Production Modes, Marx's Method and the Feasible Revolution

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Abstract

In Marx, the production mode is defined as a social organisation mode which is typified by one dominant production model which confers significance on the system at large. The prominence of production modes in his overall approach provides clues to the identification of the correct scientific method of Marxism and, probably, of Marx himself. The main aim of this paper is to define this method and to discuss a type of socialist revolution which appears feasible in this day and age.

Keywords: Marx's method, producer cooperatives, production modes, socialism

Introduction

It is not from scientific advancements – Gramsci argued – that we are to expect solutions to the issues on the traditional agenda of philosophical research. Fresh inputs for philosophical speculation have rather come from notions such as 'social production relations' and 'modes of production', which are therefore Marx's paramount contributions to science.[1] In a well-known 1935 essay weighing the merits and

[1] For quite a long time, Marxists used to look upon the value theory as Marx's most important contribution to science. Only when the newly-published second and third books of *Capital* revealed that Marx had tried to reconcile his value theory with the doctrine of prices as determined by the interplay of demand and supply did they gain a correct appreciation of the importance of the materialist conception of history.
Comparing Marx's revolution in social science to the Copernican revolution in astronomy, Plechanov maintained that the materialist approach to history was the only true scientific method that every social scientist was expected to adopt (see Plechanov 1911, p. 2); Sartre argued that «we cannot go beyond Marxism because we have not gone beyond the circumstances which engendered it» (Sartre 1960, p. 19); and forty years after him Musto wrote that "thanks its unequalled critique of the capitalistic production mode, Marx's approach will remain a milestone in social science unless and until it is proved wrong" (2005b, p. 155). In the estimation of Wright Mills, «no one can think of himself as a social thinker if he fails to give due attention to Marx's theoretical approach» (see Wright Mills

shortcomings of Marxian political economy against those of mainstream economics, the Polish economist Oskar Lange expressed a comparable view when he wrote that the former, while arguably coming short of the latter in areas such as pricing and resource allocation, had the superior merit of spotlighting the way economic life is organised, the division of society into classes and the existence of different modes of production and was principally aimed to identify the laws governing the development of human society in the long term (see Lange 1935).

In a few words, this strong point of Marxian theory can be summed up as follows: (a) it highlights a sequence of different production modes that arose at various steps in history (the mode of the ancients, feudalism, capitalism, etc.) and thereby suggests that capitalism can barely be the last link in this chain; (b) it shows that the mechanisms governing the development of each production mode obey specific laws and rules and that individual behaviour is greatly affected by the way production is organised.[2]

The prominence of production modes in Marx's overall approach provides clues to the identification of the correct scientific method of Marxism and, probably, of Marx himself.[3]

The main aim of this paper is to define this method and to discuss a type of socialist revolution which appears feasible in this day and age.

Modes of production in Marx's approach

In Marx, the production mode is defined as a social organisation mode which is typified by one dominant production model which confers

1962, p. 7), and Bloom commented that «each great cultural era of the globe seems to be fated to live through an absorbing and usually bitter controversy over the merits and relevance of the doctrines of Karl Marx» (1943, p. 53).

Detractors include Brewer, who controverts that Marx's approach offers few, if any, insights into the far-reaching issues with which mainstream economists concern themselves and thinks this to explain why they hold him in scant esteem (see Brewer 1995).

[2] Curiously, yet interestingly enough, in the four-square breakdown used by U. Pagano to illustrate the four economic organisation models he rates as the most prominent of all (Marxian socialism, the rational expectations model, Lange's 1936 model and Hayek's market economy model) we would expect market socialism to be associated with Hayek, but Pagano remarks that despite the traditional contrast between the Marxian and Austrian schools, a combination of the two would probably carry us much further (see Pagano 2006, p. 116).

As mentioned before (see, for instance, Jossa 1994a, pp. 94ff.), it strikes us as surprising that Hayek never as much as attempted to explain why he thought it necessary to have businesses enterprises run by capitalists, rather than by worker-appointed managers.

[3] Unlike O'Boyle, I do not think that the description of history as a sequence of modes of production results in downscaling the role of human action (see O'Boyle 2013, p. 1024).

significance on the system at large.[4] The idea that society is shaped by its production methods is rated as Marx's most pregnant scientific finding (see Bloom 1943, p. 58). Stedman Jones (1978, p. 341) rates modes of production as «the decisive concept around which the materialist conception of history was to crystallize between 1845 and 1847».

The relevance of the notion of production modes was first emphasised in Engels's review of the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: «the proposition that the process of social, political and intellectual life is altogether necessitated by the mode of production of material life – he argued – was a revolutionary discovery not only for economics but also for all historical sciences – and all branches of science which are not natural sciences are historical» (see p. 203 in Marx 1859).

The notion of production modes is both inextricably intertwined with the materialist conception of history and one of its principal constituents and corollaries. From the idea that the economic mechanisms governing a society are not consciously or wilfully contrived by the people – the core assumption behind historical materialism – it follows, by way of corollary, that the existing production mode is a direct offshoot of the level of development of the productive forces. Moreover, thanks to a distinct focus on the production relations prevailing at the corresponding historical stage, this notion highlights parallel trends under way in a plurality of countries and shows that economic life develops in accordance with laws comparable to those of material life.

Production modes and 'totality' in Marx's approach

In Marx's theoretical framework, production modes are closely associated with the notion of totality. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx wrote that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are not identical, but members of a totality, distinctions within a unity (Marx 1857-58, vol. I, p. 25), and that no concept, however general, can exist «except as an abstract, *one-sided* relation within an already given, concrete, living whole» (Marx 1859, p. 189).

These and comparable statements may explain the generalised assumption that Marxists reject any one-sided descriptions of capitalism and prioritise an approach founded on the notion of totality.

According to Marcuse, «for Marx, as for Hegel, 'the truth' lies only in the whole, the 'negative totality'» (Marcuse 1954, p. 347); and Wolff,

[4] The idea that Marx's concept of modes of production resulted in an epistemological break within the traditional approach to the philosophy of history is widely shared.
For the changes the notion of Marxism underwent over time, see, *inter alia*, Haupt 1978, pp. 115-45.

Callari and Roberts (1982) have laid stress on the paramount place of the totality notion in Marx's approach.[5]

On closer analysis, the prominence of the totality notion in Marx's approach is associated with his dynamic view of historical development, specifically his claim that «the structure of the whole must be conceived before any discussion of temporal sequence».

In an attempt to help appraise the role of totality in Marx's approach and underscore his valuable contribution to science, Veblen argued that «taken in detail, the constituent elements of the system are neither novel nor iconoclastic, but the system as a whole has an air of originality such as is rarely met with among the sciences dealing with any phase of human culture». For a similar view, see Bronfenbrenner 1967, p. 625.

