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## **JERZY KMITA'S METHODOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF KARL MARX'S PHILOSOPHY. FROM IDEOLOGY TO METHODOLOGICAL CONCEPTS**

### **Introductory remarks**

New interpretations of Marxism began appearing in Polish philosophy after 1955, and some of them enriched Marxism with inspirations stemming from contemporary Western philosophy. Among the most important of the new interpretations from the late 1960's and early 1970's were the interpretations developed in The Poznan Methodological School founded by Jerzy Kmita, Jerzy Topolski, and Leszek Nowak. In this paper, as stated in the title, I will deal only with Kmita's interpretation of Marxism, although all three of the interpretations, which appeared simultaneously, deserve individual discussion. One can even talk about three distinct interpretations of Marxism that were motivated by common assumptions. Among these assumptions I would mention the belief held by the founders of The Poznan Methodological School during the whole period of its activity. They believed that Marx's method of inquiry was exceptionally inspiring and useful for the study of social phenomena. The input of The Poznan Methodological School into the evolution of Marxism in Poland is extremely original and valuable. Besides its historical value, it is also still inspiring and brings methodological tools that enable reflection on the whole of the socio-economic system and the place of the human activity within it.

Taking on the issue of Kmita's interpretation, I need to begin by indicating some problems, which in my opinion had influenced Kmita's

interpretation of Marxist philosophy. The first one pertains to the approach of the leader of The Poznan Methodological School to Marx's legacy. His approach was specific and very non-standard within Polish philosophy, especially in the context of Marxist philosophy in Poland in those days. Kmita's interpretation was done from the perspective of the philosophy of science, and not through the horizon of the dominant – ideological – approach to this philosophy. Metaphorically speaking, Kmita was interested in "Marx's road to freedom". From this point of view, Kmita's interpretational perspective was extremely innovative. At that time the philosophy of science went through a turbulent development. The ideas of Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn, or Willard Van Orman Quine appeared, and in Poland the works of the Lvov-Warsaw School were carried on, mainly by Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz. These conceptions were widely discussed not only in philosophy—including Polish philosophy, but were also popular among the scientists themselves. In Poland the representatives of the Poznan School were pioneers that popularized and creatively followed the developments of the Western philosophy of science (Jerzy Giedymin, Jerzy Kmita).

As I mentioned before, the philosophy of science was one of the important points of reference in Kmita's interpretation of Marx, and it made its mark defining the range of the interpretation. What Kmita was interested in was not as much the substance of this conception (i.e. the propositions from the field of economics or those relating to social structure), but rather the way of thinking of the author of *Capital*. He did not confront Marx's theses with existing economic or humanistic knowledge, he did not develop any theme usually connected with Marxism. Kmita was interested in Marx's form of thinking, the way he organised the relevant substantive statements, which means that Kmita was interested in Marx's methodology of inquiry. The presence of Marx's substantive statements was limited to two cases: either they illustrated the epistemological theses formulated independently of Marx's doctrine, or the content of *Capital* was the basis for the reconstruction of research procedures applied by Marx. This approach to Marx's legacy was far from typical, and it received a negative response in the community of Polish Marxists. It must not be forgotten that it all happened in the country in which Marxist ideology was dominating, and intellectuals were supposed to support this ideology.

The most repeated accusation against the Poznan Methodological School and its approach to Marx's legacy was made from the ideological point of view. This accusation was expressed in the statement which implied that this interpretation of Marxism is „too logical” or that it was made “in the spirit of neopositivism”. This is not the first time in history when an ideology became the enemy of rational thinking.

The interpretation that will be discussed below, was made in light of the interpretative coefficient of the interpreter. Kmita's interpretative factor consisted of the analytic philosophy of science, with a particular regard for the humanities, and his theoretical reflection on art (symbolic culture).

The second issue that should also be discussed at the beginning pertains to the status of the interpretation. I found it groundless to think about Kmita's interpretation in terms of revisionism, as far as revisionism understood as the interpretation of Marx's thoughts initiated by Bernstein, or in terms of its definition given by Gomulka<sup>1</sup>, or as the approach to Marxism represented by a group of left-wing Polish intellectuals<sup>2</sup>. Even though the methodological interpretation of Marx did not represent “the spirit of Marxism” for some Polish Marxists, on the account of its specificity, Kmita always emphasized that he interpreted Marx's method „by bringing into his arguments some, frequently considerable, modernizing corrections, but still sticking to this ‘something’”. (Kmita, 2007, p. 279). Also, this interpretation is not the comprehensive perspective on Marx's research method, it limits itself to some selected methodological issues that were still essential for Marxism, as well as for the practice of science and philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially for the research in social sciences.

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<sup>1</sup>At the IX Plenum of the Central Committee of PZPR in 1957 W. Gomulka criticized revisionism: „Revisionism is the set of false and erroneous views essentially coming down to the negation of the regularities of social development that are objective and validated by the every-day reality, to the negation or undermining of the basic experiences of the revolutionary labour movement, that have its universal use at the given stage of the historical progress”.

<sup>2</sup>„Revisionists” was the name given to the group of the left-wing intelligentsia that was active from the second half of the 1950's to the end of the 1960's. It consisted of Kołakowski, Brus, Baczko, Pomian, Modzelewski, Kuroń, Bieńkowski, as well as “Puławy” group: Albrecht, Zambrowski, Kosman.

