

La trahison de l'opulence. By JEAN-PIERRE DUPUY ET JEAN ROBERT. Coll. "Economie en liberté." Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976. Pp. 256.

The authors of this work contend that the extension of exchange and of the market (in their terminology the "hétéronome" system) from the goods sector to the service sector (health, transportation, education, the environment, etc.) inevitably leads to a paradox. The means employed—the resources and the institutions—not only are no longer capable of satisfying individuals' ends but also serve to increase individuals' dissatisfaction and frustration. Such a situation can be seen when a soci-

ety passes a "certain" critical threshold in its economic development. Such is now the case in what are called "industrialized countries."

According to the authors, the "hétéronome" system, prevalent in all these countries, gives rise to the phenomenon of counterproductivity. The authors describe this development as a state of "demand dominance," "un processus générateur de demandes illimitées de prise en charge" (p. 9), which leads to the "deterioration of the capacity of individuals for independent production [which] creates increased demand for, and expanded production of, the 'hétéronome' system's output" (p. 63). "The greater the importance of the means put to work by the 'hétéronome' system, the more the system becomes an obstacle to the realization of the ends it is supposed to serve" (p. 63). Thus, the authors argue, medicine runs counter to the interests of health, schools counter to the interests of knowledge, the communication system counter to the interests of communicators, etc.

The authors defend this bold and provocative thesis in ten chapters arranged in three sections of varying lengths.

They begin their analysis in a "theoretical" section with a critique of current economic theory derived from Adam Smith. They do not neglect, in passing, to emphasize as clearly as possible their reservations with regard to the theories and the concepts of Karl Marx (e.g., the concept of use value) as well as his general philosophy of economic development and the evolution of societies. For, as is well known, Marx considered the extension of the market system and the continuous development of the productive forces as necessary conditions, and the compulsory path, for the advent of the "reign of freedom." The authors clearly reject this "productivist" view of the evolution of society. They believe, rather, that the extension of dominance of the market system with its corollary spread of counterproductivity can only lead to the overburdening of the entire system and consequently to its breakdown. And this is to say nothing of the frustration and loss that individuals would feel in relation to their environment and their own activities. It is worth noting here the similarity of the authors' views to those of Ivan Illich, on the

one hand, and those of J. W. Forrester, on the other.

The second section of the book aims at demonstrating the nature of the losses brought on by counterproductivity and by the inability of the "hétéronome" system to compensate these losses. Two concrete examples serve to make the point: the transportation sector and the problem of quality of consumer goods.

The third and last part (as well as the shortest) is both a conclusion and a call for action. The authors in effect ask each individual to act as a spokesman, that is to say, to act as though they recognize that the individual cost of action within the capitalist system could be prohibitive.

I find it truly difficult on reading this work to form a definitive opinion on the argument the authors make. Many of the points are vague and require elaboration. Moreover, the argument is quite extreme and categorical. But their extremism is in some sense the opposite side of a position that is just as extreme and categorical; it is a question of dealing with a thesis that attempts to understand and explain not only the economic process, but also all social processes on the basis of the market and individual behavior grasped solely in terms of a cost-benefit calculus. In this sense, the authors' work has the virtue of provoking controversy and at the same time of broadening the methodological scope that economists are accustomed to.

But the tentative task of using jointly and simultaneously tools and approaches of anthropology, of system analysis, of psychology, of urban studies, of architecture . . . and above all economics, unfortunately, does not proceed without some difficulty. In effect, the style of the work, which always avoids conventionality, suffers occasionally from a lack of clarity. The resort to an esoteric vocabulary to explain occasionally simple things needlessly complicates the task of the reader.

Finally, the problem of individuals acting as spokesmen was dealt with a few years ago in a very original manner by A. O. Hirschman [1, 1970]. It is truly unfortunate that the authors did not take the opportunity to refer to and consider Hirschman's analysis. Had they done so, their conclusions, particularly in the third section, certainly would have avoided a number of ambiguities as well as a certain hortatory tone.

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