

## ATTITUDES TO MARX'S MARXISM AND HEGEL'S ATTITUDES TO OBJECTIVITY IN RECENT DEBATES ON VALUE THEORY

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When I was a graduate student at the University of Utah back in the mid 1980s, I was preparing for my field exams in political economy. I passed my first 3 exams but when it came to the fourth I didn't pass. My examiner had asked me the one question I wanted to avoid, he wanted me to take three hours to explain in full the history of the transformation problem. I had not prepared myself to write for three hours on the transformation problem. Well, I was offered the opportunity to retake the exam after a period of study.

I virtually memorized Marx's chapter nine in volume III and Bortkiewicz's objections to Marx's method. It was also during this time that Andrew Kliman was studying with Hans Ehrbar and Marc Glick. We discussed what we were learning. I raised an issue that bothered me: why did almost everyone insist from Bortkiewicz on down to today that input prices had to equal output prices, what was the importance of that? Andrew tried to explain and defend the idea but he soon thought that he couldn't really do that.

So we came to the idea that maybe input prices didn't have to equal output prices in order to answer Bortkiewicz's charge that Marx had made an error by not transforming inputs and outputs simultaneously in a simple model of reproduction. After some hard thinking, Andrew recalled Marx's reproduction schema from volume II and in one of our long animated phone calls to each other we experimented with the idea of extending the transformation across two periods in a simple reproduction model. Our way of thinking about the solution was different than Anwar Shaikh's from the beginning because we wanted to show that every period of the illustration of the transformation of values into prices of production satisfied the conditions of simple reproduction and the aggregate equalities held across periods. Shaikh wanted to show the last period of an iteration converging to the Bortkiewicz, stationary price solution. We also realized that we had a single rate of profit that held for the entire period and that this was a production rate of profit. Piece by piece we began to realize that we had discovered an interpretation of Marx's transformation that made sense of his text in a way that the received wisdom, "Marx made an error in failing to transform the inputs from values to prices of production simultaneously with the outputs" clearly did not.

I don't mean to sound arrogant in saying this, but we knew that we had done something very daring and important when we realized how the temporality of inputs and outputs were beginning to illuminate Marx's ideas in a totally new and coherent sense. I moved to NYC to teach and finish my dissertation and Andrew stayed at the University of Utah to finish his dissertation but he kept working at the ideas with great concentration and continued to work out how our new interpretation of the transformation illuminated the falling rate of profit debate.

Later our joint work and Andrew's work on the falling rate of profit were published. We began to find others around the world who had independently come to the same or similar insights. As we presented our work we naturally opened ourselves up for criticism and so we responded and thus developed our thinking further.

What became apparent, however, after a period of time, in which we continued to respond and demonstrate the coherence of our interpretation was that there was a resistance to the temporal single system approach (TSS) that went beyond the immediate technical discussion. For example some would say, "You believe you have a direct line to Marx" or imply that we meant to say that Marx couldn't possibly make a mistake.

Far from an attitude of faith being our fundamental attitude, what has characterized our development has been the process of seeking proof for our interpretation in argument. Our original development began with re-examining what others took on faith, i.e., the idea that Marx had made an error in failing to simultaneously transform the inputs with the outputs. The more we looked at the argument, the clearer it became that the terms of the Bortkiewiczian transformation problems were not posed on Marx's ground. When we worked out an interpretation that made sense of Marx's text with the sequentialism of Marx that Bortkiewicz rejected, it became clear to us that some resistance to TSS had its roots in resistance to Marx's Marxism as a concept. Marx's transformation was consistent when time was in the equations, so why was there such strong opposition to proving this?

A confusion between what was Marx's Marxism and what was an interpretation hindered our discussion of the issues. We sought to compare our interpretation with Marx's texts and conclusions. As you can see from Andrews' comparison, (Appendix 1), we have been able to reproduce all Marx's major conclusions in value theory while other interpretations only reproduce some of them. The point is not to say this is what Marx would say today or that this was what was "in Marx's mind." The point is that we can compare interpretations with Marx's text and body of ideas

as a whole to see which interpretation is better, as an interpretation. To look at different interpretations in relation to the text they interpret is, for us, a type of objectivity.

