

Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

Peter Hudis, *Marx's Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism*, Leiden: Brill, 2012. ISBN: 9789004221970 (cloth)

At the risk of agitating the delicate relations between various schools of critical theory, I will start from the premise that while the content of Hudis's excellent volume is unmistakably Marxist in the purest sense of the term, the method by which he constructs his argument somewhat resembles a Foucauldian genealogy. Without a doubt, critical differences exist: for one, Hudis is addressing the birth of the concept of postcapitalist society through Marx's own writings rather than a diverse body of utterances; for another, Hudis is not tracing how a multiplicity of discourses coalesce into concepts – such as discipline or sexuality – that explain the various modes by which humans' subjectivities are constituted. Nevertheless, Hudis's method of analyzing the breadth of Marx's *oeuvre* in order to reveal the development of his thoughts on postcapitalist society conjures images (at least in this reviewer's mind) of Foucault patiently wading through the archive, tracing the birth of concepts operating in and pertinent to our everyday lives. Hudis's project also significantly diverges from Foucault in that instead of tracing the emergence of actual practices, he focuses on what is often implicit in Marx's work and subsequently remains latent, both in the development of Marxist theory over the last century, and in the practices constituting our everyday lives. It is here that Hudis one-ups Foucault in a sense: using a genealogical approach to build a concept that pushes forward from our current situation with palpable political urgency rather than largely stopping at revealing how we got here.

This excavation across 'the whole of Marx' is clearly one of the most impressive aspects of Hudis's book, and it is undertaken in an effort to show both the normative consistencies running through Marx's project as well as the concrete points of rupture or development. Moreover, this strategy is employed in an effort to present a holistic understanding of Marx's thoughts on a communist society that simultaneously reveals what 'actually-existing socialism'

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during the twentieth century failed to express. The volume is divided into four chapters, which cover: Marx's early philosophical, political, and economic writings; his three 'drafts' of *Capital* (*The Poverty of Philosophy*, the *Grundrisse*, and the 1861-3 draft); the three volumes of *Capital*; and, finally, his late writings (*The Civil War in France* and *Critique of the Gotha Programme*).

Across these four chapters Hudis traces three immanent normative criteria that remain consistent and fuel Marx's overall project: first, Marx's opposition to the subject-predicate inversion that defines life under capitalism and "in which the products as well as the *actions* of people take on the form of an autonomous power that determine and constrain the will of the subjects that engender them" (p.42); second, his Kantian objection to any social configuration in which man functions as a means to an end; finally, his assertion that human relations must be transformed such that individuals no longer subordinate themselves to their own creations. These three criteria reinforce the notion that Marx's critique is aimed at the capitalist social relations – specifically, alienated labor – that produce the often misguided targets of Marxian critique, such as the market, money, or private property.

This essentialism further troubles my claim that Hudis's endeavor resonates with Foucault on methodological terms, but I maintain that this is both due to the range of discourses under consideration, as well as indicative of the differences between tracing elaborations on a rational political-economic concept and the messy realities of social emergence. Yet as all authors under consideration here acknowledge, rational thought is inescapably entangled in the irrationalities of life. Hudis's account of Marx is no different, and contingencies – such as the Paris Commune or the penning of the Gotha Programme – appear as major influences on the latter's understanding of postcapitalist society. These ruptures are fuel to the fire of Marx's cognition, and cause him to revisit and refine previous ideas. For example, Hudis notes how Marx's perspective on revolution and the state from the *Communist Manifesto* is radically altered following the Commune: whereas in the former, the proletariat seizes the state and centralizes the means of production, in *The Civil War in France*, Marx views the seizure of the state to be

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immediately followed by its dismantling in favor of the “decentralized, democratic control of society by the freely-associated populace” (p.184). For Hudis, this marks an important shift in Marx where these associations of individuals become the most effective form for transitioning to a postcapitalist society.

This notion of multiple transitions is one of Hudis’s key insights into the development of Marx’s thought on postcapitalist society and helps demonstrate why covering Marx’s entire corpus is central to understanding his thoughts regarding future societies. Reading the first volume of *Capital*, for example, one would readily surmise that Marx’s understanding of life after capitalism would most explicitly be understood as freely associated individuals planning and controlling production. Yet, as Hudis shows, extending one’s reading through the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* “suggests for the first time that the postcapitalist relations under discussion thus far in Marx’s work had pertained to the initial phase of the new society, which still is defective from the vantage-point of what eventually follows it” (p.199). The abolition of capitalist value based on the average socially necessary labor time still stands, but its replacement by actual labor time shifts to a more complex schema in which all human activity – not just labor – contributes to wealth; relations of exchange based on money have still eroded but instead of being based on the exchangeability of hours worked, they are now radically altered: ‘from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs!’

Hudis’s book provides an exhaustive account of the emergence of these and other aspects of Marx’s ideas regarding a postcapitalist future. It is scrupulously researched and eminently readable, though some previous engagement with Marx would undoubtedly increase reading efficiency. In closing – and to fend off any critics who might dismiss it thinking that it claims to offer a prescribed or authoritative approach to building postcapitalist society – I offer the following three sentences from Hudis’s closing paragraph: “This work has tried to show that a much deeper, richer, and more emancipatory conception of a postcapitalist society is found in Marx’s work than has hitherto been appreciated. This is not to say that Marx provides anything in

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the way of a detailed answer as to what is a viable alternative to capitalism. His work does, however, contain crucial conceptual markers and suggestions that can help a new generation chart its way toward the future” (p.215).

Keith Harris

College of Built Environments

University of Washington

gkh2@uw.edu

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