The inadequacies of chrematistic rationality will already have suggested by contrast the nature of use-value rationality. Different use-values must be recognised as qualitatively different and hence not interchangeable in any fixed proportion. Calculation disappears from moral reasoning, and is put in its place – unable to deliver a final decision – in economic reasoning. There is no way to measure the harm of deceiving someone against the harm of hurting them (when these are alternatives), the good of forgiving wrongs against the good of punishing them, the preservation of cultural values against the equalisation of wealth, the need of a city for water against the need of a village not to be evacuated to make way for a reservoir. We can and must make these choices, of course, and the act of doing so may be thought to assign an ordinal number to alternatives, but not a cardinal number.

In evaluating a plan for a motorway, one would take into account not only costs saved, but lives lost, and such imponderables as the feeling of being boxed in by motorways surrounding one's town. The uselessness of cost benefit analysis for such a decision has recently been acknowledged with the invention of 'comprehensive weighing'. Now the sort of reasoning involved in use-value production *could* be called comprehensive weighing. However, what has in fact appropriated that title looks to me more like cost benefit analysis with a few unassimilated qualitative blobs in it. It is still conceived as something one could be *trained* in, rather as cost benefit analysts are trained. But that sort of training is just what makes people *bad* at qualitative decision making. Inevitably, they will look on the qualitative blobs as intractable problems, obstacles to a 'rational' solution. If they start taking the blobs seriously, all the quantitative work done on the rest of the values is wasted.

Secondly, while things may be desired as a *means* to realising their exchange-value, the use-value of anything is (in one sense) a real quality of it, intrinsic to it. But of course only those properties make something a use-value which make it useful to people. An onion is a use-value because it can be eaten, a landscape because it can be seen. One can sum up these two aspects of use-values by saying that they are inherent in our world. Not in *us*, as are the utilitarian values of pleasure and pain. We enjoy a meal, not a series of sensations in our taste buds; we love beauty, not the eye of the beholder; we relieve suffering, not the pity of the reliever; we seek knowledge, not the having of that knowledge by any individual. Or at least, the state of mind that values itself rather than its object, though it may occur, is rare and derivative, not to say corrupt and self-defeating. And goods or harms may occur without any consciousness of them; a person is harmed if they are deceived, even if no *further* harm ensues, and they never become aware of the deception.

Use-values are inherent in *our* world. By saying this I bracket off – though I do not necessarily deny – possible goods that are independent of the existence of people. It is we who value use-values, but that does not mean that we



value them for some end external to them. Just as an individual's desires may not be self-referential (e.g. one may desire certain things to occur after one's death), so we may value things which will produce no further benefit to any human, other than that the valued things exist. Consider here the question of our treatment of animals. Kant thought we should not be cruel to animals because such cruelty corrupts its agents. But if cruelty corrupts, that can only be because it is taking pleasure in something evil. And that is evil, not because it corrupts us, which would be circular, but because it hurts the animal. Conversely the only good desired in an act of kindness to an animal may be the animal's wellbeing.

These examples of use-value rationality have so far been mainly 'moral' rather than 'economic', even though use-value rationality, like chrematistic rationality, gets its name from its economic infrastructure. But the division between the moral and the economic, whose blurring I criticised in the chrematistic case, really is a fuzzy and relative one in the case of use-value rationality, because of its deliverance from tunnel vision. To this I now turn.

In reasoning about which use-values to produce, it is not only *saleable* effects of the production-process that meet the eye. Indeed the distinction between the product of a labour-process and its side-effects drops out as soon as we consider that process in use-value terms. To evaluate a labour-process for its productivity of use-value is to evaluate it in all its concreteness and for all its effects. Effects of the process on the worker and the environment, effects of the goods turned out on the well-being and life-style of the community, and so on. The cost of every car produced includes its contribution to the boredom of the machinists, the slicing up of the countryside, the garagisation of cities, the pollution of the air, the likelihood of squirrels getting run over and cyclists getting broken arms, and so on.

Economic choice is no longer between commodities, but between worlds. No kind of mathematical calculation can be of any assistance here. We have to ask: given the material resources that are to hand, what sort of world can we make that will be found good by the people of this civilisation?⁶ What does the good life for us require by way of houses, streets, parks, shops, workplaces, urban space, rural landscapes, public buildings, ways of getting from one place to another, food, drink, household utensils, clothes, rivers, seas, air, plants, animals, sounds, smells?

I deliberately include in this list some things which

might now be thought of as objects of consumption, some not. This kind of question cannot be asked so long as we think of our relation to the product as *consumption*. We consume, literally, food and drink. Metaphorically, we may be said to consume fuel, paper, etc. We do *not* consume transport, health care, education, forests, music, the spirit of place. Our relation to each of these things is quite different. If we want to sum them up, and arrive at a generalised notion of ourselves that may take the place in a socialist economy that ‘the consumer’ does under capitalism, the concept would have to be something like ‘dweller in the world as transformed by our work’.