As I already mentioned, Kmita's interest in Marxism falls on the turn of 1960's and 1970's. During this period, he published a series of papers on Marx's method and edited some books<sup>3</sup>. After many years, in the 21st century, he made an assessment of Marxism in the Polish intellectual life and his part in it, answering the question asked by Jacek Hołówka, the editor-in-chief of *Przegląd Filozoficzny*, about the role of Marxist philosophy in Polish intellectual life. The answer was published in [Kmita 2007]. This is important in the context of this paper because in that work Kmita formulates his position on Marx's philosophy and Marxism in Poland. In it, he held up his previous beliefs about Marx's conception that had been formulated in the 1960's and 1970's when the interpretation of Marx presented here had been developed.

Up until circa 1955, as Kmita says, it was forbidden to discuss Marxism in Poland: "A serious discussion about philosophy, including Marxist philosophy, could not happen here. (...) there was no one (...) to discuss Marxist philosophy seriously due to current political reasons. The cultural and historical causes of all this were also playing their part" (Kmita, 2007, p. 278).

Until 1955 it was impossible "to develop the disparate interpretations of Marxist philosophy" that were making use of the philosophical inspirations coming from the West. Kmita's interpretation of Marxism was developed in this atmosphere of permission to draw on the inspirations from Western philosophy. In the presented paper Kmita emphasizes that his interest in Marxism does not come only from the permission to develop new interpretations of Marxism. He believes that Marxism, and especially Karl Marx's concepts „in spite of being anachronised, mainly after the death of the great philosopher–its creator–(...) considerably inspired the very core of the contemporary philosophy. Following Margolis, we can call this core cultural relativism; Karl Marx himself would surely prefer the term 'historical relativism'" (Kmita, 2007, p. 280). Emphasising the influence of Marx on contemporary Western philosophy, Kmita named Marx's pioneering idea: the introduction of thinking in the vein of cultural (historical) relativism into philosophical considerations. This particular

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<sup>3</sup> (Kmita 1973; 1974; 1977).

accomplishment of Marx's proved to be priceless. Let us notice that it was not until the end of the 20th century that the idea of relativism had become the centre of philosophers' attention, for instance in Kuhn's theory or in American neopragmatism and postmodernism. Kmita's main objection to Marx was about the latter's too far-reaching acceptance of the methods of natural sciences in the humanities, and Marx's fixation on the naturalised vision of science that he had carried over to the field of social research.

In 1970, Kmita's paper titled *Uwagi o holizmie marksowskim jako koncepcji metodologicznej* was published (Kmita, 1970, p. 61-122), wherein he presented the fundamental outlines of his own interpretation of Marx's methodology. In the latter texts, the ideas were formulated in a more precise manner. I am referring to the methodological structuralism thesis, Marx's methodological holism thesis, and the idea of functional-genetic explanation that he connected with Marx's research method. Generally speaking, he focused on working on methodological procedures of research of social phenomena, in which a man acts consciously and intentionally, but simultaneously his acts are determined by objective conditions.

### **The thesis of methodological structuralism**

Before Kmita reached for Marx's works, he had already completed the studies on the methodological programme of the representatives of the classical German philosophy of the humanities: Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert, Eduard Spranger, and Max Weber. If we appeal to Karl Popper's distinction (naturalism-antinaturalism), we can name them the studies on anti-naturalist methodology. The result of this research was the monograph written together with Leszek Nowak, *Studia nad teoretycznymi podstawami humanistyki* (Poznań, 1968), and a series of papers published in philosophical journals. Alongside the anti-naturalist reflection, we can find here an essay on the concept of rational action. The assumption about the rationality of human actions and the conception of the explanation model called a *humanistic interpretation* were elaborated. The interest in rational action and the usefulness of this concept in the humanities was a continuation of

Ajdukiewicz's philosophical programme that Kmita supplemented with the reflection on the game and decision theory. Analysing Marx's *Capital*, he paid attention to Marx's use of the *assumption of rationality* and of his own explanation model of human activities that he called *humanistic interpretation*. In this way *Capital* confirmed the usage of these procedures by Marx.

The methodological structuralism thesis informs that "propositions that characterise the meaningful structure assigned to a particular action, which is rational in the light of this assignment, or to the result of such an action, are cognitively prior to propositions that characterise the different types of rational action or types of the result of the rational action" (Kmita, 1970, p. 73). How did Kmita understand the concepts of rational action, meaningful structure and cognitive priority? By rational action he understood a conscious and intentional activity, i.e. the activity which is subjectively determined by three elements: "The rational action is the action  $A_i$  that is determined by: 1. the knowledge  $K$  of the subject of an action  $A_i$  that characterises (a) the set  $\{A_1, \dots, A_n\}$  ( $i = 1, \dots, n$ ) of possible actions, (b) the effects of an every action  $A_1, \dots, A_n$ , that I will subsequently call values  $S_1, \dots, S_m$ . 2. Norms  $N$  of the subject of an action  $A_i$  that establish the relations of preference  $R$ , which gives order to the set of values  $\{S_1, \dots, S_m\}$  and will be subsequently called the order of values. 3. The rationality of the subject of an action  $A_i$ , i.e., the fact that it always chooses the action that results in the value that he prefers the most" (Kmita, 1970, p. 67). This value gives a meaning to an action.

