

Al Campbell and Mehmet Ufuk Tutan

Beyond 'Capital': A Necessary Corrective and Four Issues for Further Discussion

Writing in 1758, David Hume argued that, when attempting to describe some aspect of reality, one should be sure '[f]irst, that it be consistent with plain matter of fact; secondly, that it be consistent with itself'.¹ These criteria are still held as necessary for the validity of any theory concerning an aspect of the real world. Lebowitz argues in *Beyond 'Capital'* that (i) *Capital* is not a complete presentation of Marx's theory of capitalism (as established by considering the complete body of his writings), but rather a one-sided presentation: capitalism considered only from the viewpoint and the logic of capital, and (ii) the corresponding one-sided understanding of Marx's theory by the large majority of his disciples has yielded a Marxism that cannot achieve its self-declared goal of explaining capitalism. In terms of Hume's criteria, Lebowitz finds the dominant one-sided Marxism to be neither 'consistent with itself' nor to be 'consistent with plain matter of fact'. This, in turn, leaves one-sided Marxism inadequate to prepare workers for the proximate step in their

¹ Hume 1988, p. 88.

self-development, which involves overthrowing capitalism to remove the particular constraints it imposes on their realising their human potential.

Lebowitz states these concerns in different words repeatedly throughout the book. One particularly compact statement comes at the end of Chapter 2:

The lack of correspondence of the theory of *Capital* to the facts is the most important reason to attempt to develop theoretically the side of the worker. However, there are two additional reasons. In their order of importance, they are (a) that Marx's own dialectical logic *requires* consideration of the worker, and (b) that Marx intended to explore the side of the worker in a book on wage-labour.²

In this brief commentary on *Beyond 'Capital'*, we want to do two things. Because we are in strong agreement with the broad claims and message of the work, we will spend the bulk of this critique addressing four issues that either we think need further consideration beyond what is included in the book, or that we disagree with. Before that, we will give a précis of what we perceive as the central logical assertions of the work, which is necessary to set the frame in which our concerns and disagreements are located.

I. Précis

(i) Marxism is not just a positive social-economic-political theory of capitalism. Embedded in Marxism is a rejection of capitalism. That rejection is based on the goal of 'human development' or 'realizing human potential'. Lebowitz frequently refers to this same concept as 'developing human needs', which we will discuss further below. Human development is understood as a process, and human potential itself is understood historically: at some moment in history, humans have a certain potential that could be realised, and human development consists both of realising that potential and developing further potential.

(ii) Marx's analysis of capitalism is the most insightful analysis of capitalism constructed to date, both the capitalism of his time and contemporary capitalism. At the same time, the presentation in *Capital* is one-sided and therefore incomplete. Lebowitz refers to this incompleteness as a product of not rising above political economy (notwithstanding that *Capital* was a critique

² Lebowitz 2003, p. 26.

of its contemporary political economy), that is, it described the laws of motion of capital from the viewpoint and logic of capital and presented that as the laws of motion of capitalism. Thus, given that *Capital* is Marx's most finished work on the basic nature of capitalism, and given also that the large majority of the rest of his writings on capitalism were not available until relatively recently, it is not surprising that most schools of Marxist thought take their understanding of capitalism from *Capital*, and therefore reflect this one-sided understanding.

(iii) *Capital's* fundamental incompleteness concerns its logic, in the sense referred to in the quote above: Marx's own dialectical method requires considerations not included in *Capital*. Quoting Gramsci, Lebowitz argues that Marx's method and approach require that a theory be "sufficient unto itself," that is, that it "contains in itself all the fundamental elements needed to construct a total and integral conception of the world . . .".³ A total theory requires an explanation of its own prerequisites, it cannot simply take them as 'given from outside' itself. 'For Marx, all capital's presuppositions must be explained as produced by itself, as developed and shaped within the whole, "and everything posited is thus also a presupposition"'.⁴ In this framework, *Capital* as a description of capitalism is fundamentally incomplete. It takes the working class, wage-labour, a centrally necessary component of capitalism, as an unexplained 'given'. As a description of capital from the logic of capital, that is acceptable: capital takes wage-labour as given, and concerns itself not at all with its reproduction, but only with its exploitation in line with its goal of maximal accumulation. An adequate theoretical description of capitalism, to the contrary, requires an explanation of the production and reproduction of all its components, in particular both capital and wage-labour. In the system of capitalism, the production and reproduction of capital requires wage-labour, and the production and reproduction of wage-labour requires capital. The two are antagonistic (as defined by their different goals, to be discussed below) components of the whole, capitalism, and capitalism cannot be adequately described without describing the dynamics of the production and reproduction of both aspects, including, in particular, their necessary interaction.