Although for relativists "objectivity" isn't a compelling idea, for us, objectivity is a form of subjective development that arises through a dialectic in which different ideas compete to restate what Marx's Marxism is today. Our beginning principle was to understand what Marx had done first, however, instead of rushing to make our own contribution. This is why we think it is so important to compare what we think with Marx's own texts and body of ideas as a whole.

We discovered that it was the simultaneist concept of what Marx was doing in the transformation that makes Marx appear to have made an error but our temporal single system concept demonstrated an inner consistency in Marx's procedures and conclusions. Marx's text strongly supports the TSS interpretation. The addition of time subscripts to value-price equations renders Marx coherent in opposition to the tradition that finds Marx in error because his method does not conform to a simultaneist reading.

If you want to make sense of Marx, to rethink Marxism, then wouldn't it be exciting to carefully learn the TSS interpretation and its critique of the simultaneist detour? But a resistance to "getting" TSS has emerged that goes beyond technical disagreements. What is at the core of the disagreements is our contrasting subjective attitudes to Marx as founder of a new philosophy of "revolution in permanence,"--not only the technical debate. So the issue of attitudes to objectivity, in the sense of attitudes to Marx's Marxism, has emerged for me as I have participated in some of the discussions surrounding value theory.

To clarify my own thinking about the course of these discussions, I have found Hegel to be of much help, especially his chapters on various attitudes, or positions of thought to objectivity. He wrote these as an introduction to the smaller Encyclopedia Logic and the whole Encyclopedia of Philosophic Sciences in 1827. They play a role much like the Phenomenology in that they are an introduction to his system. He worked out these attitudes as a characterization of the attitudes of thought that historically preceded the dialectic proper, or the integrality of subject-object in dialectical development.

The attitudes to objectivity can be briefly characterized in the following ways: the First Attitude is faith, the Second is divided into Empiricism and Kantianism, and the Third is the retrogression into personal faith without method. What follows is a summary of my reading of these Attitudes to Objectivity.

The first attitude has an immediate confidence that it can appropriate its object through thinking. Common sense, science, as well as scholasticism share in this attitude. However, it proceeds by attaching predicates to its object without conceiving how the objective itself relates to its own determinations. It does not know the antagonism of thought to its own self, it is not an inwardized negative self-relation. It is simple confidence in knowing immediately what is. But the process of attaching predicates to an object is actually a game of definitions without comparing the definitions to the concept of the object itself. It holds its determinations of the object separately with an attitude of either/or. It lives in abstract identity as its object doesn't contain predicates within itself and, thus, there is no inherent negativity in the object. Its medium is universal generalizations, mere abstractions.

Empiricism, frustrated with mere abstractions, tries to gain a firm hold of the object, to be done with abstract generality. Empiricism holds that it is an unspeakably important principle of experience that we must be in contact with what we want to know. So Empiricism is an advance, but experience deludes itself when it believes that it has escaped the conflict of thought with itself in universal generalizations. Even empiricism must make use of categories and it may do so quite unconsciously without examining the conceptual assumptions with which it analyzes its object. Furthermore, in taking the view that the object can be cut up and analyzed in isolation from the whole, empiricism actually changes the object of study. For example, an arm separated from a body and dissected is not a living arm. It has lost its connection to the whole body and so the object of study, the body as a whole, has altered.

Kant gives a different explanation for the experience of universals than the empiricist Hume. Kant separates out universals from particulars in sense and perceptual experience. Kant changes the experiences of the object into appearances that are determined by the objectivity of the categories determined by the subjective a priori mind. The object loses its objectivity and becomes the empty thing in itself, an unknowable other. Kant fails to unify thought with experience although he has moved philosophy closer to doing so and posed the inherent antagonism of thought with itself through his exposition of the antinomies of reason. After Kant's advance, showing the subjective constitution of objectivity, the historic movement of philosophy was not forward, but backward to the philosophy of Jacobi. Jacobi makes personal revelation the authority for knowing the universal as object. The method of proof, of mediation, is dispensed with in favor of immediate personal intuition. Whatever the fact is that consciousness

discovers in itself is raised to the level of a universal for all. Because all method is based on mediation which establishes conditions for the given, Jacobi sees all method as appropriate for the finite. When it comes to the infinite, the absolute, issues of ultimate universal concern, Jacobi declares all method inappropriate and substitutes immediate intuition or belief.