The explanation of the subject taking up rational action is thus based on attributing a meaningful structure to the agent of that action. The meaningful structure consists of a system of dependencies among three elements: the knowledge of an actor, the system of values ordered by his preference, and the assumption of rationality which states that the subject chooses an action leading to his preferred value. The most preferred value gives an action its meaning. Kmita calls this type of explanation of rational action *a humanistic interpretation*. In the century-long philosophical debate on the concept of interpretation in which *the understanding* of human activity was opposed to *the explanation* of this activity, Kmita took the unconventional position

preferring the explanation. One can not only understand human actions, but primarily explain them along with the fact that Kmita's model of exceptionless explanation (humanistic interpretation) meets the formal conditions of the causal explanation. He took a stance which was contrary to the position accepted by the followers of hermeneutic philosophy, who advocated solely for the understanding of human action, rigorously juxtaposing understanding with explanation.

These premises led Kmita to formulate the methodological structuralism thesis, which states that every human activity has its meaningful structure and if the subject of a humanist's inquiry is a particular activity, then its analysis must be preceded by the assumption of the meaningful structure of this activity. The meaningful structure creates a kind of pattern providing a given direction to an inquiry that must be observed during the empirical studies of a particular human activity.

In short, the aim of this research practice is the analysis of a particular meaningful structure (the activity of a baker, a painter, a politician etc.). All the mentioned kinds of concrete activities follow the same pattern: they have a meaningful structure. Kmita gave the methodological structuralism directive the status of the researchers-addressed norm, demanding "their research practice to be conducted in a manner defined by the thesis of methodological structuralism" (Kmita, 1970, p. 64), which means that the humanities, in their effort to know human activities, should explain them by attributing the proper, empirically-verified meaningful structure to them.

The most controversial part was the assumption of rationality (for conditions of certainty): "the statement that a rational action  $R_i$  has just been taken up follows logically from the conjunction of the following statements: 1. from the statement that the subject of an action  $A_i$  had knowledge on the basis of which he can take up one of the actions  $A_1, \dots, A_n$  leading respectively to values  $S_1, \dots, S_m$ ; 2. from the statement that the norms of the subject of an action  $A_i$  define the hierarchy of values according to which the value of the action  $A_i$  is maximally preferred; 3. from the assumption of rationality" (Kmita, 1970, p. 67).



He added that the assumption of rationality can be understood objectively or metalinguistically (we can speak of an action or of the sentences describing it). Most controversial was the assumed characteristic of rationality (of decision making), which was a far cry from the everyday understanding of rationality and rational action. In many debates, critics demanded a definition of „the essence” of the rational conduct, and the formulation of criteria for distinguishing the rational action from irrational or non-rational. According to Kmita's intention, a researcher who appeals to the assumption of rationality should simultaneously abstract from the assessment of the evaluative choices made by an acting subject, and from the true/false qualifications of knowledge selected by an actor as a means of action. According to this assumption, someone acts rationally even if he or she chooses values that are not accepted in a given culture (considered as irrational, non-rational, or incomprehensible), and has erroneous knowledge about the path of their realization. If one thinks about Marxism as an ideology that is expressed in a specific axiology and the manner of arriving at it, then the assumption of rationality formulated by Kmita is disappointing, and it is not surprising that its content was often misunderstood. What became unintelligible in this interpretation of Marx's work was abstracting values and the means of their realisation recommended by Marx from positive evaluation. Nobody noticed or considered the fact that the assumption of rationality does not collide with advocating the selection of a certain set of substantially specific values, including Marxist axiology. Both Marxists or non-Marxists, the followers of various ideologies or research programmes, act rationally (their adherents follow the goals and choose means to realise them), or we must assume that they are rational for the explanation of these actions to be possible. Failing to accept this assumption undercuts the effort to make the humanities an intellectual activity that will meet the requirements of scientific knowledge in a manner defined by the standards of the natural sciences. The humanities would not have tools to explain human behaviour in a justifiable way, and to give meanings to the results of action. The assumption of rationality in the dominant ideological approach to Marxism in Poland had turned out to be worthless. The argument that this assumption is the basic element of the explanation of the



humanistic interpretation (causal explanation of action-taking), and that its removal makes the procedure of the explanation of the human activity impossible were incomprehensible and thus misguided. Besides, the scientific ideal of the humanities was no alien to Marx who believed in the naturalistic paradigm of practising science.

There is also the second circumstance which reveals the importance of the assumption of the rationality of decision making in the context of the object of interest of the social sciences. It is a relation between the subject's world of thought and the action taken by him. After all, there is no necessity by means of which having a particular motivation must result in acting upon it. Philosophers notice this problem. They invoke the concept of the will (to act), and trying to analyse it they mobilise metaphysics. Giving up the metaphysical reflections on the will, one can refer to the assumption of rationality stating that a man is consistent, that he acts in accordance with his thoughts. Thus, a certain obstacle is being removed, one concerning the shift from the world of thoughts and imagination of a man to the sphere of the actions undertaken. On the one hand, with the elimination of *the assumption of rationality*, the social inquiries would lose the possibility of formulating the credible descriptions of human actions, on the other hand, they would lose even the intermediate access to the human mental world. After all it is from the results of the actions, all the artefacts amongst them, we learn about the world view of the subject and we authenticate the vision that is attributed to the subject by looking for the confirmation in the results that he left (the results are included in the empirical base).

Now, Kmita attributed to Marx the knowledge and the usage of the methodological structuralism thesis from *Capital*. The activities of a capitalist, a worker, and of any participant in the market economy were, to Marx, the rational actions in the above sense. Kmita illustrates this thesis with examples taken from Marx's works, especially the analyses of the concept of labour from *Capital*.