(iv) One must not mix up the fundamental *shortcoming* of *Capital* (and all Marxisms based primarily on it) with the fundamental *incompleteness* discussed in the last point. The fundamental shortcoming, as also alluded to in the

³ Lebowitz 2003, p. 25.

⁴ Lebowitz 2003, p. 59.

quote above, is its lack of correspondence with reality. In particular, in line with its inherent project of moving beyond capitalism, the two most important of these non-correspondences are the 'durability of capitalism and the passivity of its working class'.⁵ Connected with the latter is also the failure to project the importance, throughout the history of capitalism but particularly today, of struggles against oppression not rooted in the role of the people as wage-labour, as for example struggles against gender or racial oppression. These fundamental shortcomings are seen as *consequences* of the fundamental incompleteness indicated in the last point.

(v) *Capital* certainly discusses wage-labour, and, in some well-known passages, its descriptions of the oppressed condition of the workers rise to poetry. The descriptions, however, are (mostly) from the logic of capital. That is, while *Capital* describes the terrible conditions of life imposed on wage-labour by capital, reflecting the logic of capital to drive down wages as low as possible, what it does not describe is the fight by wage-labour to raise wages as much as possible. That would be an aspect of the functioning of capitalism seen from the logic of wage-labour. As opposed to capital's goal of maximal accumulation, the humans that constitute wage-labour have the goal of self-development (both in their role of wage-labour, and in all other human roles). A correct description of the functioning of capitalism would describe it as the result of the interaction of the two antagonistic drives of accumulation of capital and human self-development.

(vi) Lebowitz argues that the logical device used by Marx to create this one-sided presentation is that he assumed, in order to allow him to focus in *Capital* on the logic of capital which he wanted to show there, that human needs were fixed. This, then, by assumption removed from the process the effects of wage-labour struggling for its own goal of self-development, since it did not have the expanding needs that would make that struggle continuous. Rising productivity would soon allow existing fixed needs to be met, leisure time would increase as productivity continued to grow, and there would be no cause for an ongoing struggle against capitalism as the only way to further self-development.

(vii) As briefly alluded to in the quote that opens this commentary, Lebowitz accepts the argument that Marx intended to write a separate book on wage-labour. He presumes that this is where Marx would have addressed this other

⁵ Lebowitz 2003, p. 17.

essential aspect of capitalism, and thereby completed the description of capitalism.

(viii) The three central concepts that one-sided Marxism treats in a one-sided way (that is, again, from the viewpoint and logic only of capital and not from the viewpoint and logic of the humans that constitute wage-labour) are the reproduction of wage-labour, wealth, and productive labour.

