

CHAPTER 9

Re-Thinking the Institutions and Practices for a Better Future World

AL CAMPBELL

Emeritus Professor of the Economics Department of the University of Utah (Salt Lake City, USA)

ABSTRACT

Looking at the title, many readers might assume that this work is intended as a contribution to the ongoing vital social debate about the various functional aspects of a future ideal society. However, this is not the main purpose of the chapter. Its primary goal is methodological, questioning how to determine which policies and practices are best for the desired future of society. First, there is a discussion of what is generally needed as a basis for deciding whether certain institutions and practices of a future society will be desirable, and, in particular, whether they will be more desirable than those currently existing when compared to alternative concepts of that aspect of the future society. Secondly, two underappreciated views of Marx and Engels on human nature are discussed, which became important foundations for their goals of creating the desired post-capitalist society. Thirdly, a partial list of the most commonly cited goals of socialism is provided as a basis for rethinking old ideas about the most appropriate institutions and practices for the desired future society. Finally, after establishing a transparent framework, the author reconsiders the six standard doctrines of 20th-century socialism about the institutions and practices of the desired future society.

Before beginning the first section of this brief work, it will be useful to avoid confusion to make clear how I will use four of the ten words in the title, “future better world” and “re-thinking.”

Within today's society, there are many very different general concepts of what institutions and practices would be appropriate for a better future society, and then beyond that, there are a plethora of differences of details among the multitude of variations of each general concept. A very broad division among concepts of a future society that is better than today's is between remaining within capitalism and fixing the institutions and practices that one does not like ("reformism"), and moving beyond (or "transcending") capitalism to some new system of social production and related social organization ("revolution," be the change peaceful or violent) that does not have the objectionable problems. In this work, I will use the concept of "future society" to be a synonym for a subset of anti-capitalist alternatives, a "socialist society." Among the many varieties of concepts of socialist societies, the one discussed here is most strongly influenced by the ideas of Marx and Engels.

However, given the breadth and strength of the ongoing influence of the views of Marx and Engels on ideas about a socialist future, it is important to be clear that there is no single "Marxist concept of socialism." Rather, even with the restricting adjectives "socialist" and "Marxist," there remains an abundance of different concepts of the future that consider themselves, more or less, "Marxist socialist."

Too often in articles discussing thinking about concepts of the future, the word "re-thinking" is used to mean "finding new alternatives because the old concepts are not acceptable." In this work, to the contrary, the word "re-thinking" will be used in accordance with its dictionary definition, "thinking again about some concept." Concretely, what this means is that it will not be assumed a priori that the institutions and practices being reconsidered are inappropriate for a desirable future society. Rather, to the contrary, the result of re-thinking the ideas on a well-formulated basis could be that they are not valid, or that they are valid, or that they were valid but the world has changed and so they are no longer valid now, or many other possible conclusions.

9.1 THE GENERAL NATURE OF WHAT IS NECESSARY AS A BASIS TO BE ABLE TO DECIDE THAT SOME CONCEPT OF A FUTURE SOCIETY WOULD BE DESIRABLE

This first section is very short because the point it makes is obvious, if one stops to consider it. What is logically necessary for rethinking concepts of the future, for reconsidering old ideas about what institutions and social

practices are preferable (“good”) for a desirable future society, is to know what you want those institutions and practices to achieve. The measuring stick for deciding which institutions and practices among different possibilities are considered appropriate or inappropriate for a desirable future society can only be how they do or do not support and promote some specified goals for the future society. This idea is tersely captured by the folksy English aphorism:

“You can’t pick what road you want if you don’t know where you want to go.”

Having established that to execute the purpose of this work of re-thinking institutions and practices appropriate for the future it is *necessary* to know¹ the goals for the society so that one can consider if the institutions and practices support and promote those goals or not, this work next needs to specify those goals.

9.2 TWO CONCEPTS ABOUT THE NATURE OF HUMANS THAT ARE ESSENTIAL UNDERPINNINGS FOR MARX AND ENGELS’ GOALS OF SOCIALISM

Section 9.1 established that to reevaluate previous ideas about appropriate institutions and practices for a better future, we need to first determine what goals we want the future society to support and promote. Section 9.3 will indicate the goals of the concept of socialism that will be used to do this, which this author asserts are consistent with the concept of socialism of Marx and Engels. As background to Section 9.3, this section will argue that many of those goals of socialism strongly reflect two fundamental views of the nature of humans. These views on the nature of humans are often insufficiently reflected on when discussing rethinking the institutions and practices of future societies. This section will give five quotes by Marx and Engels (from scores of other possible ones), both because they clearly indicate these two views about the nature of humans, and also to support the previous claim that the considerations on rethinking the

¹It is intellectually best to explicitly specify the goals, because that makes for the clearest comparisons. Too often in practice the specification of the goals that underly the comparisons being made are only implicitly indicated by the arguments made in the process of the comparison of which alternatives are better or worse.

institutions and practices given in this work are “strongly influenced by the ideas of Marx and Engels.”