The reasons why the notion of production modes and totality may help shed light on Marx's dialectical method[6] are implied in the description

[5] In the estimation of Adorno, it is principally in analyses of bourgeois society that the totality notion is found to be particularly rich in valuable insights; MacGregor (1984, p. 174) held that the idea of capitalism as a living system and an organic whole was one of the key elements of the dialectical method that Marx took over from Hegel; Proudhon described capitalism as a systematic totality which generates a complex tangle of contradictions (see Proudhon 1946, but also Ansart 1969, pp. 159ff.).

[6] The assumption that Marx was always a dialectical reasoner is supported by the following passage from Marx's letter to Kugelman (dated 6 March 1868): «Hegel's dialectic is the basic form of all dialectics, but only after being stripped of its mystical form, and it is precisely this which distinguishes my method» (Marx, 1868, p. 544). In fact, Marx also wrote: "if ever the time comes when such work is again possible, I should very much like to write two or three sheets making accessible to the common reader the rational aspect of the method which Hegel not only discovered but also mystified" (Marx 1858, p 155). As this plan was never put into practice, it can barely come as a surprise that Marx's dialectical method is still being construed in a variety of different ways or that Heilbroner has dismissed dialectics as «a term without a clear or univocal meaning» (Heilbroner 1980, p. 28).

Irrespective of the unmistakable Hegelian colouring of all Marx's writings, Schumpeter warned, to think of Hegelism as the keystone of Marxism would amount to debasing the scientific standing of Marx's overall theoretical edifice. Marx, he added, delighted in 'coquetting' with Hegelian phrasing, but did not go any further (see Schumpeter 1954, p. 9). Studies aimed to show that Marx gradually scaled down his use of dialectical reasoning and that dialectics cannot help us understand Marx include Bernstein 1899 (chap. II), Rosenthal 1988 and Bidet 1998 (p. 225). Analytical Marxists rate dialectical reasoning as altogether misleading and, hence, barely more helpful than formal logic in constructing a social theory (see Meyer 1994, p. 1). Setting the long string of cross-references to Hegel (especially his *Logic*) appearing in the recently published *Grundrisse* against the sparse Hegelian overtones resounding in just a handful footnotes of *Capital*, Rodolsky argued that no academic could dare to address Marxian economics unless he had concerned himself earnestly both with Marx's method and its links with Hegel's (see Rosdolsky 1955, p. 8).

In a well-reasoned study, Colletti showed that Marx's dialectical method was not identical with Hegel's (Colletti 1969). What is needed, he added elsewhere (Colletti 1958, pp. 92-93), is «purging today's Marxism of all the remnants of *Hegelian* dialectical thinking – not

of dialectics as «a theory of both the unity and exclusion of opposites» (Ilyenkov 1960, p. VII) and a method which uses the concept of totality as tool for determining the truth (Bell 1995, p. 112), as well as in the remark that «for Hegel and Marx, the notion of a living organism expresses the essence of dialectics in history» (see MacGregor 1984, p. 111).[7]

Hence, it is also possible to argue that the application of the dialectical method to economic research thrusts into the foreground «an endless intertwining of mutually connected forces, a picture in which nothing remains either what, where or as it was, but in which everything moves, changes, is in process of formation or dissolution» (Engels, 1891, pp. 35-36); in other words, it shows that dialectics is «research into the many ways in which entities are internally related» (Ollman 1976, p. 61).[8]

Lenin characterised dialectics as the most intriguing of all philosophical issues (see Meyer 1957, p. 19) and «a tool capable of disclosing links between one thing and all the others» (op. cit. p. 21),[9]

Marxism draws on Hegel for the theory that reason is in essence relational, that is to say that it necessitates a simultaneous focus on coexisting antithetical elements – i.e. 'unity of opposites'. Indeed, Hegel's ideas of reason and 'the negative' constitute the celebrated 'rational kernel' of his dialectical method. For a correct appreciation of the sheer magnitude of Hegel's speculative powers it is worth bearing in mind that Hegel was the only philosopher who rose to the challenge of offering consistent definitions of reason and thought as immaterial, rather than positive processes and even of the infinite. All pre-Hegelian philosophers, be they Schelling or Spinoza, Leibniz or Descartes, thought of the infinite as what lies beside, above or

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of all its *dialectical* overtones, but just of passages with an *idealistic* colouring. In other words, what needs to be done is *not* rectifying Marx's theoretical edifice, but just rephrasing parts of it in an effort to bring to the fore all its extraordinary complexity» (see, also, Croce 1899, pp. 4-9, Hyppolite 1969, pp. 300-303, Garaudy 1969, pp. 312-14 and Hofmann 1971, pp. 80-84).

In Althusser 1965 (pp. 18-20) we read that «young Marx was never strictly speaking a Hegelian», that he was moderately inspired by Hegel when he wrote the *Manuscripts of 1844*, but that by 1845 he had broken free from all Hegelian influence.

Musto's intellectual biography of Marx offers an intriguing glimpse into the interrelations between Marx and Hegel (see Musto 2011).

[7] Vidoni remarks that dialectical reasoning looms large in Marx's analyses of organisms, their relationship with the environment and their social relations, that is to say in passages which address highly complex processes entailing a wealth of interrelations between different actors» (see Vidoni 2007, p. 260).

The Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi argued that non-dialectical thinking «obliterates vastness and grandeur and prevents us from grasping the totality of the natural world» (see Citati 2010, p. 53).

[8] For views departing from Colletti's, see Severino 1978 and Napoleoni 1985, part III.

[9] On this point, see, also, Bernstein 1899, p. 52.

beyond the finite; in other words, as but one extreme of an opposition, a unilateral term (Ilyenkov 1960, p. VIII).[10] For all that, and irrespective of these Hegelian links, dialectics must be construed as the 'interpenetration of opposites' since this will allow retaining the non-contradiction principle.[11]

This form of dialectical thinking is even observed in a comparatively early work such as the *Criticism of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), which Screpanti explains as an attack on idealism mounted by Marx in full sync with Feuerbach's rejection of Hegel's hypostases, as an attempt to validate the Aristotelian view that the non-contradiction principle is a necessary prerequisite for logical thinking, and as Marx's first attempt to lay the foundations for the materialist conception of history (see Screpanti 2011, p. 7).

