Kautsky, Lukacs, Althusser and the Retreat from the Economic in Marxism— with the Return in Uno*1)

Richard WESTRA (Pukyong National University, Korea)

1. Introduction

Marx believed that preceding attempts to supersede it, capitalism must first be understood. Marx's endeavors in this regard—the development of his economic theory in Capital—consumed the better part of Marx's life. Yet, paradoxically, throughout more than a century following Marx's passing, Marxism (the body of thought tracing its lineage to Marx), has been offered up as essentially a theory of history. Indeed, today, few dispute the view of historical materialism as the centerpiece of Marxism, with political economy, portrayed at best as a sub-theory. The overarching concern of the article is the implications of this eclipse of Marxian economics by historical materialism. The article addresses the question of how what is here referred to as the retreat from the economic in Marxist theory is impelled by the sub-theory role political economy plays in support of historical materialism. Simply stated, it is argued that Marxian economics is compromised through its conscription by historical materialism for purposes of confirming the latter's integral claim of a socialist historical outcome. As the actual course of human history portends diminishing prospects for this, so the scope of Marxian economics is circumscribed and its contribution to the Marxist research program increasingly downplayed. It is concluded that the role of economic theory in Marxism is necessarily quite different from the foregoing and the reinstatement of the economic in Marxism hinges upon a fundamental rethinking of the relation of Marxian economics to historical materialism and, most importantly, the cognitive sequence which links them.

To achieve its aims the article adopts the following procedure: First, to trace the retreat from the economic in Marxian theory, the sub-theory relation of political economy to historical materialism will be analyzed across the work of three prominent Marxist theoreticians each widely accepted as representatives of epochs of Marxist thought. They are Karl Kautsky, Georg Lukacs and Louis Althusser. Kautsky is chosen as representative of so-called "orthodox" Marxism as well as for his long-time dominance of the Second International and claim to carry the Marxist legacy into the twentieth century. Georg Lukacs is selected given his role as the forerunner of "western" Marxism. Finally, consideration of the work of Louis Althusser is required, partly given his strident demand that Marxism be accepted as a new science, but also due to his pivotal role at the end of an era of confidence and assurance in Marxism. Interestingly, it is largely from within the Althusserian fold that an array of critical positions on Marxism—so-called "post-Marxism", "post-materialism" and downright anti-Marxism—emerges. Their work is not treated exhaustively but to discern a thread that runs through their discrete reconstructions of Marxist theory. The categories of analysis constituting the focus of three substantive sections of this article are: the character and purpose of Marxist theory; the role of Capital; and the cognitive sequence in Marxist theory. Following this discussion, an alternative approach to the relationship between Marxian economics and historical materialism predicated upon a reconstruction of Marxism originating in Japan will be offered. Analysis of this perspective in the fourth substantive section of the article unfolds in a parallel fashion through the aforementioned categories to ensure that the critique of Marxism as a theory of history is rendered as explicit as possible. On the basis of the mode of adjudication amongst Marxist theories sketched above it is then concluded that the Japanese approach returns political economy to its rightful place within Marxist theory—effecting, a return to Marx.
2. The character and purpose of Marxism as a theory of history

No figure is more responsible for shaping views on what Marx intended in his writing than Karl Kautsky. In fact, it is through Kautsky that the very term “Marxism”, denoting a systematic body of thought tracing its lineage to Marx, first comes into existence (Haupt, 1982, 276–82). Kautsky is also responsible for crystallizing the position that the core of Marxism is “the materialist conception of history” or historical materialism. In Kautsky’s hands Marxism is further invested with all the credentials of the triumphant positivist natural sciences of the day. Its fundamental purpose is purportedly to offer an objective “materialist” theory of human historical evolution and class struggle in line with work on the natural world of Charles Darwin (Bronner, 1982, 580–2; cf. Kautsky, 1989, 80–92). As Kautsky unabashedly declares, while Marx and Engels “had started out from Hegel...[I] started out from Darwin” (Kautsky, 1988, 6). The contention here thus is that it is precisely this benchmark reconstruction of Marxism by Kautsky, as an overarching or meta-theory of history, which delimits the range of questions following generations of Marxists set out to address.