(ix) Lebowitz focuses on two key concepts for the political economy of wage-labour, where the political economy of wage-labour is understood as the study of wage-labour from its own view point and according to its own logic. (a) Co-operation and opposition to competition are key (traditionally one of the central goals of socialism that has often been expressed as 'solidarity'). Whereas competition enforces and realises the logic of capital, the fight against competition is key to enforcing and realising the logic of wage-labour. Separation and competition between wage-labourers, both that which is directly and often consciously engendered by capital in the work process, and the more indirect but equally important separation engendered by capitalism when it converts differences that will always exist (such as gender, race, etc.) into separation and competition, are one important aspect of the durability of capital. But, beyond that, the material basis for expanded human development consists of the social surplus. Under capitalism, this is largely expropriated by capital, but wage-labour continually fights for whatever share it can obtain. It is necessary for workers to come to understand that the social surplus is the result of their collective labour, and to come to see themselves as co-operating parts of a collective worker. This not only strengthens them in their fight against capitalism, but beyond that, an understanding of their collective nature is an intrinsic aspect of the society to be built after capitalism that will free them from capitalism's particular restrictions on their human development. (b) Capital must be removed as mediator from all moments of the circulation of capital – in the labour market, in production, and as owners of the products of labour. On the one hand, this is a part of point (a), fighting against the separation of workers and competition between them. On the other hand, this removal, and particularly removing them as owners of the products of labour, is essential for the task that *Capital* was written for. While it is correct to say that, theoretically, the goal of *Capital* was to expose the origin of profits (and hence the dynamics of capital, the 'economic laws of capital'), that goal itself was seen as serving a political goal. Under capitalism, workers come to believe that capital is necessary for the production of a social

surplus, and hence necessary for their goal of self-development. This is not simply an illusion: under capitalism, capital and its further accumulation indeed are necessary for the production of a social surplus. It is, however, a 'mystification' of capital. Marx saw the workers coming to understand that capital was not necessary for the production of a social surplus in general, seeing through the mystification, as the most important key to overthrowing capitalism and moving beyond it, and *Capital's* ultimate purpose was to contribute to that demystification.

(x) Lebowitz's purpose in his call for a completion of Marx's theoretical project remains the same as Marx's:

Revealing capital as the workers' own product turned against them, working for unity in struggle, stressing the centrality of revolutionary practice for the self-development of the collective worker, and setting out the vision of a feasible alternative – all these are essential ingredients to the demonstration that a Better World is Possible. Build it Now.⁶

(xi) In relation to this shared purpose, Lebowitz's argument is that the omission of wage-labour as an agent for itself from *Capital*, that is, the omission of human beings, who, even under capitalism, have their own 'ought' (self-development) that differs from the 'ought' of capital (maximal accumulation), subverts the desired result. Marx's *Capital* did do a good job of revealing the nature of capital (from the viewpoint of the logic of capital, including its deleterious effects on wage-labour which are a part of the logic of capital), '[y]et understanding the nature of capital is not sufficient to lead workers beyond it'.⁷ Lebowitz argues that Marx basically believed it was sufficient, and hence (a) underestimated the durability of capital, as history has demonstrated, and (b) left an inadequate instrument for the necessary demystification, *Capital*. 'Even though there is no inexorable natural process by which capitalist production begets its own negation, nevertheless there is the *possibility* of negating capitalism.' But that requires getting beyond the acceptance of TINA ('There Is No Alternative'): 'Required as well is that they grasp that capital as such is not necessary.'⁸ The structure of *Capital* with its absence of humans as agents who try to act for themselves even under capitalism (reinforced by the other 'silence' in *Capital*, Marx's vision of an

⁶ Lebowitz 2003, p. 210.

⁷ Lebowitz 2003, p. 198.

⁸ *Ibid.*

alternative to capitalism),⁹ hindered the development of an understanding of the lack of the necessity of capital. Hence the importance of this theoretical project to Lebowitz.

II. Four issues: concerns and disagreements

(i) *Competition (a small issue: bending the stick too far)*

Lebowitz correctly lays out Marx's framework that competition between capitals is the mechanism by which the inherent aspects of capital, which above all consist of its relation with wage-labour, are enforced (see in particular Chapter 7). From this, Marx concluded that an investigation of the laws of motion of capital should start with a consideration of 'capital in general', and only later should the competition between capitals be investigated to consider how the already understood central logic of capital manifests itself in the real world. In line with his central concern to highlight the role of humans and class struggle as essential, not accidental, in the dynamics of capitalism, Lebowitz wants to be sure not to lose 'the extent to which worker's struggles impose upon capital the continuing necessity to revolutionize the instruments of production'.¹⁰ Hence he posits that mechanisation and the concentration of capital are 'based on the opposition of capital and wage-labour'.¹¹ Similarly, concerning technology, he argues that

capitalists will be constantly searching for ways to increase the degree of separation of workers . . . [and] they cannot be assumed to be indifferent to the effect of any given innovation upon the ability of workers to combine.¹²