These reflections call to mind Gramsci's conception of dialectics. «The ability to detect identity in seemingly different things and far-reaching diversity behind a seeming identity – Gramsci wrote – is the subtlest, least understood, and yet greatest virtue of a critic of ideas or analyst of historical evolution» (1975, p.2268).[12] Commenting on this passage, E. Finocchiaro remarked that «this ability of the critic-historian is dialectical thinking par excellence, or dialectics in a narrow and very special sense» (1988, p. 157).[13] [14]

Marx's method

Coming to the method of Marx and Marxism as originally defined in the *Preface* to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, let me mention, right from the start, that this text dates from 1857, but did not go to press since Marx, rating it as nothing but a fragmentary attempt, refused to offer solutions that were not backed up by adequate demonstrations. Upon its appearance in 1903, the *Preface* showed that by the autumn of 1875 Marx had fleshed out the methodological foundations of his economic theory to the full and that the continuing debate over the correct

[10] In Hegel's dialectical approach, «the individual terms are *inseparably* conjoined» (Hegel 1831, p. 14).

[11] For a demonstration that Marx's investigation of truth is consistent with the basics of the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction, see Schaff 1974, pp. 26ff. and 171ff.

[12] For Gramsci's use of dialectics, see Bobbio 1958, where Gramsci is shown to have used both the form of dialectical thinking that focuses on mutual interactions between opposed elements and the form using the thesis - antithesis - synthesis triad.

[13] As my approach may actually entail attempts at attenuation and reconciliation of the type that Naville holds to distort Marx's masterly dialectical method and reduce it to a pale cast for use by more or less eclectic philosophers (see Naville 1948, p. 12), let me re-emphasise my pledge to be always true to the spirit of Marx's approach.

[14] For the subjects touched upon in this section, see Habermas 1969, chap. IV.

interpretation of his work is just to be blamed on the fact that his method remained hidden in the folds of Capital.

As is well known, Marx held that contrary to all appearances, the procedure that starts from the real and concrete actually «proves false» (Marx 1857-58, vol. I, p. 26) because within the process of thinking the concrete appears «as a process of concentration and, as a result, not as a point of departure» (op. cit., p. 27). Accordingly, he recommended beginning with the abstract on the assumption that «the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is the only way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind» (op. cit., p. 27).[15] This begs the question if beginning with the abstract means using as starting points the simplest possible categories, for example commodities and value, or complex categories such as the mode of production.

As far as I can see, the use of abstractions as a starting point does not necessitate starting out from the simplest categories; on the contrary, more often than not the correct procedure is to start from such an abstract key notion of Marxism as the mode of production.[16]

In Marx 1857 (p. 188) and Marx 1857-58 (vol. I, p. 26) we read:

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[15] Analysing Marx's methodological approach to the study of political economy, Althusser acutely remarked that there were two methods, one starting from the real itself, the other from abstractions. With reference to the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1857-58, p. 27), he asked himself which of these two methods was the correct one and drew the following conclusion: «it seems to be correct to start with the real and concrete ... , but on closer inspection it is clear that this is false. The second «is manifestly the correct scientific method» (Althusser & Balibar 1965, p. 94).

Not unlike him, Rosa Luxemburg was persuaded that Marx tilted far more strongly towards moving from abstract to concrete, but she also spelt out that this procedure was antithetical to the European mode of speculation which in her opinion had been revived by the European Social Democrats and by Lenin's party (see Negt 1979, pp. 329-30).

This view is also shared by Aron (1979, pp. 159-60).

The reflections just developed should not make us forget that Marx consistently contrasted the Kantian-Feuerbachian approach with Hegel's. The former, which he rejected, theorised the separation of the ideal from the real and looked upon reality as irrational. In a letter to his father written in November 1837, he set this approach against Hegel's thesis that «the real is rational and the rational is real» (see Cingoli 2001, pp. 44-45).

[16] In a recently published review of the new Mega2 edition of Marx's works, Marcello Musto tries to make out what picture of Marx emerges from this new historical-critical edition of work. His conclusion is that Marx appears to be a polymorphous thinker and that the differences between this picture and that traditionally painted by Marx commentators (be they supporters or critics) are clear evidence that Marxian research still has a long way to go (Musto 2011, pp. 215 e 216).

The aim of this paper is just to analyse the method that emerges from Marx's 1857 *Preface* and the *Grundrisse* and, based on relevant passages, attempt to show that despite Marx's failure to offer conclusive methodological indications, the Marxist method is one that starts out from determined abstractions, specifically from the mode of production.

«It seems to be correct to begin with the real and the concrete, with the real precondition», In economics, therefore, it seems correct to begin, by way of example, «with the population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production.» On closer analysis, though, he continues, «this proves false. The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed. These classes in turn are an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest, e.g. wage labour, capital, etc. The latter in turn presuppose exchange, division of labour, prices, etc. For example, capital is nothing without wage labour, prices, etc.».

Ultimately, Marx's line of reasoning leads up to the conclusion that any attempt to work out a satisfactory definition of a notion requires close cross-references to the totality that notion is part of.[17]

«The simplest economic category, say e.g. exchange value – Marx wrote (1857, p. 189 and 1857-58, pp. 27-28) – presupposes population; moreover, a population producing in specific relations, as well as a certain kind of family or commune, or state, etc. It can never exist other than as an abstract, one-sided relation within an already given, concrete, living whole».

Further on (see Marx 1857, p. 191 and Marx 1857-58, vol. I, p. 30), Marx offered the following clarifications: «Although the simplest category may have existed historically before the more concrete, it can achieve its full (intensive and extensive) development precisely in a combined form of society, while the more concrete category was more fully developed in a less developed form of society. Labour seems a quite simple category. The conception of labour in this general form – as labour as such – is also immeasurably old. Nevertheless, when it is economically conceived in this simplicity, 'labour' is as modern a category, as are the relations which create this simple abstraction».

Another relevant passage runs as follows: «Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organisation of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allow insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations» (Marx 1857, p. 193 and Marx 1857-58, p. 32-3).[18]

[17] A critical perusal of the 1857 *Preface* shows that Marx not only considered the option of moving from the abstract to the concrete, but finally described this procedure as the only properly scientific method. Consequently, Fineschi argues, whereas the method he had been using that far had been as mystical in essence as Hegel's logic, from that time on it became not mystical *tout court*, but just to the extent it purported to reflect the way reality is created» (Fineschi 2006, p. 47).

[18] In the opinion of Vinci (2008, p. 56), the method which starts from the concrete, extracts from it general abstract ideas and re-examines the concrete in the light of the latter can be compared to a Copernican revolution. As the concrete starting point is fixed within

My line of reasoning so far goes to clarify that the correct procedure is generally one that starts from the whole, i.e. from totality or the abstract notion of the production mode, and then moves downward in order to bring to the fore the individual constituents of this whole.

This conclusion is backed up by the importance Marx ascribed to the notion of determined abstractions. From Marx's perspective, the severest shortcomings of political economy, his favourite field of study, were to be blamed on the practice of economists to focus on the concrete based on abstractions which were unrelated to a specified production mode and, hence, not 'determined'.