When we turn to Lukacs, the key departure from Kautsky on the character of Marxism is over the Second International’s mission to deck it out in the garb of positivism. For Lukacs, an approach to knowledge that is compartmentalizing, fixated upon appearances in the world of “facts”, and involves the human subject solely as a spectator, is symptomatic of bourgeois thinking which in the end is inimical to social change (Perkins, 1993, 148–52). According to Lukacs, such is also anathema to Marx himself. Instead, the chief traits of Marx’s work for Lukacs are deployment of the “dialectical method” and enshrinement of the category of “totality” (Perkins, 1993, 158). It is in fact through the prism of these—the former as “a vehicle of revolution” (Lukacs, 1971, 2), the latter as the key to understanding the historical process as a whole (I will return to this in the following section on the role of Capital)—that Lukacs believes the case for socialism as the telos of human history can be most robustly defended (Jay, 1984, 105–6). But, despite the nuances in his reconstruction of Marxism over questions of method and justifying the purpose of the theory, Lukacs follows Kautsky’s benchmark interpretation of Marxism as a theory of history. His own words capture this best: “In the last analysis...Marxism does not acknowledge the existence of independent sciences of law, economic or history, etc.: there is nothing but a single, unified...science of the evolution of society as a totality” (Lukacs, 1971, 28).

Althusser, in line with Kautsky, makes the strident claim for Marxism as the science of history or historical materialism. However, consistent with Lukacs, Althusser unleashes a harsh critique of empiricist accounts of historical materialism (Althusser, 1979, 56–60). Rather, the new science of Marxism, according to Althusser, as with any other historically constituted science, requires a criterion of truth and validity which is intra-theoretic. That is, the conceptual infrastructure of Marxism qua historical materialism constitutes a discrete branch of knowledge as mathematics or geology and need not depend on “external” modes of verification (as with Kautsky’s reliance upon positivist criteria). In the words of Althusser: “It has been possible to apply Marx’s theory with success because it is ‘true’; it is not true because it has been applied with success” (1979, 58–9). Althusser, to be sure, is also a prime offender in the tendency to affirm political economy as a sub-theory of historical materialism. As he baldly declares: “the theory of economics is a subordinate region of the theory of history” (183 emphasis in the original). Where Althusser parts company with both Kautsky and Lukacs is over the question of causality in historical materialism. His temporal emplacement at a point of diminishing prospects for socialist revolution animates Althusser to challenge that which Kautsky and Lukacs staunchly defend—the certainty of a socialist historical outcome. Such a position, according to Althusser, flows from non-Marxist understandings of causal determination of which historically there have existed two essential species: The first, “transitive causality” employed by the empiricist tradition proves incapable of conceptualizing the efficacy of the social whole. The second, “expressive causality” appealed to by Lukacs (and at times by Kautsky), reduces the complex social whole to a simple manifestation of an inner essence. Marx, claims Althusser, must be credited with a “break” from these forms of causal determination, establishing instead that the key to the sci-
entify of Marxism qua historical materialism is “structural causality” (1979, 138–9, 153, 185–88). To fully appreciate Althusser’s arguments over causality however, the focus must shift to the place of Marx’s Capital in Althusser’s scheme.

3. The role of Capital as a sub-theory of historical materialism

In his effort to popularize Marx’s thought in working-class intellectual circles (Pierson, 1993, 61) Kautsky’s publication of the book The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx (Kautsky, 1936) emerges as a milestone given how it offers the only major explicative introduction to Marx’s Capital for the era (Gronow, 1986, 8). Of monumental significance is Kautsky’s presentation of Capital as a genetic theory of the historical development of capitalism. This effort begins with a reinterpretation of the inaugural chapters in Volume One on the commodity and money in terms of a historically existent phase of simple commodity production antedating capitalism. It then leads to an account of Capital as theorizing first, the historical supplanting of that phase by capitalism, and second, the “socializing” of capitalism itself, which purportedly prefigures the historical onset of socialism. In accordance with this understanding of Capital as a sub-theory of historical materialism, Kautsky also defends the existence of a central “law” of accumulation responsible for propelling capitalism towards its demise. It is this law—advancing the concentration and centralization of capital, and a concomitant proletarianization—that appears center stage during the famous Revisionist Controversy; a clash which rages over matters of empirical evidence. It should be interjected here, however, that Kautsky is hardly a complete fatalist. Revolutionary transformation in his design does not hinge solely on economic forces per se but on the automaticity by which the subjective element will become manifest as a result of these (Arato, 1973–74, 7–8).

