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Book Review

In Search of a Materialist *Ethics*

Review of Ted Stolze, *Becoming Marxist. Studies in Philosophy, Struggle, and Endurance*

(Leinen: Brill/Historical Materialism Book Series)

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Ted Stolze's *Becoming Marxist* is an impressive book and one of the most important recent contributions to the question of a materialist practice of philosophy. Although it is not a typical monograph, it is not simply a collection of texts. There is a common thread running through the different texts that gives the book the character of coherent research project into the possibility of a materialist intervention that could really support a politics of self-emancipation and the ethics and civility that go along with it.

The first chapter of the book 'What is a Philosophical Tendency' begins with positing that materialism is not simply a philosophical position or system. Rather, within the terrain of philosophy we are dealing with 'an interminable struggle between inextricably linked but evershifting materialist and idealist tendencies' (p. 4). Stolze retraces this debate in the history of Marxism, stressing the importance of Louis Althusser's conceptualisation of philosophy as *kampfplatz* between spontaneous materialist elements that emerge in the terrain of science and political practice and the idealism associated with ideological regression.¹ He also refers to Althusser's highly original conception of aleatory materialism and his rejection of any philosophical theory of Origin.² Stolze then turns a very important text, namely Pierre Macherey's text on the history of philosophy as a struggle of tendencies.³

Especially striking is Macherey's argument that no philosophical category is ever fixed once and for all but is continually up for grabs, depending on the objective historical conditions and the outcome of the struggle between idealist and materialist tendencies. For example, Macherey insists that materialism is not realism but instead that realism is an 'inconsequent materialism'. His point is that various forms of idealism have regularly exploited the category of the 'real' and substituted thought for objective material reality that in fact exists prior to and independent of thought. At the same time, he notes, idealism 'dissimulates the true nature of philosophy as a struggle of tendencies', claims to be 'beyond' such tendencies, and refuses to admit their existence. (p. 17)

For Stolze, Macherey offers a more complex and nuanced image of the conflicting philosophical tendencies: 'There exists a broad array of materialisms as well as idealisms; *in the last instance*, however, each distinctive variety of materialism or idealism belongs to just that philosophical kind and not the other' (p. 19). It is exactly this that enables a 'non-exploitative Marxist philosophical interventions must occur *from within* texts and traditions themselves, by identifying the concrete ways in which materialist and idealist tendencies arise, clash, and encroach upon one another's conceptual space' (p. 26). Stolze goes back to Althusser and his insistence that the emergence of philosophy requires the existence of social classes and the existence of science. He also stresses the importance of Lenin's warning that intelligent idealism is preferable to vulgar materialism, and reminds of Michel Pêcheux's insight that when we are discussing materialism and idealism we are not discussing symmetrical philosophical tendencies.⁴ Finally by means of a reference to André Tosel's theory of a potential Marxist theory of action Stolze stresses in a certain way the practical and even normative aspects of such debates, at the same time suggesting that even a 'communism of finitude' (p. 34) will not spell the end of philosophy.

The next chapter turns to a figure with whom Stolze is in constant dialogue: Paul of Tarsus, presented here as a thinker of the conjuncture, whose project was 'the establishment of a vast network of inclusive and egalitarian urban assemblies in opposition to Roman imperial order' (p. 37), by means of a 'nonviolent resistance to Roman imperial domination' (p. 49). Stolze is critical of Badiou's approach to Paul⁵ since he thinks that 'Badiou is more interested in Paul's "doctrine" and so fails to grasp the importance of the apostle's mission – his *practice*' (p.51). Moreover, he stresses how Paul used as part of this mission also his practice as tentmaker, but also the fact that Paul was working within a broader movement.

Stolze, who has an impressive knowledge of contemporary biblical literature deals with Paul also in chapter three which deals with Paul's gift economy and a new system of value.

Finally, though, the new system of value that Paul sketches, which reconfigures and exceeds the boundaries of the classical model of a household economy, recognises the hard work and suffering undergone by its members. It involves a commitment to sharing and hospitality with all, but with what could be called a preferential option for the poor. (p. 71).

