

# ANALYTICAL MARXISM: A critical appraisal

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Abstract: This paper analyses Analytical Marxism (AM) and its relevance for Marxist theory and the social sciences. AM is rigorously defined and distinguished from Rational Choice Marxism (RCM). Some limitations of both approaches, and particularly of RCM, are shown, focusing in particular on the neglect of structural constraints to individual choices and of the endogeneity of preferences. It is argued that the introduction of these issues is consistent with an antireductionist methodological perspective and it may lead to reconsider some of the negative RCM conclusions on Marx's theory. It is also argued, however, that there are no grounds for the wholesale rejection of AM and RCM and that even critics would benefit from taking them seriously, engaging with their arguments beyond a priori exegetical and methodological disputes.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 1978, in the midst of the decline of structuralist Marxism and the renaissance of liberal egalitarianism, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* appears, in which G.A. Cohen reconstructs historical materialism (hereafter, HM) guided only by “two constraints: on the one hand, what Marx wrote, and, on the other, those standards of clarity and rigour which distinguish twentieth-century analytical philosophy” (Cohen, 1978, p.ix). The book marks the birth of Analytical Marxism (hereafter, AM): “Cohen’s book did something that had not been done before: it defined the theory of [HM] as a set of claimed theorems following from a set of postulates, and it subjected the validity of the postulates and the inferences drawn from them to the scrutiny which has come to be the hallmark of analytical philosophy” (Roemer, 1994B, p.ix).<sup>1</sup> In the following three decades, AM has provided some of the most controversial and analytically sophisticated contributions to Marx’s theory. By adopting the tools of mainstream social science and analytical philosophy, AM has reconsidered core Marxist issues in economic theory (Roemer, 1981, 1982A, 1986A; van Parijs, 1983); in philosophy (Elster, 1982, 1985; Cohen, 1988; Roemer, 1988A); in history (Brenner, 1977, 1986); in the theory of international relations (Roemer, 1983A); in the theory of classes (Wright, 1985, 1997, 2005; van Parijs, 1986); and in the theory of class conflict, the state, and political struggles (Przeworski, 1985A).

The relevance of AM can be readily measured by its impact in philosophy and the social sciences, and by the vast literature it has generated.<sup>2</sup> AM contributions provide original insights on core substantive and methodological issues, of interest to Marxists and non-Marxists alike. Yet, the dismissive attitude

towards other approaches sometimes shown by AM,<sup>3</sup> and the rejection of a number of Marx's propositions have generated hostile reactions among radicals. The methodological tenets of AM – in particular, methodological individualism (hereafter, MI) and rational choice theory – have been questioned. Critics have rejected the claim that social phenomena should be explained starting from the beliefs and actions of individuals, and the claim that the latter should be analysed with rational choice theory. The methodological debate has heavily influenced the analysis of AM substantive propositions. Most critics have rejected AM a priori on exegetical and methodological grounds, arguing that the negative conclusions reached on Marx's propositions are not surprising: they follow from the adoption of a methodology that is fundamentally inconsistent with Marx's theory.

The absence of constructive dialogue is regrettable, especially at a time when socialist theories are on the retreat. It is unfortunate that many Marxists deem AM itself just a “particularly virulent” and “fundamentally dishonest” anti-Marxist approach (Hunt, 1992, p.105; see also Schweickart, 1988). This paper contends that, despite its shortcomings, AM should be taken seriously and that it is fruitful to engage with AM arguments on their own ground, beyond a priori exegetical and methodological disputes. First, a common misconception is refuted, and AM is distinguished from the narrower approach also known as Rational Choice Marxism (hereafter, RCM).<sup>4</sup> Many critics illegitimately proceed from the critique of RCM to the rejection of AM. Second, it is argued that it is “inappropriate to attack [AM] solely by demonstrating that the methods advocated were not Marx's” (Weldes, 1989, p.371). This is explicitly acknowledged by AM at the outset, and in any case many innovations in Marxist theory have derived from the

encounter with non-Marxist traditions. AM “should be judged by whether it illuminates central questions of Marxism” (Sitton, 1996, p.104). AM does provide interesting insights on a number of core Marxist issues, such as problems of collective action, the paradox of the middle classes, HM, the class compromise, normative issues, and exploitation in socialism. Third, AM propositions are interesting even when they are unconvincing. The emphasis on clarity and rigour greatly facilitates critical assessment by exposing the crucial assumptions and weak links, and the explanatory boundaries and grey areas of AM. As noted by Levine and Wright (1980, p.51), “[I]t is not the least virtue of [Cohen’s] book that its theses and arguments are sufficiently clear and rigorous that they can be constructively criticised.” This paper provides a focused critical analysis which suggests interesting new directions for further research.

To be specific, two specific limits of RCM are analysed, namely the neglect of structural constraints on individual behaviour and an asocial view of agents. It is shown that several RCM substantive propositions are sensitive to the introduction of these features, which are arguably central in the social sciences and analytical Marxists themselves deem core features of Marxism. It is also argued that, methodologically, an approach that emphasises individual (rational) choices, but takes into account structural constraints and endogenous preferences blurs the dichotomy between methodological holism and MI, and it may depart from existing models, but is consistent with a more general interpretation of AM.

The main arguments of the paper are supported by an extensive review of the literature on AM, focusing in particular on methodological issues. Existing surveys, such as Buchanan (1987), Mayer (1994), and Roberts (1997), provide

good expositions *of* the main AM contributions, but their analysis of the debate *on* AM is less satisfactory. Further, they do not always spell out the definition of AM, and the crucial distinction with RCM, with the necessary clarity.<sup>5</sup>

The rest of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 defines AM and RCM. Section 3 analyses general methodological issues. Section 4 focuses on structural constraints and endogenous preferences. Section 5 concludes.

## 2. ANALYTICAL AND RATIONAL CHOICE MARXISM

Given the theoretical, methodological, and even political heterogeneity of analytical Marxists, it is difficult to define AM, either theoretically or in terms of membership.<sup>6</sup> Attempts to identify a set of substantive propositions shared by all analytical Marxists are necessarily vague and ultimately unconvincing.<sup>7</sup> As noted by Callinicos (1987, p.68), no analytical Marxist “accepts the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall ... and ... only one, Brenner, ... still holds the labour theory of value expounded in volume I to be true”. This by no means identifies AM as a distinct approach in Marxist thought. Some authors actually emphasise the “alarming lack of unity” of AM (Bertram, 1999, p.235) and prefer to call it an “affinity group” (Gintis, 1987, p. 983).<sup>8</sup>

There are some common traits, however, that define “a style of theorizing” (Wright, Levine, and Sober, 1994, p.56), if not a school or a “fully fledged paradigm” (Carling, 1986, p.55). The core tenet of AM, and its main departure from classical Marxism, is the denial of a specific Marxist methodology, dialectical or otherwise.<sup>9</sup> AM “believe that, although the word ‘dialectical’ has not always been used without clear meaning, it has never been used with clear

meaning to denote a method rival to the analytical one” (Cohen, 2000B, p.xxiii).<sup>10</sup>

Marxism should “subject itself to the conventional standards of social science and analytical philosophy” (Wright, Levine and Sober, 1992, pp.5-6). More precisely, Wright (1989, pp.38-9) proposes the following definition of AM.

DEFINITION 1. AM is defined by the analysis of Marxist issues and:

C1. “A commitment to *conventional scientific norms* in the elaboration of theory and the conduct of research.”

C2. “An emphasis on the importance of *systematic conceptualisation* [...]. This involves careful attention to both definitions of concepts and the logical coherence of interconnected concepts.”

C3. “A concern with a relatively *fine-grained specification of the steps in the theoretical arguments linking concepts*.”

C4. “The importance accorded to *the intentional action of individuals*.”

Definition 1 encompasses all analytical Marxists; but it is sufficiently general to allow a wide range of methodological and substantive positions. In addition to self-defined analytical Marxists, most analytically oriented Marxist philosophers and social scientists, and all Marxist mathematical economists, may be included, even if they explicitly reject affiliation to AM.<sup>11</sup> Besides, “it would be arrogant to suggest that Marxism lacked these elements prior to the emergence of [AM] as a self-conscious school” (Wright, 1989, p.39).<sup>12</sup>

However, C1-C4 are by no means trivial. The emphasis on conventional scientific norms and the rejection of a distinctive Marxist methodology have been questioned on philosophical and methodological grounds.<sup>13</sup> According to critics,

analytical philosophy essentially distorts Marxist theory. Cohen's "theory of history is subject to limitations of scope that would have been alien to Marx, who frequently makes use of the idea of history as an all-encompassing 'totality'" (Kirkpatrick, 1994, p.39). More generally, the negative conclusions of AM prove "the dangers of using philosophical tools especially designed to bury Marxism" (Kennedy, 2005, p.341). The analytical method is based on "a framework of rigid and exclusive dichotomies" (Sayers, 1989, p.83) and thus produces "not clarity and rigour, but systematic misunderstanding and misinterpretation" (ibid., p.82). Against AM, some authors have defended a specific Marxist methodology, based on dialectics and/or methodological holism.<sup>14</sup> This is a deep issue, and a proper analysis is beyond the scope of this paper. Some points can be made, though, to raise doubts on the wholesale rejection of AM on a priori grounds.

To be sure, as shown by Kirkpatrick (1994), the foundations of AM lie on "specific, and therefore debatable, positions within Anglo-American analytic philosophy" (Carling, 1994, p.61), in particular Wittgenstein and Davidson. Much of AM is "grounded philosophically in an empiricist, and more specifically positivist, commitment to an instrumentalist theory of meaning" (Weldes, 1988, p.360). And the presumption in favour of analytical philosophy and positivism of some analytical Marxists may be overstated.<sup>15</sup> However, first, logical positivism is not a defining feature of AM: as shown below, this common misunderstanding (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 1994; Tarrit, 2006) stems from conflating AM and RCM. The emphasis on "positivism" sometimes is only a statement "against post-modernist, conventionalist, relativist, anti-objectivists ... [and as] a claim about the importance of observation in the development of science" (Wright, 2001, p.16).