Though Kautsky emerges victorious from the Revisionist Controversy, problems which beset Capital as he had presented it are in fact amplified. Most pointedly, it is the question about the socializing tendencies of capitalism and the onset of socialism as an historical outcome of such which engenders the Marxist theorizing of “imperialism” as a “stage” of capitalism. While treating this issue in all its complexity would take us too far a field, suffice it to say here that contrary to recent analysis (McDonough, 1995, 339–367) the theorizing of imperialism in the hands of figures such as Lenin and Hilferding does little to counter the difficulties Kautsky’s reconstruction saddles Marx’s legacy with. For as illustrated in the masterful study by Gronow (1986, 57–9, 97–8, 118–9, 161–2), despite quibbling over the political and strategic implications of imperialism, turn-of-the-century Marxist theoreticians of imperialism accept the view of Kautsky that the core of Capital is its demonstration of the historical teleology of capitalism. This then leads to the consideration of capitalism proper as but a short-lived formation wedged between its petty commodity precursor and imperialism. In the end, therefore, there emerges a crystallization of two positions, neither of which are propitious for an apprehension of Capital as the foundation of a distinct Marxian political economy: First, if one sides with Kautsky’s detractors in the Controversy, and accept that Marx’s alleged historical conjectures in Capital are quite simply wrong, then it follows that the whole project of Marxian economics must be summarily jettisoned. But second, if the so-called stage of imperialism is recognized as involving new “complexities” for socialism as the outcome of capitalism, and the theorizing of imperialism as a major “supplement” to Marx’s work, then Capital, the fruit of decades of Marx’s labor, is still relegated to a position of limited applicability.

Problematising the subjective element in socialist revolution (given how Kautsky had expected the historical tendencies of capital to directly compel workers to overthrow capitalism) is considered a key contribution of Lukacs to Marxist theory (Perkins, 1993, 181). And it is in examining Lukacs’ effort here that his position on the role of Capital is best elucidated. To be sure, Lukacs accedes to Kautsky on the issue of inexorable laws of capitalism. He speaks, for example, of “the final economic crisis of capitalism” developing (Lukacs, 1971, 70). Elsewhere, he states: “It is doubtless true that these ‘laws’ are...objective...and as such lead to the downfall of capitalism” (Lukacs, 1971, 196). However, Lukacs’ concern with Marx’s dialectical method and apprehension of historical materialism as theorizing a totality animates him to expose what he believes to be a dialectical relation between the objective process and the afore-
mentioned crucial subjective element in socialist transformation. Here, Lukacs brings Marx’s Capital to bear claiming “the chapter dealing with the fetish character of the commodity contains within itself the whole of historical materialism” (Lukacs, 1971, 170). It does so, according to Lukacs, by capturing the phenomenon of “reification” through which on the one hand workers are confronted by the commodities they create as an alien force and subjugated as dehumanized cogs by the capitalist dynamic. And, on the other hand, the political and ideological superstructure is increasingly enveloped by the commodity form. Such is the taproot of those symptoms of bourgeois thinking registered above (and of note in the Revisionist Controversy and theorizing of imperialism with its supposed new complexities) and the ultimate impediment to proletarian radicalization (Lukacs, 1971, 83ff.; Perkins, 1993, 137-41). For Lukacs, ultimately, it is the oppression of the proletariat through capitalist reification which renders their condition representative of all class suffering across human history and confers upon them their pivotal role in the struggle for socialism. And, it is the distinctive Marxist dialectical method which is able to penetrate the semblances of capitalist reification and class oppression and spur the proletariat to fulfill its mission as the “subject” of history. Therefore, historical materialism, with its claim of a socialist historical outcome, is vindicated in Lukacs’ schema by the proletariat gaining “consciousness” of its historical destiny. In this sense Lukacs recruits Capital to offer what one commentator refers to as a “philosophical” resolution to the problem of socialist revolution in history (Meszaros, 1995, 27ff.).