That is why one can say that Paul not only calls for debt cancellation and economic redistribution, in this sense re-enacting the ancient Israelite ‘jubilee tradition,’ turning into the emancipatory imager of a ‘cosmic jubilee’ (p. 72).

The next chapter picks up a question that Althusser had first posed, namely that of a theory of historical individuality. Stolze goes back to Lucien Sève and his theory of individuality.⁶ He reminds that for Sève theoretical anti-humanism can only be the critical starting point for a potential Marxist anthropology. Stolze suggests that Sève had a more dialectical approach than Althusser, since the latter mainly stressed the general figures of individuality but not the actual complexity and variety of actual concrete forms of historical individuality, ‘the fine-grained, concrete analysis that is required in order to show how a given mode of production appropriates human mental and physical capabilities, for instance, by constraining free time or stunting personal development’ (p. 80). Moreover, Stolze suggests that in a similar manner to Althusser’s distinction between the real object and the object in thought a distinction can be made between ‘between the *concrete individual* and the *subjected individual*’ (p. 82), and this distinction enables a thinking of the ways that individuals can trace emancipative paths beyond the constraints imposed by forms of ideological interpellation.

As human beings in our individual composition, each of us strives to persist in our being and to increase our capacities to flourish. As a result, each of us in our own singularity always threatens to act as what could be called a ‘counter friction’ to disrupt the smooth operation of the interpellative machine. Again using Spinozist language, Sève envisions constructing a ‘science of the singular’ that would help one to identify and open up an emancipatory path along which all of humanity may journey together. (pp. 82–83)

Returning to biblical examples, Stolze refers to Simon Peter. By a careful reading of the Biblical sources Stolze uses Simon Peter as a reference to suggest the complexity of the process by which concrete forms of individuality emerge, within specific conjunctures and specific forms of interpellation and counter-interpellation. Moreover, by stressing the discrepancy between the what we now about Simon Peter’s actual practice and a strong ethos of solidarity to all those marginalized by Roman Imperial Rule and the later canonisation of his trajectory as a call for conformity to dominant powers, Stolze offers an example of not only the complexity of the emergent of a concrete individual but also of the equal complex ways that within ideological formation particular individuals and their names are resignified.

In the next chapter Stolze turns to the Hobbes and his conception of the multitude, and a potential theory of political passions and especially the ‘madness of the multitude’, stressing that instead of a pre-political madness Hobbes is actually referring to a revolt against a sovereign power.

In Chapter Eight of *Leviathan* Hobbes is purportedly describing the vicissitudes of human beings in the state of nature *prior to* the emergence of the order and stability that is above all else the aim of a centralised sovereign power. Yet the scenario he actually depicts much more resembles one in which a previously law-abiding people has degenerated into what in Chapter 22 he terms an unlawful

'tumultuous assembly' (L 22.33.33). As Hobbes explains in this later chapter, 'it is not a set number that makes the assembly unlawful, but such a number as the present officers are not able to suppress and bring to justice' (L 22.33). Although Hobbes does not explicitly characterize situations of 'unlawful tumult' (L 22.34) as manifestations of collective madness, the implication is there. The upshot of this theoretical 'discrepancy' is that in Chapter Eight Hobbes has already provided an example of prepolitical collective madness that would be much more appropriate for characterising the post-political multitude in revolt against an *already-existing* sovereign power. (p.104)

For Stolze Hobbes' conceptualization of the excessive passions and even 'madness' of the Multitude expresses exactly a kind of 'fear of the masses' and the explanation that he offers is that 'Hobbes's individualism prevents him from fully grasping the mass political significance of the tumultuous events unfolding around him, their properly transindividual dynamic' (p. 110).

In the next chapter he turns to three affects in Spinoza that have not received proper attention, the affects of resistance: indignation, glory and serenity suggesting that each one corresponds to 'a distinctive mode of political rebellion, namely, *indignant* rebellion, *glorious* rebellion, and *serene* rebellion' (p. 113). Stolze stresses how Spinoza has a theory of indignation and how it has both a regulative and a constitutive aspect in regards to sovereign power and its constant re-articulation. However, for Spinoza indignation is a 'bad passion' as a destructive impulse and thus also has a theory of the '*transition* from instrumentally bad to instrumentally good passions' (p. 117). In contrast, Stolze thinks that it is glory as an affect that points towards an emancipatory historical agency.