At this point, he bends the stick too far, and loses the distinction between the final effects from competition between capitals on the relation of capital to wage-labour, and the direct effects of competition. His ideas cease to correspond to the real world of capitalism. While right now capitalism is moving away from large production units that facilitate the political unity of workers, for at least three hundred years it moved toward such units. How could one

⁹ One can see quite clearly from some of Marx's other works that he indeed had a vision of an alternative to capitalism, notwithstanding his well known reluctance to present it.

¹⁰ Lebowitz 2003, p. 121.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Lebowitz 2003, p. 122.

explain that aspect of real-world capitalism if one argues that the issue of separating the working class is the driving force for mechanisation, centralisation and innovation? This is the same functionalist error of arguing that technology is determined by capital's need to control workers that was built into (along with many valuable observations) the well-known work *Segmented Work, Divided Workers* by Gordon, Edwards and Reich in 1982. To the contrary, all evidence indicates that mechanisation, centralisation and innovation are generally, in fact, driven by the pressure on profits from competition between capitals, exactly what Lebowitz here dismisses. While we consider this a small issue, given our agreement with Lebowitz's general framework on the relation of competition to the logic of capital, it nevertheless is important in fighting capital not to confuse the fact that, logically, competition only enforces the inherent logic of capital as a whole, with the position that competition is not essential, but only accidental to capitalism. Failure to realise the essential aspect of competition will misorient the struggle against capitalism.

(ii) *The absence of the issue of false needs (an issue of disagreement)*

"The creation of new needs for workers, . . . , Marx concluded, "is an essentially civilizing moment, and on which the historical justification . . . of capital rests".¹³

This role of needs is at the very heart of Lebowitz's description of the antagonistic role of humans in capitalist production, which, in turn, is the basis for the possibility of moving beyond capitalism, as follows.

Lebowitz divides human needs into three groups. First there are 'physiological needs', whose name explains their nature. Second there are 'necessary needs', that reflect 'the use-values that are "habitually required" and normally enter into the consumption of workers', and thus reflect the culturally and historically determined part of workers' consumption. Together, these first two categories are the needs that underlie the concept of the value of labour-power in *Capital*.¹⁴

In addition, Lebowitz introduces 'social needs'.¹⁵ "This is the level of needs of the worker as a socially developed human being at a given point; it

¹³ Lebowitz 2003, p. 39.

¹⁴ Lebowitz 2003, p. 40.

¹⁵ Marx used the term 'social needs' often, but in a general way, and not as part of a three way division of needs. We find Lebowitz's division of needs into these three categories useful and specifically necessary for his theory, but beyond that a generally useful way to think about needs.

constitutes the *upper limit* in needs for use-values in a commodity form¹⁶ (at a given historical time and place). These are needs developed by the system that are not regularly met at the given wage – if they were, they would become part of necessary needs, part of the value of labour-power. On the one hand, the constant development of new needs in this category is exactly what contributes to the constant human development:

... production of [the social human being] in a form as rich as possible in needs, because rich in qualities and relations – production of this being as the most total and universal possible social product, for in order to take gratification in a many-sided way, he must be capable of many pleasures, hence cultured to a high degree ...¹⁷

On the other hand, it is exactly the failure of capitalism to fulfill these socially created social needs which causes wage-labour, in pursuit of its objective of self-development, to struggle for higher wages and benefits, thus putting it in an antagonistic role with regard to capital's goal of maximal accumulation. All this, as outlined above, is at the very heart of what Lebowitz argues was left out of the analysis of capitalism that appeared in *Capital*, and must be reincorporated to give the necessary theoretical basis to strengthen the possibility of transcending capitalism.

There is, however, a serious problem with this position.