### **Marx's thesis of methodological holism**

Marx's methodological holism thesis assumes the cognitive priority of the objective structure over the meaningful structure. Inasmuch as the respect for methodological structuralism is read by Kmita into Marx's line of thought, and into statements he formulated, Marx's methodological holism thesis is classified by him as Marx's original achievement. Kmita gave methodological dimension to this assumption, one of Marx's basic theoretical ideas. According to this thesis, the identification and the attribution of the specified meaningful structure to human actions requires knowledge about the socio-economic system that this activity happens in.

The definition of the meaningful structure had already been described in the previous paragraph. To give a sense of Marx's methodological holism, the remark on the pair of the concepts - objective-subjective and the definition of cognitive priority are needed. In the subject literature, two interpretational tendencies of these definitions were dominant: the anthropological and the one that emphasized the materialistic ontological monism of Marxism. According to the anthropological version, a man's vision of the world forms the only one, subjective reality that is the object of cognition, and according to which the subject functions in the world. This vision is of a subjective nature, and what is delineated in this vision as objective is also subjective; it is connected with idealistic philosophy. The ontological materialistic monism in turn accepts the existence of the only objective reality, and subjectivity is the special case of what the objective is. Both interpretations were inadequate to Kmita in the context of Marx's statements. He came to a conclusion that the interpretation that will be suitable for Marx must fulfil two assumptions: (1) the assumption of the subjective character of the process of the cognition of objective reality and (2) the assumption of an active role of the subject. The first assumption is obvious, it is us, humans, who know the world by means of conceptual tools. The active role of the subject is evident in the belief that a human is at the same time an author and an actor of the history or social reality (men create the institutions, and the institutions create men). The activity of a man is based on his images of the world, which change the world in the actions. The actions of man, the human practice

is the place of constitution for the social structures that are recognized as objectively existent, but also as the place of confrontation for the visions created, and for the conceptions with produced reality. These interpretations, the anthropological and the monistic, cannot simultaneously contain both of these assumptions. The anthropological emphasizes human activism in the sphere of cognition and action, the monistic and ontologising however, is simultaneously deterministic in regard to human activity, being reduced here to objective conditions.

Kmita suggested the following interpretation of Marx's understanding of a pair of the concepts objective-subjective, in which "(...) the subjective is expressed as the subjective and the subjective is expressed as the objective, has its own representation in the form of, let us say, the meaningful structures (subjective and subjectifying representation of given objectivity) or contrarily, in the form of given functional assumptions that correspond to so-called the quantitative laws" (Kmita, 1970, p. 79). In Kmita's interpretation, Marx was a realist. He assumed the existence of an objective reality, but at the same time he claimed that human actions are subjectively determined (the methodological structuralism thesis) by the knowledge and the values of the acting subject. What we call objective reality can be only represented subjectively, or represented in a subjective-objective way. The subjective representation pertains to the beliefs of the acting subjects, and thus to the state of the recognition of their own activity. The subjectively objectifying representation is cognitive knowledge (fulfilling the scientific criteria and thus intersubjective) about the human actions that are formulated in the studies, the scientific ones for instance.

According to Marx's thesis of methodological holism, the propositions about the objective whole (in the above sense of the word 'objectivity'), i.e. the propositions about the socio-economic system, have cognitive primacy over the propositions describing types of rational actions or their products. In other words, the mentioned cognitive primacy is noticeable in the following directive: to explain human behaviour, aside from indicating the motives of the actors, one must refer to the propositions that characterise the socio-economic system in which the action takes place. Obviously not every action can

be explained by the propositions describing the socio-economic system. I will return to this later.

Kmita's analysis of the category of labour in *Capital* was inspirational in the context of devising the new meanings of Marx's concepts: subjective and objective. Marx characterised labour as, on the one hand, the rational activity understood as the meaningful structure (here Marx was realising the methodological structuralism directive), and on the other hand, he perceived labour as located in the socio-economic system, which gave it an altogether different meaning. The relativisation of labour to the capitalist socio-economic structure reveals a new dimension of human activity. This is a type of labour characteristic Marx considers to be objective and conditioning for intentional human activity. The objective characteristic is made within the scientific theory about the socio-economic system, thus what the scientific theory states is for Marx the representation of objective reality (subjectifying objectivity). Thus, when one speaks about the objectivity, what one can mean is only the objectivity that is recognised by the consciousness formed independently from the beliefs of the subjects engaged in the capitalist process of production. Marx's method of inquiry, according to Kmita, is the realisation of *Marx's methodological holism thesis*.

Labour as the process of production of use-value gives human effort a given meaningful structure, sets goals, and recognises the nature of the means of production used. Realising a given goal, labour is a meaningful action. The rational action, i.e., labour producing a given use-value, Marx also considers in a different manner: as the process of production of values with a certain objective effect assigned; whereby the value exists only in the use-value, in the commodity. Thus, considering labour in light of production of values simultaneously assumes the understanding of labour as rational activity producing use-value. Use labour needs to exist for labour creating values to come into existence. The production of values by labour is referred to by Marx as the socio-economic system, because the value is determined by the time of the social labour that is necessary for its creation. Value is quantifiable, and there is a standard of its measurement.

"As far as the subject of labour understood as the rational action which uses the means of production in a way set by his own knowledge and the goal of labour, labour understood as the production of values flows (leads to given results) in a way set by the socio-economic system no matter if the person entangled in the process treats the result of this process as his own or not" (Kmita, 1970, p. 92).

Concrete labour is regarded subjectively (conscious and intentional activity), and objectively—when it is considered as the value producing (the objective effect of the action realizing the intended goal), then: "It is now no longer the labourer that employs the means of production, but the means of production that employ the labourer" (Marx, *Capital*, ch. 8).

