

**Michael Wayne.** *Red Kant: Aesthetics, Marxism and the Third Critique.* Bloomsbury 2014. 240 pp. \$112.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781472511348).

This is a work of Marxist philosophy that offers an audacious rereading of Kant's critical project—in particular the place therein of the third *Critique*—as an important precursor to Marx and, more importantly, as a valuable yet largely unrecognized philosophical resource for the development of a Marxist account of revolutionary praxis. Although not entirely without precedent, such a view is unusual within the Marxist tradition. On the one hand, the orthodox Marxist view portrays Kant as a prototypical 'bourgeois' thinker on the grounds of having codified philosophically the contradictory dualisms undergirding the conceptual closure and abstract freedom that uphold the social order of capitalism. Exegetically, this view is not fundamentally opposed to mainstream liberal or conservative interpretations—it's just contextualized politically within a certain historical framework, and evaluated accordingly. On the other hand, those Marxists (far fewer) who have attempted to rethink Marxism on a more Kantian basis, whether in epistemological or moral terms, have been censured for (among other things) effectively renouncing the revolutionary intentions of the project. Against this background, Michael Wayne contends that the problems with Kantian-Marxism typically stem from its having been based on *neo*-Kantianism, and that this actually shares something crucial with the orthodox Marxist view (along with mainstream interpretations), to wit, an insensitivity to the 'internal momentum' that propelled the development of Kant's thought.

Consequently, and more specifically, Wayne's view is that each of these positions fails to grasp the real significance of the third *Critique*'s 'aesthetic turn', and how this can be seen as responding in a surprisingly radical way to the contradictions—which Wayne duly regards as reflecting real *social* contradictions—posed by the first two *Critiques*. Standard lines of interpretation downplay or ignore these contradictions, and Wayne admits that there is ample textual support for doing so—which is in effect to concede that Kant specialists are unlikely to be persuaded by his book. But they are not his intended audience. For those more radically inclined, he wants to show that there are also sufficient grounds for a more 'productive' reading, one that would see Kant as having grappled with the emerging problems of capitalist society, especially that of reification, thereby bringing to light the overlooked genealogical link with Marx, and showing how Kantian aesthetics can be read so as to make a substantial contribution to contemporary Marxist philosophy that is as important as it is unexpected.

This contribution is encapsulated in Wayne's definition of the Kantian aesthetic as 'a critical (moral-political) communicative act in a sensuous-imaginative form' (195). This conception offers 'a utopian anticipation of a reconciliation of the division between the social and the creative' which can, Wayne thinks, help us in 'reconnecting those components of our being that have been fissured by an evolving capitalist system' (1-2). By itself, such 'reconnection' does not imply any sort of revolutionary transformation. But because it is geared to overcoming the limits of reified experience, it is an essential condition of such transformation. And for Wayne that is precisely what Kant himself had in mind in turning to aesthetics—properly understood, the Kantian aesthetic 'mobilizes capacities and possibilities that make it indispensable for developing a culture open to radical social change' (5).

Following an Introduction and opening chapter that situate the main argument in broad strokes, Wayne's discussion unfolds across seven more chapters (the last of which amounts to a

condensed recap of the whole): chapter 2 sets out (somewhat sketchily) the problem stemming from the first *Critique* in terms of reification, while chapters 3-7 address aspects of Kant's aesthetics as presented in the third *Critique*, and develop the claim that this is basically a project of *de*-reification. Wayne addresses a considerable amount of material, albeit of necessity somewhat unevenly, as his attention is strategically oriented to the goal of laying out a plausible Marxist reading, and motivating Marxism's internal need for that reading. Here one will find many points of resonance with Lukács, Benjamin, Kracauer, and especially Adorno's dialectically nuanced reading of Kant. There are also several extended critical discussions of other figures, including Bourdieu, Colletti, Della Volpe, Eagleton, and Rancière. There is, however, no detailed engagement with mainstream Kant scholarship. This absence is not a flaw, as such engagement would overburden the book with little or no payoff in terms of the task at hand. But those readers who are keen on the minutiae of specialized Kant research may find Wayne's discussion somewhat loose and superficial.