In his review of the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Engels wrote that Marx adopted «the only correct mode of conceptual evolution» because he divested Hegel's dialectical method of all its idealistic echoes. The method that Marx worked out for his critique of political economy – he added – was «hardly less significant than the basic materialist conception» (Engels 1859, p. 208).[19]

This statement of Engels's requires a reasoned analysis (see Carver 1984).

As mentioned before, the key element of Marx's dialectical method is a focus on totality, the production mode, and we also know that he criticised earlier economists for failing to work out the notion of modes of production and for a naive conviction that capitalism was bound to last forever.

The logical thread followed by Meek in a 1956 study leads up to basically the same conclusion. According to this author, not unlike other great theoreticians Marx starts out from what Schumpeter termed the 'vision' of the economic process. The reason why Marx defers the analysis of details is that «to quite large an extent they are dependent upon the nature of the model-builder's vision» and upon «the nature of the *general* method of analysis which he decides to adopt» (Meek 1956, p. 277). Lenin also – he argued – pointed out that Marx's first step was to select from all social

historical time, he explains, the abstractions that Marx draws from it are determined, i.e. specifically applicable to capitalistic society. In a capitalistic society, a determined abstraction such as abstract labour is deduced from a concrete phenomenon, i.e. the existing labour organisation model, and is used to bring to the foreground an antithesis: in this case the contrast between a natural physical phenomenon such as concrete labour and a social phenomenon such as abstract labour.

Let me mention that the concrete-to-abstract procedure (which he termed the 'analytical' method) was ascribed by Hegel to seventeenth century economists and the opposite, abstract/simple-to-concrete/complex procedure (termed the 'synthetic' method) to eighteenth century economists.

[19] Moving from abstract to concrete is a method whereby thought is made to reflect material reality, not (as Hegel claimed) to create it.

relations the 'production relations' because it is these that are the basic and prime relations that determine all the others (op. cit., p. 279).

Hence, it is clear that also from Meek's perspective the proper Marxist method is one that starts out from an abstract notion such as the production mode, proceeds to focus on simpler categories and finally reverts to the concrete – the «synthesis of many determinations».[20]

With reference to Marx's position in and around 1957, Musto remarks:

«Unlike evolutionary theorists, who used to describe simple organisms first and then to progress to more and more complex ones along a simplistic ascending ladder of sorts, Marx chose to proceed in the opposite direction, and the resulting, much more complex method led him to theorise a notion of history as the sequence of different modes of production. … Ultimately, it was the bourgeois economic system that offered valuable clues to a correct appreciation of the salient traits of the economic systems of earlier ages» (Musto 2011, pp.139-40).

In short, Marx held it necessary to take as a starting point determined abstractions founded on the production mode.

In this connection, it is worth emphasising that Marx rated production modes and capitalism as abstract notions which offered the preliminary knowledge required to analyse, by way of example, a concrete production note such as British capitalism in the nineteenth century. The capitalistic mode of production, Fineschi explains (2006, p. 9), is «a sophisticated abstract reconstruction of the working mode of bourgeois society in a given period of history» and the far from simple concept of the production mode is therefore itself an abstract notion.

A different approach

The way the method of Marx and Marxism is being analysed in this paper has little in common with the traditional approach.

A recurring question is whether Marx's recommendation to begin with the abstract and move to the concrete entails taking as a starting point simple notions and working out complex notions based on them. «The concrete – Marx wrote (1857, p. 189 and 1857-58, p. 27) – is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse». The conclusion implied in this statement is that abstract notions are simple.

[20] In Lukàcs 1976 we read: «Abstraction is never fragmentary, that is to say no single element is ever presented, by way of abstraction, as segregated from the rest. Rather, it is the whole sector of the economy that is presented as an abstract realm in which the temporary exclusion of precise links between broader categories allows the categories that come into focus to act themselves out to the full» (Lukàcs 1976, p. 290).

Further on in the same text, Marx made it clear that a simple concept such as population is an abstraction and that the division of labour, money, value, which are 'individual moments', are general, hence abstract determinations.

These and similar passages induced Marx commentators to argue that whenever we take as starting points abstract notions we have to begin with simple concepts and, from them, rise to the level of the concrete (which, let this be repeated, Marx held to be complex).

As far as I can see, this wrong conclusion can both be traced to Marx's failure to define or discuss such starting abstractions and to the undeniable fact that the method he proposed in 1857 (rising from abstract to concrete) was reversed but two years later, in *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, where Marx recommended «rising from the particular to the general» (see Marx 1859, p. 3).

An additional explanation for the misconception that the method upheld in the 1857 *Preface* is rising from the particular to the general, from simple to complex, may be the use of a simple notion such as commodities as the starting point for *Capital*.

On closer analysis, however, those who reached this wrong conclusion failed to give due consideration to Marx's explicit statement, in both the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital*, that the use of a simple starting concept in these works was necessitated by his decision to follow a sequence exactly *opposite* to that typical of mainstream scientific research.

«It would be unfeasible and wrong – he argued – to let the economic categories follow one another in the same sequence as that in which they were historically decisive. Their sequence is determined, rather, by their relation to one another in modern bourgeois society, which is precisely the *opposite* of that which seems to be their natural order or which corresponds to historical development» (Marx 1857, p. 196 and Marx, 1857-58, p. 35).

Reverting to this point years later, Marx added: «Of course, the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry» (see Marx, 1873, p. 44).

To tell the truth, the *Grundrisse* do include a passage which recommends beginning with the simple and proceeding to the complex, and this may obviously account for the above-mentioned misconception.

The passage concerned runs as follows: «The economists of the seventeenth century, e.g., always begin with the living whole, with population, nation, state, several states, etc.; but they always conclude by discovering through analysis a small number of determined, abstract, general relations such as division of labour, money, value, etc. As soon as these individual moments had been more or less firmly established and

abstracted, there began the economic systems, which ascended from the simple relations, such as labour, division of labour, need, exchange value, to the level of the state, exchange between nations and the world market. The latter is obviously the scientifically correct method. The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception. Along the first path the full conception was evaporated to yield an abstract determination; along the second, the abstract determinations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought» (Marx 1857-58, p. 27).

Although the first and most obvious objection that comes to mind is that the passage concerned features in a work which was never published, it is probably more appropriate to admit that Marx's approach to this methodological point is contradictory.

In part, the blame for this misconception can also be laid on a passage from the already mentioned 1859 review of the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in which Engels (irrespective of Marx's declared intention to reverse the traditional method) spelt out that Marx, contrary to his own recommendation to use as starting points logical categories, made use of the traditional method on the assumption that «the point where this history begins must also be the starting point of the train of thought and its further progress will be simply the reflection, in abstract and theoretically consistent form, of the historical course» (Engels 1959, p. 208). Still another explanation for the wrong assumption that the abstract starting point must be a simple concept is probably the general belief that abstract notions are simple by their very nature.