The dual characteristics of the category of labour in *Capital*, Kmita considered the characteristic feature of Marx's method of research into social phenomena. The point of view on human labour understood concretely was connected with the one understood abstractly. This connection is very original. The acting subjects' (a capitalist and a worker) knowledge of a goal, and a means of action (the meaningful structure of an action) differs, it does not correspond with the knowledge of the same action, which is defined as the element of the capitalist socio-economic system. They are not reducible to one another. The theory of capitalism, according to Marx, includes the knowledge of the socio-economic system.

### **Functional-genetic explanation**

Now, let me go back to the previous issue of Kmita's interpretation regarding the connection between the meaningful structure, and the whole of the socio-economic system. This problem can be formulated as the following question: *does every action taken by a subject (the meaningful structure) need to be explained based on the knowledge of the socio-economic whole?* The followers of the ontological monist interpretation of Marxism answered in the affirmative. However, the admirers of the anthropological interpretation either agreed on the autonomy of both accounts of the concept of labour (subjective and objective), or they suggested redundancy of the subjective account in spite of the fact that for other (non-economic) humanistic disciplines they suggested the humanistic interpretation. I will explain in advance

that in Kmita's interpretation not every action is determined by the socio-economic system, and therefore not every action can be, or needs to be, explained in terms of knowledge of the socio-economic structure.

"Now it is doubtless that the whole class of human activities need not be explained, according to Marx – in any way taking into account the actual socio-economic system. These are activities that are non-rational, natural, i.e., the ones that cannot be interpreted humanistically by attributing to their subjects the given knowledge and goals. (...) According to Karl Marx, only some individual rational actions should be explained exclusively in terms of the socio-economic system" (Kmita, 1970, p. 107-108).

Kmita also argued that the belief postulating the existence of rational action which could be explained exclusively in terms of the actual socio-economic system would be inadequate to Marx's theory. Then which rational actions, or types of rational actions, should be explained by the propositions about socio-economic structure?

"The explanation in terms of the actual socio-economic system can be applied to: (1) non-dissemination of particular forms of consciousness, (2) their dissemination, (3) their persistence, (4) their fading" (Kmita, 1970, p. 112).

Not only can these types of rational actions be explained in terms of the knowledge about the socio-economic system, but also the products of the actions that can disseminate and fade in a society. In other words the originality of the method of *Capital* is that it can be applied to the explanation of an origin of social beliefs, and their fading in a given society. This explanation is not about claiming that a certain type of action could not disseminate because it was retrograde towards a given social structure, or it was too modern for a given age. Rather, it is about whether or not the system "granted" the possibility to realise the meaning of rational action, or if it made this realisation impossible. This consent takes place when the meaning of the action is consistent with the objective result of this action in the context of the socio-economic system. If, for instance, the goal of a capitalist is to multiply profit (the meaning of a capitalist's activity), and if the characteristics of the economic process indicate that the objective result of this process is the multiplication of profit, then we have the sought-after consistency between the goal and the result of the objective process. Then, the actions taken by the capitalist have the opportunity to disseminate. For

the capitalist, the increase of profit is a value, and simultaneously, the profit is an objective result of the capitalist economic process. If there is a difference between the above explained goal and a description of the results of the economic process indicated by the theory, then the actions of a capitalist in the previous manner cannot disseminate and can even fade. A type of explanation for human actions and their products, or the system of beliefs that embraces the dissemination or fading of the above mentioned categories in a given socio-economic structure, Kmita termed *the functional-genetic explanation* and declared as Marx's methodological directive in *Capital*.

Developing a model of functional-genetic explanation, Kmita took up the issues that had not been adequately recognised. Those were (1) reflections on the kind of determination that takes place between a meaningful structure and the socio-economic whole in which this action occurs, and (2) the methodological account of the socio-economic system that constitutes the autonomous whole.

According to Kmita's interpretation of Marx, the characteristics of action in terms of socio-economic system, or the objective conditions of action, should include the meaningful structure of an action. The characteristics of an action as rational, of its subjective context (a value and knowledge of the acting subject) is thus necessary. If we were to understand the basic thesis of historical materialism as do the majority of Marxists, that the objective socio-economic conditions causally determine the subjective context of an action, then Marx's reflections on, let us say, concrete labour would be redundant and incomprehensible. The concept of abstract labour would be sufficient. In the characteristics of abstract labour, the concept of concrete labour would be *implicite* included (the concept of concrete labour would be reduced to the concept of abstract labour). However, Marx emphasised the duality of the concept of human labour, arguing that the value of abstract labour does not exist without the use-value produced in the process of concrete labour. Karl Marx's deliberations directed Kmita's attention to search for a model of the determination connected with historical materialism which would be more adequate than the causal model. The goal was to give an account of the determinacy relations of the subjective context of determination by an objective one, which



would avoid a reduction of the subjective context to the objective one. After the critical analysis of the belief in which historical materialism is seen as relying on the model of causal determination, he came to a conclusion that functional determination would be more adequate to Marx's intentions. He replaced causal determination with his own model of functional determination, arguing that it better corresponds with Marx's beliefs than the dogmatic account of the causal determination model. The source of Kmita's inspiration in developing the concept of functional relations, and the concept of functional explanation and functional structure, were the works of, on the one hand, the French Marxists Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar and the Polish economist Oskar Lange and, on the other hand, the French psychologist Jean Piaget, the structuralism of Claude Levi-Strauss and the contemporary research on Darwinian evolution (Kmita, 1973, p. 237-254).

