

## CAPITALISM AND ITS PATH: FROM THE CLASSICAL APPROACH TO POST-FORDIST BIOPSYCHOPOLITICS



<https://doi.org/10.56238/arev7n5-147>

Submitted on: 09/04/2025

Publication date: 09/05/2025

**Fernando Luz Sinimbu Portugal<sup>1</sup>.**

### ABSTRACT

This work was carried out in a comparative perspective, that is, it is a dialogue of historical and socioeconomic scopes. This is an essay aimed at awakening criticality regarding the consequences of socioeconomic changes operated during Western history, as well as regarding the predominantly Eurocentric academic approach produced both in relation to the theme and to the very concept of the West. The challenge proposed in the work is to present and trace the social-historical guidelines of a heterodox Marxist concept little debated in Brazil, namely, “biocapitalism” and “psychopolitics”, that is, the post-Fordist organization in which the “factory” is confused with society itself. , in a kind of “social factory”.

**Keywords:** History of capitalism. Financial capitalism. Historical-critical method. Materialism. Biocapitalism.

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<sup>1</sup> Doutorando em Ciências Sociais na Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais (2025-2028). Bolsista CAPES. Mestre em Ciências Sociais na Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais (2023-2024). Bolsista CAPES. Graduado em Direito na Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais (2015); graduado em Filosofia na Universidade Católica de Brasília (2025); graduado em Teologia (2022), em História (2023), em Administração (2023), em Ciências Sociais (2025) na Universidade Estácio de Sá (bolsista UNESA); em Teologia Católica na UNINTER (2025). Bolsista da instituição; especialista em Direito Público pela Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais (2017); especialista em Direito Constitucional (2021); Direito Administrativo (2021); Direito Civil e Direito Processual Civil (2021) e em Ciências Criminais (2021); em Direitos Humanos (2023) e em Ensino à Distância (2023) no Centro Universitário União das Américas - Uniamérica. Secretário-Geral da Associação de Pós-Graduandos da Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais (2023-2024). Link relativo ao currículo lattes do pesquisador: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/3426892936688569>; Identificação no Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0070-0183>.

## INTRODUCTION

Capitalism is a historical process that has generated moral, ethical, economic, legal, sociological, anthropological, philosophical and social effects in general. However, society has not always been guided by the maxims, aphorisms and foundations of this system. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the historical and social traces that result in the current global configuration, specifically from antiquity to the financial capitalism that reigns in modern times. In this sense, this work aims to establish a dialogue with current social scientists, who disagree on several points with Marxism and/or Marxianism. The analysis culminates in “post-Fordist biocapitalism”, an idea developed by authors from the Italian operaismo movement, who consider themselves a reinterpretation of Karl Marx, that is, a kind of updating of Marxian ideas according to the current context. In fact, this modest work will be carried out using traditional academic sources on the history of capitalism, that is, in accordance with the most widespread systematic approach in Brazilian and global education. However, duly founded criticisms of this approach will be made in due course throughout the text of this work, under the strict responsibility of the author. Here, therefore, is a small critical contribution to the Academy regarding the history of capitalism, that is, it seeks to answer the following question: how did capitalism emerge and arrive at its current form?

## CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Within the classical Brazilian academic perspective, the discipline of History is traditionally approached in a Eurocentric way, which contributes to the idealization of a supposed national Western identity (Guarinello, 2020).

In general, inevitably, Humanities scholars have inherited perspectives, in a certain way biased, within this macrosocial spectrum called the “West”.

It is not the Ancient History of the world, therefore, but the History of a very specific part of the past: that of the origins of the West. By assuming and teaching that this is our Ancient History, we are doing a job of memory and, as we have seen, of identity production. We assume, almost naturally and unconsciously, that we are part of the history of the West. Other content, which may even be older, is presented to us as the History of other peoples.

Without realizing it, for better or for worse, Ancient History Westernizes us. It places us on a timeline, positions us in world History as heirs of the Near East, Greece and Rome. Through it, we become successors of Medieval History, and the History of Brazil becomes a branch of European History in modern times, when our territory was colonized by the Portuguese from the 16th century onwards (Guarinello, 2020, p. 13).

Having considered the “Western” perspective on the epistemological premises of historical science, let us move on to the conceptions of Antiquity.

According to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the fathers of the self-proclaimed “scientific socialism”, the history of peoples must be analyzed from the perspective of the class struggle, that is, in a “dominator-dominated” paradigm.

The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, feudal lord and serf, guild master and fellow-traveller, in short, oppressors and oppressed, in constant opposition, have lived in an uninterrupted war, sometimes open, sometimes disguised; a war that has always ended either in a revolutionary transformation of the entire society, or in the destruction of the two classes in conflict. In the most remote periods of history, we see, almost everywhere, a complete structuring of society into distinct classes, a multiple gradation of social positions. In ancient Rome we find patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, lords, vassals, guild masters, apprentices, fellow-travellers, serfs; and within each of these classes other particular gradations (Engels; Marx, 2010, p. 40).

