



Resensies / Reviews

Neo-Marxism and neo-Calvinism

**Klapwijk, Jacob. 2010. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: critical theory and the messianic light*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock. xiv + 109 p.
Price: \$15,00. ISBN: 1-978-1-60899-701-5.**

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Jacob Klapwijk is a well-known scholar in the neo-Calvinist tradition, Professor Emeritus at the Philosophy Department of the Free University in Amsterdam. This book was originally published in 1976. It focuses on neo-Marxism, a movement that was then very strong and popular, but, nowadays, it seems to face difficult times in the relativist and market-driven context in which we live.

One might even wonder whether reflecting on those issues of the 1970s is still relevant today and, as a consequence, whether the book is still worthwhile reading. Admittedly, after the 1970s there were many new developments within neo-Marxism. In my opinion, however, the book still shows its relevance even 40 years later. But let us begin from the beginning ...

What is meant by the “dialectic of Enlightenment”? First of all it is the title of a famous book by Horkheimer and Adorno (1947). What the phrase implies, however, is that the aspirations of the Enlightenment (the “century of the lights”) have turned out to be illusory.

The Enlightenment relied on the light of Reason in order to free humankind into a new maturity, towards a disenchanted world in which progress and justice would be finally possible. But then, argued Adorno and Horkheimer, the “dialectics” came in and the new dream revealed itself as a myth. In its attempt at controlling nature, reason ended up controlling human beings and stifling their own freedom.

(Those who are familiar with Dooyeweerd's analysis of the "nature and freedom" motif, will realise the convergence between the two schools on this theme.)

The Frankfurt School (on which Klapwijk's book focuses) did realise the failure of the rationalist project and has desperately tried to provide an alternative via its own analysis of politics, science, religion, art and so forth. In this analysis the School has distanced itself from the Enlightenment but also, to a large extent, from classical Marxism (although the latter is not a rationalist movement).

In his perspective, Klapwijk analyses with competence and precision the philosophies of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Habermas (without forgetting a brief preliminary introduction to the Enlightenment, Hegel and Marx).

One surprising element emerging from this analysis is that, with Adorno for example, a point is reached (in his *Minima moralia*) where the need for a "light from outside" is recognised. The need for a kind of "redemption" is considered for a period, while in Horkheimer a "religious yearning" is also unearthed and the "hope principle" (which was elaborated by many German theologians), creates a further bridge for a dialogue with christian philosophy.

Unfortunately, these routes are often only mentioned by the authors of the Frankfurt School and not pursued further. Klapwijk's (diagnostic) point of view is that the "critical theory" of the Frankfurt School has not been critical enough, that it kept relying on reason while failing to realise that rationality itself is linked to an underlying "faith" in (or fundamental commitment to) what Dooyeweerd called "the pretended autonomy of theoretical thought".

Of course Klapwijk has sketched here only the preliminary basis for a dialogue. From the 1970s, as already mentioned above, there were further developments within neo-Marxism (especially with Habermas). It is interesting to know, however, that Klapwijk himself never abandoned this dialogue (cf. Klapwijk, J. 2000. *A la recherche d'une philosophie ouverte: Herbert Marcuse et le néo-marxisme. Hokhma*, 25(3):1-15).

More in general, neo-Calvinism has never abandoned its interest for neo-Marxism. I have in mind for example the contributions of Van der Hoeven on Marx, Popta on Sovietic Socialism, Wolterstorff on Liberation Theology, Zuidervaart on Adorno and so on. Klapwijk's

book is therefore part of a broader contribution and dialogue, but it retains its own special place in this ongoing interaction.

The value of the book, even 40 years later, lies in the fact that it is written from an original point of view but also in its detailed and reliable analysis. It will help any reader to understand better this specific School of thought which may be facing several challenges in the present but is still quite influential in our cultures. It will also help the christian reader in particular to find unexpected connections between neo-Marxism and the “messianic light”.