Second, there is no proof that *no* part of Marx's theory can be fruitfully examined using analytical philosophy. Sayers (1989) argues that the debate within AM on Marx and ethics shows the impossibility of capturing the historical nature of Marx's theory using analytical philosophy.<sup>16</sup> However, Levine (1982) provides an analytical reconstruction of Marx's approach based on HM that is consistent with Sayers'.<sup>17</sup> More generally, it is unclear that in AM, "[t]he analytic supplants the critical and, in the process, all normative concerns vanish" (Bronner, 1990, p.244). Further, Cohen provides a recognisably Marxist, if not orthodox, version of HM, as acknowledged by critics: "*Karl Marx's Theory of History*, whatever one thinks of the interpretation of [HM] offered there, is one of the classics of twentieth-century Marxist philosophy" (Callinicos, 2001, p.171).<sup>18</sup> Indeed, a reconstruction of Marx's theory motivated by high standards of clarity and rigour is "far from alien to the spirit of Marx's own understanding of his project" (Kirkpatrick, 1994, p.36).<sup>19</sup> Finally, Sayers' (1984) critique focuses on Cohen's specific philosophical approach (which Sayers describes as positivist-empiricist, Humean), but does not necessarily extend to the whole of analytical philosophy. Marxist analytical philosophers emphasise that analytical philosophy "is held together not by common doctrines but by common standards of successful practice" (Miller, 1984, p.4).<sup>20</sup> Indeed, an interesting post-positivist analytical approach to Marx has been proposed where "the style of analytic philosophy is divorced from positivist substance" (Miller, 1984, p.4).

Actually, AM has reconstructed and defended a distinctive, rational kernel of Marxist theory, which comprises the following three core components:<sup>21</sup> (1) the Marxist theory of history, or HM, which is interpreted as a theory which sees

“socialism as a possible product of the materialist dynamics and contradictions of capitalism” (Wright, Levine, and Sober, 1992, p.186) with an important role for class struggle; (2) the Marxist theory of the state, according to which all states are class dictatorships expressing the rule of the economically dominant class. To each economic structure, there corresponds a different form of state. The proletarian state is the only state whose historical aim is to eliminate the need for states, a notion that is incompatible with “the statism endemic to all strains of modern political philosophy, including liberalism” (Levine, 2003, p.163); (3) a set of normative ideals that include self-realisation, autonomy, community, and equality in a classless society.

Third, there is no universally accepted definition of dialectics and it is unclear that no form of dialectical reasoning is compatible with analytical philosophy. Hunt (1998) and Arnsperger (2003) have proposed an analytical dialectics; Wood (2004, Part 5) provides an interesting analytical discussion of dialectics.<sup>22</sup> Smith argues not only that “systematic dialectical logic and the search for microfoundations characteristic of [AM] are compatible in principle” (Smith, 1989, p.329), but also that “micro-foundations must be provided for dialectical transitions” (ibid.).<sup>23</sup> Finally, it is unclear that “dialectical logic” would *per se* revert all AM negative conclusions on Marx’s theory. The attempts to rescue the traditional labour theory of value or to criticise the AM theory of classes based on some form of dialectics, for instance, seem rather vague and unconvincing.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the relevance of the previous issues, Definition 1 cannot really explain the controversy it has generated.<sup>25</sup> In fact, in order to identify the minimum common denominator of AM, it does not include the most controversial

axioms, which are endorsed by some of its most prominent exponents, in particular Jon Elster and John Roemer, and which distinguish RCM.

DEFINITION 2. RCM is defined by C2 and C3 plus a commitment to:

C1'. The use of "state of the arts methods of analytical philosophy and 'positivist' social science" (Roemer, 1986C, pp.3-4).

C4'.(i) MI: "the doctrine that all social phenomena – their structure and their change – are in principle explicable in ways that only involve individuals – their properties, their goals, their beliefs and their actions" (Elster, 1985, p.5);

C4'.(ii) Rational choice explanations. This "involves showing that the action was rational and that it was performed because it was rational. That the action was rational means that given the beliefs of the agent, the action was the best way for him to realize his plans or desires. Hence, rationality goes along with some form of maximizing behaviour" (Elster, 1985, p.9).

Contrary to a common misconception, Definition 2 does not apply to all analytical Marxists.<sup>26</sup> Cohen's (1978) reconstruction of Marx's theory of history relies on functional explanations, which "*very roughly* [hold] that the character of what is explained is determined by its effect on what explains it (Cohen, 1986, p.221). In Cohen's HM, "Marxism is *fundamentally* concerned not with behaviour but with the forces and relations constraining and directing it" (Cohen, 1982, p.489).<sup>27</sup> Van Parijs (1982, 1983) supports the search for microfoundations, but does not subscribe to C4'.<sup>28</sup> Levine, Sober, and Wright (1987) propose an antireductionist view of explanation that allows for supra-individual postulates. Wright (1989) endorses a realist view of science and methodological pluralism.

Wright (1985, 1997) proposes a theory of class in which class relations and class structure are the pivotal concepts, and the explanation of social processes need not “be reduced to the attributes of the individuals choosing and acting. The [social, or class] relations themselves can be explanatory” (Wright, 2005, p.14, fn.11).<sup>29</sup>

Definition 2, however, captures the essential elements of originality of AM, – more precisely, RCM, – and it clarifies the main terms of the controversy. Its main *methodological* corollary is that MI is the only legitimate foundation for the social sciences,<sup>30</sup> and the only parts of Marx’s theory which “make sense” are those that can be analysed consistently with MI or, more narrowly, with standard “rational choice models: general equilibrium theory, game theory and the arsenal of modelling techniques developed by neoclassical economics” (Roemer, 1986B, p.192). Elster (1985, p.7) argues that Marx was “committed to [MI], at least intermittently”, but, largely due to the influence of Hegelian philosophy, he did not adopt MI consistently. Elster reads various passages (especially in the *Grundrisse*, on the movement of capital and the subordinate explanatory role of competition) as an “explicit denial of [MI]” (ibid.). Then, he concludes that Marx was methodologically inconsistent or, more strongly, intellectually weak, because “it is difficult to avoid the impression that he often wrote whatever came into his mind, and then forgot about it as he moved on to other matters” (ibid., p.508).

RCM typically reaches two kinds of *substantive* conclusions on Marxian propositions and concepts: some are considered either wrong or impossible to conceptualise consistently with C4’, and thus are discarded. Roemer (1981, 1986A) and Elster (1985, p.155-161) dispose of the labour theory of value, the theory of the falling rate of profit, and “the various other theories of capitalist

crisis scattered around in [Marx's] writings ... [which] tend to be trivial, or rambling and repetitive, or obscure" (Elster, 1985, p.161). After a long journey through Marx's writings, Elster concludes that "Today Marxian economics is, with a few exceptions, intellectually dead" (Elster, 1986A, p.60),<sup>31</sup> alongside scientific socialism, dialectical materialism, and the theory of productive forces and relations of production (ibid., p.186-200). Przeworski (1985A) and Elster (1982) challenge the Marxian theory of class struggle and the theory of the state.

Other concepts and propositions can be analysed within a rational choice framework, but need a substantial re-definition (this partly explains the emphasis on C2 and C3). "[I]f one accepts the methodological validity of individualistic postulates, most if not all traditional concerns of Marxist theory must be radically reformulated. Whether ... the ensuing theory will be in any distinct sense 'Marxist', I do not know" (Przeworski, 1985B, p.400). Some intuitions on the symbiotic interaction between classes can be analysed in a game-theoretic framework, but at the cost of a substantive shift in both meaning and political implications.<sup>32</sup> Roemer provides microfoundations to exploitation and classes, and outlines an original Marxist political philosophy, thanks to (possibly at the cost of) a reduction of Marx's theories to an almost exclusive emphasis on asset inequalities.<sup>33</sup> Actually, he now holds that even "exploitation theory is a domicile that we need no longer maintain: it has provided a home for raising a vigorous family, who now must move on" (Roemer, 1985, p.33).<sup>34</sup>

After reformulating Marxian microeconomics in neoclassical terms, Roemer argues that "even if one estimates that not much is left ..., or that what is left is not particularly Marxian, that is not damaging, to this enterprise at least"

(Roemer, 1986A, p.3). In the closing sentence of *Making Sense of Marx*, Elster claims that “it is still possible to be a Marxist ... I find that most of the views that *I* hold to be true and important, I can trace back to Marx” (Elster, 1985, p.531). But the echo of Marx is very faint indeed, in a book where most of Marx’s claims are deemed “pointless”, “absurd”, “wishful thinking” (see, e.g., *ibid.*, pp.191, 317, 390), such that “It is not possible today, morally or intellectually, to be a Marxist in the traditional sense” (*ibid.*, p.531). Except for a loose, atheoretical affiliation with (analytical) Marxism, it is unclear in what sense “Elster [1985] remains radical and sympathetic to the Marxian project, and ... defends many of its fundamental components” (Levine, 1986, p.728).<sup>35</sup> Cohen, too, has recently raised doubts on the explanatory power and normative relevance of HM, and on Marxism in general.<sup>36</sup> “To the extent that Marxism is still alive ... it presents itself as a set of values and a set of designs for realizing those values” (Cohen, 2000A, p.103), which coincide with left liberal egalitarianism.<sup>37</sup>

Given the scope and relevance of these claims, it is not surprising that RCM has generated a vast debate both on methodology and on substantive propositions.

### 3. GENERAL METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

A first set of criticisms concern the use of mathematics. According to some critics, formal models are inherently associated with bourgeois science and politics. In the struggle for socialism “any means-ends or cost-benefit calculation would tend to produce reformist solutions ... [it is] not a question of quantitative, individualistic means-ends or petty cost-benefit calculations, but a question of life and death” (Kieve, 1986, p.574). Similarly, Bronner argues that “all political

phenomena in general, and movements in particular, become equalized through the mathematical or game-theoretical laws in which they gain their definition as social actors. At best, the question of qualitative change is circumvented” (Bronner, 1990, p.250). These criticisms are not convincing; Marx studied pure mathematics and was convinced about the opportunity to apply it to the social sciences.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, they rely on the questionable claim that there is no mathematical object that can be used to analyse any part of Marx’s theory.

Even the weaker claims that “[t]he pursuit of mathematical clarity abolishes time, purges historical and social theory of their temporal dimension” (Kirkpatrick, 1994, p.48);<sup>39</sup> or that the emphasis on mathematical or game-theoretical models leads AM to “liquidate ... the normative purpose of the entire theoretical and practical enterprise” (Bronner, 1990, p.248) seem unwarranted. There is no reason to believe that mathematical models imply static or ahistoric theories, let alone the loss of any normative content. These views seem as one-sided as the “mathematical fetishism” often attributed to AM.