Returning to Althusser and the question of historical causality it should be evident how, working within the parameters of Kautsky’s benchmark interpretation of Marxism as an overarching theory of history and historical directionality, Althusser struggles not to throw out the baby with the bathwater. If transitive causality is the source of economism and claims for determination by the economic base expressive causality leads to voluntarism and views of determinism by the superstructure such that, for Althusser, Lukacs is simply flipping the non-Marxist causal coin. Marx’s break, as alluded to above, purportedly establishes the “relative autonomy” and reciprocal effective of both base and elements of the superstructure (politics and ideology), as well as the reflection within them of the whole, therefore rendering the practices constituting any mode of production “overdetermined”. As Resch (1992, 50-1, 62) puts it, Althusser’s structural causality “conceptualizes the social whole as a parallelogram of forces each bearing within itself the imprint of its conditions of existence.” But, how then does Althusser simultaneously maintain the integrity of Marx’s Capital as well as the historical-explanatory potency of Marxism? As a “subordinate region” of the theory of history political economy partakes of the same criteria of validity as historical materialism. Further, according to Althusser, Marx’s extended in depth treatment in Capital of one region—the economic—of the capitalist mode of production establishes that, despite the relative autonomy of practices or regions, historical structures are in fact “structures in dominance” (Althusser, 1979, 108) in that the economic is pegged as determinate in the “last instance” (though, as Althusser asseverates, “the lonely hour of the ‘last instance’ never comes”, 1990, 112-3). To sum up, Althusser recruits Capital in his elaboration upon the mode of determination of historical causality with the conclusion on the question of socialism as an historical outcome that, as summarized by his colleague Etienne Balibar: “Communism as a mode of production is a possibility rooted in the contradictions of capitalism at every ‘stage’ of its development, no more, no less” (Balibar, 1993, 14).

4. The cognitive sequence in Marxism qua Historical Materialism

Cognitive sequence refers to the flow of knowledge in Marx’s work. The position taken in this article is that this is the most problematic issue in Marxist theory. While it is certainly the case that Marx read voluminously, beyond his pithy statement of historical materialism in the famous “Preface” to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, in Marx’s published writing, there is a paucity of systematic analysis of history sufficient to ground the conceptual architecture of historical materialism; not to mention a defense of the view that historical materialism offers an adequate explanation for processes of social change across the sweep of human history as a whole. The questions which arise therefore are: If historical materialism is the overarching master theory of Marxism, what
is the basis of its claims to validity? And, how does this theory impart validity to other areas of Marxist research such as Marx’s economics? This is precisely why the role of Capital, Marx’s life work, looms so large in discrete reconstructions of historical materialism. For it is Capital and political economy which, though portrayed as a sub-theory of historical materialism, is saddled with the task of verifying the claims of historical materialism—a meta-theory of history. This is accomplished with circular argument that leaves the sources of Capital’s own claims to truth un-interrogated.

Kautsky, for example, despite popularizing Capital and defending its so-called inexorable laws, never considers the work as a self-substantive, theoretical endeavor. Rather, for him, the preparation of Capital exemplifies the infusion into nineteenth century economics of the authority of “historical science” (Kautsky, 1988, 478-80). And, like any healthy positivism, essentially dependent upon empirical evidence, Capital, which purportedly traces the unfolding telos of capitalist history, provides proof in a given context of the wider teleology of human history as a whole. In Kautsky’s own words, “every step in social science has proved it—that, in the last analysis, the history of mankind is determined...by an economic development which progresses irresistibly, obedient to certain underlying laws” (Kautsky, 1971, 119).

Despite Lukacs’ critique of Kautsky’s positivism, and the important contribution to Marxism inhering in his notion of capitalist reification, he unequivocally reproduces the cognitive sequence of Kautsky’s reconstruction of Marxism. That is, while Marxism and the theory of history is the totality, it is Capital—in Lukacs’ case, a single chapter allegedly offering the key to the animation of proletarian revolutionary consciousness—which then validates the prognosis of historical materialism.

Althusser, to be credited with his defense of Capital given how the actual course of human history cast doubt upon Kautsky’s claim that Marx’s master work proves capitalism spawns socialism, or Lukacs’ argument that Capital displays how revolutionary consciousness flows from capitalist oppression, blazes a similar trail in terms of his understanding of the cognitive sequence in Marx’s writing. The new science of historical materialism, though already “true”, derives vital insights into historical causality from the regional theory of political economy of Capital. However these insights emanate not from political economy per se, but from a “reading” of Capital (Althusser, 1979, 19ff.) which purportedly retrieves a subterranean text ensconced within it that provides the key to understanding historical causality.