Still from a Marxist-materialist perspective, Antiquity would be a pre-capitalist phase, in which the entire social structure would have emerged due to war issues, that is, cities would be housing complexes for warriors, a structure that made the emergence of private property possible, based on the dynamics of dominator-dominated between peoples.

The community/city would thus be a military force. The concentration of housing in the city would be the basis of a war organization. War, in turn, and the very nature of the previous tribal structure would lead to the differentiation between the members of society (inferior and superior, conquerors and conquered, free and slaves). It was in this way, according to Marx, that communal property would have separated from private property. In the ancient city, the land was appropriated and worked individually, because it did not require collective labor. The community, or city, was the reciprocal relationship between private owners, their alliance against the outside, their guarantee of property. In Marx's view, it was a society of small peasants who cultivated their own land. As they became more prosperous, they exploited foreign slaves (Guarinello, 2020, p. 24-25).

In turn, Max Weber developed the subject in another way. Originally, according to Weber, there would be “Western” and “Eastern” cities, just as Karl Marx alluded to. However, in the latter, power would be immensely centralized and bureaucratic, while in the former the primitive diffuse-democratic character would have emerged.

For Weber, the city was the urban center that, as such, differentiated itself from the rural space, being able to dominate it, be dominated by it, or even separate itself from the rural world. For Weber, both the ancient and medieval cities were bourgeois, in the sense that they were imposed on the great families, suppressed relations between aristocratic people and instituted a form of public power, rather than family or hereditary power. For Weber, the ancient city was, above all, the seat of rural landowners, who lived off the income obtained in the countryside. In this

sense, they were consumer cities, since they did not need, unlike medieval cities, to develop their own artisanal production to guarantee supplies. (...) The urban wealth of the ancient world led the elites to an idle lifestyle, focused on luxury and cultural production: this was one of their weaknesses, but also one of the causes of the brilliance of ancient culture. The decline in the supply of slaves, caused by the end of the conquests of the Roman Empire, led to the decline of mercantile and rational production, marking the decline of the ancient city and the loss of the brilliance of its erudite culture (Guarinello, 2020, p. 26).

It should be noted that both Marx and Weber brought with them European views on the subject, with positivist traits from the 19th century and, consequently, with certain prejudices characteristic of their times, although they defended avant-garde, humanitarian and revolutionary ideas at the time.

From another perspective, in a purely philological analysis, the word “ancient” refers to something that existed in the past; that has passed; that has ended and/or refers to historical Antiquity (Languages, 2022).

In fact, today's historiography understands that the traditional definitions of “ancient” are problematic and can be approached from different aspects, depending on the branch of knowledge chosen for the analysis.

The delimitation of the Ancient Near East in time and space (and consequently the delimitation of the argument of this book) is a problem that is both practical and historical in its broadest sense. Practical arguments such as the sectoral (and especially philological) competence of scholars, or their disciplinary tradition, undoubtedly play a role. In this sense, the initial limit that separates history from prehistory is clearly linked to the contribution of written sources to merely archaeological ones; another limit of pre-classical history in relation to classical history is linked to the emergence of Greco-Roman sources, which are diverse in language and typology and traditionally separated from the study of ancient Near Eastern sources. The same applies to the spatial delimitation of the Near East in relation to the surrounding regions that remained at a level of lesser complexity for longer. (...) The archaeological procedure has objective and scientific characteristics, and tends to reconstruct the dating of archaeological discoveries (or rather, their insertion in the context of discovery) by comparing them with each other and with the present (B.P. dates “before present”). Historical work has a cultural characteristic and tends to reconstruct ancient dating systems and ancient chronological sequences, to relate them to our system and our sequence so that they are accessible (Liverani, 2020, p. 33- 36).

Furthermore, Classical Antiquity, according to the Brazilian pedagogical convention, can be defined as the period between the end of the Neolithic period (2,200 BCE) and the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 CE (Common Era) (Pinto, 2022).

As for the majority of labor relations at the time, it is important to emphasize that slavery drove the ancient world economically. In order to study the subject in a scientific

and systematic way, Karl Marx coined the concept of “mode of production” and inserted it into his conception of historical materialism, in the following terms.

The mode of production of material life determines the process of social, political and spiritual life in general. It is not the consciousness of man that determines his being, but, on the contrary, his social being that determines his consciousness. (...) In broad terms, we can designate as so many epochs of progress in the economic formation of society the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal and the modern bourgeois modes of production. Bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production, antagonistic not in the sense of an individual antagonism, but of an antagonism arising from the social conditions of life of individuals. However, the productive forces that develop under the seal of bourgeois society create at the same time the material conditions for the resolution of this antagonism. With this social formation, therefore, the prehistory of human society ends (Marx, 2009, p. 47-48).

Therefore, according to the concept developed by Karl Marx, the mode of production in Greco-Roman Classical Antiquity was based on slavery, that is, on the dynamic in which the dominator – enslaver – would transform another human being into property, a fact that was reflected in the language of these people, that is, “δούλος” in Greek and “sclavus” in Latin. Both words can be translated as “slave” in modern Portuguese.