The first of the two views about human nature that are strongly reflected in many of the goals for a future society to be presented in what follows is that humans by their very nature are a collective and social species. Because of the importance of the false attack by defenders of capitalism that socialism involves the subordination of the interests of the individual to the interests of the collective, this same first point will also be discussed in terms the nature of human individuality. The second of the two views to be discussed is the importance of *human consciousness* to the nature of being human.

9.2.1 HUMANS BY THEIR NATURE ARE A COLLECTIVE AND SOCIAL SPECIES

Throughout human history, individual humans have always conducted their lives as differentiated parts of a human society, demonstrating that existing collectively and socially is part of the nature of being human. A society is organized “in a human way” if the participation in society by each person supports and promotes their potential development. All the class societies throughout history, which were not organized “in a human way,” did not adequately support and promote the human development of the subaltern.² Such a class society then presents itself to these subaltern individuals as being opposed to their manifesting their nature as humans by participating in and collectively directing human society. In 1844, Marx wrote:

Since human nature is the true community of men, by manifesting their nature men create, produce, the human community, the social entity, which is no abstract universal power opposed to the single individual, but is the essential nature of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth. ... as long as man does not recognize himself as man, and therefore has not organized the world in a human way, this community appears in the form of estrangement, because its subject, man, is a being estranged from himself (emphasis in the original) (Marx, 1844a).

²To be more precise, restricting the collective self-determination or self-governance (to be discussed more below) of the subaltern definitionally involves blocking at least these dimensions of their potential human development.

Since the time of the Russian Revolution and before, defenders of capitalism have attacked socialist concepts of a better world as requiring the subordination of the interests and rights of the individual to the interests and rights of society. The refutation of this false assertion rests on the rejection of the false understanding of the relation of the individual to society that is the necessary background assumption for capitalist economic theory (neoclassical economics), capitalist political theory (liberalism³), and beyond (and including) those, the false broad capitalist ideological worldview. Given the strength of the false capitalist view of the individual in the developed capitalist countries since WWII and particularly since the rise of neoliberalism, including its penetration into the ideas of many advocates of transcending capitalism to build a more human future, re-thinking the practices and institutions for a better future world requires careful consideration of the nature of human individuality and the relation of the individual to the society that it is part of.

Looking again at the preceding quote from Marx, one sees that the issue of the collective and social nature of humans and the issue of the relation of the nature of the individual human to the society that it is part of are actually just two ways of referring to, or naming, the same issue. Given the significant contribution of the false capitalist concept of the individual to the ongoing defense of capitalism, it will be useful to discuss again the issue of the collective and social nature of humans, now in its equivalent form of the nature of the human individual and its relation to the society that it is part of.

As will be indicated in the next section, the actions of “emancipation” or “liberation,” or the conditions of “liberty” or “freedom” resulting from those actions, have been longstanding goals of socialism for all humans. Socialism’s well-known goal of transcending capitalism comes from these goals, together with an understanding of the operation of capitalism as presenting barriers to the achievement of these goals for all individuals. Hence contrary to the false assertion that socialism subordinates the interests of the individual to anything, we see that it is exactly a concern for the interests of all individuals that is the driving force behind the fundamental socialist project of transcending capitalism.

But the misrepresentation of socialism’s goals by capitalist ideology as requiring the subordination of the interests of the individual to the interests

³“Liberalism” in the political theory sense of Locke and Montesquieu, not the American English political meaning of the word.

of society goes far deeper than just simply asserting the misrepresentation. Capitalist ideology's formulation of its false assertion rests on a false understanding of the nature of human individuals in society. From the 1800s onward socialist theory has understood this.

The capitalist view of the human individual that underlies their economic and political theories, and more generally its capitalist worldview, is often appropriately referred to by its critics as that of the "isolated individual." With no consideration of the social processes (thus yielding the "isolated individual") by which individuals develop what at some point in their lives they consider their interests, this view starts with an individual simply having inherent interests. The capitalist view's concern is then to consider what "rights" it should provide to this individual to protect and promote its interests against the interests of any other person, or the interests expressed by any collection of people, which is its simplistic view of what society is. From this lack of social process, the theory then tends to yield individuals that, even beyond being "isolated," become conflictual (including between the individual and society), as soon as there are limited resources that all individuals want unrestricted access to in pursuit of fulfilling their interests. The capitalist theory then quickly bogs down because guaranteeing one person's rights to some things negates another person's rights to those things. Their theory of the individual then falls back to prattling about what are "inherent rights," "natural rights," "God-given rights," and so on, in their inherently conflictual misunderstanding of the human individual.

Conversely, the starting point of the socialist understanding of the individual is the collective and social nature of humans, and thus the development of the individuality of each human through a process of the interaction of their biological capabilities with the social process of their lives. The creation of one's individuality through the social process of an individual's life includes the obvious ways that one's individuality is shaped by parents and teachers and interactions with thousands of other members of society, both individually and through society's institutions. But beyond that, it is further modified by the way one learns to view oneself, and the rest of the world beyond oneself, through the worldview of the particular subculture of the particular culture that one lives in. Contrary to the claims of the defenders of capitalism, socialism indeed starts its whole project of social transformation from a concern with individuals and what capitalism does to them, but those individuals are correctly understood as "social

individuals” (“social beings” in the following quote), rather than “isolated individuals.”