Hegel becomes quite angry with Jacobi declaring that at least the earlier form of faith, e.g., in the Catholic Church, had the authority of its body of doctrine and history. Jacobi substitutes personal faith in the immediacy of self-consciousness for one's relation to an organized body of doctrine. Hegel states that his own doctrine of essence demonstrates the opposition of Jacobi, a self-developing philosophy of immediacy and mediation. The issue of proof, of mediation, of method, is what drives Hegel to single out Jacobi as an attitude to objectivity which Hegel thinks marks a retrogression in thought once the forward movement towards creating a new unity of thought and experience in the historic development of thought is halted.

Hegel starts stressing the importance of taking responsibility for the organization of thought's development rather than allowing thought and experience, subject and object, to fall apart in indeterminacy. In the Encyclopedia Logic Hegel begins to restate philosophy on the basis of his concept of "becoming" in order to show the integrality of the subjective and objective moments of the dialectic. Hegel's new concept of "absolute negativity," especially in the Philosophy of Mind, extends what Kant and others had worked out earlier. Hegel's Encyclopedia can be said to develop the Idea of subjective-objective development as a demonstration of the method of absolute negativity.

Now, what does this have to do with debates in Value theory? As a whole, I see Hegel's attitudes tracing a process not unlike the degeneration of a research project. Simultaneism appears to stress the abstract identity of inputs and outputs and resists the difference that temporality, a process of becoming, introduces. Today, simultaneism's development appears to be culminating in an assertion that no one can know what Marx really meant, there is no one right method to make sense of Marx, and to allow various contradictory conceptions to coexist on the basis of personal preference (See Foley's paper). Moreover, there seems to be a tendency to separate theory and practice as a tactic to avoid moving forward with current debates on temporality vs simultaneism in Value Theory. One place where this can be seen is in the concluding paragraph of the Foley paper for this conference where the final sentence reads:

"The release of scholarly energy into the empirical investigation of the development of world capitalism need not wait on the resolution of every knotty interpretive and theoretical issue in the labor theory of value."

With regard to another particular issue in value theory, I wonder if those who claim that Marx defined value in chapter one of Capital and never developed it further in relation to price are thinking in abstract identities like the first attitude of faith. They take a definition, as a universal, but do not show its particularization, price, emerging from within the concept of value. Value and price are held sharply apart. In the dual system approach, we either have price or value. Never mind that the commodity can be both and is not completely identical to either term.

The other issue I wish to take up here is the idea of Marx's "error," "inconsistency," or "obscurity." When Andrew, I and others subjected it to examination, we discovered that there was not a solid ground for accepting the argument that Marx made an error. Yet, others continue to take the object, the error, as an object of faith and continue to debate value theory in a Sraffian framework without examining the objectivity of their belief, the assumption of an original error. The history of this research project is the attaching of ever more intricate predicates to an empty object, Marx's error, which was a particular, simultaneist, underconsumptionist representation of Marx's value theory. After all, value for Sraffians as well as Samuelson is actually redundant. The labor theory of value collapses.

The second attitude may describe those who turned to empirical studies of vertically integrated labor coefficients in order to demonstrate the existence of value in the real world of experience. Some of these empiricists want to leave the battle over the general interpretation of value behind as empty abstractions based on textual scholasticism but it must be pointed out that they still work with a concept of value. The issue is, what is the content of the concept of value that they work with? Was it Marx's, or is it another variant? Theoretic differences over the categories employed in empiric studies cannot be avoided as objectivity requires that we examine the thought categories as well as the empiric research.

The Kantian moment of the second attitude may be represented by "abstract labor" theorists and to some extent the New Interpretation. These theorists recognize the deficits of a solely empiricist attitude and so turn to a critical examination of the categories through which we interpret what appears as value. Like the empirical attitude, critical

thinking about our categories present a conceptual advance. Yet, a critical, systematic development of categories will fail to demonstrate the objectivity of Marx's concept of value if it cannot demonstrate quantitatively how Marx transforms value into price. Verbally describing a concept is insufficient in this quantitative arena, the numbers must come out right and the issue of simultaneous vs temporal method cannot be avoided.