Stolze thinks that in 'Part Five of the *Ethics* Spinoza famously proposes a kind of cognitive therapy by means of which human passional servitude can partially be overcome by the power of reason to redirect bad affects' (p. 131). To that end in regards to indignation 'it is necessary to counter its effect by strengthening the affect of generosity by reflecting on the usefulness of social solidarity' (p. 133). This points to the importance of how 'serenity is an *essentially active* joyous affect in contrast both to indignation, which is a passive sad affect, and to glory, which is a joyous affect but one that fluctuates between passive and active forms' (p. 135). If we combine this with the Spinoza's knowledge of the third kind.

For Spinoza politics rooted in knowledge of the third kind would not be abstract and formal but would be qualitative, concrete, and would concern the order of everyday existence. As a result, persons who cultivated the affect of serenity would strive to extricate themselves from fear of failure and death and to understand that freedom is a constant struggle whose path is arduous: along the way victories are invariably mixed with defeats. A serene individual would not only persist in his or her desire for socio-political transformation over the long run, but in the very midst of social upheaval he or she would also seek to adopt, and sustain, what Spinoza memorably called the 'perspective of eternity' (*species aeternitatis*). (p. 137).

Stolze in many instances expresses his theoretical debt to Alexander Matheron and in particular his book *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* [Individual and Community in Spinoza],⁷ so it seems rather natural to dedicate a chapter to Matheron's reading of Spinoza. This how Stolze attempts to present the broader significance of this reading:

Essentially, Spinoza is arguing for an indefinite enlargement of collective beatitude or what we could call a 'politics of the third kind'. A wise person is able to form a 'community of minds' not only with a small number of privileged individuals but potentially with all of humanity. Indeed, such a community of all minds has always already existed *in itself*; this community-to-come only needs to be revealed to each of its members and thereby to be realised *for itself*. This requires the recomposition of finite modes and the establishment of enhanced communication among individuals. It is worth noting that for Spinoza a community of wise persons would not be 'simpler' than societies with *imperia* but would embody complex social-political institutions and would promote robust democratic debate. (pp. 147-148).

The next chapter, actually described by Stolze as an interlude, refers to the question of a potential ethics for Marxism. He turns to the Spinozist notion of *fortitude*. Indignation can be the first affective form of resistance, but is not enough. Consequently, what is needed is a 'a second, more affirmative, moment of radicalisation: a 'utopian' – or perhaps 'romantic' – desire for a profoundly different world' (p. 161). This is what he finds in fortitude as a combination of courage and generosity.

What then is the relevance of Spinoza's analysis of fortitude for radical political theory and practice? First of all, courage and generosity can emotionally bind persons together in pursuit of a collective project. As Macherey has argued, courage is a 'force of character' that is mutually reinforced and strengthened by generosity. Moreover, since fortitude, courage, and generosity are active and joyous affects, their cultivation and stabilisation can help groups avoid the pitfalls of passive and sad affects, namely, such passions as fear and hope. They can bolster what Hasana Sharp has termed Spinoza's strategy of 'anti-fear'. Finally, although Spinoza does not explicitly say as much, these affects can be, and are, imitated: those who find themselves in the company of courageous or generous persons are frequently led as well to take on these qualities. (p. 166)

The next chapter deals with 'a missed encounter between Karl Marx and his French contemporary, Claude Bernard, the leading physiologist of the nineteenth century and the discoverer of the key biological concept of what has come to be known as 'homeostasis' (p. 177). Combining this return to conceptions of nature, life and labour in nineteenth century and contemporary debates on the metabolic rifts, Stolze proposes a conception of emancipation that also includes the ecological dimension.