Marx indicated his understanding of this inherent connection of the very nature of an individual and the society that they are part of (which connections we will see in the next section are built into many of socialism’s well-known goals for the future) at the very beginning of his and Engels’ oeuvre.

Above all, we must avoid postulating “society” again as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual. The individual is the social being. His manifestations of life—even if they may not appear in the direct form of communal manifestations of life carried out in association with others—are therefore an expression and confirmation of social life. Man’s individual and species-life are not different, however much—and this is inevitable—the mode of existence of the individual is a more particular or more general mode of the life of the species, or the life of the species is a more particular or more general individual life (Marx, 1844, p. 299).

He returned to emphasize the fundamental importance of this and to express it even more clearly in a number of places in his mature writings, including in his best-known draft of his masterwork *Capital*.

The point is rather that private interest is itself already a socially determined interest and can be attained only within the conditions laid down by society and with the means provided by society and is therefore tied to the reproduction of these conditions and means. It is the interest of private persons; but its content, as well as the form and means of its realization, are given by social conditions that are independent of them all (Marx, 1857, p. 94).

9.2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS TO THE NATURE OF BEING HUMAN

The second understanding of human nature that underpins many goals of socialism is that a *differentia specifica* of humans is their possession of capabilities that no other animals have. Two of these capabilities, central to the concept of socialism and its goals, are that humans have the ability to imagine future states of reality different from the existing reality, and the capability to employ rational thought, or reason, to decide how to realize the desired future state. This understanding of human nature holds that beyond the ability to act, which is common to most animals, humans

can act consciously. These characteristics could be called “specifically human” or, as in the second quote to follow, “truly human.”

Although the direct topic in the following work from 1867 is human labor, this early modern socialist discussion brings out clearly this understanding of the nature of humans that underpins many of the goals of socialism:

We are not now dealing with those primitive instinctive forms of labor that remind us of the mere animal. ... We presuppose labor in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labor process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the laborer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own ... (Marx, 1867, p. 188).

A use of the words “human consciousness,” which is closely related to the meaning of the inherent unique characteristic of humans as “awareness” discussed in the last quote but somewhat different, is as follows. Here, “to be conscious” roughly means “to be aware of and to understand.” This usage indicates a condition that may or may not pertain to a specific human at a specific time, as opposed to the previous usage to indicate an inherent characteristic of all humans, an aspect of the nature of being human. However, the meaning of this usage is nevertheless strongly related to the earlier one. All human decisions and activities influence the operation of all human societies, but humans often do not know in advance what the effect will be. Then, similar to human consciousness in the previous usage distinguishing the work of humans from that of other animals, in this different meaning the words indicate being aware of and understanding how human societies operate. When one wants a specific social result, one “in the main and to a constantly growing measure” (see following quote) knows what actions will generate the desired result.

Engels laid out this use of the term “consciousness” as a goal of a human-centered future society that would replace capitalism, which it had throughout the works of Marx and Engels, in one place as follows:

... The struggle for individual existence disappears. ... The whole sphere of the conditions of life which environ man, and which have hitherto

ruled man, now comes under the dominion and control of man, who for the first time becomes the real, conscious lord of nature, because he has now become master of his own social organization.

... Only from that time will man himself, with full consciousness, make his own history—only from that time will the social causes set in motion by him have, in the main and in a constantly growing measure, the results intended by him. It is humanity's leap from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom. (emphasis added to highlight its addressing of the issue of consciousness) (Engels, 1878, p. 270).

9.3 THE GOALS OF A FUTURE BETTER WORLD

The methodological argument of this work on how to re-think the institutions and practices proposed for a future better world is that one needs to consider if they can be used to first create and subsequently operate a socialist society, which requires that they not contradict any of socialism's goals. To make this argument does not require a comprehensive (or even a "very extensive") list of the goals of socialism to be made.

The first two parts of this section will list 17 of the most frequently proposed goals for a future society that is better than capitalism: first nine "broad and abstract" goals, and then eight "specific and concrete" goals. They are listed as illustrations of the nature of the goals of socialism, to make the discussion that will follow less abstract. The third part of this section will then briefly consider an equivalent way of describing the purpose of a future better society in terms of a single goal instead of a plethora, an approach that many authors use sometimes because it can be pedagogically useful to do so.

9.3.1 NINE "BROAD AND ABSTRACT" GOALS

The quote by Engels above includes three of the plethora of broad goals for a future better world that were expressed frequently in the 19th and 20th centuries (and still are today). The first was that humanity (collectively) "makes its own history." This is tied to the concept of human nature that was considered above, that humans have the potential to act consciously, and from that gain increased collective self-determination over their own existence, and hence (over time) of their own history. Two other common

expressions of this same goal for a more human future society are that “people collectively become the subjects of history as opposed to beings its objects,” and that “people collectively become the masters of their own fate.” The second goal for a better future society indicated in the quote by Engels is a part of the first. For humans to collectively be the masters of their own fate, one necessary aspect is that they “become the master of [their] own social organization.”⁴ Other roughly equivalent expressions commonly used to indicate this goal of socialism are “self-determination,” “self-governance,” or “socialist democracy.”⁵ The third commonly indicated goal of socialism in the quote is “freedom,” often expressed roughly equivalently as “liberty,” or by the act that freedom or liberty is obtained by, “self-emancipation.”