To sum up, the foregoing demonstrates how the signal apprehension of Marxism as an overarching theory of history crystallized in the benchmark reconstruction of Marxism by Kautsky persists in the work of the most diverse Marxist thinkers. As well, it confirms how in the sub-theory role played by Capital, Marx’s economics is increasingly undermined as an economic theory in its own right. Paralleling this retreat from the economic is also an increasing retreat among Left intellectuals from Marxism per se as a guide for social actors seeking to understand history and processes of social change; a trend driven by the inconsistencies and gaps in historical materialism which only seem to mount with each successive reconstruction.

Kautsky, of course, never explains how Capital is infused with historical science. And, even if Capital’s purported charting of the course of capitalist history was accurate, it does not constitute an empirical validation of historical materialism which, as a theory of human history as a whole, still requires evidence from all other historical epochs to maintain its truth claims as such. Lukacs also deftly evades the question of Capital’s validity. In this regard Roy Bhaskar is correct to suggest that Lukacs’ touting of a single chapter in Capital as the source of proletarian revolutionary awakening and the truth of historical materialism elides the very question of what precisely historical materialism was ever a theory of (Bhaskar, 1989, 139). Althusser’s claims for Capital simultaneously proceed furthest in effacing its character as an economic theory in its own right and offer the most oblique defense of historical materialism. In Colletti’s words, Althusser’s Reading Capital constitutes “a lengthy theoretical construction erected, so to speak, behind the back of Capital” (1974, 16). E. P. Thompson, so befuddled by Althusser’s enterprise, recommends the full excommunication of Capital from Marxism, allowing historical materialism to stand alone (Thompson, 1978, 57-65). However this saddles him with the task—which he never faces—to explain the basis upon which the propositions of historical materialism are
proffered. In any case, Althusser's writing emerges as a symbol of all that is wrong with the very aspiration of Marxist theory to produce scientific knowledge, or for that matter, any truth claims about the social world (Norris, 1996, 194–95).

5. A Japanese Approach and the Return of the Economic in Marxist Theory

Rethinking the Character and Purpose of Marxism: Was Marx obtuse, laboring for decades on an intricate theory of the capitalist economy simply to assert socialism as an historical outcome? Is Capital really intended as a sub-theory supporting an overarching theory of history which in the end appears to have little need for its insights? The position this article takes is that such is hardly the case. It is true that Marx commences his intellectual pursuits in the fields of philosophy and history. But his cognizance of the challenges socialism poses to existing social theory spur him to embark upon the in-depth study of the political economy of capitalism. This latter endeavor contributes to Marx's promulgation of historical materialism (Suchting, 1983, 34-6, 49). In turn, historical materialism provides Marx with a clear-cut vantage point from which to mount assaults upon views of his early, utopian, antagonists in disputes over social change. Yet, the evidence is that Marx is not wholly satisfied with his advocacy for socialism on the basis of historical materialism. Rather, he perceives historical materialism as a "guiding thread" or springboard to a project apart, the momentousness of which he probably recognizes only as his development of historical materialism nears conclusion (Itoh, 1988, 41-3, 51).

Detached from political debates marking the development of Marxism in Europe and North America, and flourishing in an intellectual environment in which neo-classical economics never achieves the hegemonic status it attains in Anglo-European academia, the Japanese Uno approach to Marxist theory apprehends Marx's work in the most unique and compelling fashion a propos the "conventional" rendering of Marx treated above. The Uno approach discerns that Marx is driven to explore the workings of the capitalist economy as his life's work not only because of his interest in socialism, but due to the gradual understanding emerging from his studies of the peculiarity of capital as an object of knowledge.

It is worth approaching Marx's thought here through the prism of work of economic historian Karl Polanyi: For Polanyi's (1977) notion of the capitalist economy becoming "dis-embedded" from society—the politics, ideology, religion, culture and so forth with which it is intermeshed across the sweep of human history—offers an insightful though incomplete conceptualization of what strikes Marx. That is, the rise of capitalism in history is marked by the unraveling of interpersonal relationships in economic life which had characterized human society since time immemorial, and their replacement with impersonal economic relations of self-regulating markets. The early political arguments by enthusiasts of this process hail the constancy and predictability which markets bring to human material affairs (Hirschman, 1977). However, writing at a time when the capitalist economy is well established, Marx grasps how with economic life organized through integrated systems of self-regulating markets, human beings increasingly abdicate responsibility for managing their own material reproduction. Marx captures this in his oft-quoted descriptions of capitalism as an "upside-down" society, or one where markets convert human material relationships into "relations among things". It is precisely this set of phenomena to which reification refers.