More subtly, post-modern Marxists deflate the explanatory power of formal models to the vanishing point, interpreting them as a “form of ‘illustration.’” For Marxists, mathematical concepts and models can be understood as metaphors or heuristic devices” (Ruccio, 1988, p.36).<sup>40</sup> It is unclear that this view can be supported by Marx’s writings and no textual evidence is provided. Rather than a specific interpretation of Marx, it reflects a post-modern epistemological stance where mathematics, and all scientific languages, are reduced to mere “narratives,” which raises the familiar issue of how competing hypotheses can be rationally evaluated. The interpretation of mathematics as a form of “illustration” also

reflects the post-modern denial of the explanatory power of theoretical abstractions. The emphasis on rather elusive “historically concrete social processes”, however, does not lead beyond the formulation of vague, if not empty, general statements, such as that Marxian class “can be analysed as the determinate result of the entire constellation of social processes that can be said to make up a society or social formation at any point in time; in turn, it will be only one of the myriad determinants of those nonclass social processes” (Ruccio, 1988, p.38).

A related criticism is based on the idea that some core concepts of Marxian social science cannot be fully captured by formal models. An emphasis on formalism can obscure important theoretical and political issues, and “enervate Marxist theory in the name of rigor” (Anderson and Thompson, 1988, p.228). Some critical facts about capitalism “can be established without mathematical proof” (Wood, 1989, p.47). According to critics, for instance, Roemer’s theory of exploitation “loses in social and historical relevance what it gains in logical and analytical rigor” (Dymski and Elliott, 1989, p.367). More generally, formalism can obscure issues of empirical relevance, because “‘Does it make sense?’ has priority over the question of its empirical truth” (Kirkpatrick, 1994, p.43). These objections raise the issue of the status of what cannot be modelled formally, but also of how methodological approaches orient substantive research. In RCM “a convincing social scientific explanation ... must be backed by a deductive, formal, mathematical model. While this does not inherently mean that all theory must buy into the assumptions of rational choice, micro-models, still, since these tend to be the most tractable mathematically, a commitment to this kind of

rigorous deductive model building tends to underwrite substantive theory grounded in such rational actor premises” (Wright, 2001, p.15).<sup>41</sup>

These objections are forceful. They raise doubts on an excessive emphasis on formal models in the social sciences and suggest that a rigorous interpretation of assumptions and results, of their scope and limitations is necessary. Yet they do not entail the rejection of mathematics. “A model is necessarily one schematic image of a theory, and one must not be so myopic as to believe other schematic images cannot exist. Nevertheless ... the production of different and contradicting models of the same theory can be the very process that directs our focus to the gray areas of the theory” (Roemer, 1981, p.3). Moreover, often “lurking behind every informal causal explanation is a tacit formal model. All explanatory theories contain assumptions, claims about the conditions under which the explanations hold” (Wright, 1989, p.45). It may be argued that formal modelling tends to force researchers to make such assumptions and claims explicit and open to critical scrutiny.<sup>42</sup> Models are also important for empirical research in the social sciences because, owing to the difficulty of creating real experimental conditions, “thought experiments are essential to give plausibility to the causal claim we actually make about any concrete problem” (Wright, 1989, p.45).

In sum, the emphasis on the “contemporary tools of logic, mathematics, and model building ... [and the] unabashed commitment to the necessity for abstraction” (Roemer, 1986C, p.3) is neither trivial nor uncontroversial. But it is sufficiently general to be interpreted in many ways and thus it seems insufficient to reject RCM, let alone AM, a priori. From this perspective, the choice of modelling tools is more important than general discussions on mathematics.

A second set of objections focus precisely on neoclassical tools, arguing that neoclassical assumptions necessarily lead to non-Marxian results.<sup>43</sup> This objection is pertinent, because it is grounded in the difficulty of *inter-theoretic reduction*, a well-known problem in the philosophy of sciences (Sensat, 1988; Weldes, 1989), and its relevance is indirectly confirmed by the mainly negative results reached by RCM. Yet, although it can be forcefully raised against specific models, its generality is less evident as it relies on a narrow, if unrealistic, description of neoclassical economics as “ill-suited to modeling anything but supply, demand, and technical relationships” (Anderson and Thompson, 1988, p.225).<sup>44</sup>

According to some critics, the individualistic bent of neoclassical economics “will generally *preclude* (not just exogenize), as a matter of logic, the norms and other factors that actually determine the behaviour in question” (Baker and Weisbrot, 1994, p.1108). The ambiguity of this claim is telling: if the analysis of such issues is precluded *as a matter of logic*, the qualifier “generally” is redundant. Instead, because no proof of the claim exists, “generally” should be read as requiring that neoclassical individualism be “carried to its logical conclusion” (ibid.). This is a much weaker and more plausible claim, which depends inter alia on the definition of neoclassical economics adopted.

For instance, the Marxian labour/labour-power distinction, whose absence is widely considered one of the main limits of Roemer’s theory of exploitation,<sup>45</sup> can be modelled within a broadly defined neoclassical framework, as in Bowles and Gintis (1990). Marx’s theory of the falling profit rate can be analysed as a Prisoner Dilemma. In general, it is unclear how “[t]he congeniality between game theory and reformist policies” (Carchedi, 1989, p.109) could be proved. “The

simple correlation between the content of particular theories and the methods used is ... insufficient to establish the truth of this hypothesis. What would have to be shown is that simply by using game theory, the critical, emancipatory content of the analysis is subverted” (Wright, 2001, p.23). Instead, game theory is a large box of tools that do not necessarily require individualistic assumptions and can be fruitfully applied to Marxian economics, as suggested also by critics of AM.<sup>46</sup>

The non-neutrality of techniques and the problems of intertheoretic reduction are important, and suggest special caution in the choice of tools. As noted by Roemer (1982B, p.285), not all questions of interest in Marxism can be attacked with general equilibrium and game theory. Static general equilibrium models do not seem “very suitable for founding the theory of history” (Carling, 1997, p.771).<sup>47</sup> Standard rational choice models normally consider as exogenous what critical social science should seek to explain, that is “the social structures which set the terms of what is reasonable and preferable in any given context” (Wood, 1990, p.116). Yet the rejection of all attempts at cross-fertilisation seems unwarranted, especially if neoclassical economics is considered as a large, heterogeneous toolbox. Schwartz (1995, p.283) and Veneziani (2005) argue that Roemer’s static general equilibrium model is inadequate to analyse exploitation, and it is unclear that the standard “neoclassical model of a competitive economy is not a bad place for Marxists to start their study of idealized capitalism” (Roemer, 1986B, p.192). Yet they do not prove a general impossibility result. Instead, the analysis of Roemer’s economies suggests alternative assumptions and formalisations, including within a broader neoclassical framework.

Despite the relevance of the previous issues, the main methodological debate has revolved around C4' and its role in Marxism. On the one hand, many AM criticisms of functionalism seem compelling, especially if strong variants are considered, according to which the beneficial consequences of some institution or social practice are sufficient to explain it.<sup>48</sup> The functionalist tendency “to postulate a purpose without a purposive actor” (Elster, 1982, p.454) and to assume that (systemic or class) needs create their own fulfilment (ibid., p.462) seems unsatisfactory. This is especially true when functionalism is associated to teleological views of history and society, where long-term tendencies are ultimate explanatory forces and “the earlier stages are seen as tending irresistibly towards the latter as being explained by their contribution to the latter” (Elster, 1985, p.114).<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Elster is “very effective in exposing numerous examples of the lazy appeal to the idea that this or that institution was serving to reproduce capitalist relations of production” (Callinicos, 2003, p.10).

On the other hand, three important caveats are of the order. Firstly, the limits of functionalism do not imply that functional explanations ought to be rejected on methodological grounds. As convincingly shown by van Parijs (1982), Elster’s own analysis contradicts his claim that “functional analysis ... has no place in the social sciences, because there is no sociological analogy to the theory of natural selection” (Elster, 1982, p.463).<sup>50</sup> He explicitly makes room for processes guided by natural selection, as in evolutionary models of market competition, for models of social change as an absorbing Markov process, and for reinforcement.<sup>51</sup>

More interestingly, Elster (1986B) has reconsidered his critique of Cohen’s account of functional explanations.<sup>52</sup> The latter “can be sustained by *consequence*

*laws*, of the form: ‘Whenever  $x$  would have favourable consequences for  $y$ , then  $x$  appears’. If a law of this form is established, we may affirm that  $x$  is explained by its favourable consequences for  $y$ , even if no mechanism is indicated” (Elster, 1982, p.478, fn.8). Elster has conceded that for functional explanations to be valid, there must be some “mechanism responsible for a phenomenon having the consequences which (functionally) explain it” (Callinicos, 1989, p.9), but the full feedback loop by which an institution is maintained by its beneficial effects need not be specified. But then, given these qualifications, “What is left [of Elster’s criticism] is a sensible but unexciting warning against fallacious functionalizing” (Schwartz, 1993, p.296). This is not to say that functional explanations provide a satisfactory account of social phenomena.<sup>53</sup> However, “functionalist Marxism was not made illegitimate by the mere fact that it tries to explain social phenomena by reference to their latent functions” (van Parijs, 1982, p.509).<sup>54</sup>

Secondly, Elster’s critique of Marx’s theory on methodological grounds has been questioned. In fact, “nowhere does Elster show Marx committed to views that in principle deny microfoundational accounts” (Levine, 1986, p.726).<sup>55</sup> Elster finds Marx “guilty” of functionalism and teleological reasoning often based on a piecemeal reading of Marx’s texts, with a propensity to extrapolate relevant passages from the context.<sup>56</sup> Or, as in the case of HM, based on the identification of Marx’s theory with Cohen’s functionalist interpretation of it, whereby “the economic structure has the function of developing the productive forces, and the superstructure the function of stabilizing the economic structure” (Cohen, 1980, p.129) and a “theory of historical inevitability” (Wright, Levine, and Sober, 1992,

p.53) with a strong teleological flavour emerges. Cohen's technological determinism, however, is not the only possible interpretation of HM.<sup>57</sup>

At most, Elster shows that Marx does not support C4', hardly a startling result and arguably not enough to reject Marx's theory. Actually, various critics have suggested that Elster's arguments are undermined by the same kind of problems that he identifies in Marx's theory, and his methodological propositions would not stand up to his own procedure of critical assessment (Levine, 1986, p.723). Warren (1988, pp.454-461) argues that Elster does not provide a single consistent definition of MI and often slips from one to another without proper justification. According to McCarney (1989, p.156) "[t]here is uncertainty as to the kind of explanatory moves which are licensed and, more especially, prohibited by his methodological commitments", as shown by the repeated warnings of the danger of "premature reductionism" or by the treatment of classes as strategic actors.<sup>58</sup> Van Parijs (1982, p.510, fn.3) suggests that "Not only does Elster (1982) not provide a case for [MI], ... he does not even believe in it". According to Moggach (1991, pp.44-45), in his writings Elster gives inconsistent answers concerning the role of rational choice explanations.