To reestablish the dignity of freely associated labour, then, would require not only healing the metabolic rift between humanity and nature and the social metabolic rift among persons but also restoring human homeostasis in order to insure fair

opportunity for the fulfilment of human 'purpose and desire' in the workplace and throughout the larger society. (p. 184)

In the next chapter, entitled 'Hegel or Spinoza: Substance, Subject and Critical Marxism,' Stolze attempts to answer recent criticisms of the 'Spinozist turn' of radical thinkers, criticisms that have been made by thinkers such as Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou. Stolze is critical of both claims that somehow the return Spinoza represents the ideology of late capitalism but also the idea the only possible conception of the Whole would be a Hegelian one. Moreover, he insists that it is unfair to treat Spinoza's work as lacking a reference to subjectivity, if we look at Spinoza's *Ethics*. At the same time, following Macherey⁸ Stolze insists that '[b]y making thought an attribute of substance, Spinoza construed knowledge as an absolutely objective process without a subject and freed its internal causal movement from any teleological presupposition' (p. 195). Moreover, for Stolze 'Spinoza's conception of selfhood as inextricably caught up in causal relations, by contrast, provides the basis for an *ecologically embedded* perspective that continues to be both more plausible and useful for political theory and practice (p.196).

The next chapter, entitled 'Contradictions of Hyperreality: Baudrillard, Žižek, and Virtual Dialectics,' begins with a very interesting comparison between Leibniz and Ernst Bloch. For Stolze, 'Leibniz held a position that the actual arises from, and is dependent on, the virtual' (p. 200), whereas for Bloch 'the virtual arises from, and is dependent on, the actual' (p. 201). Stolze uses Bloch's critique of Leibniz as a way to discuss Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality and the 'inverted Leibnizianism' that can be found in this perspective.

It would be difficult to find a more revealing account of Baudrillard's inverted Leibnizianism: the reassertion of windowless monads, the invocation of a holographic universe in which each individual expresses the totality of all individuals but only from within – the outside has effectively dissolved. External relations between and among individuals have folded into, been exhausted by, internal relations alone. (p. 205)

Stolze suggests that Spinoza already offered in his time an answer to Leibniz that in a certain way also points towards the limits of Baudrillard's position. Instead of a virtual possibility which is already there at the beginning, Spinoza points towards the constant reopening of historical possibility within the singularity of bodies and conjunctures, something that can help us go beyond Baudrillard's pessimism.

In Leibniz's metaphysics virtual possibilities simply await their actualisation; in Spinoza's metaphysics, though, we discover something 'less than substance' that drives and incessantly reopens the ontological process by which both singular things (actualities) and accompanying new real-possibilities (virtualities) arise. (p. 207)

The next chapter, entitled 'A Marxist Encounter with the Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze,' attempts a reading of the encounter and dialogue of Deleuze (and Guattari) with Marxism, including a defence of the notion of micropolitics.

Micropolitics isn't intended to replace class struggle but to operate as a militant analysis (or an analysis *for militants*) that might help to prevent left organisations and mass movements from reproducing within their ranks precisely the same hierarchies, the same certitudes, the same oppressions that already exist in class society. (p. 216)

Chapter 12, 'Deleuze and Althusser: Flirting with Structuralism' discusses a dialogue between Deleuze and Althusser on structuralism and in particular their exchange in regards to Deleuze's text on structuralism.⁹ In that text Deleuze, attempted to offer some criteria that could facilitate the recognition of 'structuralism' in order to avoid elusive generalizations: 'a symbolic criterion, a topological criterion, a differential and singular criterion, a serial criterion, and a criterion involving the "empty case"' (p. 222). These criteria indeed offer a way to recognize the broad movement usually labelled 'structuralism', stressing the particular theoretical modalities that can be found in such texts, beyond the simple reference to the 'structure', and also including in the last criterion the question of displacement between series that in the eyes of Deleuze makes possible a structural mutation or a revolutionary practice.

According to Stolze, Althusser's response to Deleuze offered two main points of criticism. One was that usually when referring to structuralism different writers and currents are put together despite their many differences. The other had to do with the emphasis on the symbolic which may be appropriate in domains such as psychoanalysis but not in other. Consequently,

What Althusser (by way of Macherey) seems to be most concerned about in his letter to Deleuze, then, is the latter's failure to grasp the unevenness of structuralism or to see the struggle of tendencies within such a heterogeneous movement of diverse authors, texts, and insights. There is a pressing theoretical need to distinguish between those features of structuralism that can lead to enriching Marxism and those features that must be kept at a distance. In a word, Deleuze's lecture inadequately sorts out the materialist and idealist elements at work within the structuralist ideology. (p. 229)

What is important is how these comments were reflected in Deleuze's revision of his text. Stolze stresses the inclusion of a 'a new fourth criterion called that of differentiation, with a 'c' to distinguish it from the criterion of differentiation with a 't' (p. 229). For Deleuze this distinction is a way to rethink different temporalities but also the question of virtuality in a dialogue with Althusser.