Even though when discussing the goals of a future better society socialists for convenience often drop the prefix “self” when indicating self-emancipation, it is nevertheless important to underline the centrality of that prefix “self” to the concept of socialism. It is a profound misunderstanding of socialism to see it as only concerned with material well-being and material equality. Cows have great material well-being in that the drive for maximum profits under capitalism means that they get all the food they want, immediate care for any medical problems, housing suitable to protect their health and wellbeing, and maybe even air conditioning for milk cows to boost their production if that passes a cost-benefit analysis. But “being materially taken care of” by Plato’s philosopher kings

⁴There are other things that contribute to humans being the collective masters of their existence besides being masters of their own social organizations. For example, when humans learned to cultivate plants and breed animals, that reduced the dependence of their existence on natural climatic conditions and thereby increased their control over that aspect of their existence. There are goals for a future better world generalizing this type of increased human mastery over human existence, but providing a comprehensive or even very lengthy listing of the goals socialism is not necessary or even useful for the purpose of this work.

⁵A politically important aspect of the ideology of capitalism since its inception has been its claim to not only be consistent with democracy, but to promote it. It is a historical fact that many capitalist societies have allowed broader social participation in social decision making than earlier class societies. But even in theory, “capitalist democracy” (also called “bourgeois democracy”) is extremely limited by specifically recognizing the priority of the property rights to the means of production (necessary for the exploitation that is at the heart of the capitalist system) over the democratic rights of the entire society whenever they come into conflict. In practice, capitalist societies do not require capitalist democracy to operate, and those capitalist societies that do generally operate with capitalist democracy limit or abandon it whenever a threat to the continuation of the capitalist nature of the society makes it useful to do so. Socialists often say that a goal of their society is “democracy”, but when they do so they are using the word “democracy” as a shorthand expression for “socialist democracy”. Capitalist democracy which prioritizes property rights in the means of production to society’s collective democratic rights is not a goal of socialism.

is inconsistent with the socialist goal of collective self-determination that we have just considered, of becoming the collective masters of all the institutions that we are part of. Developing our potential to be more fully human definitionally (by the socialist understanding of the nature of being human discussed above) requires our being the collective active agents in determining everything about our social existence, since such collective self-determination is, as argued, something specifically human.

Starting with these three, a list follows of nine of the most common “broad and abstract” goals from the discussions over the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, as illustrations of this type of goal for a future better society.

- i. Humans collectively make their own history (they are collectively the subjects of their own history; they are collectively the masters of their own fate);
- ii. Society collectively controls all its own institutions (social self-determination; social self-governance; socialist democracy);
- iii. (Self) emancipation or liberation (or equivalently indicating this goal by the results of these actions, freedom, or liberty);
- iv. Solidarity;
- v. Equality;
- vi. Elimination of exploitation;
- vii. Elimination of all types of oppression;
- viii. Meaningful work (work that supports and develops the workers’ potential humanity);
- ix. Environmental and ecological sustainability.

9.3.2 EIGHT “SPECIFIC AND CONCRETE” GOALS

The category of “goals for a future better society” also includes another plethora of goals which are of a different kind from those just considered: “specific and concrete” goals. These have been formulated in particular in the political fight against capitalism over the last two centuries. Again, as illustrations of the multitude of goals of this type, a list of eight follows:

- i. Adequate healthy food;
- ii. Universal free healthcare;
- iii. Universal free education;
- iv. Humanly dignified housing;

- v. Adequate time not working (adequate vacations, and limits on working hours per day and working days per week);
- vi. Comprehensive social security;
- vii. Abolition of child labor;
- viii. Social control of production.

9.3.3 "THE GOAL" OF SOCIALISM

If one is to re-think the institutions and practices of a future better world in terms of whether they support and promote its multiple goals, a theoretical issue immediately presents itself. What if one proposed institution or policy supports and promotes one goal of socialism better than does some alternative considered institution or policy, but supports and promotes some other goal(s) less? From their origins humans have implicitly resolved such issues in practice by evaluating the value to them of the trade-off of the gain for the one goal to the loss for the other.⁶ If one instead were to have a single goal for a future better society, then of course this problem with a multi-dimensional goal would not arise as choices could be made according to which of the alternative alternatives supports and promotes that single goal better.