Thirdly, criticisms of methodological holism and functionalism do not automatically lend support to C4'.<sup>59</sup> To deny that "[e]xplanation proceeds from the laws either of self-regulation or of development of [supra-individual] entities" (Elster, 1985, p.6) does not entail endorsing C4'. As noted by Callinicos (1987, p.83), "methodological collectivism is the contrary of MI not its contradictory". Conversely, to reject MI does not imply the adoption of a collectivist ontology: it only implies the existence of irreducible social structures, so that not all social

phenomena and institutions can be explained *only* in terms of individuals.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, pace Przeworski (1985B, p.400) and Buchanan (1987, p.107), rational-choice theory is not the only reasonable way to “close the loop” of functional explanations: RCM “is just one out of many ‘alternatives’ to functionalist Marxism” (van Parijs, 1982, p.511, fn.27). Many critics of AM have rejected both functionalism and the arguably reductionist RCM view of agency.<sup>61</sup>

In sum, the fact that “The avoidance of microeconomic analysis can lead to functionalism” (Roemer, 1981, p.114) is by no means sufficient to support C4’. As admitted by Elster (1986B, p.202), C4’ should be evaluated *per se* as the proper explanatory strategy in the social sciences, rather than in opposition to functionalism and holism, which sometimes appear in AM writings just as a rhetorical “straw man” (Foley, 1993, p.301). Neither RCM arguments nor the debates in the philosophy of science, however, provide decisive support for C4’.

C4’.(i) encompasses two separate assumptions: the first one postulates the possibility of *intertheoretic reduction*, namely the reduction of macro-level theories to micro-level theories, without loss of meaning or explanatory content. A thorough analysis of this important issue in the philosophy of science goes beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that intertheoretic reduction is in general quite problematic, as shown by Levine, Sober, and Wright (1987, pp.75-8), Sensat (1988, sect. 2.2), and Weldes (1989, p.363-6). It may lead to “the complete *replacement* of the secondary theory, including its ontology, with the primary theory due to the transformation of both the meanings and the content of the secondary theory” (Weldes, 1989, p.365). This should act at least as a warning to identify the hard core of Marx’s theory when evaluating the adoption of C4’.

Secondly, C4'.(i) entails neither “an atomistic perspective (it grants that relations between individuals are not always reducible to monadic predicates)” (Elster, 1993, p.7).<sup>62</sup> Nor that everything about the social outcomes of behaviour can be explained only in terms of individual intentions.<sup>63</sup> It does require, however, that “ultimate ontological and explanatory priority is accorded to the individual” (Weldes, 1989, p.356). The rationale for C4'.(i) can be stated as follows. “If the goal of a science is to *explain by means of laws*, there is a need to reduce the time-span between explanans and explanandum – between cause and effect – as much as possible, in order to avoid spurious explanations” (Elster, 1985, p.5). The specification of a micro-mechanism is necessary for the credibility of a macro law, because it shows how it “actually works”. The process of micro reduction also enhances our understanding of an explanation. “To explain is to provide a *mechanism*, to open up the black box and show the nuts and bolts, the cogs and wheels, the desires and beliefs that generate the aggregate outcomes” (Elster, 1985, p.5).<sup>64</sup> This is also due to the fact that in the social sciences “we do not find the strong types of regularities and laws that would make us confident in the causal connectedness of social phenomena” (Little, 1989, p.167).

Moreover, actions are the outcome of the decisions of subjects endowed with consciousness and only individuals possess consciousness. AM reject structuralist and functionalist conceptions, dominant in some strands of Marxism, which reduce agency to structure by viewing agents as bearers of social norms, “which they first ‘internalize’ and eventually act out” (Przeworski, 1985B, p.382). Or by conceiving of individual choice as severely limited, if not entirely determined, by structural constraints on individual feasible sets.<sup>65</sup> These approaches seem

inadequate, but it is unclear that MI provides a satisfactory alternative, because “[t]he tension between individual and structural explanations is ... resolved (or dissolved), by fiat, by denying ontological and explanatory status to social structures” (Weldes, 1989, p.356).<sup>66</sup> This reductionist stance seems problematic.

At the ontological level, it is unclear where the process of reduction should end. On the one hand, individuals can be understood as structures liable of further decomposition in more elementary parts (e.g., cells). On the other hand, even neoclassical economics admits supra-individual units, by only requiring that they be well-defined decision makers.<sup>67</sup> More importantly, “ontological reducibility (decomposability without remainder) does not *entail* explanatory reducibility” (Levine, 1986, p.724). On the ontological claim that societies are collections of individuals, “holists and individualists need not dispute” (Nielsen, 1989, p.526). To deny the possibility of purposive action to supra-individual entities is arguably a basic requirement of any materialist ontology, but it does not imply MI.<sup>68</sup> For instance, pace Elster (1985, p.460), “it is trivially true that language is made up of properties of individuals ... [but] one cannot form a concept of language that refers only to the empirical existence of individuals ... [because] language is the kind of thing that emerges from social interaction” (Warren, 1988, p.455).

In general, macro-level theories might provide a satisfactory answer to some questions and a micro-mechanism need not improve an explanation. “World War II was, in the sense in question, just an aggregation of subatomic particles in motion. But knowing all there is to know about these subatomic particles would not help us, in all likelihood, in knowing, say, the causes of World War II” (Levine, 1986, pp.724-5, fn.12).<sup>69</sup> The appropriate level of explanation depends

on the object of analysis; for instance, a macro approach seems more appropriate in the analysis of the dynamics of animal populations, where what matters is the behaviour of aggregates, not the choices of single individuals. Levine, Sober, and Wright (1987, pp.76-7) distinguish between *tokens* and *types* and argue that token-reductionism – the micro-reduction of specific instances of social types – is desirable and consistent with a materialistic approach. But type-type reductionism is not possible in the case of *supervenient* properties and relations, where many distributions of properties of individuals can realize the same social type.

Consider now C4'.(ii). To begin with, it is important to note that C4'.(i) and C4'.(ii) are logically independent, a point not always noted by critics.<sup>70</sup> MI does not preclude non-intentional explanations of human behaviour, and “the inculcation of norms, habits and rituals or even psychoanalytic theories of the unconscious” (Levine, Sober, and Wright, 1987, p.83) can explain individual actions.<sup>71</sup> In turn, intentionality in MI does not imply rational choice theory or neoclassicism.<sup>72</sup> Intentional explanations only require the specification of a goal for the sake of which an action is undertaken; neither optimisation nor even “satisficing” behaviour are necessary. Rational choice requires in addition that the beliefs guiding behaviour be internally consistent, plausible and caused by the available evidence.<sup>73</sup> Finally, C4' does not imply selfish behaviour. “MI is a claim about valid social explanations and not (necessarily) a theory which conceives human beings as isolated and competitive monads” (Callinicos, 1987, p.68).

In RCM, there is a presumption in favour of rationality and selfishness, “but it is ... [not grounded] in any substantive assumptions about human nature” (Elster, 1985, p.6). AM acknowledge that the conception of “undifferentiated,

unchanging, and unrelated ‘individuals’” (Przeworski, 1985B, p.381) typical of rational choice theory is limited and “the theory of individual action must contain more contextual information than the present paradigm of rational choice admits” (ibid.). A person’s interests “need not be narrowly conceived as inducing purely selfish preferences or material goods ... [Moreover] more subtly, it is not always possible for a person to be ‘rational’ ... because a person may have many dimensions to his interests, and there may be no satisfactory way of aggregating the effect of an action over all these” (Roemer, 1989, p.378). Besides, “rational-choice models of behaviour do not yield uniquely determined predictions in all cases ... [therefore] rational-choice explanation needs in general a supplement of causal explanation” (Elster, 1986B, p.209). Much of Elster’s work actually shows the limitations of rational choice theory.<sup>74</sup> Yet these issues are neglected in RCM models, which are based on a conventional view of individuals and on the identification of intentionality with standard instrumental rationality.<sup>75</sup> This would seem to lead to an inconsistency: Elster and Roemer “use models founded on neoclassical principles, and make claims about Marxism on this basis, but they do not believe that these principles are true” (Howard and King, 1992, p.349).

*Per se* this inconsistency is only apparent. The adoption of rational choice theory “has little or nothing to do with the empirical observation that this is how individuals ‘are’” (Kirkpatrick, 1994, p.46). The assumption that people behave rationally “is largely a methodological one. One cannot even start to make sense of people unless one assumes that they are by and large rational” (Elster, 1986B, p.210). A similar justification underlies the assumption of selfishness. “Not all rational actions are selfish. The assumption that agents are selfishly motivated

does, however, have a methodological privilege, for ... [n]on-selfish behaviour is logically parasitic on selfishness” (Elster, 1985, p.9). Moreover, RCM views altruism as the only alternative, which is at least as arbitrary as selfishness.<sup>76</sup> Finally, a realistic description of society, with differently motivated individuals “may make any deductive analysis next to impossible. The strength of [MI] is methodological: it lies in the willingness ... to ignore all complications that would impede getting answers to central questions” (Przeworski, 1985B, pp.386-7).