Quite clearly, then, Deleuze has embraced Althusser's critique of the 'homogeneous continuity' and 'contemporaneity' at work in the Hegelian account of historical time. He agrees that the 'differential histories' comprising a given social formation manifest their own distinctive rhythms and only exist in a complex state of interdependence. However, Deleuze has enriched Althusser's analysis by further demarcating the 'virtual coexistence' or 'differentiation' of these histories from their 'actualisation' as particular material *effects* – that is, their 'differentiation'. (p. 232)

Moreover, Stolze stresses how in the second of the version of his text Deleuze revisits the notion of the 'empty square', the paradoxical object that enables displacement, on the basis of Balibar's comments in *Reading Capital* on the notion of value, with Deleuze insisting that value as expression of 'generalized labour' 'is reducible neither to the terms of the exchange, nor to the exchange relation itself, but that forms an eminently symbolic third term in perpetual displacement, and as a function of which the relational variations will be defined.' (Deleuze 2004, p. 188). Stolze stresses how for Deleuze the connection between the subject and the empty space enables the emergence of a 'nomadic subject', a notion that would later be central in Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical investigations.

Chapter 13 turns to Antonio Negri's reading of the Book of Job.¹⁰ Stolze stresses how Negri actually manages to 'to identify a powerfully materialist dimension of the Book of Job' (p. 241) and to grasp the emancipatory aspect inscribed at the heart of Messianic references. Consequently, he suggests that 'Negri has made a formidable contribution to what could be termed a distinctively Marxist wisdom tradition' (p. 245).

Chapter 14 turns to Jürgen Habermas and his conception of the public sphere. Stolze retraces Habermas intellectual trajectory and how he gradually moved to a position that capitalism is unsurpassable: 'although Habermas has regularly called attention to the failures of advanced capitalist societies, he has equally insisted that capitalism itself cannot be superseded' (p. 253). Stolze presents all the difficulties that Habermas faces in his attempt both to defend the need for autonomous public spheres and turn towards a more 'realistic' political position, and how Habermas ends up with a theorization which recognizes a rather minimal ability of movements and citizens to actually induce social transformation.

Although Habermas explicitly permits citizens within 'weak' public spheres to discuss anything they like – presumably even the structural transformation of capitalist social relations – nonetheless his allowance for such freewheeling discussion has a political price to be paid. These opinions, no matter how urgently or persuasively expressed, remain mere opinions; and ultimately citizens must be content either symbolically to storm an administrative fortress (the siege model) or else generate certain messages from the periphery that at best will eventually filter across to be interpreted, and legitimated, by the administrative centre (the sluice model). Either way, their ability to carry out genuinely collective action has been seriously undercut. (p. 260).

Chapter 15 takes as starting point Stolze's 'dismay at Richard Rorty's rejection of a "bottom-up way of achieving utopia"' (p. 263). To that he opposes his own version of a 'weak universalism' (p. 265), which is largely indebted to Étienne Balibar's exploration of the ambiguities of universalism¹¹ and also Balibar's insistence on the inseparability of freedom and equality and on the 'intersubjective or "transindividual" nature of ideal universality' (p. 268). Stolze insists on the possibility of a 'specifically *normative* Principle of Self-Emancipation' which he defines in the following manner:

Actions undertaken to improve the wellbeing of the oppressed should be either led by the oppressed themselves or, to the extent that this is not feasible, at their behest and under their authority. (p. 271)

Stolze insists that if we think emancipation as self-emancipation, then it is also necessary to accept the position that 'rights should never be *imposed* from above but must always be *claimed* from below, either directly by victims of oppression themselves or, if this is not feasible, by those who indirectly seek to support the self-emancipation of such victims by acting *as if* the oppressed themselves were in charge' (p. 276). Moreover, again drawing on Balibar's writings, he suggests that this also points towards a form of 'bottom-up' or potentially communist civility. Stolze also attempts to answer any potential criticisms to his position, either in the form of calls for a 'strong' universalism, or in the form of positions that deny the existence of any normative aspect in Marx's mature work, to which he opposes his own political conception of normativity: 'without political struggle from below, there can be no moral progress from above' (p. 292).