But, what concerns Marx even more, is the principles or "logic" of capitalist material reproduction: For, while all human societies have at their core sets of principles ensuring their economic viability, in capitalist society these operate as an extra-human force such that the self-regulating market reproduces economic life for the abstract purpose of augmenting value or profit-making. In this sense Marx apprehends capitalism not only as a society in which the economic is dis-embedded from the social, but as a reified one where the economic wields other elements of the social for its own self-aggrandizement. As summarized by Postone (1996, 156): "Capitalism, as analyzed by Marx, is a form of social life with metaphysical attributes—those of the absolute Subject". In what follows, the article examines the implications of Marx's analysis for the Uno approach in terms of the categories set out above: the character and purpose of Marxist theory; the role of Capital; and the cognitive sequence in Marx's work.
Deriving from what Albritton (1999) elaborates upon as the “ontological uniqueness” of capital it is necessarily the case, for the Uno approach, that there can be no overarching theory of Marxism qua historical materialism. That is, the political economic study of capitalism and historical materialism constitute two discrete projects in Marx’s work (Uno, 1980, xxiv–v). This does not exclude, of course, cross-fertilization between the two projects, a question addressed in relation to the cognitive sequence in Marx’s work according to the Uno approach, only that their subject-matter are quite different and therefore the study of each carries distinct epistemological and methodological proviso’s. Capital and Marxian political economy explore the modus operandi of material reproduction in a very peculiar, historically delimited, human society. Historical materialism, on the other hand, studies material existence and social change across human history in toto. What this essentially means is that as an historical society capitalism may be studied within the context of historical materialism in comparative perspective with pre-capitalist or future socialist societies. But the reverse is not possible. The sort of theory required to analyze the abstract logic of self-regulating markets of capitalism cannot be applied to human history as a whole where no such logic holds sway.

Marx’s Capital as an Economic Theory: Along with the conscription of Capital as sub-theory of historical materialism a second unfortunate tendency in Marxism is to defend what is a markedly incomplete work as a sacred text. Uno, concerned less with being faithful to what Marx said in this or that context, rather becomes preoccupied with being faithful to Marx’s project—the economic theory of capital. Marx begins Capital (1977, 90) with a statement to the effect that to produce knowledge of economic life in capitalist society “the power of abstraction” must act as a substitute for natural science’s procedure of laboratory experimentation. He then introduces the commodity as the most fundamental category of political economy containing within it the seeds of capital—the opposition or “contradiction” between value and use-value—and deploys a method of dialectical abstraction in an attempt to trace out all the categories of capital and their logical interrelations. Unfortunately, Marx never survives to complete Capital, and nowhere explicitly defends his methodological procedure in that work, leaving a legacy of conflicting interpretation and befuddlement. Immersing himself in Capital Uno comes to understand that Marx’s thought process therein simply follows the very tendency capitalist exhibits in history of subsuming or “synthesizing” use-value life, including its well-sprung, human labor power, and converting the components of that life into commodities or value objects priced in self-regulating markets. In other words, Marx is hardly the arch metaphysician. Instead, it is capital which manifests a deep structure of logical interconnections and tendency toward self-abstraction amenable to dialectical analysis.*4*

In dealing squarely with the methodological implications of this Uno argues that to produce the most robust and complete knowledge of what precisely that constant in each and every capitalist society is, it is necessary to extrapolate to a hypothetical conclusion the tendencies of capital to reify economic life in a world of impersonal, self-regulating markets geared to augmenting value. As such, Marx’s three-volume project in Capital is reworked and complemented in the Japanese Uno approach as the theory of a purely capitalist society (TPCS). This theory, which in its most up-to-date version (Sekine, 1997) takes on Capital’s neo-classical detractors, constitutes an economic theory par excellence of a (commodity) economic society completely under the thrall of capital; a society where human material existence is “purified” or purged of all non-economic, non-capitalist encumbrances. True to the conceptual requirements of dialectical procedure*5* the TPCS unfolds all the categories of political economy as a self-contained thought experiment which commences with the commodity form of the product of labor and concludes with the final determination of capital where it itself becomes a commodity as expressed in the category of interest. The TPCS, however, is not a genetic theory of the historical development of capitalism: Though it is a materialist theory given that the unraveling of the categories of capital in the TPCS hypothetically consummates the material force of capital in history. Further, the logic or “laws” of capital, which the TPCS exposes, do not operate to produce socialism.

