EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVES

THE RECURRING TEMPTATIONS OF ANTI-EQUILIBRIUM

The New York Times (March 26) reports the death of Irving Louis Horowitz, well-known sociologist and academician, at age 82. Horowitz became famous for denouncing left-wing "fascists" and "professional savages" and defending what he regarded as objective, empirical, "non-ideological" approaches in the social sciences. The role of empiricism as a non-ideological ideology of the right will be addressed in connection with musings on "anti-equilibrium" (see below). What may intrigue readers is that Horowitz was a frequent contributor to *Science & Society* during the 1950s, on record with two articles (one on Bertrand Russell, and one on the "New Conservatism"), a Communication (on Maurice Cornforth's review of Harry K. Wells' *Pragmatism*), and ten book reviews. It is fascinating to realize how many prominent mainstream intellectual figures of the 20th century, such as Horowitz, both liberals and neocons, began life as Marxists, and so found a home at S&S. Why they subsequently evolved away from their earlier commitments in the direction of the mainstream is a subject that deserves careful (empirical?) investigation! But their earlier work is still worthy of note, however much it may elude the attention of latter-day biographers, and of the individuals themselves.

Also, before getting down to business, I would like to share the following, from a letter from a prisoner in California:

> One of the developments I see within prisons is the rising in consciousness of the prison population. Hunger strikes in prisons here in California are more and more coming together to protest in different ways. . . . I see prisoners grappling with socialist theory and learning about revolutionary history, from Lenin's Russia to Mao's China, Cuba, Vietnam's struggle to the groups that rose here in America, but which were quickly repressed. The development I see of prisoners is in part due to the many revolutionary publications entering U. S. prisons; *Science & Society* is amongst the many publications making an impact in these gulags and I thank you on behalf of the many others learning serious thought from your pages.

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Without exaggerating the role of S&S in the growth of prisoners' political consciousness, this prompts me to remind readers of our campaign for gift subs, in honor of the 75th anniversary. Please contribute to our fund to support new subs, both for those who will (we hope) renew for themselves, and those (such as prisoners) who can't do that.

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Now, what is this "anti-equilibrium" stuff about?

Without attempting anything like a thorough statement here, let's begin with a few core ideas about cognition or knowing, drawn from Hegel, Marx and others.[1]

The world of sensation or perception, the first stage of knowing, presents as a vast, random, disorganized and fluctuating mass of fortuitous events. When we reach into this mass and extract from it a systematic substratum of regularity, we have found the "essence" underlying the "appearance" of perceived sense data; think of this as a second stage in the process of cognition. This stage locates an intelligible structure of relations not spontaneously visible at the outset — a set of internal regularities that, to the naive view emanating from our first stage, are utterly counter-intuitive, but that derive in a non-arbitrary way from the mass of data encountered at that first stage. With this essence, or model, in tow, the reverse path of readdressing the complexity of the initial perceptions, but now organized according to the stage 2 model by means of successive concretization, leads to the third and highest level of this dialectic. Full comprehension consists, at this final stage, of the essential inner structure in dynamic association with its manifestations at the level of concrete, detailed phenomena. Initial appearance → abstract revealed essence → structured totality. The key to the dialectic is to avoid *either* stopping at stage 2, *or* attempting to bypass it.

Now approach this from a materialist standpoint, as an analysis of material reality. Take, from Engels, this insightful aphorism: motion is the mode of existence of matter. From Hegel we have learned that the history of a thing is the thing itself. But the thing only exists, as a determinate subset of "all that exists," because it has an inner regularity that distinguishes "its" phenomena from phenomena in general: because it has a *structure*. So, here is an improved aphorism: Motion *and* structure are the *twin* modes of existence of matter. Anything — such as, for example, capitalism — that is complex enough to be worthy of study is *both* structural *and* transformational. It is, so to say, a

1 Contributions to the following section were made by Russell Dale and Julio Huato. Here, and everywhere throughout the "Editorial Perspectives" pieces in S&S, criticism and commentary from all members of the journal's Manuscript Collective are reflected in the final product.

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layered system that both consists of stable, determinate regularities; and is subject to inherent and constant processes of evolution, alteration, qualitative implosion/explosion, transcendence — in a word, change.