The idea that Lebowitz has in mind for the type of things that constitute these social civilising needs is the following:

The worker's participation in the higher, even cultural satisfactions, the agitation for his own interests, newspaper subscriptions, attending lectures, educating his children, developing his tastes, etc.¹⁸

What about the need for jet skis, cock fighting, pornography and McDonald's french fries? Many people feel a strong need for them. Is the development of these needs part of 'an essentially civilizing moment?'. Of course, most progressives and communists would answer 'no' – but that then poses the central problem.

Lebowitz spends a significant amount of space, and returns to the point a number of times, correctly arguing that Marx was very concerned to show that the new needs were generated by the operation of the capitalist system

¹⁶ Lebowitz 2003, p. 40.

¹⁷ Lebowitz 2003, p. 38, quoting Marx.

¹⁸ Lebowitz 2003, p. 70, quoting Marx.

itself.¹⁹ At the same time, Lebowitz showed in the quote above, again correctly, that Marx held, and gave great importance to, the ‘creation of new needs . . . as an essentially civilizing moment’. But the latter is a normative assertion. The statement makes no sense without some assumed measure from outside the system of what needs are civilising and what needs are not.

David McNally addresses this issue briefly,²⁰ responding to Kate Soper’s book *On Human Needs*, which presents this critique at much greater length. After laying out the issue clearly, and then briefly describing Marx’s concern with developing an immanent critique, McNally continues: ‘It seems clear that, however important a whole range of needs may be, the most significant of these for Marx is the need for individual self-development.’ That certainly corresponds to our reading of Marx. But this just poses the same issue in different words: which of the needs generated by capitalism could be called ‘genuine needs’, in accord with their contribution to this central goal of human self-development, and which ones do not contribute, and so could be called ‘false needs’? It is not adequate to argue with McNally that all that is needed is (i) capitalism to generate a need for self-development, and fail to meet it, and (ii) this failure to induce class struggle toward a social transformation.²¹ In line with the quote from Marx that opened this section, capitalism generates all sorts of needs that it does not meet, and this is indeed the ongoing source of the struggle against capitalism as Lebowitz argues. But that does not take us to the need for gas-guzzling cars, brand-name sneakers, or mountains of cosmetics as being either ‘essentially civilizing moments’ or ‘contributing to human-development’.

The argument in this section is only that we disagree with Lebowitz in his omission of the issue of false needs. We hold strongly that they must be included and addressed. Without them, there is a missing aspect to Lebowitz’s missing aspect of capitalism.

In the next section, we will put forward some suggestions on how false needs might be approached. We certainly consider them incomplete positions, and only as a contribution to what we believe is a needed discussion on this under-investigated issue. A disagreement by the reader on the approach to

¹⁹ As part of Marx’s whole deep concern that the critique of capitalism had to be an *immanent critique* if it was to be complete, hence valid.

²⁰ McNally 1993, p. 188.

²¹ McNally, 1993, p. 190. McNally gives a third condition, which indeed is necessary for a transition toward socialism, but is not relevant to the point being discussed here.

this issue that we suggest in point (iii) should in no way invalidate the argument of point (ii).

(iii) *Incorporating the issue of false needs (an issue for discussion)*

We want to start with a well-known quote by Marx followed by a well-known position of his concerning socialism, to give a general indication of what we consider the nature of true human needs, and from there indicate what we consider the essence of false needs under capitalism.

... as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore, as activity is not voluntary, but naturally, divided, man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. . . . [I]n communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.²²

The quote is somewhat unfortunate in that it has often been read to posit that a goal is for each person to be able to do whatever she wants, whenever she wants, as an individual, even according to whim. A more careful reading would note that it says one is free to not be restricted to one job for life exactly because society regulates production. The implication then is that job changes are indeed possible and desirable, in accord with the true multi-sided character of human nature, but they would be done in consultation and co-ordination with others, that is, socially, not as the act of an isolated individual. The point here that Marx was concerned with was that, for human development, one should not be confined to work in one job for life. Under capitalism, job restriction follows in the name of efficiency, given that the purpose of work is to maximise accumulation. Under socialism, the purpose of work is two-fold, both to socially provide the goods needed to survive and develop as humans, and to develop oneself from the work itself. From the latter, it follows that one should be able to vary one's work.