But then listing a set of well-known criticisms and violations of the axioms rational choice theory (including issues of intransitivity, satiation, incompleteness, etc.) *per se* is not sufficient to dismiss RCM, let alone AM, pace Philp and Young (2002) and Tarrit (2006). Violations in the axioms of a theory do not automatically warrant its wholesale rejection. According to Elster (1979, p.116), despite all problems, “there is a hard core of important cases where the rational choice model is indispensable. ... [T]his model is logically prior to its alternatives”. For the criticisms to be convincing, one ought to show how taking account of such violations would improve explanations. It is not obvious, though, how, say, intransitivity would be helpful in this sense. According to Roemer (1989, p.379) “[w]hen rational choice is not possible, there is a fundamental indeterminacy in human behaviour. Banking on that indeterminacy as a reason to invoke holistic explanations is like invoking the uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics to rescue free will.” This reply may be unsatisfactory, because it tends to identify rational behaviour with standard instrumental rationality, whereas the means to be “by and large rational” is a matter of dispute. It forcefully suggests, though, that more is needed to reject C4’.(ii) and criticise RCM.<sup>77</sup>

#### 4. STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS AND ENDOGENOUS PREFERENCES

Section 3 critically evaluates the methodological tenets of RCM and raises doubts on the view that it is the only scientific approach to Marxist theory. A wholesale rejection of RCM, let alone AM, on a priori methodological grounds, however, seems unwarranted. The debate on C4' is far from being settled in the philosophy of sciences, and an analysis of RCM uniquely at a general methodological level is unlikely to lead very far. This section takes a different perspective and focuses on two specific issues, namely structural constraints on individual choice and the social formation of agents. There are several reasons for this choice. First, both issues are of foremost importance in the social sciences, and in particular in Marxist theory, as acknowledged by AM. It is unclear, though, that they are consistent with C4'. Second, they lead to reconsider RCM results. Therefore, third, a robust, but focused critical perspective on RCM can be identified which avoids a priori rejections, fosters dialogue between alternative approaches, and suggests directions for further research in Marxist theory.

Structural constraints relate to the problem of generalising individual-level predicates to group-level predicates: if the individual property is not generalisable, a fallacy of composition may arise. Fallacies of composition are central in the social sciences: “economic agents tend to generalize locally valid views into invalid global statements, because of a failure to perceive that causal relations that obtain *ceteris paribus* may not hold unrestrictedly” (Elster, 1985, p.19), leading to counterfinality and social contradictions. This implies, however, that “the group as a whole faces a constraint that no individual member of the group faces”

(Lebowitz, 1994, p.167), which suggests at least that MI be refined because the analysis of the whole cannot be strictly reduced to the analysis of its parts.

In AM, this issue forcefully emerges in Cohen's (1983, 1985) analysis of proletarian unfreedom. Cohen argues that proletarians are not forced to remain in their class and are individually free to improve their social condition. To generalise such freedom, however, would involve a fallacy of composition: it is impossible for all proletarians to exit their class in capitalism, and each proletarian "is free only on condition that the others do not exercise their similarly conditional freedom" (Cohen, 1983, p.11). Individual freedom coexists with collective unfreedom. But then, knowledge of group-level properties and constraints "is prior in the explanatory order to understanding the conditional and contingent state of the individuals" (Lebowitz, 1994, p.167). Social structures have explanatory autonomy, because "agents' powers are partly dependent on their position in social relations" (Callinicos, 1987, p.89).

In general both individual and structural constraints shape agents' choices. In Roemer's theory, an agent "acquires membership in a certain class ... by virtue of choosing the best option available subject to the constraints she faces" (Roemer, 1988A, p.10). This would seem to support an purely individualistic perspective. Veneziani (2005) argues, however, that Roemer can adopt an individualistic perspective, while retaining some crucial Marxian insights, only by assuming that individual constraints severely limit agents' choices. By ruling savings out, for instance, the reproduction of the social structure is guaranteed by fiat: in a sense, structural constraints are implicitly incorporated into individual ones, rather than being explicitly modelled. Similarly, in his analysis of social conflict, Przeworski

considers Mrs. Jones, “a lady who owns some land, is married to a machinist, is a mother of a prospective accountant, and is white and catholic ... Her objectives and her resources do not classify her as a worker; she decides to become a worker given her objectives and resources” (Przeworski, 1985A, pp.94-5). In the light of Cohen’s analysis, this is a one-sided perspective, which may explain why an agent remains in the working class, but not the structure of social classes.

The second issue concerns the social determination of agents. MI requires an asocial view of agents, whereby individuals are logically prior and their attributes and beliefs are determined only by the actions and properties of individuals, or else structural features would play a fundamental explanatory role, via their effect on preferences and beliefs.<sup>78</sup> The very distinction between individual and social predicates is problematic, however. In general, “the individual-level predicates relied on by the individualist have built into them salient features of the relevant social context” (Weldes, 1989, p.361). Many RCM assumptions, such as profit maximisation, the existence of enforceable property rights, and a labour market, presuppose certain social relations.<sup>79</sup> Even within given social relations, many individual attributes are socially determined. Indeed, among the defining features of Marxism is the belief that “in some way life – the things that human beings in their acting do and accept – conditions consciousness so that ‘life’ does not arise out of ‘consciousness’ but ‘consciousness’ out of life” (Nielsen, 1989, p.537).

Analytical Marxists acknowledge the importance of the social formation of the individual. The “causal explanation of mental states, such as desires and beliefs” (Elster, 1985, p.4) is the first tier of Elster’s theory of scientific explanation.<sup>80</sup> Roemer rebuts the neoclassical defence of wealth inequalities based

on heterogeneous time preferences, because “[a]ttitudes toward saving are shaped by culture, and cultures are formed by the objective conditions that [agents] face” (Roemer, 1988A, p.62). Crucial to Marxism, and to AM, is “a commitment to the malleability of human preferences, to the social formation of the individual ... [whereas] the neoclassical theory ... is weak and misleading, because of the non-autonomous formation of preferences” (Roemer, 1986B, p.201). In general, “individuals are formed by society, and these individuals react rationally to their environment to produce tomorrow’s environment” (Roemer, 1986B, p.196).<sup>81</sup>

There is no proper analysis of preference formation in RCM, however. Roemer (1986B, p.195) admits that the social formation of ideas challenges the methodological premises of RCM, “since the rational choice model assumes the maximisation of utility subject to constraint”. He suggests, however, that this issue can be analysed within a modified rational choice framework, by “postulating some apparatus of meta-preferences: a person has a variety of preference profiles he can ‘choose’ to have, and given the information in his environment ... he ‘chooses’ an appropriate conception of welfare” (Roemer, 1986B, pp.198-9). This undeveloped suggestion is interesting, but as such it begs all sorts of questions and it raises the fundamental issue of infinite regress.

Generally, RCM takes preferences as given for theoretical or technical convenience: “once the issue of the formation of preferences has been settled, then the most convincing and fundamental explanation of a social phenomenon is ... one that explains [it] as the result of individuals pursuing their interests ... subject to the constraints they face” (Roemer, 1989, p.378). The formation of preferences is treated as de facto secondary, at least methodologically.<sup>82</sup> In

Roemer's theory, for instance, the normative relevance of exploitation depends mostly on the historical processes generating DOPA; he only notes that "Having a theory of how capitalism (or any economic structure) shapes preferences *would add to the story*" (Roemer, 1988A, p.177; italics added). Similarly, endogenous preferences seem crucial to understand collective action, due to the importance of solidarity and class consciousness. Yet Elster's game-theoretical analysis abstracts from this issue. "Game theory takes preferences as given, and has nothing to offer concerning preference formation" (Elster, 1982, p.480, fn.46).

If preferences can be taken as given in most cases, though, it is unclear in what sense the social formation of agents is deemed a core feature of Marxism. Conversely, the RCM "claims for the importance of a Marxism based on rational choice [do not] reflect the limitations of neoclassical methods, and the qualifications on rationality, which they themselves accept" (Howard and King, 1989, p.408). If endogenous preferences are central to Marxist theory then it is odd to draw general conclusions on Marx's propositions based on models which take them as given. Methodologically, RCM does not address the challenge that the endogeneity of preferences poses to C4', and tends to elude the issue of whether the simplifying assumption is adequate, and whether preference formation and analysis can be neatly separated.<sup>83</sup> Substantively, in many parts of Marx's theory the two issues abstracted away seem of essential relevance.

Consider first Cohen's reconstruction of HM, in which history is ultimately driven by the development of productive forces. This view relies on a notion of transhistorical "rational adaptive practices" of human beings, who face conditions of relative scarcity and "possess intelligence of a kind and degree which enables

them to improve their situations” (Cohen, 1978, p.152). Scarcity and rationality lead to a tendency for productive forces to develop and, eventually, to the transition from one mode of production to the other. The technological determinism and the underlying conception of rationality of Cohen’s theory have been criticised. That agents are rational and aim to improve their condition “does *not* so far provide them with an interest in *improving the forces of production*. Only under *specific structural* conditions is the interest in material advantage tied to an interest in a strategy of productivity-enhancing investment” (J. Cohen, 1982, p.268).<sup>84</sup> Brenner (1986) argues that indeed pre-capitalist social formations lacked such conditions and instead rent extraction was the dominant activity, so that Cohen’s approach cannot explain the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In general, if actors are rational, but “*what* it is rational to do will depend on their specific position in the relations of production (Callinicos, 1987, p.62),<sup>85</sup> a more complex explanation of historical progress is necessary.

Within AM, Wright, Levine, and Sober (1992) have developed a less deterministic version of HM in which structural constraints and endogenous preferences play an important role. They argue that “the content of both rational action and scarcity ... are not given for all the time, but are instead endogenous to the social system; ... determined by the relations of production themselves” (Levine and Wright, 1980, p.62). Therefore they interpret HM as “a theory of *historical possibilities* opened up by the development of ‘productive forces’” (Levine, 2003, p.164; italics added), with an important role for class struggle. Social constraints also play an important role in Carling’s (1991, 1993, 1994) interpretation of HM as a theory “in which the development of social relationships

is determined by the joint action of human nature with social and other conditions” (Carling, 1994, p.67), and the effect of human nature is “often socially constrained and guided” (ibid.). Carling rejects Cohen’s idea that, given a certain level of development of productive forces, agents rationally choose optimal relations of production. He suggests instead an evolutionary mechanism to explain the transition to a different mode of production, which entails “lower demands on the rationality of agents” (Carling, 1993, p.50) and does not necessitate an asocial argument concerning agents’ rationality to defend HM.