A little bit earlier, in the mid 1960's, the French Marxists had been the first to start research the model of determination assumed by Marx in *Capital*, seriously questioning the universal attribution of the causal determination model to Marx. They applied a similar approach to the concept of socio-economic system, making use of the structuralist thesis in defining the concept of the socio-economic whole. In discussion with the above mentioned thinkers, Kmita developed the concept of the functional structure. According to Kmita, the socio-economic structure is adequately represented by the functional structure, which he understood in biological terms:

"By the functional structure I understand every single organism, often the organism with its immediate surroundings. The functional structure can be roughly characterised in the following way: (1) it divides into a series of elements whereby for every single element there is a certain repertoire of its possible states; (2) in the set of every possible sequence of elemental states, which I will call the global states, there is a distinguished proper subset of it, so that a given structure has a determined property P, known usually as the state of equilibrium if and only if it is characterised by the global state which is a member of this subset; (3) for every subsequence of the elements there are subsequences of the elemental state so that with any given state of other elements the structure would not have the property P—this type of subsequence of the elemental states we will call the anti-functional series of the elemental states; (4) the functional structure always has the respective value" (Kmita, 1973, p. 213-214).

The premises of the functional explanation making up its explanans he called *the functional reason*.

The functional reason of the answer to the question "(...) why is there chlorophyll in the leafage? Can be put in the following way:

- (1) This organism is an embryophyte.
- (2) Every embryophyte is capable of photosynthesis.

(3) Lack of chlorophyll in the leafage of an embryophyte would cause its loss of the capability of photosynthesis (it is anti-functional on account of the capability of photosynthesis)

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There is a chlorophyll in the leafage of this plant".

The premise (3) of the functional reason is the functional law, while the premise (2) formulates the law of maintaining equilibrium. From this moment up to the time of development of the model of the functional explanation, of the functional dependence etc., the fundamental epistemological issue taken up by Kmita which pertained to Marx was expressed in the question about the relations between the meaning and the functional reason.

While identifying the socio-economic whole with the functional structure on account of a given property P, he replaced the causal determination commonly attributed to Marx with the functional determination. The functional explanation embraced the valid explanation of the features of particular elemental states of this structure, and particular subsequences of its elements.

The socio-economic structure functionally determines its elemental states while human consciousness is one of the possible elemental states of this whole. The functional law takes the form of a statement that it will be impossible to maintain a state of equilibrium of a given socio-economic structure, if the appropriate type of beliefs (meaningful structures) does not appear in this structure. To the functional structure in form of the socio-economic whole, the law of maintaining the state of equilibrium is the thesis of reproduction. The

socio-economic whole is in a state of equilibrium if there is reproduction i.e., all of the social relations are reproduced. The simple reproduction takes place when every relation is reproduced in the same form. There can also be an extended reproduction that increases in a reproductive cycle, and an atrophic reproduction that diminishes the extent of the social relations in a reproductive cycle.

From the characteristics of the functional mechanism follows that the content of the beliefs “serving” the functional structure cannot be derived from it. In other words this structure does not determine the content of beliefs. Let me remind that through functional explanation, one can explain only their dissemination, fading, and persistence. *How do the meaningful structures that turned out to be functional originate?* Firstly, let us note that reflection on consciousness and the ways of its dissemination goes beyond the scope of considerations pertaining to functional mechanisms, examples of which are brought by biology. When we enter the territory of the humanities the objective biological analogies are useless. However, it does not mean that the theory of evolution stops being the inspiration for the social sciences. The formal analogies between the theory of development of the natural world, and the description of the progress of the human world, including the sphere of subjectivity, are still being exploited. Social theories of development take into account the relations between the subjective and objective context of action.

In Kmita's conceptual apparatus the relations are identified as those occurring between causal determination (subjective context of action) and functional determination (the objective context of action); also between the motives of a human action and the socio-economic structure. Kmita was not completely satisfied with the answer given by Althusser who admittedly also equated the socio-economic structure with the functional structure, but he characterised the human actions only within an objective context. However, Lange, whose proposition Kmita considered to be an example of a diachronic-functional structure, reckoned that human actions are functional in regard to the directional development of this structure. Both answers were considered by Kmita as one-sided, they were insufficiently taking into account, or completely ignoring, the subjective contexts of human actions.

While analysing K. Marx's propositions about a dissemination of the transformation of natural rent into rent land, the creation of manufactures, and the process of exchange, Kmita reached the conclusion that Marx used the model of functional-genetic explanation. As I already mentioned, while discussing the scope of problems falling within the model of the functional-genetic explanation, a chance for dissemination exists for these kind of actions and products, or more precisely their subjective contexts, in which the meaning of an action (also the meaning of the products) is in accordance with the objective result (the function of action) of action in the socio-economic structure. Moreover, the functional-genetic model explains the upholding and fading of beliefs.

"This is an outline of Marx's scheme of a functional-genetic explanation of a dissemination of the subjective context of a given rational action (...)

(1) A certain type A action, having a meaning M appears in the context of a socio-economic structure E having a property P.

(2) Every type A action and every M meaning leads to a type R result in the context of any socio-economic structure with a property P.

(3)  $S \approx R$  (a result R corresponds approximately to a subjective goal S).

(4) If any A type action and meaning M appears in the context of any socio-economic structure having a property P, in which the result of A is R and  $R \approx S$ , then A disseminates in the context of this structure.

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A type A activity and meaning M disseminates in the context of a structure E"  
(Kmita, 1973, p. 253).

