I agree with a great deal in Gregor McLennan's review of Jon Elster's *Making Sense of Marx* (RP42), and most of all with his idea of the book's importance. He may well be right in thinking it 'likely to dominate discussions of Marx and Marxism for the next decade'. There is also likely to be widespread assent to his view of it as 'the flagship for a new armada of Marxist analytical scholarship and reassessment'. The names of the other captains in the armada would have to include those McLennan mentions of G. A. Cohen and John Roemer. Here, one might suppose, is the long-awaited marriage of analytical philosophy and Marxism. Elster's book may not be the last word on all, or any, of the themes and findings of the new school, but it is surely the best general guide and compendium. As such, its publication does not simply mark the height of current academic fashion, but is an event of real importance on the intellectual scene.

Against this background there is one aspect of McLennan's review with which I would like to take issue. It is his tribute to the 'fair-minded feel' to the book, and his claim that Elster is 'sympathetic to the Marxist project'. The book does not feel in the least fair-minded to me. On the contrary, it could serve as an anthology of varieties of critical unfairness. On the evidence of it, Elster could be regarded as sympathetic to the Marxist project only in so far as that is compatible with a marked lack of sympathy with the project's founder. In amplifying these remarks, 'I shall not be engaging directly with the central theses of the book. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that nothing here is a substitute for that vital task. It will, however, be necessary to point to flaws in the details of some specific arguments. What is at stake in those cases is not for the most part of great moment in itself. Nevertheless, they provide clues as to the author's relationship to his subject which can supplement what is gained from formal statements of his programme and conclusions. In particular, they offer an invaluable perspective on issues of fairness and sympathy. Views on these issues must in their turn have implications for the book's reception, for they help to shape the context in which it is located and discussed.

The simplest kind of unfairness in Elster's reading is misrepresentation. Again and again the line of Marx's argument is bent, and always in the direction of making it untenable. A couple of examples will have to suffice here. Elster dismisses Marx's views on the antagonism between English and Irish workers with the remark: 'Ruling classes can exploit prejudices, but they cannot create them' (*Making Sense of Marx*, p. 22). All page references are to this work unless otherwise indicated. In the passage in question, however, Marx's claim was not that the antagonism was 'created' by the ruling classes but that it was 'artificially kept alive and intensified' by them (pp. 21-22). The difference is crucial in its setting. The desire to refute what, on Elster's own showing, Marx does not hold is found elsewhere. Thus, for instance, he cites Marx's defence of Fourier and other 'organizers of labour': it 'was not their view, as Stirner imagines, that each should do the work of Raphael, but that anyone in whom there is a potential Raphael should be able to develop himself without hindrance'. This defence relies for its point on the assumption that the potential to be a Raphael is not universal. Yet Elster interprets it so as to fit with his belief that Marx's corpus as a whole never 'refers to differences in natural talents' (p. 83). Later the point is caricatured further. Elster attacks the 'Utopian' idea that 'everybody could be a Raphael' while referring to the earlier discussion in a way plainly meant to imply that the idea was held by Marx (p. 201). Yet the distinction between it and his actual view that everybody who could be a Raphael should be allowed to does not need labouring.

Another kind of unfairness, all to familiar when analytical philosophers turn to Marx, is the Stalinist smear. Elster notes that Marx found himself compelled, in his own words, to 'say to the workers and the petty bourgeoisie: it is better to suffer in modern bourgeois society, which by its industry creates the material means for the foundation of a new society that will liberate you all, than to revert to bygone forms of society...'. Elster comments: 'Substitute the peasantry for the petty bourgeoisie and primitive socialist accumulation for modern bourgeois society and you have the classic justification for Stalinism' (pp. 116-17). This procedure is so useful it seems a pity to stop there. Thus, substitute the unemployed and market forces and you have the classic justification for Thatcherism. The point is not just that Elster is indulging in the kind of uncontrolled analogizing he castigates when he thinks he finds it in Marx (see e.g., pp. 508-10). It is also that the analogy in this case is singularly inept. Stalinism did not, as Elster is well aware, rely on 'saying' to the peasants in an effort to persuade them of the need for sacrifices. It typically worked through coercion and terror. Moreover, its programme has to be conceived as pure loss of life and the amenities of life on the part of those who suffered it for the sake of a hypothetical future. The impression that Elster wishes to link Marx with such projects is strengthened a little later by a reference, on the basis of the same discussion, to his 'philosophy of history that allows one to regard pre-communist individuals as so many sheep for the slaughter' (p. 118). Some account should, however, have been taken of Marx's apparent belief that his recommendations will be of benefit to his audience themselves: their outcome 'will liberate you all'. It is understandable that someone writing at the present time...
only to be won, if at all, by the travail of generations. But this would not have been so obvious to Marx writing in January 1849 in the midst of a European revolutionary upheaval. Elster's treatment of the case points to some of his chief weaknesses as a commentator: his abstract, formalising style of thinking and lack of feel for the specificity of the contexts in which intellectual positions are advanced; more generally, his lack of an active historical sense.