This author, and many other advocates of socialism over the last two centuries, often find it convenient and pedagogically useful in some given situations to talk about socialism as having a single goal, human development. Marx and Engels often referred to human development as the goal of their concept of socialism. To randomly pick just two illustrations, in 1845 Marx and Engels wrote about the goal of "... 'free activity,' which is for the communists the creative manifestation of life arising from the free development of all abilities of the [whole person] ...," while two years later Engels wrote about the goal of "... the all-round development of the abilities of all the members of society"

Changing the form of expressing the purpose of a future better society from "goals" to "a goal" of course cannot change at all the nature of the real-world problem that this work is concerned with, choosing between

⁶For an extended discussion of this issue see "Evaluating Against a Multi-Dimensional Economic Goal: A Sustainable and Prosperous Socialism" by this author, *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 13(1), 2021, 105–126. The *IJCS* is open source and so this article is can be accessed at www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?doi=10.13169/intejcubastud.13.1.0105.

alternative institutions and practices. Having put a label of “human development” on the overall goal immediately poses the question of what one means by human development. For example, in line with, and stemming from, their differing concepts of the nature of humans discussed above, capitalist ideology and socialist ideology have very different concepts of what constitutes human development. The socialist concept of human development that has been developed over the last two centuries is in fact best reflected by the multitude of goals socialists have established for a desired future better society. Human development for socialists involves humans developing more collective conscious control over their institutions and their existence, and doing this is supported by working in ways that develops these; being fed, educated, sheltered, and medically cared for at levels that support and promote the development by humans of their potential capabilities; and so on. A way to present the relation between a single goal such as human development and the plethora of goals in the “many goals” understanding of a future better society is to consider the plethora of goals as subgoals of the central goal: they indeed are also goals of socialism, but now are not simply posited as goals, but rather achieve their status as subgoals from their contributions to the support and promotion of the single posited goal.

While “human development” is a common choice when presenting socialism as having a single goal as the label for that goal,⁷ there are many other labels for the same concept that different people use at different times when indicating the goal of a desired better future society, and of course it is the concept and not its label that is important. One is “development of humans’ potential.” The “development of humans’ capabilities” (or equivalently “abilities”) is a way of formulating this idea that has become well-known and is associated in particular with the work of Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen.⁸ Bringing in the historical element, Fromm wrote “the history of mankind is a history of the increasing development of man” (Fromm, 1961, p. 43).⁹ There are many other ways one can label the same concept of human development. The expression that this author finds the most beautiful as well as rich (but slightly too long to gener-

⁷Note that for both “human development” and the various possible alternative ways of expressing the same concept, in line with the discussion above on the nature of humans, this concept is to be understood as simultaneously referring to both individual humans and the human collective (society).

⁸Who, note, are explicitly not Marxist socialists.

⁹Fromm expands this statement of the goal of Marx and Engels’ socialism in his section “Marx’s Concept of Socialism” (1961, 58–69).

ally be convenient) is by Paulo Freire: “man’s ontological and historical vocation to become more fully human” (Freire, 1992, p. 40). Like Fromm, he indicates that this goal has always been a goal of humanity, but he goes on to also argue that it is ontological: humans have the goal of human development because they are humans, and the goal of human development is part of what being human is.

9.4 ILLUSTRATIONS: RE-THINKING SIX EXAMPLES OF 20th CENTURY “DOGMAS” ON THE SOCIALIST FUTURE

The penultimate section of this chapter will now use the methodology developed to reconsider six “dogmas” of 20th century socialism about a desired better society intended to replace capitalism. As indicated previously, the purpose of this work is to indicate an explicit methodology for the process that has always occurred in practice by some advocates of a post-capitalist future of re-thinking what have become the dominant ideas among socialists at a given time about a desired future better world. While the six institutions and practices reconsidered are among those most discussed by socialists today, in the context of this work they are being presented only as illustrations of the application of the methodology. And while there were always some people who considered themselves to be socialists who had alternative ideas to the dogmas being reconsidered here, these were the dominant ideas on these issues among socialists in the 20th century. Some of the ideas being reconsidered were near hegemonic among socialists while others were dominant but less so. In all cases the word “dogma” is being used only according to its dictionary definition to indicate that the idea was dominant, with no negative implications. As indicated in the introduction, the re-thinking methodology needs to be free of any a priori assumptions about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of these dogmas prior to their being reconsidered.

The following six dogmas from 20th century socialism will be reconsidered:

1. Socialist production needs to be socially planned.
2. While the state may well be necessary in the transition from capitalism to socialism to fight the remnants of the capitalist class and its supporters, by the nature of “a state” it will “wither away” under a socialist mode of production.

3. The use of any type of markets for any purpose violates the goals of socialism and is therefore incompatible with a mode of production being socialists. “Socialism with markets” is an oxymoron. This is equivalent to the dogma that all planning and the execution of that planning in a socialist mode of production must be done by some system of material balances.
4. “Market Socialism” in the sense that the term came to be used in academia in the Global North in the last part of the 20th century is not a form of socialism.
5. The use of some circuits of capitalist accumulation in some subordinate parts of the economy (in particular not in “the commanding heights”) is incompatible with a socialist mode of production.
6. The use of some circuits of capitalist accumulation in some subordinate parts of the economy (in particular not in “the commanding heights”) is incompatible with any process of constructing a socialist mode of production.
 - i. The validity of the dogma that socialist production must be socially planned (for short – “a planned economy”) for a mode of production to be socialist follows almost immediately from socialism’s goals that humans collectively make their own history, or that society collectively controls all its own institutions (or that it has social self-governance, or socialist democracy in all aspects of society, including the economy). Note that capitalism fails to meet these socialist goals (and therefore needs to be transcended to achieve socialism) in two ways. First, as opposed to all society collectively controlling its institutions and the functioning of its society, the decisions and actions of some subsection of society (the capitalist class) very disproportionately influence how society functions.¹⁰ Beyond that, while the decisions and actions of the capitalists are the primary determinants of the functioning of the society, they cannot said to be controlling their society or its institutions in the socialist sense of the word discussed above of developed humans controlling their institutions and society consciously, a priori deciding what results they want