The simultaneous appropriation of structure/essence/abstraction/determinacy as one aspect, and transformation/appearance/concreteness/contingency as the other aspect, of the third cognitive stage might therefore appear as the best way to proceed with critical–revolutionary social theory. Marx seems to have done just that in his life-long study of the political economy of capitalism: the law of value, for example, reveals the inner social structure of outwardly apparent exchange relations, and is constantly asserted precisely through its continual violation; the equations of expanded reproduction show inner necessities in the structuring of capitalist industry for purposes of accumulation, again constantly subject to being overthrown *via* crises.

Inner structure and determinacy, however, also appear in theories of market *equilibrium*, even the *general* equilibrium of all markets taken as a single system, within mainstream capitalist economics. "Equilibrium" is a position of rest of a system: a set of values of the variables comprising the system toward which the system tends, and at which (once there) it will remain, in the absence of changes in underlying properties. The heart — the "elegant showpiece," as it has been called — of neoclassical microeconomics consists in the attempt, at mid-20th century, to demonstrate that the "economy" (reduced, of course, to competitive markets among "individuals" and "firms," and therefore minus the crucial distinguishing features of *capitalism*) has an equilibrium that is unique (there is only one), stable (the system tends towards it and not away), and socially optimal (in whatever limited sense this concept may apply).

This is, of course, pure apologetics, and many on the left have been quick to recognize it as such. Thus: "anti-equilibrium." Joan Robinson's iconoclastic stance toward the dominant neoclassical orthodoxy produced trenchant critiques of that orthodoxy, which, however, may often have crucially mixed together rejection of misuse of equilibrium with rejection of equilibrium as such. Janos Kornai (*Anti-Equilibrium*) made similar points during the 1970s. The Temporal Single System (TSS) school of Marx-based writers (they don't like the term "Marxist"; see the Communication by Guglielmo Carchedi, this issue) makes a point of rejecting both equilibrium and *dis*-equilibrium (these are closely connected, as the latter is the demonstration of forces within a system that violate its conditions of equilibrium), in favor of a *non*-equilibrium approach.

And now we have the widely discussed work of Yanis Varoufakis, a longtime S&S contributor and Contributing Editor who has become an important commentator on the European and Greek crises. His book, *Modern Political*

Economics: Making Sense of the Post-2008 World, written together with Nicholas Theocarakis and Joseph Halevi, makes the full case. The main point is stated in an interview given by Varoufakis to Philip Pilkington (March 1):[2]

> The essence of the economists' inherent error is that they erred into thinking it is possible to tell a credible story about how values and prices are formed in complex (multi-sector) economies that grow through time. . . . [They] introduced hidden (and sometimes not so hidden) assumptions that "closed" their model at the expense of credulity (*e.g.*, an assumption that the economy comprises a lone Robinson Crusoe–like figure, or a single commodity, or that all exchanges occurred in a timeless universe and at a flash of a fleeting moment).

Determinacy, in other words, is purchased at the expense of realism, where realism consists of conflict, complexity, and processes in time: "really-existing capitalist reality . . . refuses to fit into well-behaved models."

But the qualifier "really-existing" is quite interesting here. Is Varoufakis saying that *really existing* capitalism — the capitalism that appears to consciousness at the first stage of our cognitive sequence — is the only object available for study? Suppose instead that we reach for the *inner core* of "really existing" capitalism; there we might find determinate relations, objective necessities, central properties, all of which may conceivably be described as a system (whose quantitative dimension will appear as a set of equations with determinate solutions, or equilibria). In this we need not suppose that any single model by itself can encompass the entirety of this inner reality. In particular, there is no equilibrium balance of class forces; this inherent tension cannot be "solved." Nor do we imagine that our models can include the profligate complexity of what appears on the surface; indeed, their purpose is precisely not to do this. Finally, we do not suppose that the properties revealed in our models' solutions prove the eternal, timeless, or "natural" character of capitalism, or establish its crisis-free properties; again, quite the opposite.