This blind spot may help to explain another feature of his method, the tendency to treat all of Marx's writings as one vast text to be assessed primarily for internal coherence. Thus, he assembles a number of passages in order to exhibit the inconsistencies in Marx's writing but scarcely hearkens back to Marx's more recent sources. The sources range from private notebooks to preparatory outlines to material published by Engels to works whose publication was overseen by Marx himself. Given this provenance, it is hardly surprising that inconsistencies can be found. The absence of any could only mean that one's subject had stopped thinking about the topic at an early stage. Elster shows no feeling for the heterogeneity of his evidence, nor any of the caution it should induce. This is all the more surprising since he had earlier acknowledged that 'to have given a pause. It comes in a letter to Engels: 'Whatever shortcomings (my writings) may have, they have the advantage of forming an artistic whole, which can only be achieved through my method of never letting them into print before they lie wholly before me' (p. 42). This gives grounds for the distinction between what Marx let into print and what he did not, and even between those categories and what was never intended for print in the first place. In this connection one may also note Elster's comment that Capital II is 'certainly one of the most boring works ever written by a major author'. (p. 142), aware that this we know by that title was put together by Engels, exercising considerable editorial discretion, from manuscripts left after Marx's death, and was not written by Marx to be read in its present form. In view of this, his comment is surely something of a cheap gibe.

The meanness of spirit shown here and elsewhere in the book will surprise those who know Elster's other writings. The various 'Replies' to critics, for instance, have a remarkable balance and liberality, being always ready to reshape a thesis in the light of objections, conceding a point where it seems necessary and holding the line firmly where it does not (Inquiry 23, 1980; Theory and Society 12, 1983). These habits of mind are naturally enough reflected in the detailed analyses, which are variously characterised by Elster as 'rambling', 'arbitrary', 'confused', 'incoherent', 'rather absurd', 'downright silly' and 'a conceptual jungle'. It may be said that he shows himself somewhat insensitive to the comic possibilities that arise, against this background, when he turns to authors of whom he approves, as when we are assured that '(G. A.) Cohen's approach is characteristically lucid' (p. 244). The incongruity here may oblige the reader to pinch herself to get things back in their true proportions, with Cohen as one of our ablest professors and Marx as what he professes.

The low regard Elster has for the subject of his book has a more serious aspect. For it may well be thought an odd qualification for the author of a study of more than five hundred pages. Moreover, the overwhelmingly negative tone of the study must give rise to the question of how such an intellectual pygmy could merit attention on this scale. It may be surmised that, in the course of the writing, Elster gradually became alive to the pressure of this question. At any rate, the final paragraph tries to strike a positive note, by indicating the sense in which he regards himself as a Marxist:

"... speaking now for myself only, I believe, it is still possible to be a Marxist in a rather different (i.e. non-traditional, 3M) sense of the term. I find that most of the views that I hold to be true and important, I can trace back to Marx. This includes methodology, substantive theories and, above all, values."

(p. 931)

This is a useful check-list, and it should be asked how far the items on it will bear scrutiny.