What then is the utility of Uno and Sekine’s reconstruction of Marx’s Capital as the TPCS? First, as an economic theory the TPCS shares

---

*NII-Electronic Library Service*
features of its neo-classical competitor. Both are “abstract” theories of economics and, while the TPCS commences with value categories absent in neo-classical economics, it also treats questions addressed by the latter of supply and demand impact upon price formation, tendencies toward market equilibrium, and the allocation of resources. Neo-classical economics, however, purports to be a trans-historical theory of “economics” holding implicit the view that all human society naturally gravitates toward capitalism. For Marx, however, attempts to posit an historically constituted society as a natural order, whether expressed as the divine right of kings or the neo-liberal claim for the infallibility of markets, amounts to little more than ruling class ideology. It is clearly no accident that economic theory arises only in the age of capitalism. The very condition of possibility of economic theory is precisely the unique ontological structure of capital wherein economic life is organized according to the abstract criteria of self-regulating market operation. It follows then, that Marx distinguishes between economic life, something without which human society would be impossible, and the peculiar means by which such life is reproduced by capital. According to Uno, therefore, in order for Marxian economic theory to prove its worth, it is incumbent upon it to demonstrate how capital yields the material life of an entire society for its abstract chrematistic of value augmentation yet simultaneously satisfy what Uno calls “the general norms of economic life”; pillars of economy required by any human society as the fundamental condition of its material-reproductive viability. And it is in problematizing the historicity of capital to accomplish the foregoing that the TPCS yields the most complete and objective knowledge possible in a social scientific endeavor of its object of knowledge—capital.

Second, the TPCS is the foundation for the political economic study of capitalism as a whole. Uno acknowledges that while the TPCS elucidates the deep structure of capital with optimal precision the theoretical requirements of the TPCS create a divide separating analysis of capital from the study of diversity and happenstance across capitalist history. According to Uno, this burdens the project of the political economic study of capitalism as a whole with a methodological procedure of levels of analysis through which the movement in thought from the TPCS to the empirical-historical analysis of capitalism is mediated by a stage theory of capitalist development68). Work of Unoists in explicitly problematizing the relation between the logical and historical in the study of capitalism develop these levels and elaborate upon the epistemology of each and specify how they operate in a division of labor to produce knowledge of capitalism.

Third, the TPCS provides a window of opportunity for developing a research program to study what Uno dubs the general norms of economic life. It is precisely due to commodity-economic reification inherent in capital’s chrematistic operation of self-regulating markets that it is possible to study the capitalist economy “directly”. In pre-capitalist or post-capitalist society where economic life is not revealed “transparently” the study of material life in these societies must proceed through the prism of analysis of capitalism. Marx captures this in the notion: “Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape” (Marx, 1973, 105). However achieving clarity over the flow of knowledge and grounding of concepts in this endeavor remains a vexing problem in Marxist theory.

Capital, Cognitive Sequence, and the Return to Marx: What is a mode of production? What precisely are forces and relations of production and their interrelation? What constitutes an economic base as separate from a political superstructure? How does Marx promulgate these and other concepts of historical materialism with an aura of incorrigibility in the absence of extensive supporting documentation from the study of human history in toto? As treated above, Kautsky’s view that they carry the authority of “historical science”, Lukacs’ claim of their verification by the rise of proletarian consciousness and a socialist historical outcome, or Althusser’s position that their truth is intra-theoretic to an esoteric “new science” are similarly unconvincing. Yet the profession of Marxist studies continues to defend Marxism qua historical materialism as an overarching theory of history with attempts to insulate its “core” concepts with respect to their truth value from particular applications of those concepts in human history (Suchting, 1991; 1993).

From the perspective of the Japanese Uno approach, it is solely within the reified context of Capital reconstructed as the TPCS that the aforementioned concepts are grounded as
First, socialism must be positively defined; at least in its most fundamental incarnation. Second, it is necessary to defend, up front, claims that socialist society offers human beings genuine socio-material betterment from that of capitalism. Third, social actors must be forthcoming with basic propositions for the institutional structure of the future society which will attest to its long term material economic viability and congruence with socialist social aims.