²² Marx and Engels 1976, p. 47. We are interested here in this quote only regarding the points we make concerning it. It is widely dismissed even among Marxists as a utopian aberration of Marx's. For a tightly argued position to the contrary, see Ollman 1979, Chapter 3.

A well-known position of Marx on socialism was that it would (to start) cut the working day in half. At the same time that Marx argued that work had to be radically transformed so that one could self-develop through work, he also argued that non-working time had to be expanded for self-development.

Together, these positions suggest that Marx held that time free from material constraint (such as providing material sustenance for survival) was the raw stuff of authentic human freedom, the necessary prerequisite for authentic human development.

Pat Devine's interpretation of the work of Rudolf Bahro ties the above to the issue of false needs.²³ As we find the concepts of absorbed and surplus consciousness used there not very illuminating, we will make the whole presentation in terms of human activity, but the argument is the same.

We have just described the type of genuinely free activity that Marx believes capitalism today restricts, compared to what would be technologically possible. We can begin with the limit of twenty-four hours in a day. Until we entered the unhealthy sleep-deprived age of modern capitalism, we could take as a rough figure that, on average, eight of those hours were spent sleeping. Some part of the remaining sixteen hours had to be dedicated to socially providing the materials for life. That would vary radically between cultures and between times, and between members in a given culture, in accord with the level of the forces of production and in accord with the social norms of production and consumption. Suppose a person worked²⁴ twelve hours per day, leaving one with four hours 'free time'.

This free time can be spent in two ways, in response to two different kinds of needs. On the one hand, 'emancipatory activities' are a response to emancipatory needs. These would be exactly the type of activities that Marx was concerned with expanding the possibilities of, activities that lead to self-development, self-realisation, multi-dimensional growth (development of undeveloped aspects of one's potential), and so forth. These activities could take many forms – studying in groups with or without teachers, practising skills such as sports, music or art, experimenting in science, developing types of human behaviours such as nurturing or decision making, introspection on one's relations with other people, or any of an infinity of other possible emancipatory activities, all involving the free exercise of human creativity. On the other hand, one could spend this free time on 'compensatory activities'.

²³ Devine 1988, Chapter 7.

²⁴ All activities involved in both production for existence and reproduction.

These are seen as activities one undertakes exactly because access to emancipatory activities is blocked, through any number of possible blocking mechanisms (the most effective being those internalised in the person involved), as substitutes for and distractions from authentic emancipatory activities. This is the essence of today's materialist²⁵ consumer society in advanced industrial economies that is at the heart of much the socially pervasive malaise so broadly commented on, especially under the rubric of 'the need to find meaning in your life'. As Bahro expressed it,

people have to be indemnified, by possession and consumption of as many things and services as possible . . . for the fact that they have an inadequate share of proper human needs.²⁶

Expanding on Marx's quote above, Devine suggests six²⁷ different types of activities that would constitute examples of the socially developed needs that would constitute civilising moments as referred to in the quote by Marx above, authentic needs that would contribute to human self-development: planning, administering, creative, nurturing, skilled and unskilled.

The obvious final piece to this approach is the question of how to decide what are authentic needs and what are false needs. The solipsism of neoclassical theory where everyone simply decides for themselves what they consider to be their authentic needs could not work in any social system where humans are interconnected, exactly because of the unaccounted for interconnections, including in capitalism which falsely claims to be reflected by neoclassical theory. There are two parts to this issue: (i) how would a decision be made as to what activities to pursue, that is, which activities would be considered authentic activities and which would be considered false activities, and (ii) how would it be guaranteed that the decision made was correct? It is important to understand that what we run into here in the end, once we reject solipsism, in this inquiry into authentic and false needs is the well known, and we would argue not thoroughly resolved, issue of socialist democracy.²⁸ As the issues and the debate on this are extensive, we will here just indicate aspects of what we consider essential for a healthy socialist democracy, as it pertains to our concern of distinguishing true from false needs. We suggest three

²⁵ In the popular usage of the term, not the philosophical.