Or course, as in any kind of practical reasoning, various values, positive and negative, are brought to mind and a decision made with regard to them. But instead of assigning them arbitrary numerical values and doing sums, possible combinations of the values are considered as complex modifications of the world. Each value contributes to the whole, not as an addition to or subtraction from a sum, but as a qualitatively distinct aspect of a concrete whole. The decision before us is then which of these possible wholes to bring about.

Of course much (though not all) work will still be undertaken to meet needs for consumable material objects. These will be one set of values, to be reckoned alongside the cost in terms of concrete work required (and not *abstract labour*, see *Capital*, p. 131ff.), the resources thereby depleted, and any environmental effects. Certain kinds of environmental effect will enter the reasoning in a fairly obvious way; I mean the *big* environmental issues on which the future of our planet depends. But many subtler environmental issues are brought into play by the notion that we are choosing not which commodities to produce, but what world. We have to start asking ourselves questions like: does walking along that road, or travelling in that bus, make us feel peaceful or anxious and aggressive; how would the situation of our town be changed by the building (or demolition) of a box of motorways round it; what relations of houses to streets make for good neighbourliness; what sounds do we want to hear during our everyday activities – and many more, even subtler questions. This is not as easy as doing sums, and we shall inevitably fall far short of success in it. But having seen the successes of modern capitalism in these matters, who’s worried about the failure?

Finally, the question how science is to be applied in accordance with use-value rationality. Abstraction is necessary in science if testing, measurement, and exactness are to be possible; but the aim of science is not to explain what goes on in the laboratory, where these abstractions are realised. It is to explain what goes on in the concrete conjunctures of the world, and ‘the concrete is concrete because it is the union of many determinations’ (Marx). To this end, the various abstract strands have to be plaited together again – not indeed in one vast system of nature,⁷ but in many little systems. To apply science at all, it must be applied in open systems, and this means systems in which many processes, known through many sciences, work to-

gether. To apply science with *adequate knowledge of that to which it is applied*, one must apply concrete conjunctural science, the union of many abstractions. In demanding full-circle science, not the wresting of abstract midstream results, use-value rationality may well take up some romantic or holistic themes, without becoming anti-science or in any way interfering with the sciences’ freedom of inquiry. It simply requires science to finish its job, just as we would not let a builder leave slates loose and live wires exposed, or a chef serve us half-cooked chicken. The proposal is moderate enough in conception, but revolutionary in application, given the present organisation and use of the sciences. It means that new knowledge of the laws of nature will not by itself give rise to new technologies. All-round knowledge of a concrete domain of nature is first required. Of course, our knowledge will always be finite, so damaging applications will always be possible; but many would be avoided.

Postscript

Virtually any socialist argument will be countered by reference to the recent history of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. On the issue in hand, I think some pre-emptive response is needed.⁸ For use-value production means planned production as opposed to the market, and those economies that were planned have now opted for the market.

First let me say that, while I rejoice in the achievement of democratic liberties by those countries, I see nothing to rejoice about in their new economic order or situation. But I grant that the failures of their economies under planning were real enough too. Here I am going to stick my neck out and say that the chief failing was the opposite of what it is often said to be. It was not their failure to catch up with the west. Given where they started from, their record in this respect, until the 1980s, was much better than it could have been under other economic systems. But partly because they were so geared to this aim, and partly because of the over-centralisation which was itself largely a consequence of this aim, their record in human terms was not so good, and in ecological terms was disastrous.

In explaining this bad record, the foremost cause was that they were (and are) nation-states. As such they compete on the world market as producers and also compete militarily as powers. This subjects them to the same compulsion to accumulate that capitalist firms experience. If we want a scientific term for these economies, variously called ‘existing socialism’, ‘state socialism’ and ‘state capitalism’, it would be *national socialism*, had not that phrase already been taken by an altogether more sinister movement.

In relation to global ecological problems – acid rain, deforestation, greenhouse effect, etc. – such competing agencies, be they corporations or states, will always be more or less subject to tunnel vision. Only for global agencies does this supreme use-value without exchange-value – the habitability of the planet Earth – come into view as an over-riding concern. At the same time, centralised

planning in nation-states is too remote from the ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ of local problems by local communities, to be sensitive to the use-values at stake in such planning. Nation-states, east or west, are in some ways too large, in some ways too small, to plan use-value production effectively. Having made this two-edged criticism, I am perhaps obliged to make specific suggestions, even at the risk of appearing utopian (a fault which I regard as very grave – but here my sketch is only meant to indicate the general direction of desirable change).