The presented model of the functional-genetic explanation, as it can be seen, does not reduce consciousness to the objective context, nor does the socio-economic structure determine causally the content of beliefs that contribute to the meaningful structures. Kmita acknowledged the above reconstructed mechanism, one which hides behind the model of the dissemination of the subjective context explanation, to be the fundamental in Marx's thinking. The developed model of the functional-genetic explanation which argues for the acceptance of characterising human activity in terms of decision rationality is necessary not only in the process of explaining individual

activities which are devoid of a greater historical meaning, but it is also necessary in the process of explaining historically important decisions made in the name of community and the phenomena concerning mass activity.

### **Explaining historical phenomena of development**

Kmita regarded the explanation of historical development phenomena as a foreground task for Marx's theory of scientific knowledge. In the Introduction to *Założenia teoretyczne badań nad rozwojem historycznym* (1970) he mentioned some reasons in favour of this approach. As part of this task, he worked on the meaning of the fundamental theses of materialistic holism, and he inferred from them the consequences pertaining to the development of the social sphere of the scientific practice. In the mentioned text, he uses the phrase *Marx's theory of scientific knowledge*. The leader of The Poznań Methodological School was encouraged to use this concept perhaps by the results of the analyses of Marx's research method that had been conducted by the School so far. Marx's research method was elevated to the level of an epistemological theory which, as a coherent and organised set of the methodological propositions, should have a proper legitimisation (philosophical justification) to avoid typical objections raised against rival epistemologies (for instance Neopositivist or Popperian). The important postulate addressed to any philosophical conception is also the demand of self-referential application of its own statements to itself. Therefore Marxist epistemology cannot precede science, "be a science before science" (to use Marx's phrase); it is preceded by historical materialism. Historical materialism itself is historical, so is the Marxist theory of scientific knowledge. The reflection on the status of historical materialism and the general theory of social development included in it provides, in Kmita's interpretation, the premises for explaining the development of the scientific practice, its subjective context composed of methodological norms and directives. The binding norms and directives of a given discipline or group of disciplines were constituted and universalised as the response to the expectations towards science through the demands of social development of the socio-economic structure in which the science functions.

Kmita began his reflection on Marx's conception of social progress with the analysis of the Darwinian theory of the evolution of species, in an effort to reconstruct this type of explanation in the categories of philosophy of science. He concluded that if the theory of evolution explains the development of species, then the pattern of this explanation is in any way different from the explanation pattern of physics. The fundamental difference lies in the selection of general propositions, i.e. scientific laws that are the necessary element of every model of explanation. Comparing the law of physics with the fundamental law of theory of evolution (the principle of natural selection) he distinguished two kinds of laws: "(...) (1) laws in the narrow sense – describing specific regularities; (2) nomological formulas describing contour regularities" (Kmita, 1976, p. 55). The distinction between the types of laws turned to be the basis of the two kinds of explanation: the exceptionless explanation, the explanans of which would include scientific law in the narrow sense, and the historical explanation, the explanans of which includes the nomological formula.

The position that the application of the exceptionless explanation model has a limited range in the humanities, because of the difficulties with formulating scientific laws in the narrow sense is commonly accepted, and the view that this group of disciplines is of an idiographic nature becomes more and more popular. Kmita's historical explanation gives a solution to the outlined dilemma. It connects the two opposite positions, helping to hold the view that social knowledge is nomological, while simultaneously being idiographic. The specific character of nomological formulas and corresponding overall regularities lies in the fact that laws as nomological formulas indicate only the main functional dependence (the natural selection and the function of mutations). Referring to the law of natural selection is in no way a final form of explanation. The actual empirical studies are necessary to conform the nomological formula to empirical data. It is necessary to equip the formula with empirical content accommodating the spatiotemporal parameters of the phenomena being explained. It is about recognising particular mutations that are predicted in the evolutionary principle of natural selection.

By the analogy with the status of the laws of biological evolution, Kmita attributed the status of nomological formulas to the laws of historical materialism.

“The fact that the concrete historical explanation referring to Marxist theory of social development uses the explanans in which a unique combination of historical events appears, does not exclude the law in the form of a proper nomological formula under which this combination falls. In my opinion, the laws of historical materialism are, similarly as for instance the principle N of natural selection for the biological theory of evolution, the nomological formulas” (Kmita, 1976, p. 62).

In the discussed interpretation, Marx's laws of historical materialism direct and sensitize the researcher to the problems and connections that should be taken into account, but in no way does historical materialism replace the honest empirical studies. The laws of historical materialism serve the same function as the principles of structuralism for the structuralist studies. Additionally, if we assume the distinction between the social and individual consciousness, as Kmita did, then it follows that the social practice functionally determines the social, but not the individual, consciousness, i.e. the commonly accepted belief that actually lingers in a given state of the socio-economic structure.

### **Marxist theory of scientific knowledge**

To the area of Marxist epistemology recreated by Kmita, apart from historical explanation and characteristics of the status of historical materialism, we should add the speculations concerning the social practice and historical possibility and necessity. These speculations were carried out in a methodological spirit, and their intention was to create proper methodological tools, on the one hand enabling the possibility of knowledge of social phenomena, and on the other, building the understanding of Marx's perspective of inquiry.

The social practice, taken from the view of epistemology attributed by Kmita to Marx, was characterised as “(...) a special case of the diachronic, hierarchical functional structure—on account of the (developmental) global quality consisting of the reproduction of the



existing objective conditions connected with the production of the new conditions of this sort" (Kmita, 1976, p. 21).

As one can see, the above understanding of practice is consistent with the previous findings made within the framework of this interpretation, but let us notice that they are distant from the common sense meaning of the term "practice".