²⁶ Quoted in Devine 1988, p. 164.

²⁷ He stresses nothing hinges on exactly these particular broad divisions or the particular activities he offers as examples of each.

²⁸ Most Marxists advocate one or another form of socialist democracy involving

components are essential to the decision-making process. (i) The decision on authentic versus false needs must be made socially, in the sense that everyone affected must be involved in the decision. For this issue, that would mean everyone in society. (ii) The decision on authentic versus false needs must be made socially, in the sense that the members interact in forming their opinion. This is the essence of what has come to be called 'discursive democracy' or 'deliberative democracy'. The central point is that, unlike in neoclassical theory, people do not approach social decisions with fixed preformed opinions ('preferences'), and simply socially decide according to one voting rule or another. Interaction before any stage in which people express their opinions allows people to see issues from the perspective of other people, which can (and in the real world often does) cause them to change their 'preferences', their opinions. (iii) The decision-making on authentic versus false needs must be participatory, and this includes that the decision must be dynamic and repeated and not 'once-and-for-all'. People (including the possibility of representatives, though there are well-known problems with that) must be involved in administering and constantly evaluating the effects of the decisions made as to what promotes human development and what does not. This is necessary both as a channel for correcting incorrect decisions, that is, noticing when decisions subjected to the test of human practice are not yielding the results they were expected to yield, and to notice when the environment which is being operated in has changed in such a way that activities that were yielding the expected and desired results, now yield undesirable, or less than maximally desirable, results. It would be nice to argue that there is some guarantee that through trial and error, over time, this process will necessarily 'discover', 'reveal', or 'converge on' authentic needs, and thereby expose false needs. But, of course, notwithstanding our Gramscian optimism of the will, which does believe this social process shall, on average and over time, eliminate false needs, one has to accept the pessimism of the intellect as logically indicating that no such guarantee exists.

We want to end this section by pulling attention away from its details and returning to the central point of both this section and the last one. False needs are an essential issue to be addressed in Lebowitz's framework, and more

elected representatives when direct democracy is not possible or desirable. For a well articulated statement of an alternative minority current that advocates 'demarchy', a system where governing representatives are selected by lot, see Cockshott and Cottrell 1993, Chapter 13.

broadly, in any appropriate Marxist theory of progress. We have presented here what we consider a plausible way to socially address the issue, but there is no claim that this is the only way, or even the best way, that could theoretically be imagined.

(iv) *A theory of capitalism versus a general theory of oppression and exploitation (an issue of disagreement)*

One central concern of Chapter 8, 'The One-Sidedness of Wage-Labour', is to return to the issue of the separateness of workers that is so essential for the continued existence of capitalism, and give it a much more central *theoretical* role than in previous Marxisms. Lebowitz argues

it is not a great leap to extend this discussion of differently-produced wage-labourers to differences based on age, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, historical circumstances and, indeed, on 'all human relations and functions, however and in whatever form they may appear.'²⁹

From that, he attempts to 'demonstrate that within the Marxian framework there is theoretical space to develop these questions'.³⁰

His argument proceeds as follows. He begins with a point that is central throughout his whole work, that, in *Capital*, Marx abstracts from the concrete humans that constitute wage-labour by treating it as 'wage-labour as such', that is, treating wage-labour from the point of view and logic of capital. In reality, wage-labourers, however, are real humans, and they have many other dimensions to their existence besides that of wage-labour. To be concrete, he then develops his argument in terms of the issue of gender. Men typically and historically have had power over the disposition of the time of women (and children), and could use that to cause them to produce use-values (services or goods) that the men consumed. In the framework that Lebowitz has established in the book of a process of production of the workers, he refers to this as exploitation. Generally, this has been referred to as oppression, and we argue that Lebowitz's terminology here begins to confuse the exploitation that is the source of the surplus-value, whose accumulation is the purpose of capitalism, with all other forms of oppression, which in capitalism serve above all the essential task (for capital) of maintaining the