Consider next the issue of collective action, which is central in Marxism, due to the relevance of class struggle and revolution. “The relation between social relations and individual behaviour is the Achilles heel of Marxism” (Przeworski, 1982, p.307). Often an excessive malleability of agents is postulated by assuming that class positions lead to class behaviour, which does not explain why revolution does not take place as often as predicted without resorting to an unsatisfactory appeal to ideology and deception. Rational choice theory instead shows some of the difficulties of collective action, emphasising “that it often pays to defect. ... Quite generally, there are always private costs associated with organization, whereas the benefits typically are public goods” (Elster, 1985, pp.347-8).

Rational choice theory, however, is unable to explain why collective action often takes place, in the form of strikes, rebellions, and even revolutions. The conception of asocial, unrelated individuals makes it difficult to account for collective action, except by appealing to repeated interaction; side payments by some organisation; or non-fully-rational behaviour. This is unsatisfactory. Many instances of collective action are not repeated games. Further, to assume side

payments/punishments “is of no avail if we address the question of how trade unions came to be formed in the first place” (Elster, 1986B, p.211). It also implies a simplistic view of leadership as a pure centre of command. Finally, an appeal to “weakness of will” (Elster, 1986B, p.213), and emotional or irrational behaviour seems weak ground to found an analysis of collective action and revolutions.

A more convincing explanation emphasises preferences for collective action and conditional rationality, which “might transform the Prisoner’s Dilemma into an Assurance Game, in which the cooperative behaviour would be the solution outcome” (Elster, 1986B, p.213). This implies an interesting view of leaders as the providers of information that makes coordination possible in the assurance game. The explanandum remains unexplained, however, because “these games function as tools that can highlight the fact that a change has occurred” (Weldes, 1989, p.375), but the change that produces the shift from a prisoner’s dilemma to an assurance game is located outside the theory. It “must be explained by social psychology, not by game theory” (Elster, 1982, p.480, fn.46). Actually, Elster (1985, p.359) admits that collective action “may simply be too complex for individual-level explanations to be feasible at the current stage”. It is unclear, though, that it is only a matter of developing more sophisticated analytical tools. Two related problems associated with C4’ seem relevant.

First, the concept of purely instrumental rationality embodied in C4’ may be too limited. Even voting behaviour cannot be properly explained, and it “provides one of the strongest cases against the omnipotence of rational-choice explanation. Voting does seem to be a case in which the action itself, rather than the outcome it can be expected to produce, is what matters” (Elster, 1986B, p.18). This suggests

that in collective action problems the rational choice or causal determination of ends, and thus norms and identity, may play a crucial role (Ripstein, 1989). Elster (1989C) has recently acknowledged the importance of social norms and norm-following behaviour,<sup>86</sup> where rational choice theory is necessary to understand the means-end nexus but norms are not necessarily chosen according to the axioms of standard rational choice theory and may have an irreducibly social dimension. These forms of collective identification are “distinct from both self-interest and altruistic concern as normally conceived” (Graham, 1989, p.305) and do not entail any irrational behaviour since agents are “engaged in goal-oriented, purposive, self-interested action – i.e. each is acting rationally” (Wolff, 1990, p.482).

Second, in standard rational choice theory agents contemplate their choices in isolation, in the vacuum of a prestrategic situation. However, “[t]he appropriate view is neither one of two ready-to-act classes nor of abstract individuals, but of individuals who are embedded in different types of relations with other individuals within a multidimensionally described social structure” (Przeworski, 1985B, p.393). This suggests a more detailed analysis of the social structure shaping the interaction between agents, but also a focus on the endogenous changes in agents’ attitudes towards collective action. A first step in this direction is made, within AM, by Bertram and Carling who suppose that “[t]he real choices that individuals make are against the background of choices other make and practices they engage in” (Bertram and Carling, 1998, p.286) and the choices of each individual have external effects on other agents’ decisions. This allows them to model a dynamic process of endogenous formation of agents’ attitude towards collective action as the product of struggle itself, whereby an increase in the

number of agents engaging in revolutionary activity increases the probability of other agents acting. Interestingly, however, their analysis is purely structural and no model of individual decisions is provided.

Finally, consider Przeworski's (1985A) critique of the Marxist theory of class struggle and redistribution. According to him, it is not feasible to transcend the boundaries of capitalism, since socialist parties cannot win elections on a radical platform, and in any case self-interested, rational workers should support capitalism over socialism. Nor is it possible to seriously rectify the inequalities associated with capitalism, because the State is structurally dependent on capital. Faced with radical redistributive policies (or a militant labour force), capitalists cease to invest, causing an economic crisis and the failure of any redistributive attempt. This reductionist approach to politics is not entirely convincing.

Consider the latter claim concerning distributive conflict within capitalism. Przeworski (1985A, p.43) posits a profit-squeeze mechanism whereby "if profits are not sufficient then eventually wages or employment must fall". Let  $P^e$  be a measure of 'sufficient' profits: this mechanism is consistent with a large range of values of  $P^e$  and thus, absent an explanation of  $P^e$  itself, the explanatory power of Przeworski's analysis is limited. Indeed, Mohun and Veneziani (2006) show that a short-run profit-squeeze cycle can be detected in the post-war US data, but the cycle itself shifts over time, reflecting a significant change in  $P^e$ . Arguably, in this context, the interesting issue is *not* the profit-squeeze mechanism, but the determination of  $P^e$  as the product of social, political, and economic conditions, government policies, etc. As noted by Cohen (1994, p.10) "the extent to which we can [redistribute the unequalizing results of market activity] without defeating our

aim (of making the badly off better off) varies inversely with the extent to which self-interest has been allowed to triumph in private and public consciousness”. Without an explanation of  $P^e$ , the model may be formally correct, but a major part of the most interesting phenomena is left out of the analysis.

The relevance of endogenous preferences (and thus ideological struggle) for political processes and policy formation cannot be overstated. If “individual identities and thus preferences are continually molded by society” (Przeworski, 1985B, p.384), then standard rational choice theory seems ill-suited to understand deep trends in policies *and* politics, let alone the transition from one mode of production to the other. It is true that “the power of neo-classical economics lies in being able to separate the analysis of action at a particular moment from everything that created the conditions under which this action occurs” (ibid., p.385). To assume exogenous preferences, however, begs all sorts of questions. It may be true that the transition to socialism should be studied focusing on “the concrete individuals living under capitalism ... with their endowments and preferences” (ibid., p.397), rather than appealing to what people will prefer after socialism is established. But this does not imply that preferences should be taken as exogenous and immutable during class struggle or electoral processes. On the other hand, it seems equally reductive to see endogenous formation of identity of workers as “a consequence of strategies pursued by leaders of left-wing electoral parties” (ibid., p.385).<sup>87</sup> Indeed, “the central difficulty of individualistic views of history is to explain how actions of individuals produce new conditions ... Today, the apparatus of game theory can at best elucidate isolated, singular events that

occur under given conditions. It has nothing to say about history” (ibid., p.401). In addition, it is unclear that it has much to say about major political processes.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the debate on Analytical Marxism. AM is precisely defined and distinguished from Rational Choice Marxism. The general methodological debate on AM and RCM is analysed and the shortcomings of methodological individualism and rational choice theory are highlighted. It is argued, however, that the wholesale rejection of AM or RCM, on a priori methodological grounds is not warranted and in general the dispute between alternative Marxist approaches is unlikely to be settled uniquely at a general methodological level. Two specific issues are analysed, namely structural constraints and endogenous preferences, which are arguably central in the social sciences. It is shown that they lead to reconsider several RCM propositions and conclusions on Marx’s theory. It is unwarranted, though, to conclude that AM contributions are “‘little better than interruptions to our studies’” (Suchting, 1993, p.158). Actually, the analysis of endogenous preferences and structural constraints seems a promising line for further research, which may depart from existing RCM models, but is consistent with a more general AM approach.

Methodologically, to acknowledge the importance of social structures and the social formation of individuals blurs the dichotomy between holism and MI, and supports an antireductionist perspective which allows for “the irreducibility of macro-level accounts to ... micro-level explanations” (Levine, Sober, and Wright, 1987, p.75) in social theory. It also raises doubts on standard models of agency

and on the narrow view that “it is only within the rational-choice context that some of the leading items on the classical agenda of Marxist theory – historical explanation and the delineation of the social form, the collective dynamics of class struggle, the evolution and evaluation of capitalism – can be fruitfully discussed” (Carling, 1986, p.55). As argued above, some of these items are those for which standard rational choice theory seems least suitable.

Therefore this research project is likely to depart from existing RCM models. The emphasis on structural constraints and endogenous preferences, however, does not imply the rejection of formal models, or even neoclassical tools, let alone the denial of the importance of micro-analysis. “If human agency is an irreducible aspect of social events, then no explanation of these events is tenable which does not make claims about the intentions and beliefs which actors have and how these will issue in action” (Callinicos, 1987, p.82). Even if MI is rejected, macrolevel accounts should be consistent with, if not grounded in some individual level analysis. To take seriously “the problem of understanding the relationship between individual choice and social processes ... does not imply that social processes can be *reduced* to problems of individual intentionality, nor does it imply that instrumental rationality is the ubiquitous basis for intentional action; but it does mean that social theory should systematically incorporate a concern with conscious choice” (Wright, 1989, p.47).<sup>88</sup>

The analysis of structural constraints and endogenous preferences might lead to a more realistic, relational conception of individuals and thus to a more satisfactory microfoundation of Marx’s theory, based on a concept of agency which avoids the dichotomies between abstract free choice and complete social

determination of individual behaviour, and between self-interest and altruism.<sup>89</sup>

From this viewpoint, the Marxian concept of praxis, which emphasises normative concerns and non-instrumental rationality, may be a good starting point. “This concept of agency has a creative, open-ended character (hence the term praxis) in that it does not present human beings as necessarily conforming to some biologically or psychologically inherent rationality, as some, though not all, rational choice theory does” (Carver and Thomas, 1995, p.9).