¹⁰Note that to violate these socialist goals it is not necessary that part of society has *no* influence on how society functions, only that the ruling class has *disproportionate* power. In general, the desires and associated efforts of the subaltern will have some influence, but the ruling class rules.

to achieve and then making decisions and taking actions that approximately yield the desired results. The lack of understanding by capitalists and their agents of any except quite general relations between economic goals they might want to achieve and the actions that would yield those is a well-known fundamental characteristic of capitalism.

- ii. The dogma that the state will wither away under a socialist mode of production violates the goals of socialism. If society is to collectively control its own history and all its own institutions, this cannot be done by a process of all members of society together discussing, deciding on, and then implementing those decisions for every social issue. One could say that trying to do so would not leave enough time for the development of any other dimensions of human development than collective self-governance, but the time constraint is actually more severe than that. There simply is nowhere near enough time in our 24-hour days to make all social decisions through a process of everyone participating in meetings of the entire society in which everyone directly presents their thoughts on every social issue. And even beyond this time constraint that makes it impossible, to think that only in this way could society “protect the interests of every individual” is to fall into the misunderstanding of individuals as isolated and therefore with inherently antagonistic interests, which only they can be the agent to defend since all other agents have antagonistic interests. The socialist understanding of humans as inherently collective and social, and the goal of society to support and promote the human development of everyone, changes the role of the state from “protecting as best as possible all the conflicting individual interests,” to determining the existing collective interests of the social individuals and enacting corresponding policies in order to best promote human development for all. There is nothing inherent to the task of determining these social interests that requires the direct participation of every member of society in resolving every social issue. To the contrary, our social nature means exactly that subsets of society which society decides are appropriate for the social tasks that they are being selected

for can work to determine the social interest involved, and then to build institutions and enact policies to promote them. These subsets are the “active agents of collective society for the social issues in their mandate.” And these institutions with the determined practices created to determine and promote society’s collective interests are “the socialist state.”

Confusing this issue is that Marx and Engels repeatedly argued that the most fundamental characteristic of a state in all class societies is its role of oppressing the subaltern in the interests of the ruling class. That role of the state will not be present in a socialist society. Hence if the transition from capitalism to socialism, and thus the extinction of the capitalist class, takes place over some extended period of time, one could say that the fundamental role of the capitalist state will “wither away.” But Marx and Engels were very clear that other aspects of the capitalist state would not disappear (although basically all of them would need to be transformed to greater or lesser extents). Marx stated this very explicitly.

In this sense it is possible to speak of “the present-day state”¹¹, in contrast with the future, in which its present root, bourgeois society, will have died off.

The question then arises: what transformation will the state undergo in a communist society? In other words, what social functions will remain in existence there that are analogous to present state functions? (Marx, 1875, p. 95).

Confusing the issue still more, Marx and Engels at times used the phrase “the withering away of the state” to indicate part of the process of the transition from capitalism to socialism. But taking into consideration their clearly stated position that socialist society will have a state, together with their understanding that the fundamental characteristic a capitalist state is its oppression of the subaltern, looking at all the places in their work where they used the expressions similar to “withering

¹¹By putting this in quotes Marx indicates that he is referring to what he has just talked about in his preceding two sentences, that which is common to all capitalist states notwithstanding what he calls their “motley diversity of form”.

away of the state” it is clear that in these they used the word “state” to mean “capitalist state,” or “state as we know it.”

- iii. The dogma that using any type of markets for any purpose is incompatible with a mode of production being socialist is false. There is no goal of socialism that using markets necessarily violates. One common procedure that leads to this false dogma is to postulate markets and planning as opposites. If that were correct, then by the correctness of the first dogma considered in this section, this dogma would also be correct. But there is no reason that one cannot have markets operate as a tool for some economic interchanges within a socially planned economy. Even under capitalism planning and markets are not opposite. Capitalist economies were extensively planned during WWII in the US and the United Kingdom, and French Indicative Planning (especially the first Plan) involved extensive planning for capitalism. Going beyond these exceptional examples of the possibility of planning in capitalist economies, all government intervention into capitalist economies is planning. This is true for industrial policies, trade policies, infrastructure policies, and many more. The capitalist world today is actually shifting from the ideology of neoliberalism to an ideology in which they openly call for more planning of various types of government intervention and industrial policies (and protective trade barriers) in the interests of its country’s capital. The correct observation that these types of planning differ “in degree” from the system of material balance planning developed in the USSR that spread in modified forms to many other countries that broke from capitalism in the 20th century is correct, but there was also different degrees and different forms of planning even among all these.¹² The issue of the form and degree of planning is a separate issue from the issue of if using some markets as economic tools to carry out some economic tasks in an economy immediately precludes the possibility of having a