Wayne's overall discussion is an attempt to capture the 'architecture' of Kant's critical project. His interpretive standpoint thus assumes that the project has an overall structural coherence. Unlike others who make similar assumptions, however, Wayne insists that within and between the first two *Critiques* there are real contradictions, and that the third enacts a philosophical and methodological break in order to resolve them. Adopting a 'parallax' view in the sense of Kojin Karatani's idea of 'transcritique', Wayne contends that Kant recognized the contradictions as such, that he was disturbed by them, and that he undertook a radically new approach precisely in order to provide the dialectical mediation that *de*-reification required. *This* is the 'architecture' that interests Wayne, and which he thinks is neglected by other interpretations, which tend either to gloss over the contradictions and to force Kant's aesthetics into a kind of dumbed-down consistency with the first two *Critiques*, or else simply to take the contradictions as evidence of a bankrupt system. Wayne's dialectical orientation enables him to navigate between the text of the third *Critique* and its historical context—as much as possible he bases his arguments on the letter of Kant's work, but there are pivotal moments where he admits that Kant himself was still unclear as to the implications to which the 'momentum' of his own reasoning implicitly committed him.

The devil is, of course, in the details, and there is a profusion of details in this work. In addition to many key notions from the first *Critique*, including subreption, the aspects of Kant's aesthetics that are given a Marxist interpretation include reflecting (as opposed to determining) judgment, productive and reproductive imagination, the beautiful and the sublime (reintegrated as a 'conceptual pairing'), aesthetic ideas, technic (as distinct from the technically practical), formal purposiveness (as distinct from purposiveness without a purpose), indeterminacy, singularity, analogy, and metaphor. A brief review cannot address Wayne's specific arguments. But his key claims may be laid as follows: Kant's aesthetic is *not* non-conceptual—this is the backbone of Wayne's account. He argues that other interpretations, in following too literally those passages indicating a non-conceptual reading, grievously misunderstand what's really going on. In Wayne's cogent but contentious view, Kant's aesthetics differs from the earlier *Critiques* not in virtue of being non-conceptual, but because it introduces a *different kind* of conceptuality—one which, in bridging conceptual knowledge and sensuous experience, provides a glimpse of the socially transformative praxis thematized later by Marx (a view bolstered by considerations on how Kant's discussion of artistic labour introduced a materialist turn in his work). Wayne's claim about aesthetic conceptuality supports his further contention that Kantian aesthetics is thoroughly social or intersubjective, and that it can serve to further cultivate human sociality, rather than being, as it is usually portrayed, merely subjective or asocial. This is tied to Wayne's understanding of Kant's notion of 'disinterestedness', which he interprets

persuasively as freedom from compulsion in a way that rebuts the standard view that Kant's aesthetics must be read apolitically. Not that Wayne subordinates it to the political agenda of Marxism. But given the generative role he assigns to the productive imagination, the metaphorical dimension of the aesthetic portends the possibility of seeing the world anew that is an essential precondition of any viable revolutionary agency, and is best understood in this way.

In short, Wayne aims to recover the 'materialist kernel' in Kant's thought, and to rethink Kant's aesthetic turn in 'historical materialist terms' (6), while also making clear Marxism's need for this understanding of the relation between culture and imagination. This makes it a very welcome book. Those interested in the philosophical aspects of Marxism, and/or the latent political content of the third *Critique*, will do well to consult it. Not that it's the final word. Due to the sheer scope and complexity of the undertaking, some of the connections drawn between Kant and Marxism are not developed as fully as even sympathetic readers might wish. Also, there is the conspicuous absence of any detailed consideration of the teleological part of the third *Critique*. This is odd, inasmuch as many of Wayne's own claims—e.g., concerning the need to rethink nature (191), how the aesthetic produces 'onto-historical images' (211), and his own defence of 'teleological positing' (163-5)—suggest that that is actually where Kant's dialectical architecture culminates, and hence where the philosophical bond with Marxism is to be found. Nevertheless, as it stands, Wayne's book makes a provocative and substantial contribution to Marxist philosophy that should help to stimulate productive new approaches to the aesthetic dimension of radical politics and the deeper grounds of critique in general.

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