The reflections on the concepts of historical possibility and necessity in turn complete the methodological model of historical explanation. The goal was to better define the historical process through pointing at the historical necessity that determines the social practice. A thing that is initially only possible becomes a necessary fact, becomes real in the process of actualization of this possibility in the social practice. In other words, this happens when one of the possible projects achieves, through the practice, the form that is independent from the project. Referring to the findings of William Dray, who distinguished two independent procedures in historical studies (answering two questions: *Why did the given situation happen?* and *How did it happen?*), Kmita took these two procedures to be connected by the concepts of historical necessity and possibility (Kmita, 1976, p. 69n.).

In the subsequent chapters of *Szkice z teorii poznania naukowego* Kmita was concerned with the scientific practice which he defined as the substructure of the dynamic and hierarchical functional structure that he identified with the whole socio-economic system. His thought slowly evolved towards the shifting from "(...) the problems of the theory of historical knowledge to the problems of the historical theory of knowledge" (Kmita, 1976, p. 29). Then he took up the task of developing an epistemological theory which he named **historical epistemology**. Kmita always thought that "(...) among the ideas making up the Marxist account of the social world and the ways of knowing one can extract a number of thoughts that constitute not only a certain conception of science but also the conception that is able to face the difficulties that the contemporary philosophy of science is struggling with" (Kmita, 1983, p. 45).

Kmita tried to show the validity of inspirations drawn from Marx in the process of solving the problems of philosophy of science that in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was going through a crisis. The crisis was connected with two groups of issues: the status of methodological

norms and directives of practicing science (between relativism and universalism), and the rules of scientific progress (between epistemology and sociology of knowledge).

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Kmita's interpretation of Marxism discussed above is very specific, because it was developed from the perspective of philosophy of science and its state at the beginning of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. one hundred years after Marx's *Capital* had been published (1867). Karl Marx was not a methodologist nor a theoretician of science; he was a philosopher and social scientist who developed and applied an original method of inquiry. He did not lay out systematically the methodological rules of his method. Among his published works, we can find only a few casual remarks on the applied method. Those remarks are scattered throughout his texts. One can also use, as Kmita did, the analyses of social phenomena that Marx carried out according to this method. In these circumstances, the effort to make Marx's methodological statements consistent was—and still is—a considerable intellectual challenge. But the interpretation of Kmita aimed at something more: at the restating of Marx's scientific methods in the categories, concepts and problems of philosophy of science as it was in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in doing so it endeavoured to achieve three goals. First, to demonstrate the competitiveness of Marx's approach against the dominant methodological paradigms at that time, and second, to provide the research tools for the contemporary theoretical analyses of the social world. Last—and supposedly not least—not to lose this “something” characteristic of Marx's thought. Thus, Kmita's interpretation of Marxism is not restricted to a literal reading of Marx's texts.

*translated by Ewa Modrakowska*

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## ABSTRACT

### **JERZY KMITA'S METHODOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF KARL MARX'S PHILOSOPHY. FROM IDEOLOGY TO METHODOLOGICAL CONCEPTS**

The article presents J. Kmita's methodological interpretation of selected cognitive methods used by K. Marx. Those methods were (and I believe they still are) significant for the social sciences and the humanities, even a century after they had been developed. J. Kmita's interpretation reveals specificity of epistemic procedures carried out by the author of "Capital" and emphasizes contemporary actuality of Marx's epistemological ideas. To achieve that aim, Kmita refers to the concepts established in the field of philosophy of science of his time. According to J. Kmita, the attractiveness of Marx's approach lies in the opportunity to develop a methodological interpretation of Marx philosophy, which in turn enables the formation of a unique theory of science development, alternative to those provided by logical positivism, falsificationism, neopragmatism or sociology of knowledge. Such theory would combine the perspective of sociology of knowledge with an epistemological approach to the development of science.

**KEYWORDS:** historical explanation, functional explanation, functional-genetic explanation, humanistic interpretation, methodological structuralism, Marxist holism, assumption of rationality

### **JERZEGO KMITY INTERPRETACJA METODOLOGICZNA FILOZOFII KAROLA MARKSA. OD IDEOLOGII DO POJĘĆ METODOLOGICZNYCH**

W artykule przedstawia się interpretację metodologiczną wybranych przez J. Kmitę metod poznawczych stosowanych przez K. Marksa. Metody te, były (i myślę, że są nadal) doniosłe dla uprawiania nauk społecznych i humanistycznych jeszcze po stu latach od ich powstania. W przeprowadzonej interpretacji, wydobywa J. Kmita specyfikę sposobu postępowania poznawczego twórcy *Kapitału* oraz ukazuje aktualność rozwiązań epistemologicznych Marksa. Wykorzystuje do tego celu dorobek współczesnego mu stanu filozofii nauki. Atrakcyjność Marksa, zdaniem J. Kmity, leży w możliwości wypracowania w oparciu o metodologicznie zinterpretowany dorobek Marksa, nowatorskiej w stosunku do logicznego empiryzmu, falsyfikacjonizmu, neopragmatyzmu czy socjologii wiedzy, koncepcji rozwoju nauki.

Łączyłaby ona perspektywę socjologii wiedzy z podejściem epistemologicznym w charakteryzowaniu procesu rozwoju nauki.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** wyjaśnianie historyczne, wyjaśnianie funkcjonalne, wyjaśnianie funkcjonalno-genetyczne, interpretacja humanistyczna, strukturalizm metodologiczny, holizm marksistowski, założenie o racjonalności