¹²Note also that these economies all had markets even in the core sectors of the economy that had no capitalist circuits of capital. These markets operated differently in some ways from markets in capitalist circuits of capital, a point that will be expanded on in what follows, but there were markets in these material balances planned economies.

planned economy. “Socialism with markets” is a theoretically possible subgroup of the large variety of different possible socialist modes of production.¹³

- iv. The dogma that “Market Socialism,” in the senses the term came to be used in academia in the Global North since the last part of the 20th century, is not a form of socialism is correct. There are actually two different concepts of “Market Socialism” that have become popular in academia in the Global North since late in the 20th century.¹⁴ The best-known advocate of the first is Alec Nove. Here the “commanding heights” of the economy would continue to be planned in something resembling the material balance way of the USSR, while secondary parts of the economy, and particularly parts where such planning did not appear to be either efficient or effective, would allow capitalist relations of production. This already existed in some countries to differing degrees above all in parts of agriculture, with Poland being a particular example of this. This planning concept was then extended both to more parts of the economy “of secondary importance” that were not performing well under some particular variation of a material balances planning system, and in addition allow some of this capitalist production to be organized as larger capitalist enterprises (even if not the behemoths that exist today in capitalist countries). The government would regulate the private sector and also build a safety net much as is done under social democratic capitalism. Such a system would, of course, be incompatible with the socialist goal indicated above of ending all exploitation, of ending the appropriation of the products of their labor from some people by other people.

¹³Analogous to the large variety of different capitalist modes of production that have existed over the course of capitalism’s history and that exist in the world today, there is a large variety of different ways that a mode of production could be organized and be socialist.

¹⁴Discussions of “Market Socialism” sometimes have a few paragraphs talking about the system of Lange, Lerner, and Dickinson from the 1930s. That system operates entirely differently from either of the two systems of Market Socialism that will be discussed here. While one could at least reasonably argue that their system would not be inconsistent with the goals of socialism presented, it will not be discussed here because there is no discussion anywhere in the world today of implementing that sort of system.

Two particularly well-known advocates of the other concept of Market Socialism, popular in academia in the Global North, are Pranab Bardhan and John Roemer. In this model, each enterprise pursues maximum profits according to the normal rules of competition between enterprises, similar to capitalism. However, all profits are distributed among the workers of the enterprise. Hence, as a collective version of a self-employed worker in a capitalist economy, no one appropriates the products of others' labor, and there is no exploitation (a cooperative enterprise-based version of Marx's petty commodity production from Chapters 1 to 3 of *Capital*, before capital and exploitation were introduced to his theoretical presentation). This concept of Market Socialism, however, violates the correct dogma of having a socially planned economy, and thus undermines the goal of society having conscious control of all its institutions. It is often falsely asserted that markets necessarily lead to a lack of planning (this argument is countered in Dogma 3 above), and therefore to "economic anarchy." What is true, however, is that production determined by uncoordinated enterprises in competition, without overall social planning, does result in such "economic anarchy" and a lack of control by society over its institutions.

The list of advocates for some form of Market Socialism in both of these senses is extensive. For a collection of relatively short introductory pieces on various interpretations by about 15 different authors, including Nove and Roemer, see *Why Market Socialism* (Belkin & Roosevelt, 1994).

"Socialism with markets" and "Market Socialism," notwithstanding how often many people confuse or conflate the two, are entirely different things.

- v. The use of some circuits of capitalist accumulation in some subordinate parts of the economy (in particular not in "the commanding heights") is incompatible with a socialist mode of production. This dogma is actually a restatement of one of the two forms of Market Socialism discussed in dogma 4, and so it has already been evaluated as correct. It is repeated here

in this form to underline the difference of this correct dogma from the one that will follow, which despite sharing so many words in its statement with this dogma and therefore too often being used interchangeably with it in practice, it is entirely different. This distinction is extremely important to make in the world today because this correct dogma is too often brought up to oppose the very large social processes going on today in China, in Vietnam, and as of recently, in Cuba, to which in fact it does not apply. The following dogma does apply to those social processes, but will be argued to be false.

- vi. The use of some circuits of capitalist accumulation in some subordinate parts of the economy (in particular not in “the commanding heights”) is incompatible with any process constructing a socialist mode of production. This dogma is false. It has been argued in the last point that, in line with the goals of socialism, once constructed a socialist mode of production cannot have any capitalist relations of production in it. That does not logically preclude the use of capitalist relations of production in some parts of the economy during the process of constructing a socialist mode of production.

This is a specific example of the well-known issue of the relation between the means and the ends of any desired process. They are of course related in the sense that the means used will always affect one’s ability to achieve the desired ends. But it is also well-known that it is not in general logically excluded that one can use means that are themselves incompatible with the ends to achieve those ends. If one does that, however, it remains logically necessary in order to actually finish the process of achieving the ends to, at some point stop, using those incompatible means.