This assumption is implied, for instance, in the following excerpt from Wetter 1848 (p. 386): «By unity of analysis and synthesis we do not mean that the first step must be an analytical procedure designed to identify the simpler categories by way of abstraction and that the second step should solely be their concentration into a synthesis. Actually, analysis and synthesis must be inextricably intertwined over the whole process which starts from abstract determinations and rises to the concrete. The process whereby the categories rise from abstract to concrete (synthesis) requires an ongoing effort at differentiation within each of the less abstract categories (analysis) and, lastly, an additional synthesis to work out a less abstract category».[21]

[21] The same misconception underlies the following excerpt from Ilyenkov 1960 (p. 7): «Each of the definitions forming part of a system naturally reflects only a part, a fragment,

Let me re-emphasise that quite a lot of Marxists rated the simple-to-complex procedure as the correct scientific method on the assumption that this was the method that Marx and Engels themselves recommended. In a much praised monograph on Marx's method, Dal Pra wrote that «our mind reconstructs its representation of reality by combining together a number of simple determinations» (Dal Pra 1972, p. 316) and that the procedure entailing the rise from simple to concrete must consequently be looked upon as the appropriate scientific method.

Discussing a point analysed in *Capital*, Lukàcs wrote that this key problem alone was sufficient evidence that the method of rising from individual sub-processes to the all-embracing process required not only a major effort at abstraction consistent with our modern thought processes, but the attempt to transcend certain limitations of abstract ideas in an effort to gain a correct appreciation of totality (see Lukàcs 1976, p. 303). Here Lukàcs seems to assume that the notion of totality, that is to say the production mode, is not an abstract concept, but a material reality. As a result, he argues that economic analysis must take as its point of departure a simple concept such as the notion of value (see Lukàcs 1976, pp. 290-96).

Much in the same vein, Marković maintained that the technical and methodological innovation introduced within the framework of Marx's conception of history was a method which starts from simple universal abstract notions such as commodities, labour, money, capital, surplus value, etc., and rises from these to aspects of material reality (see Marković 1969, p. 133); Jahn and Noske (1980) argued that the Marxist method was to «rise from simpler to ever more complex aspects of the object of our inquiry»; and Fineschi (2006 (p. 136) described Marx's research method as positing the starting category, that is to say commodities, with all the determinations highlighted before» (see, also, op. cit., pp. 139-46).

Marx and socialism

In Abendroth 1858 (p. 77), Marx and Engels are said to have consistently striven to come to terms with the awareness that the actions of people in society, though autonomously devised, tend to evolve in directions other than those that had been – and could be – anticipated and end up by shaping the subsequent path of mankind (see Abendroth 1958, p. 77). From Abendroth's perspective, this means that unless and until this situation is reversed, the aim of making men masters of their history will not be achieved.

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and records only one of the particular moments of concrete reality in its entirety. Hence, when it is considered separately from the others, it is abstract».

As Abendroth held this to be the core problem behind Marxist thought, he concluded that Marxism was as timeless as that issue (op. cit., pp. 78-79). For my part, I fully agree with him on this point since I hold that Marxism as a theory of revolution has lost none of its topicality.

In an analysis of this point, Bloch argued that based on a misreading of Marx, scholars addressing Marxian theory from a merely empirical angle of view end up by expunging two supposedly utopian visions of reality which actually draw their relevance from this utopian colouring: firstly the ideal and, secondly, the ultimately utopian component of the former. And while they do so on the assumption that these visions lack concreteness – he continued – it remains that both of them are integral components of Marxism and will continue to be so for good (see Bloch 1968, p. 209).

Day after day, ever more people are developing an awareness that capitalism is a catastrophe from which humankind is unable to break free. An often-quoted argument has it that unless and until critics of free enterprise capitalism succeed in working out a suitable alternative other than a better regulated free market capitalist system or state capitalism (the traditional socialist system), it is highly unlikely that people will join to form a social movement poised to dismantle capitalism. Although this criticism is widely shared, it is fair to admit that the alarming tendency to stage protests without offering viable alternative options is probably the main vice of democratic citizenship today (see Bodei 2013, p. 163).

In my opinion, at this stage of history we have realised that shedding the fetters of capitalism without recourse to a violent revolution is no unrealistic prospect, i.e. that this goal can be attained through the peaceful enforcement of resolutions passed in parliament. Indeed, the findings reported in the producer cooperative literature since the appearance of Ward's seminal 1958 article have offered convincing evidence that a system of worker-controlled firms, though evidently no all-cure, is sure to work at high levels of efficiency.

The question arising at this point is: what did Marx mean by socialism?

To answer this question, it is worth bearing in mind that Marx always refused to write recipes for what he termed the 'cook-shops of the future' and left it with 'cooks' to work out solutions to the problems he had been pointing up.

In the estimation of the Webbs, in matters of post-revolutionary economic policy Marxist theory is of no avail since Marx's theoretical approach, for all its depth and breadth, offers no indications concerning the way to address issues likely to emerge within a socialist economy. In support of this view they mentioned Lenin's explicit statement, following his

seizure of power, that he did not know of any single socialist who had made it his task to investigate these issues.

The resulting theoretical void has been severely criticised by more than one author. Hutchinson, for instance, has emphasised that Marx and Engels did not realise that proclaiming themselves revolutionaries while failing to offer clues, however slight, to the possible organisational model of the proposed alternative society was, to say the least, an attitude of utter irresponsibility (see Hutchinson 1978, p. 197).

For my part, I wish to point out that Marx and Engels, while doubtless failing to provide details of the organisation model of the future, spelt out in bold letters that the characteristics of the socialist model of society were to proceed from the successful supersession of all the contradictions they had pointed up in capitalism.