The next chapter is dedicated to Islamophobia with Stolze beginning with Sartre's writings on Anti-Semitism¹² and how they were also influential in critiques of racism, colonialism and sexism, in order to suggest the possibility of treating Islamophobia in similar terms. This how he defines his approach:

Bearing in mind Stephen Eric Bronner's caveat that 'solidarity with one's own group is easy – solidarity with the Other is always more difficult', my concern is not with how Muslims themselves act in a self-emancipatory manner but with how Muslims and non-Muslims can engage in a common struggle against Islamophobia. This is the question of how, to use Deleuzian terminology, non-Muslims may enter into a *becoming-Muslim* – a 'minoritarian' emancipatory process that can help to *dialecticise* the 'majoritarian' emancipatory process associated with class. (p. 301)

As a result, resistance to anti-Semitism and to Islamophobia lies in reclaiming the concrete features of our human condition and in fashioning societies grounded in solidarity and justice for all. (p. 302)

The next chapter attempts to deal with the moral arguments associated with the Climate Crisis. The first argument is the *Urgency Argument* based on the premise that 'one should urgently act to halt any grave threat posing serious harm to others' (p. 304). The second argument is the *Unsustainability Argument* based on the unsustainable character of contemporary capitalist development. To the *Urgency Argument* Stolze adds the *Obstruction Argument*, which points to the ways that capitalism obstructs collective action to tackle the current Climate Crisis. From this he moves to the *Removal Argument* which is constructed in the following manner:

1. The capitalist mode of production is a grave threat posing serious harm to human development.

2. Any mode of production that is a grave threat posing serious harm to human development should be removed.
3. But capitalism *must* be removed through collective action.
4. Therefore, capitalism *should* be removed through collective action. (p. 317)

The final chapter, which is defined as a *Coda*, suggests that a major influence on both Spinoza and Marx was Aristotle, 'in particular with respect to what Aristotle called *eudaimonia*, Spinoza called *beatitudo*, and Marx called 'real' – as opposed to 'illusory' – happiness' (p. 322). Stolze insists that *eudaimonia* refers to a practical activity and thus it is consistent with Marx's vision in *Capital* of a society based on the production by freely associated men, and he goes at length how in Marx's reference to a potential socialist future we can find such a conception of a society that expands free time and the potential for collective *eudaimonia*. Stolze insists that although Spinoza seems to align himself more with Epicurus, Democritus and Lucretius, one can still find elements of an Aristotelian conception of *eudaimonia*, especially when he discusses *beatitudo*. Moreover, Stolze suggests a certain materialist reversal of the order of Spinoza's *Ethics* in order to think a version of beatitudo that is based on the common potentiality for emancipation and happiness of finite human beings in their collective practices.

But what if we were to read Spinoza's *Ethics* not according to its order of presentation but instead according to its conceptual order? What if we were to carry out a *materialist reversal* and begin with finite modes, human in particular, seek what is common to all as we move ontologically outward, and come to appreciate how everything holds together as diversity in unity? Beginning with Part three, we would move in succession to Part Four, Part Two, Part One, and still wind up at Part Five – but with a new appreciation of what Spinoza means by substance and beatitudo. Substance would then be seen as a point of arrival and not as a point of departure; and we would grow accustomed to calling metaphysics not first but *last* philosophy.