Elster's account of Marx's methodological achievement is prominent among the aspects of his book that merits full-scale independent treatment. Even a brief glance is, however, enough to show that what he says about it amounts to the faintest of praise and what he could claim to have derived from it in a personal way is wholly mysterious. Marx's central contribution is taken to be the idea that uncoordinated actions may come to grief through the mechanism of unintended consequences (pp. 44, 48). This is the phenomenon which Elster, borrowing from Sartre, calls 'counterfinality'. It is one of the two main species of social contradictions discussed at length in his earlier work Logic and Society. The second is called 'suboptimality', and involves the kind of intentional produc-
tion of suboptimal consequences of which the Prisoner's dilemma is the paradigm. The contrast lies in the fact that, while suboptimality presupposes strategic rationality on the part of the players, counterfactuals can arise only at a pre-strategic, pre-game-theoretic stage. This stage is, for Elster, the true home of Marx's methodological expertise. Thus: 'Although strategic interaction is crucial in economic life, the way in which and when classes in modern society took little explicit account of it'. Moreover, what he says is 'hardly more coherent and systematic than what may be discovered in Hobbes, Rousseau or Tocqueville', and he is 'sometimes confused' with respect to a 'crucial' element of it (pp. 14-15). Indeed, he scores badly for game-theoretic competence in general. Thus, he commits the cardinal error of violating the principle of 'mutual rationality' (p. 298). His inadequacy also shows itself in less basic, but still important, areas, as in his 'narrow pre-strategic conception of power' (pp. 406, 421).

To see the force of this assessment, one has to invoke an idea that runs through Elster's work and is made most fully explicit in one of the sets of 'Replies' to critics referred to earlier. It is that the conceptual distinction between counterfactual and suboptimality 'corresponds to the historical divide' between traditional and modern societies (Inquiry 23, 1980, pp. 216-17). It follows that while Marx's methodological contribution may be of use to the anthropologist or ancient historian, it can have little to offer the student of capitalism. It follows also that he himself lacked the conceptual tools needed to do justice to a central object of his social science, the formation and interaction of classes in modern societies. What actively interests Elster, as any acquaintance with his writings will show, is the application of game-theoretic insights to those societies, not the parametric predilections of traditional actors. It now becomes difficult to see what could be of personal significance for him in Marx's method. Indeed, one might ask how Elster could possibly respect Marx, since he is a complete duffer at game theory.

Faced with the claim that Elster finds some of Marx's substantive theories to be 'true and important', one can only ask 'what theories'? On almost any medium-sized topic one chooses, his verdict will be, 'to be frankly dismissive'. Taking up the epithets listed earlier, one may note that Marx's views on 'man and nature' are said to be 'either rambling and incoherent, or inherently trivial' (p. 53). His discussion of religion is described as 'arbitrary and largely incoherent' (pp. 493-94). Going beyond the list, one may cite the assertion that the writings on international politics are 'largely devoid of theoretical interest' (p. 17). It is true that occasionally a less hostile conclusion is revealed, but even then what is chiefly remarkable is the grudging and patronising way in which he manages to put these elements to his credit. Elster's verdict is that Marx's substantive theories to be 'true and important', in the sense deserving the label is just the kind of farcical intellectual disaster, but that is another matter.

The comparison with Kolakowski, Elster's predecessor as the chief interpreter of Marx to the academy, is instructive here. Without wishing to propound any cheap party line, the comparison can be quite unfair to view the first volume of Main Currents of Marxism in that way. It is true that the later volumes, on Marxism after Marx, are an accelerating intellectual disaster, but that is another matter. Kolakowski's reading, in contrast to Elster's, makes intelligible the claim of Marx's work to be an important and intellectually significant venture, not just a major post-Ricardian whose method may be of use to the anthropologist or ancient historian. Indeed, he scores badly for game-theoretic competence in general. Thus, he commits the cardinal error of violating the principle of 'mutual rationality' (p. 298). His inadequacy also shows itself in less basic, but still important, areas, as in his 'narrow pre-strategic conception of power' (pp. 406, 421).

The first, the theory of history, is on Elster's presentation comprehensively vitiated by his prior nature of his reasoning - the speculative, teleological nature of his reasoning: the speculative, teleological strategy in his thought' (p. 437). The position as the second, economic theory, is sufficiently indicated by noting that the two 'main pillars' of the analysis of capitalism as an economic system, the labour theory of value and the determination of profit, have both, according to Elster, 'conclusively been shown to be invalid' (p. 119). In general, his view of Marx's status as an economist is fairly caught in McLennan's focusing on the phrase 'a minor post-Ricardian' (p. 513). If one steps back from Elster's own account to ask what elements within the methodological expert's trust in his reputation for game-theoretic competence in general. Thus, he commits the cardinal error of violating the principle of 'mutual rationality' (p. 298). His inadequacy also shows itself in less basic, but still important, areas, as in his 'narrow pre-strategic conception of power' (pp. 406, 421).

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