In this connection, let me mention that as Marx particularly emphasised two basic contradictions within the world in which we live (the plan-versus-market and capital-versus-labour oppositions), it is possible to envisage two production systems capable of guaranteeing the transition to communism: a system of publicly run and centrally planned enterprises and a system of workers' councils, that is to say a system of producer cooperatives run by the workers themselves.[22]

Time and again, Settembrini emphasised that one of the two alternative transition scenarios sketched by Marx was a peaceful road to the establishment of a democratic form of evolutionary socialism (see, also Avineri 1968). At the other end of the spectrum, Bakunin described Marx as

[22] Originally, Marx and Engels believed that the precondition for the establishment of a socialist system was centralising all powers firmly in the hands of the State. It was the Paris Commune that induced them to reconsider this stance and to think of socialism as mainly connoted by democratic production processes (see Screpanti 2007, pp. 145-46). This conclusion is prompted by a passage from *The Civil War in France*, dated 1871, where Marx wrote that the Paris Commune (which «supplied the republic with the basis of really democratic institutions» and «the political form, at last discovered, under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour»; see Marx 1871, p. 85) had shattered the power of the modern state (op. cit., pp. 82 and 83) to the point where the old centralized government had been obliged to give way to the self-government of producers even in the provinces (op. cit., p. 82).
In contrast, Lichtheim (1965, p. 228) has argued that late in life Marx abandoned his temporary infatuation with the utopianism of the Paris Commune and reverted to statist stances. This opinion is shared by Lehning, who rates the 1871 text of *The Civil War in France* as that of a writer who was basically a non-Marxist, that is to say as a clear sign that Marx went through a spell of non-statist thinking (see Lehning 1969, p. 431).
Some Hegelian Marxists hold that Marx's theoretical speculation powers began to falter from his fortieth year of age onwards, specifically from the time he wrote the *Grundrisse* and published the first and second editions of Book I of *Capital* and the *Preface* to its French edition, down to the second edition, in 1879, of the *Notes on Adolph Wagner's 'Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie'* (see Backhaus 1997, p. 297 and Haug 2005, p. 293).

a tyrannical centralizer who did extol the triumph of equality, but held on to the naive belief that this goal could be achieved through state action and the dictatorial rule of a possibly strong central government. On closer analysis, Marx's disregard for the cook-shops of the future gives us scope for arguing that either production system can have a place within his theoretical framework.

In the light of this, the question why Marx should deserve more credit as a theoretician of rational planning than an advocate of self-management and participative democracy is little more than a purely academic query (see Screpanti 2007, p. 146).

The call for the handover of factories to workers dates back to the Chartist movement in Britain and was translated into practice – albeit in non-democratic forms – upon the establishment of a self-managed firm system in Yugoslavia. Its roots are in the notion that means of production are to be socialised.

In point of fact, self-management theorists draw a clear-cut distinction between nationalisation and socialisation. As the former, they claim, entails the retention of production means by the State and only the latter vests self-management powers in workers, this only is able to cancel the separation between the 'two factors of production' that Marx used to denounce. Indeed, Marx's writings on the Paris Commune made a strong case for the self-government of factories by producers, i.e. free associations of those directly engaged in production.

As far as central planning, the first of the two above-mentioned systems, is concerned, the model that Marx had in mind had little, if anything, in common with the top-down Soviet-type planning model that history has meanwhile proved wrong.

The theoretical categories underlying twentieth century socialism were principally defined by Lenin and then further developed by Stalin. And as the scant esteem in which Marx is held by many is doubtless to be blamed on his association with the USSR, today, following the collapse of the despotic state socialism model, the need to reconsider non-statist alternative options to liberal-democratic capitalism is becoming more urgent than ever.[23]

Although experience has taught that centralised planning is no solution, considering that Marxist policies today are moving further and further away from the principles of the Bolshevik model, this does not necessitate consigning socialism or Marxism to oblivion.

[23] This is the rationale behind the argument that contrary to all appearances, the balance in Marx's polemic against Proudhon on this point is ultimately tilting in favour of the latter.

In the light of the fact that economic cooperation theorists have fleshed out an option to capitalism which would both ensure efficiency and not require central planning as a matter of course, there is scope for arguing that Marx has happily survived a spell of near-hibernation since his name will no longer be associated with the oppressive bureaucratic system of the past century.[24]

As Marxists clearly distinguish between socialism and communism and Marx and Engels themselves deemed it impossible to abolish markets at the earlier post-capitalist stages, a democratic firm system which vests management powers in workers can be said to be fully compatible with Marx's theoretical approach even if it fails to abolish markets.

According to Bernstein, the historical roots of revisionism are an aversion to the 'welfare state' and a supportive attitude towards the world of cooperation (see Bernstein 1918, p. 23 and Angel 1975, pp. 117-18). For my part, I wish to add that this new approach to socialism is probably in full harmony with Marxism.

Conversely, I do not share Bernstein's view that class interests ebb away in direct proportion to advancements in democracy.

Those who hold that Marx's conception of socialism is difficult to reconcile with markets are hereby referred to a 'methodological' indication owed principally to Gramsci, i.e. an encouragement to reword any tenets of Marx (even basic ones) whenever this should appear to be necessitated by novel insights or historical developments. Such a practice would be perfectly in line with Derrida's argument that Marxism «remains at once indispensable and structurally insufficient» and should therefore be «transformed and adapted to new conditions and to a new thinking of the ideological» (see Derrida 1993, p. 78) and with Gramsci's own observation that the canons of historical materialism are applicable to history only *post factum* and should never become an obstacle to the analysis of the future (see Gramsci 1914-18, pp. 153-55 and Cacciatore 1987, pp. 255-56).[25]

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[24] Lunghini and Cavallaro report an interesting statement by Keynes which runs as follows: «The Republic of my imagination lies on the extreme left of the celestial spheres. Yet all the same I feel that my true home, so long as they offer a room and a floor, is with the Liberals» (Keynes 1926b, p. 260). In their opinion, this quote is clear evidence that in 1926 even a person who thought of himself as an extreme radical rejected the system that had been established in post-revolutionary Russia as an inacceptable organisational model.
An often-heard objection is that those Marxists who call into question the labour theory of value and the Soviet model have generally failed to make it clear what they hold to be the true essence of Marxism (see, for instance, Rodinson 1969, pp. 9-13, who tries to reverse this tendency by offering his own definition of Marxism).

[25] Bronfenbrenner traces the continuing topicality of Marx's thought in this day and age to a generalised feeling of dissatisfaction, rather than to its inherent scientific merits (see Bronfenbrenner 1970, pp. 137- 40).

The place of revolution in Marx's approach

In full sync with Sartre's argument that we cannot go beyond Marxism because «we have not gone beyond the circumstances which engendered it» (Sartre 1960, p. 19),[26] in the light of the recent theorisation of a form of revolution which is both possible and desirable in our contemporary world it is possible to argue that Marx's theory of revolution has lost none of its topicality.

«Marx's philosophy – Petrović has argued (1975, p. 40) – is both speculation on the essence of being and speculation on revolution,[27] but not speculation on being plus revolution. On the contrary, thanks to its essence as speculation on being, it is at the same time (not 'additionally') speculation on revolution - and, consequently, on socialism».