Most positive planning needs to be done by small, democratic command economies (which does not preclude market relations at the corner shop and jobbing builder level). How small? Well, a city can hardly be divided into several separate economies, and some cities comprise some millions of people. But ideally, a state of one million people is too large. On the other hand some planning needs to be legislated and policed on a worldwide scale, including much negative planning (e.g. prohibiting atmospheric pollution or the destruction of rain forests), and inter-state trade and investment needs to be controlled in the interests of global equalisation and the prevention of market-compelled productivity-drives. For in use-value terms the drive for unlimited growth would appear not as a sign of a healthy economy, but as a cancer on the body politic.

Notes

- 1 Districts of Southampton on the west bank of the River Itchen.
- 2 The concept of use-value is almost exactly equivalent to that of the ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*) in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*.
- 3 For simplicity of example, I am leaving out other aspects of this real issue. It is my opinion that taking them all into account would on balance strengthen the case against a second campus on Lord’s Wood. (Since writing this particular plan has been shelved.)
- 4 On this attitude to space, let me quote C. S. Lewis, writing on the advantages of growing up in a no-car family:

The truest and most horrible claim for modern transport is that it ‘annihilates space’. It does. It annihilates one of the most glorious gifts we have been given. It is a vile inflation which lowers the value of distance, so that a modern boy travels a hundred miles with less sense of liberation and pilgrimage and adventure than his grandfather got from travelling ten. Of course if a man hates space and wants it to be annihilated, that is another matter. Why not creep into his coffin at once? There is little enough space there (*Surprised by Joy*, p. 127).

- 5 The special role of general practitioners in medicine also illustrates the need for concreteness in applied science.
- 6 These questions need the qualifications ‘for the people of this civilisation’, ‘for us’ and so on, so as to avoid turning into utopian questions about the best society absolutely. The somewhat holistic way of asking questions, which use-value rationality cannot shift, puts it at risk of a kind of utopianism, exemplified frighteningly by Trotsky’s remarks on future environmental planning:

The imperceptible, ant-like piling up of quarters and streets, brick by brick, from generation to generation, will give way to titanic constructions of city-villages, with map and compass in hand (*Literature and Revolution*, p. 249).

This loathsome vision (and I speak as an admirer of Trotsky on many matters) exemplifies the metaphysical attitude behind utopianism: the desire for an environment which, instead of incarnating our regional histories, in each case unique, springs

fully formed from the mind of a calculator – expressing an unhistorical conception of humankind as a mass of worldless individuals. Trotsky assures us that ‘Most likely, thickets and forests and grouse and tigers will remain, but only where man commands them to remain’ (p. 252). But if people were infected by this titanic vision, we can be sure that they would have no time for merely ‘natural’ tigers, and would prefer to decorate the world with geometric shapes, ‘compass in hand’. I would hope that this rootless notion of originality, being no more than an aesthetic effect of chrematistic rationality, would disappear from a use-value-rational world, to be replaced by a preference for the almost imperceptible transformation of deeply assimilated traditions. If so, the danger inherent in ‘holistic’ planning would be avoided. It would be holistic not in the sense that totally new wholes would be planned, but that it would be contrived that the integration of the newly produced elements into the pre-existing whole should form a preferable whole.

Cf. Engels’ remarks in the Old Preface to *Anti-Dühring* about the dialectical nature of Greek thought, the necessity for science to pass through an undialectical phase in modern times, and the consequent need for dialectic to restore its concreteness.

Among the Greeks – just because they were not yet advanced enough to dissect, analyse nature – nature is still viewed as a whole, in general. The universal connection of natural phenomena is not proved in regard to particulars; to the Greeks it is the result of direct contemplation. Herein lies the inadequacy of Greek philosophy, an account of which it had to yield later to other modes of outlook on the world. But herein also lies its superiority over all its subsequent metaphysical opponents (*Dialectics of Nature*, pp. 45–46).

Engels is fully aware of the practical necessity of such scientific attention to the interconnectedness of natural laws in concrete particulars:

Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us. ... The people who, in Mesopotamia, Greece, Asia Minor and elsewhere, destroyed the forests to obtain cultivable land, never dreamed that by removing along with the forests the collecting centres and reservoirs of moisture they were laying the basis for the present forlorn state of those countries. ... Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature – but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly (op. cit., p. 180).

Though it is my opinion that recent events in Eastern Europe, while they have altered the polemical situation, do not in themselves require us to make any revisions in socialist thinking. The events there in Stalin’s time did necessitate rethinking; but to suddenly embark on such rethinking now smacks of time-serving. To give a historical analogy: it is as if someone became disillusioned with the ideals of 1789, not because of the Jacobin terror or the corruption of the *Directoire* or the aggressions of the Empire, but because Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo.

Of course, other developments may require socialists to rethink, and some do – notably ecological ones.

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