It is here then, to follow up on the question of the utility of Capital, that Marxian economics proves its indispensability. Because the TPCS conclusively displays how it is possible for the abstract logic of capital to serve its chrematistic of value augmentation yet simultaneously satisfy the general norms of economic life it thereby demonstrates the feasibility of socialism; a society in which those very norms of material existence will be satisfied by the conscious decision-making of freely associated human beings. However, this is only the beginning. In theorizing the material reproductive operation of a reified society where human beings abdicate their responsibility for managing their economic affairs to an abstract extra-human force the TPCS vividly portrays capitalism as the limit form of what a human society should not aspire towards. As such, socialism in its most fundamental incarnation may be conceptualized as the antithesis of the bourgeois utopia of capital captured in the TPCS. Therefore, a further contribution of Capital reconfigured as the TPCS to the making of socialism is as a guide to social actors pinpointing precisely what must be undone in our economic life to free it from the reified grip of capital and its disabling residues. But, in addition to this, the TPCS (with input from Marxian political economy as a whole in its levels of analysis and the comparative study of human material existence across the sweep of human history in historical materialism), informs the construction of an ontology of socialism (Westra, 2002) which outlines at a most basic level how future socialist societies will meet the test of economic viability required of any human society while simultaneously realizing socialist principles to guarantee human beings genuine socio-material betterment.57

6. Conclusion

The concern of this article is the retreat from the
economic in Marxist theory. It argues that the benchmark reconstruction of Marxist theory in the hands of Karl Kautsky set Marxism on the trajectory of this retreat given the way it conscripted Marxian economics as a sub-theory of an overarching theory of history the purpose of which is the confirmation of a socialist historical outcome. The article proceeds to demonstrate how despite clear nuances and conceptual innovation in later signal reconstructions of Marxism by Lukacs and Althusser the basic position of Kautsky on the character and purpose of Marxism and cognitive sequence in Marx’s thought is maintained leading towards the further devaluation of Marxian economics. To resurrect Marxism and reindate the economic in Marxist theory, the article continues, it is vital that we step outside the conventional apprehension of Marx’s work as an overarching theory of history and revisit some of the fundamental questions about the social world Marx felt compelled to answer. In this spirit the Japanese Uno approach is introduced and its original treatment of the character, purpose and cognitive sequence in Marx’s thought elucidated. If there is one element of the Uno approach that we may single out for its far-reaching theoretical implications it is the appreciation in the approach of the ontological uniqueness of capital as a social science subject-matter. On this basis the Uno approach maintains that the political economic study of capitalism and historical materialism constitute two discrete projects in Marxism. And, reversing the cognitive sequence which has held across reconstructions of Marxism since Kautsky, Uno argues that it is through the prism of the economic theory of Capital reconstructed as the TPCS that Marxist study of human material existence necessarily flows. Capital, in this fashion, is not only defended as an economic theory in its own right, but in the knowledge it provides on what must be deconstructed in our economic lives to free us from the reified grip of capital, it is upheld, as per Marx’s own position, as the scientific foundation of socialism. And in reclaiming Capital’s rightful place as the revolutionary kernel of Marxism the Uno approach effects a return of the economic in Marxist theory, and hence, a return to Marx.

Notes

1) An earlier version of this article was presented at the J SPE annual conference, 2004.

2) On the development of Marxism and Marxian economics in Japan, see for example, Morris-Suzuki (1991).

3) The founding English language monographs of the Uno approach are as follows: Principles of Political Economy, Uno (1980) is Uno’s only work to date published in English. Principles, is the English version of Uno’s abridgement of a two-volume work of the same name written in 1950–52. Sekine (1997, 2 vols.) treats the subject-matter of Uno’s two volume work though in an original and more robust fashion. Albritton (1991) constitutes an original contribution to Uno’s work. The article literature is vast but a useful cross-section of it may be accessed through Westra (1999).

4) To be sure, there is no substitute to reading Sekine (1997, 2 vols.). Succinct summaries of the complex question of dialectics in economic theory include Sekine (1998; 2003).

5) On the specificity of dialectical logic see Kourkoulakos (2003).

6) Albritton (1991) is the most recent English language development and refinement of Uno’s stage theory.

7) On this concept, see for example, Westra (2004; 2007).

Bibliography


Colletti, L. (1974) “A Political and Philosophical Inter-

view,” New Left Review, 86.


Kautsky, K. (1936) The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx
(New York: The Macmillan Co.).

(2006年12月17日受理 2007年3月9日採択)