

Fred Moseley and Martha Campbell (eds) (1997) New Investigations of Marx's Method, New Jersey, Humanities Press.

This is the second volume of essays on Marx's method produced by this group of authors, who are united by a rejection of the dominant interpretations of Marx's method in favour of a much more radical conception of the originality of Marx's thought.

The papers cover a wide range of topics from a number of different, though not inconsistent, perspectives. Chris Arthur presents a typically meticulous rejection of the idea that Marx employed a logical-historical method in *Capital*, arguing that Marx used the method of systematic dialectic, in which every concept forms part of a complex totality so that there are no logically or historically primitive terms, but rather each concept has to be developed through successive stages in the elaboration of its relation to the whole. The commodity provides the starting point of capital not because it is logically or historically prior to capital, but because it is the most abstract and universal element of the capitalist mode of production.

Patrick Murray, picks up on this theme to argue that Marx's method goes beyond the classical philosophical dualism of subject and object, expressed in the contrast between the naturalism of classical economics, which reduces the commodity to the product of labour, and the subjectivism of neo-classical economics, which reduces the commodity to a subjective evaluation of its utility. Marx can grasp the contradictory unity of the commodity because he analyses it as a determinate social form. However, the concept of social form is not just a methodological device, it is the concept of the real processes which determine the existence of things in the external world. This leads

Murray to the notion of ‘redoubled empiricism’, according to which Marx explains not only the superficial phenomena which are described by classical and neo-classical economics, but also the real processes which determine these phenomena. This implies that Marx not only explains more things than the economists, but that Marx also explains different things, which are excluded from the economists’ view by their methodology.

The status of Marx’s critique of political economy is the focus of Paul Mattick Junior’s essay, which develops the argument that Marx’s critique of capitalism and his critique of political economy are one and the same thing, since the critique of capitalism reveals the reality of exploitation beneath the appearance of freedom and equality which is expressed in the economists’ concepts. This is an important complement to the two previous essays because it establishes that Marx’s theory is neither more comprehensive nor different from political economy, but that it is in its essence a *critique* of political economy.

The following three essays deal with more specific aspects of the interpretation of Marx’s work. Martha Campbell defends Marx’s theory of money against recent criticisms by Ong and Levine on the grounds that they do not understand Marx’s derivation of money from his analysis of the value form. Fred Moseley disposes of a century of futile debate on the ‘transformation problem’ by showing that Marx consistently argued that the total amount of surplus value is determined independently of and prior to its distribution in the forms of interest, rent and profit. Gert Reuten offers an important and original discussion of the concept of a tendential law, as developed by Marx in relation to the law of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall.

The final essay by Tony Smith returns to the issue of Marx's systematic dialectical method in relation to the Lakatosian paradigm. This essay addresses a central issue which underlies all of the contributions to the volume, but which is in general not adequately addressed, which is the question: in what does the superiority of Marx's method lie? Smith's answer is to reject Lakatosian instrumentalism and to argue that the superiority of Marx's method lies in the greater adequacy to reality of its core explanatory propositions. However, this begs the question of who is to decide which theory is more adequate? If we are to leave the judgement to the 'scientific community' it is clear which theory is regarded as being more adequate, and it is not that of Marx.

Several of the papers clearly establish the distinctiveness of Marx's methodology, show that this methodological distinctiveness has important substantive implications, and argue that Marx's theory is in some sense superior to that of economics. But the problem remains of whether Marx's theory is superior only on the basis of the Marxist methodology, or whether it is superior in some absolute sense. Murray and Smith stress the greater explanatory power of Marx's theory, but do not establish on what grounds such a judgement is to be made. Mattick, on the other hand, takes a much stronger and, in my view more sustainable position. The core of Marx's critique of political economy was that the latter was not simply less comprehensive but that its propositions, where they were not tautologous, were irrational and incoherent. Moreover, Marx established this not on the basis of a peculiarly Marxist dialectical logic, but from the perspective of any kind of logic at all.

The essays collected in this volume make an important contribution to what should be central methodological debates in the social sciences, yet they will probably be read

only by confirmed Marxists. There is no doubt in the minds of Marxists that Marx, with his dialectical method based on the concept of social form, resolved the antinomies which have plagued the social sciences in showing that the apparently polar contradictions, of subject and object, value and use-value and so on, are moments, and principles of development, of a single contradictory unity. The social scientists' suppression of these contradictions means not that they can explain less than can Marxism, but that they can explain everything and nothing. Nevertheless, Marx also explained why these vacuous theories persist, for they perform a vital ideological function in giving the ephemeral phenomena of social life a spurious permanence and solidity. This book shows that Marxism lives, but Marxists also have to go beyond the interpretation of Marx's method and apply it, as did Marx, to the ruthless critique of the ideological limitations of bourgeois social science.