Finally, the third attitude of objectivity may be the most relevant to the current state of debates in value theory. The third attitude both particularizes and personalizes the theoretical disputes in value theory such that each one has an insight that s/he likes and that is then designated as "Marxist" and as universal as anyone else's representation. Method, as rooted in an organized body of doctrine, takes a back seat to the development of the individual's particular interest and particular criterion. In place of a comparison of differing interpretations with Marx's body of ideas as a whole, we get the tendency to let each theorist substitute their own project as Marx's.

The motivation and form of this "Third Attitude" research project may develop through some process like the following imagined sequence: Marx can't be right about everything, no one is; he made errors; there are some ideas that I like in Marx; I can refer to Marx selectively as it suits my insight; I'll develop my own model and signify my distance as well as closeness to Marx by calling my view "Marxist." In short, the form of this relation to Marx is like "having your cake and eating it too." (Marx is in error, I'm right, therefore I represent Marx's ideas.)

Marx according to this attitude is the universal object, and each one claims to be doing what Marx failed to work out, or left incomplete. Each is correcting poor Marx. Yet the object, Marx's Marxism, as a body of ideas in need of clarification and restatement, gets left out and becomes an mere indeterminate thing-in-itself, a projection screen for our own revelations.

It's great to have our own insights, to do empirical research on that basis, but let's not jump to conclusions without proof that these concepts are re-statements of Marx's doctrine without continuing to establish some way to be responsible for working out differences in interpretation. Many of our insights may be different than Marx's and also be worth developing. Is it too much to ask that researchers differentiate what is their own concept and what is Marx's?

Theory and practice, like subjectivity and objectivity, are integrally related in dialectic method. What is important, at this historic juncture, I think, is that we continue to move forward, after the collapse of major state capitalist regimes which presented themselves to the world as a concretization of Marxism, to determine anew what is Marxism now that we don't have that incubus of oppressive state powers calling themselves "Communist" or "Marxist" weighing us down. To continue to hold to the dogmatic faith that Marx made an error in not transforming inputs simultaneously with outputs is retrogressive and is holding back forward movement and the development of a new attitude towards Marx's ideas. Given what is at stake in this debate, the coherence of Marx's Marxism, we must continue to examine whether simultaneism or temporality is the concept that best recreates the arguments of Marx and not allow the theoretical debate to be sidetracked in assertions of faith, the conflation of empirical research with theoretical debate, or the degeneration of research and debate into everyone doing his or her own thing.

There is another issue which I cannot make a full argument for here that needs to be raised. It also relates to the Third Attitude. This is the tendency to view Marx as doing "economics" and creating a new political economy. Marx's philosophy at all times was directed to the critique and transcendence of capitalism. The total humanist vision of freedom that is Marxism cannot be grounded in economics and it may be that the attempt to solve problems within the context of economics as a discipline, even with TSS methodology, truncates that vision. This too is the Third Attitude in that it separates the universal, as the revelation of personal faith, from the particular which immediate intuition grasps. In other words, both economics and philosophy become private enclaves.

As the Marxist-Humanist philosopher Raya Dunayevskaya has observed, Marx can't solve our problems for us, we must re-create the dialectic anew, concretely and universally. But, if we take shortcuts, and allow Marx body of ideas to be treated as an abstract identity, an empty thing in itself, without concrete self-determination of the ideas intrinsic to his texts, we lose the richest foundation revolutionaries have for articulation of a vision of the future that points a way out of our present stifling, retrogressive reality.

I will end by quoting something that Marx wrote in *Pre-Capitalist Formations* (1857) that articulates his vision of humanity's future in the present as the "absolute movement of becoming." Notice too how Marx's concept of "wealth" and "human power" below imparts a sense of the integrality of both subjectivity and objectivity, the "totality," moving forward "as new beginning" in Marx's dialectic method.

....When the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is wealth, if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers, etc., of individuals, produced in universal exchange? What, if not the full development of human control over the forces of nature--those of his own nature as well as those of so-called "nature"? What, if not the absolute elaboration of his creative dispositions, without any preconditions other than antecedent historical evolution which makes the totality of this evolution--i.e. the evolution of all human powers as such, unmeasured by any previously established yardstick--an end in itself? What is this, if not a situation where man does not reproduce himself in any determined form, but produces his totality? Where he does not seek to remain something formed by the past, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?