The topicality of Marx is supported by a 'Marx-Renaissance' of sorts, that is to say by a wealth of Marx studies that have recently appeared in the literature and bear witness to a continuing concern of scholars with Marxian theory.[28]

As is well known, in the minds of economists the term revolution (i.e. the break with the existing social model) is to be construed as the introduction of a new mode of production.[29] This was doubtless the view of

[26] Similarly, forty years after him Musto argued that "thanks to Marx's unequalled critique of the capitalistic production mode, his approach will be a milestone in social science unless and until it is proved wrong" (2005b, p. 155). On this point, see, also, Kellner 1995, p. 26.

[27] In a 2006 paper, Roberts set out to refute the view of Marx as a theoretician of capitalism (which he thinks is widely shared) and to offer instead a – purportedly new – picture of Marx as the theoretician of the anti-capitalist revolution. In fact, this paper just shows its author forgetful of the fact that the characterisation of Marxism as a theory of revolution goes back to Lukàcs (1923, p. 320) and has been concordantly upheld by scholars ever since (see Jossa 2006).

Agnes Heller, a disciple of Lukàcs, (1976, p. 135) , has argued that identifying some codex of socialist morality in Marx (the codex of communism) is essential if we are to gain a correct appreciation of his approach and work towards developing a form of 'living Marxism'.

Without denying Marx's status as a theoretician of revolution, Wallerstein, Przeworski and others have remarked that trade unionists resolved to endorse capitalism on realising that the battle for the protection of worker interests within that system was the best option open to the working class (see, for instance, Przeworski, 1995, p. 169). In this connection, however, it is worth emphasising that purging Marxism of its revolutionary kernel might arguably lead to an academically correct picture of Marx, but would deprive his approach of its unmistakable sting.

[28] The claim that Marxism is on the wane is widely shared. One of the first authors to challenge this view by close reference to contemporary events was Struve (1899).

[29] Marx's definition of revolution is a clear and simple notion. In Kautsky 1902 (pp. 168) we read that the main difference between reformism and revolution is not the use of violence in one case and its rejection in the other. (To tell the truth, on occasion he did suggest the exact opposite – see, for instance, Kautsky 1892, pp. 65-77). In Kautsky's

Marx, the great theoretician of production modes and the way they arise, grow and pass away;[30] but it is also shared by anyone prepared to admit that there are many possible modes of production and, specifically, that socialism is an organisational model which differs from capitalism and, consequently, a new production mode.[31]

It is worth emphasising that the concept of revolution as the establishment of a new production mode is so central to Marx's thought as to necessitate the argument that Marxism is a theory of revolution (see Lukàcs 1922, p. 320). From this, it follows that a) the criterion against which we are to test the validity of Marxism is how far the establishment of a genuine socialist system will prove to be practicable; and that b) the qualification of 'Marxist' should be restricted to those who maintain that a socialist or communist order can be established in practice (and consistently

opinion, the salient characteristic of a revolution was «the conquest of political power by a new class (op. cit., p. 169). Authors endorsing the opposite view, i.e. the idea of non-violence as passivity and of violence as an essential component of any revolution, include, by way of example, Settembrini (1973, p. vii), Geary (1974, pp. 92-93) and Roemer (2008, p.14).

Notwithstanding the evidence that Marx and Kautsky proposed clear, simple and ultimately concordant definitions of revolution, Simone Weil argued that «among all those who still persist in talking about revolution, there are perhaps not two who attach the same content to the term» (see Weil 1995, p.32). The definition of revolution on which Sartori dwells at length in a 2015 study (see Sartori 2015, pp. 15-35) differs greatly from the one suggested in this paper.

The view of revolution as the introduction of a new production mode and the clarification that revolution does not necessarily entail the use of violence go to explain that revolutionary aspirations have nothing to do with the 'lyric age' discussed by Milan Kundera in his charming 1973 book entitled *Life is Elsewhere* (1973). Central to Kundera's book is the idea that the desire for a revolution is the typical attitude of the inexperienced young and is born of a 'lyric' disposition of mind. According to Kundera, it arises in people who are unable to act and give themselves up to dreams of a better life, seeking refuge in dreams, in lyric life, in poetry. Lastly, the links between revolution and violence lead Kundera to claim that police action, poetry and revolution have in common much more than is generally assumed. On closer analysis, though, Kundera's reflections, for all their acumen, have no bearing on Marx's view of revolution as the replacement of the existing production mode with a different one.

[30] «The scientific standing of Marxism – Gruppi argues (1970, p. 340) – rests entirely on the emphasis laid on the historically determined essence of economic laws, on the dynamic evolution of economic systems and the inextricable nexus between economic and political-sociological analysis.

[31] The idea that Marxism is a theory of revolution and that revolution is the mission of the proletariat leads me to argue, in the wake of Lukàcs, that Marxism is the expression of the class consciousness of the proletariat (Watnick 1962, p. 161).

with Marx's approach).[32] From this, it follows that those who do not believe in revolution cannot be characterised as Marxists.[33]

As Marxist thought draws nourishment from the prospect of social change, any attempt to deny its revolutionary essence will result in distorting its theoretical foundations. To the extent the twenty-first century proves to be an age of long-term social stability, all Marxist movements are likely to be perceived as irrelevant and to whither away; if, conversely, no stability should be achieved, social thought will necessarily be influenced by Marxist ideas or by any other ideas that should appear to be further developments of Marxism.[34]

The roots of Marx's revolutionary vision

To establish why the worldview of this great Trier-born thinker is so radically revolutionary, we may turn to a well-reasoned 1961 book in which Tucker showed that Marx had chosen revolution and communism even before commencing work on his material conception of history.

The view that Marx's idea of revolution has its underpinning in historical materialism is generally traced to the following passage from the *Preface* to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

"In the real production of their existence men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material

[32] In a speech delivered on Marx's grave, Engels said: «Marx was before all else a revolutionist. His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being; to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, which he was the first to make conscious of the conditions of its emancipation» (see Mehring 1918, p. 530).

[33] In a well-known paper by Holloway, a disciple of Lukàcs and Adorno, we read that the problem with the traditional concept of revolution «is perhaps not that it aims too high, but that it aims too low. The notion of capturing positions of power, whether it be governmental power or more dispersed positions of power, in society, misses the point that the aim of the revolution is to dissolve relations of power, to create a society based on the mutual recognition of people's dignity" (Holloway 2002, p. 20). On closer analysis, Holloway's argument is to be rejected for two main reasons. Firstly, it fails to construe revolution as a change in the production mode; secondly, it fails to point out that a new production mode would amount to a proper revolution even where its effect should be, not to overthrow the existing power structure altogether, but just to bring about a more equitable distribution of power.

As Korsch put it, all the deformations that Marxism underwent at the time of the 2nd International can be summarised in «one all-inclusive formulation: a unified general theory of social revolution was changed into a critique of the bourgeois economic order, the bourgeois State» (see Korsch 1923, p. 59).