From a substantive viewpoint, whereas RCM contributions to Marxist theory are mostly negative, in that they lead to the refutation or revision of propositions and concepts, the AM reconstruction of the core of Marxism outlined above is a significant, positive contribution, which may play an important role for a revival of socialist theory. However, it risks to remain a brilliant but sterile logical exercise, unless it can foster a progressive research program in explanatory social theory. This implies a revision of RCM results, which suggest precisely that “Marxism’s relevance to the progress of social science is exhausted” (Levine, 2003, p.170): its valuable insights have been incorporated into the mainstream, the rest should be discarded. As argued above, not only is the analysis of endogenous preferences and structural constraints consistent with the AM reconstruction of the core of Marxism, and in particular with a non-deterministic interpretation of HM. More importantly, it may also provide the first outline of a progressive research program in explanatory social theory that builds on, and is complementary to, the core of Marxism identified by AM, and that may lead to reconsider RCM results.

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the birth of AM and of the September group, which started to meet in London in 1979, see Carling (1986) and Wright (1989). Callinicos (1989), Wright (2001), and Levine (2003) provide interesting accounts of the social and intellectual context in which AM developed. Miller (1983) discusses the general rebirth of interest in Marxism in analytical philosophy in the 1970s. Nowak (1998) identifies a Polish analytical Marxist school in the 1950s and 1960s.

<sup>2</sup> An AM approach has also been adopted in anthropology (Donham, 1990), political ecology (Hughes, 2000); philosophy of religion (Nielsen, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> “[T]here exists Marxism which is neither analytical nor bullshit, but, once such ... pre-analytical Marxism encounters analytical Marxism, then it must either become analytical or become bullshit” (Cohen, 2000B, p. xxv-xxvi).

<sup>4</sup> Carling (1986), Wood (1989), Carver and Thomas (1995).

<sup>5</sup> There are also surveys devoted to specific AM contributions. For instance, see Rigby (1987) on Cohen’s theory of HM and Veneziani (2006) on Roemer’s theory of exploitation and classes.

<sup>6</sup> According to Ware, there is “no one theory of [AM], not even a way of doing [AM] (Ware, 1989, p.5). See Wood (1989), Wright (1989), Nielsen (1993). The boundaries of AM do not coincide with the September Group, which has comprised in different phases: Jon Elster, Adam Przeworski, Gerald A. Cohen, John Roemer, Robert Brenner, Sam Bowles, Joshua Cohen, Robert van der Veen, Pranhab Bardhan, Philippe van Parijs, Hillel Steiner, and Erik Olin Wright.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Goldstein (2006) and Tarrit (2006). These authors also include some methodological propositions (for example, the rejection of dialectics), but their analysis is not very accurate. (Actually, somewhat puzzlingly, Tarrit (2006, p.607) claims that the rejection of the falling rate of profit “is the only theoretical element on which all analytical Marxists agree”).

<sup>8</sup> Suchting (1993) moves from the acknowledgement of such heterogeneity to the unwarranted conclusion that AM cannot be defined due to its inconsistencies. For a reply, see Carling (1994).

<sup>9</sup> In Marxism “orthodoxy refers exclusively to method” (Lukacs, 1971, p.1). For a specific criticism of Lukacs, see Wright, Levine and Sober (1992, pp.103-105).

<sup>10</sup> “Dialectical logic is based on several propositions which may have a certain inductive appeal, but are far from being rules of inference” (Roemer, 1986B, p.191). See also Levine (1989).

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<sup>11</sup> See the debate between Carling (1986) and Wood (1989) on Norman Geras's affiliation to AM. In extensive interpretations of Definition 1, the fuzzy boundaries of AM tend to vanish altogether. See, for instance, Tarrit's (2006, p.598) inclusion of Michael Albert, Robin Hahnel, Stephen Marglin, David Miller, GEM de Ste Croix, in AM because they "can be associated with topics that have been discussed" at the September Group. Or Mayer's (1994, p.88ff) inclusion of GEM de Ste Croix for equally vague reasons.

<sup>12</sup> "Clarity and rigour are the virtues of *good* philosophy ... Analytical philosophy has no special monopoly on them" (Sayers, 1989, p.81). See also Carling (1986, p.27, fn.7).

<sup>13</sup> Some critics question even the emphasis on clarity. "We may want to reflect on why we value clarity as much as we do, and on whether the same standards of clarity hold for any theoretical discourse, regardless of the nature of its object or objects" (Kirkpatrick, 1994, p.36).

<sup>14</sup> See Sayers (1984), Sayer (1987), Carchedi (1989), Mandel (1989), Bronner (1990), Moggach (1991), Hunt (1992), Varoufakis (1992), Burkett (2001), Kennedy (2005).

<sup>15</sup> The commitment to analytical techniques "reflects nothing less than a commitment to reason itself" (Cohen, 2000B, p.xxiv and passim). See also Elster (1985, p.239).

<sup>16</sup> The debate on Marxism and ethics in analytical philosophy is a precursor of AM. See, for instance, the contributions in Cohen, Nagel, and Scanlon (1980). For a survey on Marx and ethics, see Wilde (1998). On the more specific issue of Marx and justice, see also Geras (1985).

<sup>17</sup> Sayers could rightly claim, instead, that AM is antithetical to historicism, which he deems fundamental in Marx's theory (Sayers, 1989, p.95ff). Yet this is hardly a specific feature of AM.

<sup>18</sup> See Martin (1989, p.662), Bronner (1990, p.248), Kennedy (2005, p.332), Callinicos (2003, p.2).

<sup>19</sup> Similarly, what Martin (1989) defines the AM pursuit of naturalism – against the Hegelian idealizing impulse, – he acknowledges to derive "from Marx himself" (Martin, 1989, p.661).

<sup>20</sup> See also Miller (1983), Ware (1989), Nielsen (1993).

<sup>21</sup> See Wright, Levine, and Sober (1992), Burawoy and Wright (2001), Carling (1997, 2003), and Levine (2003). See also Nielsen (1989). Wright, Levine, and Sober (1992, p.183ff) and Burawoy and Wright (2001, p.474ff) also include class analysis as a distinctive component of Marxism:

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classes are important to understand a range of social phenomena and the concept of exploitation is central in understanding the conflictual relations between classes.

<sup>22</sup> See also the analysis of the concept of totality by Wright, Levine, and Sober (1992).

<sup>23</sup> Even in a dialectical perspective, analysis is one-sided, but it is “an indispensable feature of any scientific account” (Sayers, 1984, p.4). See also Devine (1993, p.51).

<sup>24</sup> See, respectively, Moggach (1991, p.58, fn.4) and de Brunhoff (1991).

<sup>25</sup> Virtually all critics de facto focus on RCM. In his review of Wright, Levine, and Sober (1992), who adopt instead Definition 1, Foley notes that the conclusions “are on the whole mild, sensible and, as the options are presented, persuasive” (Foley, 1993, p.298). He objects mostly to the “addiction to philosophic and sociological jargon, extreme caution in the formulation of hypotheses, ... and painfully slow movement toward minimally exciting conclusions” (ibid.).

<sup>26</sup> Carling (1986, 1990) claims that Definition 2 applies to all analytical Marxists due to a very weak, if loose, interpretation of C4'. He has later acknowledged the difference between the two Definitions (Carling, 1994). Howard and King (1989), Hunt (1992), Sitton (1996, p.274, fn.1), and Tarrit (2006) also seem to conflate Definitions 1 and 2. To overlook the distinction, though, may be misleading. For instance, if Definition 1 is adopted, as in Philp and Young (2002, p.314), it is untrue that AM “involves the use of rational actor models” (ibid.) or that reductionism is a “further hallmark of AM” (ibid., p.316). The alleged methodological contradictions of AM identified by Philp and Young (2002, p.316) derive entirely from such definitional confusion.

<sup>27</sup> According to Callinicos (2003, p.4), one of the strengths of Cohen’s interpretation lies “in the firmly structural account that it gives of the production relations and therefore of classes”.

<sup>28</sup> Individual and structural explanations may be consistent if the latter are interpreted as referring to “*structural constraints*, i.e. to social institutions, class relationships and other objective states of affairs which are imposed by past history as a compulsory framework for the actions of the agents” (van Parijs, 1983, p.119).

<sup>29</sup> See also Little (1986, 1989). Carling (1991, 1997) critically evaluates the role of MI in HM.

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- <sup>30</sup> For a particularly clear statement, see Elster (1982, p.463). This paper focuses only on the fairly strong, reductionist MI chosen by RCM (Elster, 1985, p.5). For a discussion of different varieties of MI in the social sciences, see Levine, Sober and Wright (1987) and Udehn (2002).
- <sup>31</sup> The main exception is the theory of technical change (Elster, 1986A, p.188).
- <sup>32</sup> See Elster (1982, pp.463-478), Przeworski (1985A). For a critique see Burawoy (1989, 1995).
- <sup>33</sup> See, respectively, Roemer (1982A, 1988A), Roemer (1983), and Roemer (1988B).
- <sup>34</sup> See also Roemer (1988A, p.89 and p.175), and Elster (1985, p.228-229).
- <sup>35</sup> For a rather harsh criticism of Elster's approach, see Meikle (1986) and Slaughter (1986).
- <sup>36</sup> See, for instance, the introductions of Cohen (1988, 1995, 2000B). A reconstruction of the evolution of Cohen's thought is in Carling (2003) and Callinicos (2001, 2003).
- <sup>37</sup> A similar view is expressed by Roemer (1986A, p.88) and (Elster, 1986A, p.220). On the relationship between AM and liberal egalitarianism, see Levine (1982, 2003), Callinicos (2001).
- <sup>38</sup> See, for example, Smolinski (1973)
- <sup>39</sup> See also Bronner (1990) and Kennedy (2005).
- <sup>40</sup> See also Amariglio, Callari, and Cullenberg (1989).
- <sup>41</sup> A similar point is made by Mayer (1989, p.439) and Levine (2003). Ripstein (1989) argues that analytical tractability has led AM to focus on exploitation, distributive justice and problems of class formation, instead of what he deems the more important issues of alienation and fetishism.
- <sup>42</sup> From this viewpoint, formal models can be interpreted as "a commonly agreed upon standard of communication and rigor" (Roemer, 1982B, p.285).
- <sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Anderson and Thompson (1988), Wood (1989), Hunt (1992). Interestingly, in his early writings, Roemer (1978) endorses the traditional Marxist views against neoclassical economics.
- <sup>44</sup> For instance, the claim that neoclassical models have "nothing to say" (de Brunhoff, 1991, p.42) on ethnicity and class struggle seems too strong, especially in the light of Roemer (1979).
- <sup>45</sup> See, for example, Anderson and Thompson (1988), Lebowitz (1988), Dymski and Elliott (1989), Devine and Dymski (1991), Schwartz (1995). For a survey, see Veneziani (2006).