²⁹ Lebowitz 2003, p. 154.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

separateness of the workers. He continues in the same vein by arguing that these workers are involved in two *class* relations: in a class relation of wage-labour to capital, and in a class relation of patriarchy in relation to the family.³¹ In line with the universal human drive for self-development that is central to his whole theoretical structure, he argues that anyone 'exploited' (oppressed) in any way will have a tendency to struggle against their situation.³² This last point is certainly true, but, again, it does not logically establish that all such oppressions play the same role in capitalism.

We maintain that Lebowitz mixes up two correct claims. He has asserted that the general method that Marx used to examine capitalist exploitation could be fairly directly extended to study all other forms of oppression that involve the claim to the labour time, and hence the produced use-values, of one group by another. One would only have to consider the issue from both sides, the side of the oppressors (or, better said, from the side of the system of oppression), and from the side of the oppressed, who are driven by the goal of self-development. We agree with this position. But there is then a logical jump from that to concluding that *all* such oppressions need to be considered to understand the essential nature of capitalism.

This point can be made more concrete by noting that gender discrimination is neither necessary nor sufficient for capitalism. We know historically that it is not sufficient for capitalism – we have had gender discrimination under at least every form of historically recorded class society. Its necessity, on the other hand, is certainly not historically disproven, since it has certainly existed under all historical forms of capitalism (though to significantly differing degrees, it is worth noting). But we must consider its theoretical necessity as well.

The methodological point here is exactly the point that Lebowitz made so clearly concerning competition. Marx (correctly) considered capitalism first without competition, because competition is not logically necessary for the capital/wage-labour relation that is the heart of capitalism. At the same time, competition indeed is essential to real-world capitalism, in its role as the enforcer of the logic of capital. Gender oppression is conceptually similar. The logical essence of capitalism can be indicated without any reference to gender oppression or any other type of oppression other than exploitation,

³¹ Lebowitz 2003, p. 151.

³² Lebowitz 2003, p. 152.

as Marx indeed (half) did in *Capital*. One can even complete the theoretical description of capitalism along the lines Lebowitz has called for by including the missing half of the description, the struggle by wage-labourers against the limits that capitalism places on their self-development in their role as wage-labourers. All this can be done without any reference to the many other forms of oppression that humans can suffer. None of this contradicts that these other forms of oppression do play an essential role in capitalism (like competition, though in a different essential role) by maintaining the separateness of the workers that is a life-and-death issue for capitalism, and for those of us trying to overthrow capitalism.

Lebowitz is correct, and it is a politically important point, that the human struggle for self-development implies the struggle against all forms of oppression, that each of those struggles is an important struggle for human self-development in its own right in addition to being important to the essential issue of the unity of wage-labour, and further, that all such struggles reinforce each other because of their transformatory effects on the humans involved. All of that, however, does not give to all forms of oppression and the fight against them the same *logically necessary role* in the functioning of capitalism as exploitation and wage-labour's fight against it.

III. Conclusion

One cannot understand capitalism properly without dialectically reconnecting to *Capital* its missing side of the study of wage-labour from the viewpoint and logic of wage-labour. While overthrowing capitalism and moving beyond it is always only a possibility and not an inevitability, the possibility is significantly less with an incorrect one-sided understanding of capitalism than with a proper understanding of its totality. While, of course, it would be absurd to claim that the only way to gain such an understanding of capitalism as a totality is to read *Beyond 'Capital'* (noting that Lebowitz himself could not have read it as he worked out its ideas, nor could his source for his studies, Marx), we will argue that it is by far the most *efficient* way we know to escape from the dominant incorrect one-sided understanding of Marxism and obtain an understanding of a dialectically (logically) whole, and therefore politically more useful, Marxism. And since we are trained as economists, maximum efficiency is good enough for us.

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