
MARX? MARX AGAIN?*

The return of the Marxian critique of political economy in a non-Marxian time – the time of supermodern capitalism – is a theoretical challenge, if not a theoretical scandal. But this return is evident: from university auditoria to slogan-chanting squares to Facebook bubbles. Humanity is once again interested in the historical fate of modern capitalism, this – as Max Weber described it a century ago – “most fateful force in our modern life”. Humanity is not only fascinated with but also worried about the things that surround it – iPhones, drones and electronic bracelets, with a satellite sky hanging over them – things which, if Marx had been theoretically far-seeing, represent reified social relations, but which this same Marx had never even dreamed of. We find it hard to say whether archaic animals or technological simulacra await us in the jungle – but what kind of jungle is this? – of supermodern capitalism. Or perhaps we will unexpectedly be struck by an ecollapse? Or the former classes will turn out to be races and the man of labor will find himself within the race of the superfluous – and no longer of the deprived – of those who are useless to the class of the practically immortal (except perhaps as “pets”, along with dogs)? The problem is that this is not a sci-fi novel, nor is it a script for an eco-thriller. How could these possibly be the problems that are worrying us some thirty years after the collapse of the Bolshevik experiment under the Berlin Wall?

And further: What would *Capital* give us for the solution of these problems – and what is more, in a critical dialogue with Weber? And furthermore, involving actors such as Schumpeter and Foucault? Isn't *Capital* by now just an exhibit in the museum of the history of modernity, surrounded by all the other bogeys that haunted Europe after 1848? If we mean the theory as we can find it there, this may well be the case; but if it is about a legacy comprising a problem field wherein not only the solutions but also the problems can be critiqued and raised again and again, then *Capital* could be a revolutionary chance for a politics that is already an art of the impossible (contrary to what Bismarck thought of politics). Perhaps here the French would be tempted to say, “Marx est mort, vive Marx!”; since I am not as elegant as they are, I will only invite you to think these problems through together.

Deyan Deyanov
Translated by Elitza Stanoeva

*To a large extent, this issue, which evolved from a session of the Institute for Critical Theories of Supermodernity that split into two – surprisingly for us – *seems* to have split into two as well. That is why Kolyo Koev and I decided from its very first page to outline the framework of the critical dialogue within which it was conceived.

THINKING MARX THROUGH WEBER? THINKING WEBER THROUGH WEBER HIMSELF?

The present day is not only non-Marxian but also conspicuously “non-Weberian”. Or at the very least, the value spheres that Weber differentiates typologically in his famous “Intermediary Reflection” – religion, politics, economics, erotic and intellectual knowledge, which he considers to be in tension with one another – are intertwined to such an extent that it is hard to identify any clear boundaries among them. It is perhaps *the figure of the enclave* – the incursion of the political into economics, of the intellectual into the erotic, of religion into politics, or vice versa – which is the relevant starting point for an analysis, rather than the spheres brought to their typological limits.

But because of its sensitivity precisely to specific *historical intersections* that *set new boundaries*, Weber’s methodology is well-equipped to redirect theoretical and empirical research attention (by reframing the relevant “logical forms”) towards new subjects of reflection instead of considering the processing of its empirical material to be an “end in itself”. Because, as Weber declares at the end of his programmatic article for *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*: “But, at some point, the colouring changes: the significance of those points of view that have been applied unreflectingly grows uncertain, the way forward fades away in the twilight. [...] Then science, too, prepares to find a new standpoint and a new conceptual apparatus, and to contemplate the stream of events from the summits of thought.”*

As regards the dialogue with Marx, in the above-quoted article Weber points out the heuristic power of Marx’s theoretical visions and insists that this power is manifest the most when the latter are seen as “ideal types”. What he means we can grasp from the way Weber (using in fact an idiolect, known precisely from Marx, about the significance of “practically true abstractions”) treats the theoretical points of one of the most significant economic theories in his day – the so-called marginal utility theory. In a short article on this theory, he notes that the approximation of reality to its theoretical propositions “*has continuously increased*; that the fate of ever larger sections of humanity has been caught up in it; and that, as far as we can judge, this development will continue in the future.”** In other words, the historical significance of the economic theory of the Austrian school (its abstract nature notwithstanding) consists in summarizing important elements of the everyday rationality of the modern era and contributing to the comprehension of its rationality (compared to its antecedents) which has expanded into all corners of social life.

This principle is not sufficiently developed vis-à-vis the Marxian critique of political economy, but the genealogical method which suggests binding present-day social forms to a constellation of antecedents allows *not only for a meaningful dialogue with Marx but also for thinking Weber through Weber himself*.

Kolyo Koev
Translated by Elitza Stanoeva

* Max Weber, “The ‘objectivity’ of knowledge in social science and social policy,” in *Collected Methodological Writings*, ed. Hans Henrik Bruun and Sam Whimster (London & New York: Routledge, 2012), 100–138, here 138.

** Max Weber, “The theory of marginal utility and the ‘fundamental law of psychophysics,’” in *Collected Methodological Writings*, 242–251, here 248 (emphasis in original).