Beatitudo would turn out to be not the solitary experience of a fortunate few but a common good to be experienced through sharing with others to the greatest degree conceivable, ultimately, with all of humanity and the entire world. In continuity with the Aristotelian Left, and in particular with his Islamic philosophical predecessor Averroes, Spinoza agrees that the human intellect is not privately and exclusively held by individuals but opens up to the entire cosmos. (p. 336)

Based on such a reading of Spinoza in light of what he defines as a 'Left Aristotelian' tradition, Stolze suggests that anticapitalist struggle can be conceived, in a certain way in an *eternal* dimension, in the sense that it points beyond the current conjuncture towards a society organized on the basis of the common interest of humanity.

If human beings are to transform social structures and institutions effectively and lastingly, then they must go beyond conceiving them abstractly and isolated from

one another; instead, they must grasp how these structures and institutions fit concretely into a larger scheme (whether it is called 'divine' or 'natural' is moot, for these descriptions are functionally equivalent in Spinoza's metaphysics). Indeed, this realisation allows for the demarcation of an *eternal* dimension to political struggle that is not limited to merely episodic skirmishes. In order to overturn capitalism one must be able to step back and comprehend it from 'the perspective of eternity' and thereby orient anti-capitalist strategy that could lead to a new mode of production under – as Marx put it in *Capital* – the 'conscious and planned control' of 'freely associated' men and women. Let us call the anticipatory experience of this eternal dimension of political struggle by its Spinozist name, *beatitude*, for it points beyond the present conjuncture to how one day society could be reorganised in the common interest of all humanity (p. 347)

The fact that the book ends with such an attempt towards a Marxist-Spinozist conception of beatitude in a certain way encapsulates the originality of Stolze's approach. In a certain way one might say that Stolze attempts to research the conditions for a materialist *Ethics*, in the sense of a materialist ontology that can form the basis of a collective achievement of both the social forms of emancipated human labour, but also the collective wisdom and intellectual love that indeed lead to beatitude and *eudaimonia*, conceived as both social and intellectual states. This is the point where the common threads running through the book and the different chapters meet. On the one hand, Stolze retraces a line of thinking, from Althusser, to Deleuze, to Macherey that inspired by Spinoza (but in the case of Stolze also by a certain 'Left Aristotelianism') redefines materialism as a radical anti-teleological position, beyond any historical metaphysics. On the other hand, Stolze takes this as the starting point in order to rethink an *Ethics*, not in the sense of a set of moral assumptions, but in that of a collective emancipatory praxis that leads to a society where collective understanding and knowledge, what Stolze even suggests to describe as 'Marxist wisdom', enables the collective experimentation with new social forms beyond the constraints of the market and beyond the risk of an imminent ecological disaster of planetary dimension. This is combined with an acute perception of how in the Biblical tradition and historical Christianity we can find the dynamic of a movement towards emancipation from poverty, imperial power and fear. And it is here that we can find the originality of Stolze and the importance of his contribution to a rethinking materialism as an emancipatory philosophical practice aligned to political projects aiming at facilitating the self-emancipation of that vast majority of persons that in contemporary societies have to endure the humiliating and alienating effects of capitalist exploitation. Thus he manages to bring forward an ethical and praxeological element that is usually absent from most discussions of the tradition associated with Althusserian theoretical anti-humanism, which I think has a broader significance and enables both a better understanding of this tradition and better dialogue between it and other philosophical traditions. And his that by a series of texts, in fact a philosophical trajectory, that, at the same time, offer important readings of theoretical confrontations with these questions, thus making evident that the process of elaborating such a potential materialist *Ethics* can only be dialogic and agonistic, combining textual

attentiveness, dialectical reasoning and a militant optic, in sum a certain idea of reading and writing as interventions.

Consequently, Stolze makes an important contribution to the open question of a philosophy for Marxism, in the sense of a philosophy that both enables the critical theoretical work that is necessary to understand and fight exploitation and oppression but also allies itself with the collective praxis that can induce such social transformation.

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Notes

¹ A position that in its full elaboration can be found in Althusser 1990.

² Althusser 2006.

³ In Macherey 1999.

⁴ Pêcheux 1982.

⁵ Badiou 1997.

⁶ Sève 1972.

⁷ Matheron ²1988.

⁸ In particular Macherey 2011

⁹ In Deleuze 2004.

¹⁰ Negri 2009.

¹¹ See Balibar 2020.

¹² Sartre 1995.