[34] In the opinion of one of the founders of analytical Marxism, far from being a theory of revolution Marxism is actually a critical approach to the analysis of capitalistic society which offers no key to its transformation (see Elster 1985, pp. 513-31).

forces of production." The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which arises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution» (Marx 1859, p. 5).

To refute the view that the roots of Marx's communism lie in this passage, Tucker provides evidence that Marx became a revolutionary and a communist around 1843, due to the influence of Moses Hess, and specifically on realising that alienation is principally caused by the way economic life is organised in civil society.

Feuerbach had shown that 'productive activity' was a distinctive feature and attribute of the human species, he argued, but the Feuerbachian theorist Moses Hess had reached the conclusion that egotistic drives prevented man in the modern world from producing cooperatively and that capitalistic society was therefore in a state of 'perversion'. As suggested by Tucker, Moses Hess was also greatly influenced by Proudhon, the originator of a form of 'philosophical communism' which commingled the ideals of communism with Hegel's philosophy of history. From Proudhon, he wrote, Hess principally took over the notion of property as theft, the founding stone of his Feuerbachian theory of alienation.

These reflections induced Tucker to suggest that Marx grew into a communist when he embraced the philosophical communism of Hess and its Hegelian core idea of alienation, but that he wove into his view of communism a notion unknown to Hess, i.e. the idea of the proletariat as the instigator of a new social order.

It was the idea of class struggle as the interpretative key of history – he maintained – that led Marx to distance himself from Hegel. According to Sabine (1937, p. 588), Marx took from Hegel the idea of nations as the true actors in history (a notion which was actually but loosely connected to Hegel's overall system), replaced the thesis of the struggle between antagonistic nations with the notion of a struggle between social classes. In this way, he stripped Hegelism of its political overtones ... and turned it into a powerful form of social radicalism.

From Tucker we also learn that the idea of the proletariat as the instigator of a new social order derives from a very influential book written by Lorenz von Stein. In *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, he argued, which was written at the end of 1843, Marx is seen to

have undergone a major process of change that leads him to replace «the image of self-alienated humanity» with that of the proletariat as the «suffering expression of alienated man in revolt against his condition» within the existing economic system. Quoting Marx's saying that just «as philosophy finds in the proletariat its *material* weapon», so «the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapon in philosophy», he emphasised that Marx developed «this singular philosophical conception of the proletariat» under the influence of Lorenz von Stein's book.

In point of fact, von Stein was a conservative eager to refute the socialist and communist ideas circulating his day, but his book helped disseminate the idea that the proletariat, the new property-less class that had made its debut on the historical world scene, was, by its very nature, a revolutionary class engaged in a struggle against capital.

In the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel had warned that a dangerous process resulting in the concentration of disproportionate wealth in just a few hands was threatening to unleash a rabble of paupers, though he added that poverty itself was not enough to generate a revolt of the masses. To create a rabble, he argued, it takes «joined to poverty, a disposition of mind, an inner indignation against the rich.» Even the description of the proletariat as a rabble – Tucker argues, derives from von Stein's book, with which Marx's writings of the middle forties «show a minute textual familiarity» (Tucker 1961, p. 115).

Yet, he noted, von Stein's contention that communism is the class ideology of the proletariat was countered by Marx in a matter antithetical to that of Hess. Whereas Hess criticised von Stein for explaining communism as the response of a single class to its material deprivation, Marx looked upon the proletariat as the class called upon to free humanity from the evils of capitalistic alienation.

These reflections show that the initial step in Marx's progress towards communism was a Hegelian form of 'philosophical communism'[35] which had as its main, and probably permanent underpinning the idea of alienation.[36]

[35] As far as the influence of Hegel on Marx is concerned, I am prepared to agree both with Tucker and with Berlin's argument (1963, pp. 120-21) that Marx's immediate successors tended to understate the ascendancy of Hegel without considering that when Marx's theoretical framework is represented in line with Marx's own perception of himself as a rigorous scientist concerned with the investigation of truth, but without a concomitant focus on the unifying model that helped mould his approach, his approach ends up by being splintered into a myriad loosely linked intuitions.

[36] For a different description of Marx's road from liberalism to socialism, see Cornu 1955.

Let me add that the acme of Marx's development into a revolutionary coincided with the development of his materialist approach to history and the associated idea of modes of production.[37]

In due time, however, Marx reconsidered his one-time beliefs and spoke out for a peaceful transition to socialism. With reference to the description of universal suffrage as one of the main goals the proletariat was to strive for, there are some who point out that even in such an early work as the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* Marx described the takeover of the proletariat as a victory in the battle for democracy (see Avineri 1968) and that *Capital* includes passages underscoring the importance of Factory Acts and the fact that many British parliaments passed resolutions favourable to workers, rather than their employers (see Sidoti 1987, p. 280).

1867, the year when the Second Reform Act enfranchised working men in the upper income brackets, marks a watershed of sorts, in terms that Marx began to envisage a peaceful transition to socialism. In this connection, Lichtheim remarks (1865, pp. 120-21) that *The Civil War in France*, written in 1871, includes passages which show Marx upholding ultra-democratic views that call to mind Proudhon, his traditional enemy. [38]

However, as a result of the continuing influence of the educational background that made him a communist when still a young man, Marx never completely discarded the idea that the new order might have to be established by violent means.

Conclusion

The prominence of production modes in Marx's overall approach offers clues to the identification of the correct scientific method of Marxism and, probably, of Marx himself. Identifying both this method and a model of socialism feasible in this day and age are the two main aims of this paper.

In Tosel 1996 (p. 147) we read that following the gigantic, yet incomplete effort to merge the high points of Western thought (Hegel + Ricardo + French Jacobinism) into a critically contrived synthesis, Marxism deteriorated into an orthodox creed that has doubtless helped socialise and politicise workers, but has failed to teach them how to secure a hegemonic position in economic life. Now that economic cooperative theorists have

[37] According to Tucker (1961, p. 172), «mature Marxism was the baby grown to adulthood» and it was therefore «perfectly proper to speak of the mature doctrine in terms applicable to Marxism».

[38] The turn of British Marxists to reformism at the end of the nineteenth century has often been traced to a rapid pace of economic growth. According to Lichtheim, this explanation is barely convincing since due to a downward trend in Britain's overseas trade money wages hardly rose in those years and continued to stagnate even during the subsequent upswing of the economy (see Lichtheim 1965, pp. 207-08).

fleshed out an alternative option to capitalism which is sure to work at high levels of efficiency, it is possible to argue that Marx has happily survived a spell of near-hibernation since his name will no longer be associated with the oppressive bureaucratic system prevailing in the past century.

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