The heart of the matter is a distinction which I propose, between *ontological* equilibrium and *methodological* equilibrium. Here I am borrowing from Jon Elster, whose *Making Sense of Marx* (1985) relied heavily on the concept of methodological individualism (where the adjective is clearly intended to separate this individualism from the more common variety found in most Enlightenment thinkers). Ontological equilibrium is the view that "the economy" "actually reaches its equilibrium" (Robert Solow); that "market economies" are inherently stable, crisis-free, conflict-free, and productive of

2 The interview is in two parts; the quote is from part 1, found at http:// www.nakedcapitalism.com/2012/03/the-new-priesthood-an-interview-with-yanis-varoufakis-part-i.html

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both social harmony and efficiency. Methodological equilibrium, by contrast, is the use of equilibrium as a way of perceiving systemic properties, so as to grasp both the homeostatic and the transformative aspects of capitalism. Its premise is that while capitalism is tendentially and periodically unstable, it is not absolutely unstable, in the sense that it has no systemic aspects at all. I'm tempted to say: if you want to overthrow and replace it, you had better first of all figure out how it works.

In sum. It's an old cliché, of course (and our illustrious former colleague, Annette Rubinstein, hated it), but I'll use it anyway: take care not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. In their zeal to oppose economic orthodoxy's *misuse* of equilibrium to establish the eternal, inevitable and beneficial properties of the system-of-the-present, many on the left go too far and reject all use of equilibrium as a methodological tool to explore capitalism at the systemic level, as well as to then apply the theory thus derived to exploration of the contradictions at the heart of this system. To reiterate: if something exists, it is (at one level) a system; if it is a system, then it has regular properties that can be described, by means of simultaneous equations or some other representation of those properties in their pure form. This is an injunction to approach time theoretically: to take certain properties (*e.g.*, the technical and social relations of production existing at a given moment) and hold them constant, not because they ever are constant in "really existing" reality (that would of course be ridiculous), but because by treating them as unchanging in a given context, other things, such as prices, money wages, profit rates, interest rates, and a system-reproducing structure of output, are allowed to seek their benchmark values — their equilibria — and the system of such values can be studied. Structure and transformation, stasis and crisis are intertwined aspects of capitalist reality. Time and dynamics are always central. But if we worship time, we lose track of structure, just as if we worship structure we lose track of time. Both the equilibrium/structural and the transformative perspectives, then, are required, if we are to grasp capitalism as the complex reality that it undoubtedly is, and to deepen and unify Marxist research in a way that can provide a solid foundation for the practices of the left.

In closing, I also note that worshiping the empirical, as Irving Louis Horowitz urged us to do, would mire us down in stage 1 of our cognitive sequence; then we can truly be prisoners of the obvious, and the difficult questions surrounding how to grasp the unity of structure and change within the reconstructed totality do not even begin to emerge.

The cognitive methodology of Hegel and Marx, I am realizing, is much easier to summarize than to put into practice.

D. L.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

ANARCHISM: THEORY, PRACTICE, ROOTS, CURRENT TRENDS

Science & Society is planning a special issue on the broad theme of anarchism, as appearing in both past and present-day political movements. While contributors will of course shape the content and perspectives of the issue as it develops, we especially encourage contributions within the following subject areas:

1. The nature of anarchist theory and practice, from the standpoint of historical materialism. Anarchism as a laboratory for the study of the material roots of ideology. Does the existing body of anarchist writing contribute to Marxist understandings of the state? Of the nature of ruling-class hegemony? Of the balance between spontaneity and organization in the struggles of working and oppressed classes and strata? Of transformations in capitalism related to globalization, neoliberalism, financialization, cognitive commodities, creative labor, etc.?

2. The classical roots of anarchist thought in the works of Bakunin, Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, and others, especially in relation to the position of Marx and Engels in the International Working Men's Association and the individual-country working-class movements of the 19th century.

3. The specific features of present-day anarchist thought. Survey of books, journals, websites, blogs. The role of new information technologies in contemporary social and political debate.

4. Anarchism in today's new social movements: the anti- and counter-globalization protests; the uprising against the WTO, Seattle, 1999; the World Social Forum and its regional and national counterparts; and the present-day Occupy movement, in the United States and internationally. What is the nature of anarchism's influence, and how has it evolved? How is anarchism conceptualized in today's Occupy movement, and how do these conceptions differ from classical anarchism?

5. Anarchism and "black shirt" practices on the left, old and new, from the 19th century to the Spanish Civil War, to the 1960s peace movements and up to the present. How central is anarchist theory to these practices? Can it be separated from them?