To make this logical argument concrete, consider the relation of war to peace. It is very broadly socially accepted that sometimes to achieve the end of peace it is necessary to use the incompatible means of fighting a war.¹⁵ If one has a process where that is true, it nevertheless remains definitionally true that to actually achieve the goal of peace one must stop fighting the war. Similarly, within the Marxist tradition itself it is

¹⁵The fact that in the world today arguably the majority of governments fighting wars claim that they are fighting for the goal of peace when in reality they are driven by some other goal, does not negate the logical point being made.

widely (and in this author's view correctly) argued that in a transition from capitalism to socialism where the latter has the goal of ending all class oppression, it is necessary to use the means of oppressing the still existing capitalists in the form of legally taking from them the powers that they still have, because of their economic power in the transitional economy. Again, definitionally the use of those means of oppression that are being posited to help the process of constructing socialism will have to stop at some point before one can claim to have constructed a socialist mode of production.¹⁶

China, Vietnam, and Cuba are all engaged in (significantly different) social processes with the goal of building some sort of socialism. Given the theoretical point that the future is not determined, and beyond that, the political point that powerful forces in the world are fighting against those countries achieving that goal, it is not certain if they will succeed. All three countries have made capitalist relations of production legal in some parts of their economy (Cuba doing so in 2021). The logical point of this section, that using some capitalist relations of production in a desired transition to socialism does not preclude the desired goal of a society free from those relations, of course says nothing about if the use of such relations in a given process at a given time will actually support and promote the goal, make it more difficult to achieve, or even contribute to the failure to achieve it. Supporters of a future better world then need to study these three real-world experiments to see how the allowed capitalist relations under the given restrictions on them in the three very different countries in fact do affect their transitions to socialism. In the first place, the processes need to be continually monitored to evaluate if the capitalist relations of production, in the given way they are employed, are actually contributing to the construction of a post-capitalist society, or if to the contrary they are harming or blocking that goal. Second, if they are found to be more beneficial than harmful as they are intended to be, these processes must still be studied to deepen our understanding of what dangers to the process of constructing socialism they nevertheless do generate, and from that what policies can be adopted to address those dangers. And finally, these processes must be watched as the process of constructing a better society

¹⁶Also, since a socialist mode of production will have no classes and hence no remnants of the capitalist class, the cause for maintaining the oppression in the process of building socialism will have disappeared.

advances, to see how in the future these capitalist relations of production will be transcended to complete the desired construction of socialism.

One final word on the use of “socialist mode of production” in this point and throughout this chapter concerning the socialist goal of eliminating all exploitation. All socialists refer to the US as a capitalist economy. In actual fact, some production occurs in the US by forms of production that are best characterized as feudal. One example is the survival of legal sharecropping and of some modes of production that in practice amount to sharecropping, albeit both in minimal amounts. Much larger amounts of production by sharecropping or sharecropping-like production occur in many countries of the Global South that socialists classify as capitalist due to the dominance of that form of production there. In the US some production occurs that is best characterized as slavery, in particular among some groups of current immigrants. Again, this happens to a much greater degree in a number of countries of the Global South that socialists classify as capitalist. In this sense, it would be possible to talk of a country achieving the construction of a socialist mode of production that still has some “pre-socialist production” in some parts of the economy. Analogous to what socialists do today referring to countries as capitalist, I would expect in the future they will refer to countries where the strongly dominant part of the economy is conducted by socialist relations of production as socialist economies, even if they involve some niches of remaining capitalist relations of production. Throughout this work, however, including for the six illustrations of the methodology for evaluation of past dogmas, I have used the term “socialist mode of production” (or “socialist production” or “socialist economy”) to indicate a system in which all production occurs through socialist relations of production.

9.5 CONCLUSION

The point of this work is to discuss a logically meaningful methodology for re-thinking existing ideas about appropriate institutions and practices for a future better world. There are two parts to the re-thinking methodology proposed. First one must know what goals one wants the institutions and practices to achieve, or at least to support and promote. Then one must analyze if the institutions and practices being re-evaluated will in fact support and promote those goals, and if they will do so better or worse

than some alternative existing or posed institutions and practices. With this as its purpose, this work then discusses some of the most commonly presented goals that it asserts inform the Marxist vision of socialism, including two discussions on two not-well-recognized assumptions about the nature of humans that serve as underpinnings for many of socialism's goals.

Finally, as illustrations of the methodology discussed, six major dogmas from 20th century socialism are reconsidered on the basis of whether they are consistent with the goals of socialism. The six dogmas and their concluded validity based on this re-evaluation follow.

1. Socialist production must be socially planned. Valid.
2. The state will wither away under a socialist mode of production. False.
3. "Market Socialism," in the sense the term came to be used in academia in the Global North since the last part of the 20th century, is not a form of socialism. Valid.
4. Using any type of markets for any purpose is incompatible with a mode of production being socialist. False.
5. The use of some circuits of capitalist accumulation in some subordinate parts of the economy is incompatible with a socialist mode of production. Valid.
6. The use of some circuits of capitalist accumulation in some subordinate parts of the economy is incompatible with *any process constructing* a socialist mode of production. False.

KEYWORDS

- **capitalism**
- **human nature**
- **marxism**
- **socialism**
- **institutions**
- **social transformation**

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