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<sup>46</sup> See, among the others, Lebowitz (1988, pp.195-7), Sensat (1988, p.215), McCarney (1989, p.158), Weldes (1989, p.374), Schwartz (1995, p.282). Arnsperger (2003, p.6) suggests that evolutionary game theory may be useful to model some aspects of dialectics.

<sup>47</sup> See also Przeworski (1985B, p.381). Carling (1991, 1993) suggests an evolutionary approach.

<sup>48</sup> For a definition and analysis of different variants of functionalism, see Elster (1982, p.454ff).

<sup>49</sup> “Functional explanations are teleological, and teleology is not explanation” (Roemer, 1986C, p.7). See Elster (1985, pp.107-118) on functionalism, teleology, and HM. See also Becker (1988).

<sup>50</sup> According to Elster (1986B, p.203), in societies “the environment to which institutions adapt themselves generally changes so rapidly, relative to the speed of adaptation, that an equilibrium is rarely attained or even approximated”. For a thorough reply, see van Parijs (1982).

<sup>51</sup> See Elster (1982, pp.455, 462, 478, fn.7). For an analysis see van Parijs (1982, pp.498ff).

<sup>52</sup> Instead Cohen (2000B, p.xxiii and passim) has recently endorsed MI. This may be less surprising than it seems. According to Roemer (1986C, p.8), “The difference between Elster and Cohen ... is not about the importance of basing mechanisms of historical change in the rational behaviour of individuals. It is rather, a difference of opinion about whether one must understand the micro-mechanisms before an event can be considered explained”. Levine and Wright (1980, p.57ff) and Kirkpatrick (1994, p.43) analyse the individualistic foundations of Cohen’s approach.

<sup>53</sup> For various critiques of Cohen’s account of functional explanations, see Elster (1983, p.115; 1986B, p.204), Buchanan (1987, p.106), Becker (1988, pp.871-2), Schwartz (1993, p.283ff). For a critique within Cohen’s theory of HM, see Satz (1989, pp.403, 407, 411). For a discussion of some of the issues raised by critics, see Cohen (1978, pp.272-7; 1986, p.225).

<sup>54</sup> Van Parijs (1983), Levine, Sober, and Wright (1987), Carling (1991; 1993), Dorman (1991), and Schwartz (1993) also argue that the case against functional explanations is overstated.

<sup>55</sup> See also Warren (1988, pp.471ff), Graham (1998, pp.302ff), Howard and King (1989, p.404).

<sup>56</sup> As argued, for instance, by Levine (1986, pp.725-6), Wood (1986), Sensat (1988, pp.206-7), Mandel (1989, pp.124-7), Nielsen (1989, pp.523-9), Weldes (1989, pp.370-371), Wood (1989, pp.56-8, 73-4), Carver and Thomas (1995, p.4).

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<sup>57</sup> For a critique of Cohen's functionalist interpretation, see Sayers (1984) and Becker (1988). *Contra* Cohen, Satz (1989) argues that despite appearances, many of Marx's explanations of social changes are *not* functional. "Instead [Marx] offers a theory of causes" (Satz 1989, p.411).

<sup>58</sup> See, respectively, Elster (1985, pp.6, 359, 363) and Elster (1979, p.11).

<sup>59</sup> According to Elster (1985, p.4; 1986B, p.206ff), functionalism and holism are "closely related." For an analysis of the relations between them, see Levine, Sober, and Wright (1987, pp.73-4).

<sup>60</sup> See Levine, Sober, and Wright (1987, pp.75-78), Weldes (1989, p.363), and Schwartz (1993, pp.293-4), Callinicos (2003, p.9).

<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, post-modern Marxists have turned the accusation of functionalism against AM: "the reason why a full-blown functionalism is not needed is that the agents who comprise the economic structure are endowed initially with attributes which are functional to the system of exchange that AM imagines to constitute 'the economy'" (Amariglio, Callari, and Cullenberg, 1989, p.362). Hindess (2003, p.330) also stresses the "surreptitious structural determination" of the agents. A similar point is made by Wood (1990, p.121) and Roberts (1997, p.23).

<sup>62</sup> "Many properties of individuals such as 'powerful' are irreducibly relational so that accurate description of one individual may require reference to other individuals" (Elster, 1982, p.453). See also Levine, Sober, and Wright (1987, pp.70-1). Yet agents must still be "conceived as existing outside of any *particular* set of social relations" (Roberts, 1997, p.23), or else these relational properties would implicitly embody relevant features of social context.

<sup>63</sup> Elster (1985, pp.18-27) also analyses *subintentional causality*, which refers to non-intentional psychological properties that influence behaviour, and *supraintentional causality*, which refers to the unintended consequences of intentional behaviour. Although he is a psychological reductionist (Elster, 1989B, p.74), he does not endorse a simplistic psychologism, since social phenomena are not always immediately reducible to psychological ones. See Warren (1988, p.458). On psychologism and MI, see Sensat (1988, pp.195ff).

<sup>64</sup> See also Little (1986, pp.127-131) and Roemer (1989, p.380).

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- <sup>65</sup> Elster (1979, pp.113-5; 1982) and Roemer (1986B). Howard and King (1989, p.409), Warren (1990, pp.603ff), Levine (2003) argue that this is a caricatural account of structuralism, which stresses a weaker social “determination” of individual choices, via preferences and constraints.
- <sup>66</sup> See also Warren (1988), Howard and King (1992, p.353, fn.38). For an analysis of the dialectics between agency and structure in Marxism, see Callinicos (1987), Sensat (1988), Weldes (1989).
- <sup>67</sup> See, for instance, Roemer’s (1985, p.64, fn.44) own discussion of the *family* labour supply elasticity. A similar point is made by Weldes (1989, pp.360-1), Howard and King (1992, p.346).
- <sup>68</sup> See Levine, Sober, and Wright (1987), Sensat (1988), Warren (1988), and Udehn (2002).
- <sup>69</sup> See Sensat (1988, pp.201-3), Howard and King (1992, pp.346-7), Schwartz (1993, pp.294-5).
- <sup>70</sup> See, for instance, Bronner (1990, pp.256ff).
- <sup>71</sup> See also Weldes (1989, p.356). “The Marxist theory of ideology, understood as a theory of the process of forming social subjects, can also provide a basis for elaborating microfoundations” (Levine, Sober, and Wright, 1987, p.83).
- <sup>72</sup> Roemer (1981, p.114), Elster (1985, p.6), Przeworski (1985B, p.401, fn.1), Barnes and Sheppard (1992, pp.3-5), Elster (1993, p.7), Schwartz (1993, pp.298-300). For a detailed analysis of MI, rational choice theory, and neoclassical economics, see Elster (1979). Goldstein’s (2006) definition of MI as including neoclassicism is therefore inaccurate.
- <sup>73</sup> Elster (1985, p.8), Moggach (1991, pp.43, and 59, fn.12). See also Ripstein (1989, p.464).
- <sup>74</sup> Most notably, Elster (1978, 1979, 1989A). See also Elster (1985, pp.473ff) on ideology.
- <sup>75</sup> See Levine (1986, pp.726-7), Howard and King (1992, pp.347-8).
- <sup>76</sup> Przeworski (1985B, p.386), Buchanan (1987, p.113).
- <sup>77</sup> It is worth noting in passing that the literature in cognitive psychology that, according to Philp and Young (2002), is ignored by analytical Marxists is discussed in Roemer (1986B, pp.193ff).
- <sup>78</sup> Taylor (1986), Sensat (1988, pp.197-9).
- <sup>79</sup> Callinicos (1987, p.84), Weldes (1989, p.362).
- <sup>80</sup> The other two are the “intentional explanation of individual action in terms of the underlying beliefs and desires ... [and the] causal explanation of aggregated phenomena in terms of the individual actions that go into them” (Elster, 1985, p.5). See Elster (1982, p.463; 1986B, p.209).

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<sup>81</sup> See Elster (1978, 1979, 1989A), Przeworski (1982), Roemer (1989, p.378). On the importance of endogenous preferences in RCM, see also Carling (1986, p.55), Mayer (1989, pp.421ff).

<sup>82</sup> See also Przeworski (1985B, p.385), Elster (1986B, p.209) and Carling (1990, p.98).

<sup>83</sup> Roemer's theory may be taken as a proof that preference formation and structural constraints are not necessary to provide foundations to exploitation theory. However, as noted above, this conclusion seems unwarranted. For a more detailed discussion, see Veneziani (2006).

<sup>84</sup> See Levine and Wright (1980), van Parijs (1982), Sayers (1984), Callinicos (1987), Satz (1989), Foley (1993), Suchting (1993). A good exposition of Cohen's theory is in Mayer (1994), Sitton (1996), and Roberts (1997). Further contributions on the AM theory of history include Wetherly (1992), Miller (1984), Cohen (1988), Carling (1991), Wright, Levine, and Sober (1992).

<sup>85</sup> See also Buchanan (1987), Becker (1988), Carling (1991, chp.1).

<sup>86</sup> Social values may be defined as "states of affairs whose realization depends essentially (not merely instrumentally) upon reciprocal relation between another's experience and my own" (Wolff, 1990, p.484).

<sup>87</sup> Burawoy (1989, 1995) argues that despite all the emphasis on MI and rational choice theory, Przeworski treats voters as dupes in the hands of party leaders. See also Przeworski (1989).

<sup>88</sup> For example, rational choice theory does not satisfactorily explain ideology. Yet structural approaches are "necessary but not sufficient, because they ignore the ways that ideologies are produced or reproduced by individual practices ... By default they portray ideologies as imposed on cognitively passive individuals" (Warren, 1990, p.602).

<sup>89</sup> Callinicos (1987, p.82), Sensat (1988, pp.202-3), Warren (1988), Burawoy (1989, 1995), Mayer (1989, p.427), Weldes (1989, pp.373-4), Bowles and Gintis (1990), Wolff (1990), Howard and King (1992, p.348), Warren (1990, pp.603ff), Goldstein (2006).