6. The relation between anarchism and libertarianism. Does anarchist thought transcend the distinction between political right and left? Does anarchism have a distinctive post-capitalist vision?

While we expect contributors to innovate and shape their papers according to specific interests and views, we encourage them to contact the Guest Editors (email parameters provided below), so that completeness of coverage can be achieved, and duplication avoided, to the greatest extent possible.

We are looking for articles in the 7,000–8,000 word range. Projected publication is Spring 2014, so we would like to have manuscripts in hand by January 2013. Discussion about the project overall, and suggestions concerning content, should begin immediately.

The Guest Editors are: Russell Dale (russelleliotdale@gmail.com); Justin Holt (jh129@nyu.edu); and John P. Pittman (jpittman@jjay.cuny.edu).

IN THIS ISSUE

Sometimes a book review becomes more than a book review (this is a different matter entirely from a book review becoming bigger than it should be!). We asked Lenin scholar Lars Lih to review the important new book edited by Richard Day and Daniel Gaido, *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: The Documentary Record*, and what emerged was a major re-reading of the "permanent revolution" concept, as it appeared in the thinking of German and Russian Social Democrats in the early decades of the last century. Lih's position is controversial — how could it not be? — and we anticipate further rounds of debate. Here I will just record my sense of the richness of this discussion, and of how sophisticated, in certain ways, thinkers like Kautsky, Lenin, Mehring, Luxemburg, Ryazanov and Trotsky were, in comparison to present-day left conceptualizations.

Norwegian political economist Jørgen Sandemose ("Manufacture and the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism") returns to a topic that is an S&S classic — referring back to the 1950 transition debate among Maurice Dobb, Paul Sweezy, Rodney Hilton and others, which laid the foundation for the later Brenner debate and continuing discussions in S&S and elsewhere. Taking issue with Brenner's English "agrarian" interpretation, Sandemose also points to a strange disconnect between the chapters on manufacture and large-scale industry in *Capital* I and the chapters on "So-Called Primitive Accumulation" toward the end of that work. His careful confrontation of Marx's texts with new empirical data enriches our understanding of the emergence of capitalism in England and reinforces a sense of the complexity of the feudalism-to-capitalism transition and the need to carefully distinguish the different stages of that transition.

Liberalism has often been seen as antithetical to socialism, and this perception is amplified in the current period of worldwide neoliberal ascendancy. Political scientist Ed Rooksby, however, urges (in his paper, "The Relationship Between Liberalism and Socialism") that we restore the element of continuity between these two great doctrines, or paradigms, to its proper place. He argues that the core values of classical liberalism, especially when confronted with the issue of equality, contain immanent contradictions that lead toward socialist understanding, and that those core values must therefore be assimilated into socialism, rather than being seen as rejected or replaced by it.

S&S has a long tradition of careful exegesis of Marx's texts in political economy; a look back through recent issues (which one hopes are permanently housed on readers' shelves!) will reveal rich troves of material. Now Greek authors Spyros Lapatsioras and John Milios take time out from the urgency of ongoing attacks on the Greek people by European (and world) financial elites to study "The Notion of Money from the *Grundrisse* to *Capital*." Without trying to summarize their argument here, I will only say that it exemplifies the distinction between textual analysis, on the one hand, and *textualism*, on the other. The latter term means the hortatory adulation of Marx's texts, usually in the service of propping up some preconceived political position and claiming the status of sole representative of Marx's "true" intentions. Lapatsioras and Milios do just the opposite: they study Marx, and the evolution of his ideas, in the search for important elements that we can carry forward in the continuing development of critical political economy. One can see important lessons for the present, as left forces tackle (to focus only on the United States for the moment) issues such as reform vs. abolition of the Fed, alternative money (Ithaca dollars), the Solidarity Economy, etc. But this clearly takes us beyond the moment.

Finally, and noted briefly, Guglielmo Carchedi's reply to Russell Dale on "Mathematics and Dialectics in Marx." Carchedi's anti-equilibrium position was referred to earlier; his unique contribution is to link his "temporalist" view of value theory to the foundations of dialectics, and to address the dialectical implications of Marx's mathematical manuscripts (also a topic of long standing in S&S; see Carchedi's and Dale's references). This is just one more important discussion that is sure to continue as we go forward.

D. L.

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