

Lenin as a Master of Business Administration and Philosophy

Philosopher Slavoj Žižek sometimes quote the following joke from the former Soviet Union. The background of the joke is that Lenin would always encourage young people to educate themselves under the slogan: learn, learn, learn.

Marx, Engels, and Lenin are asked whether they would prefer to have a wife or a mistress. As expected, Marx, rather conservative in private matters, answers, "A wife!" while Engels, more of a bonvivant, opts for a mistress. To everyone's surprise, Lenin says, 'I'd like to have both!' Why? Is there a hidden stripe of decadent jouisseur behind his austere revolutionary image? No - he explains: "So that I can tell my wife that I am going to my mistress, and my mistress that I have to be with my wife ..." "And then, what do you do?" "I go to a solitary place to learn, learn, and learn!"¹

The Hegelian logic illustrated by the joke seems to capture the liberties of being engaged in our CBS MSc in Business Administration and Philosophy in general and our course in Money, Finance and Sustainability in particular. To demonstrate this point, we might offer the following version of Žižek's joke:

In their youth, Marx, Engels, and Lenin are asked whether they would prefer to study economics or philosophy. As expected, Marx, rather concerned about being able to eventually land a well-paid job, answers, "Economics!" while Engels, more of a bonvivant, opts for philosophy. To everyone's surprise, Lenin says, 'I'd like to have both by doing the MSc in Business Administration and Philosophy at Copenhagen Business School!' Why? Is there a hidden stripe of decadent jouisseur behind his austere revolutionary image, who wants to get a well-paid job while at the same time having the pleasure of a meaningful and interesting education? No - he explains: "So that I can tell the economists that I am studying philosophy, and the philosophers that I am studying the economy..." "And then, what do you do?" "I go to Solbjerg Plads to study money, money, and money!"

When Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations* in the 18th century or even when Karl Marx wrote *Capital* in the 19th century, there was no clear distinction between philosophy and economics and both of these works are regarded as classics within both

1 Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2009), 7.

fields. But in the 20th century, the discipline of economics was separated from philosophy and developed into an autonomous field of research based on a distinct set of concepts and methods. This separation of philosophy and economics left the question of money largely falling between two stools.

Mainstream economics tend to study the effects of money and monetary dispositions rather than the object of money itself. Reflections on the nature of money seem to invariably lead to metaphysical philosophizing, which is far beyond the scope of the preferred mathematical methods of economists. From the point of view of philosophy, economics came to be regarded as the natural place for the study of money. At best, philosophers would study the effects of capitalism on the social and psychological life of people. Yet, the nature of the phenomenon of money itself was regarded as being beyond the scope of the discipline. With a few exceptions on both sides of the disciplinary boundary, neither philosophy nor economy has taken full responsibility for the study of the nature of money for most of the 20th century.

Our BSc and MSc in Business Administration and Philosophy can in general be understood as an effort to bridge this gap between philosophy and economics. And it is very much what is at stake in our particular course on Money, Finance and Sustainability. At the core of the course is the philosophical questioning into the nature of money. As illustrated by the Lenin joke, doing philosophy at a business school provides the perfect alibi to dig into the metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties of money. We are not constrained in our object of study by the classic thinking of philosophy, and we are not constrained in our reflection by the rigorous methods of economics. In this age of financial crisis, the time is certainly ripe for this kind of study.

This special issue of *Hvorfor* contains some of the fruits of the labor of the students in our 2014 class on Money, Finance and Sustainability. The reader will find eleven different takes on the question of money. The idea for the volume emerged as I was grading the papers and felt that they were too good to be read only by myself and the censor. Even if you are not interested in money, you can be sure that money is interested in you. Hence, there should be something for everyone in the following papers. The papers are not only worth reading in their own right. They also provide a perfect showcase for the kind of thinking that we aim to promote in our program in Business Administration and Philosophy at CBS.

The papers have been selected out of a pool of about 50 essays submitted for the exam. Although many of the remaining essays are certainly also worth reading, we have, for the sake of simplicity, simply selected the ones receiving the best grades. In order to give an unmediated impression of the work that our students are doing, the texts in this volume have not been through the kind of review and revision process that is the standard in regular journals. This means that they do not necessarily appear as polished as the papers that one would usually find in such journals. In turn, I find that the uncarved style of these papers allows the reader to get a better glimpse of what goes on under the hood of the writer.

The credit for the current publication should go not only to the authors of the eleven papers but also to their fellow students in the class, who have contributed to the lively learning environment that is the background of the papers. But most of all we are indebted to the editors of *Hvorfor*, who have accepted to publish this special issue as well as done all of the careful editorial work that goes into producing it.

Ole Bjerg

Associate Professor

Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy

Copenhagen Business School