We have seen above that at a very early stage of the development of production, human labor became capable of supplying products in quantities considerably greater than those required to sustain the producers, and that this stage of development is essentially the same as that in which the division of labor and exchange between individuals emerged. It was not long before the great “truth” was discovered that human beings can also be commodities, that human power can be exchanged and exploited by transforming human beings into slaves. Human beings had barely begun to practice exchange when they themselves began to be exchanged. The asset became a liability, whether human beings wanted it or not (Engels, 2019, p. 161).

The slave-based mode of production demonstrates that Classical Antiquity was a pre-capitalist historical moment, given that the majority of the workforce was used through direct physical coercion, through explicit reification of the human being, without compensation in the form of wages. In other words, the slave-slave dynamic did not follow the capitalist logic of wage-earner.

Finally, the social structure is decisive for the materialist-historical approach, that is, the economic reality would be predominant for the organizational changes in society. In this sense, Antiquity remained, in general, rural and distant from capitalism itself, a subject that will be addressed later in this work.

## FEUDALISM

The fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 CE became a landmark, due to the territorial fragmentation that occurred and, nevertheless, due to the advent of what would later be called feudalism, of course, under intense scrutiny and academic deliberation, a medium in which there is always more than one possibility of approaching the same facts.

The Middle Ages encompass a period of about ten centuries, between the end of Antiquity and the beginning of the modern era. This is a chronological convention, a way of ordering and classifying historical time, alongside the Ancient Age (or Antiquity), the Modern Age and the Contemporary Age. Historians have never reached a consensus on the precise milestones of the beginning of the end of the Middle Ages: for some, it would be the fall of Rome in 476 and the fall of Constantinople in 1453; for others, the Edict of Milan in 313 and the arrival of the Spanish in America in 1492 (Silva, 2021, p. 7).

The Middle Ages, therefore, are a historical process that lasted for about a millennium, a reality that suggests intense changes during its course. In fact, the common characteristics of the main constituent elements of this period can be suggested objectively, namely, Christianity – the Catholic Church –, Latin and classical Greek philosophy.

Christianity, in addition to being an effective tool for the (often forced) integration of barbarians, served as a vector for the expansion of the Latin world beyond the borders of the former Western Roman Empire. Despite the loss of almost the entire Iberian Peninsula to Muslims at the beginning of the 8th century, the Christianization of Germany, Scandinavia, the British Isles, Bohemia, Poland, Hungary and Croatia integrated new territories into what has come to be known as Christendom. (...) Firstly, it was in the medieval period that we witnessed the advent of the idea of Christianity, which, for the first time in history, made the inhabitants of a vast region, stretching from Scotland to the Iberian Peninsula, from Gaul to Eastern Europe, passing through Scandinavia and the Balkans, feel like members of the same community, despite their numerous cultural, political, etc. differences (Silva, 2021, p. 9).

The current Brazilian pedagogical convention regarding the term “feudalism” understands it as the socioeconomic organization of Western Europe between the 5th and 15th centuries, that is, during the Middle Ages (Higa, 2022a).

In another sense, for philology, the word “feudal” refers to “feudatory”, “feudalism”, “fiefdom”, that is, to the dynamic between lord and vassals (Dicio, 2022).

Nevertheless, from a historical-materialist perspective, the mode of production of the feudal period is based on the predominantly rural dynamic of servitude, that is, between landowners and serfs. It is important to emphasize that the urbanization of the period is an essential characteristic for understanding the flourishing of capitalism.



The medieval period was also marked by the relations of domination that were established between the landowners and those who worked them (the peasants) and even those who lived near the centers of seigneurial power. These relations, which we will call in this book “seigneurial domination”, were characterized by the economic, legal, political and military control of the peasants by the aristocracy. They also included a series of obligations of the landowners towards these peasants, mainly defending them against external threats and arbitrating their conflicts. Another important originality of the medieval period was urbanization. Although the majority of the population lived in the countryside, it was during the Middle Ages that the urban phenomenon became relevant and that cities emerged as dynamic elements of the economic, political and cultural life of the European continent. Cathedrals, the largest buildings in Christianity, were built in medieval cities and their most important educational institutions, the universities, were founded (Silva, 2021, p. 12-13).

In fact, Karl Marx recognizes the feudal period as the decisive moment for the advent of capitalism, that is, it is the “primitive accumulation” that made it possible for the founding elements of the dynamics of capital to be made available in society.

The capitalist relationship presupposes the separation of the worker from the ownership of the conditions for the realization of his work. As soon as capitalist production is established, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on an ever-increasing scale. The process that creates the capitalist relationship can be nothing other than the process of separation of the worker from the ownership of the conditions for the realization of his work, a process that, on the one hand, transforms the social means of subsistence and production into capital and, on the other, converts the direct producers into wage laborers. So-called primitive accumulation is therefore nothing more than the historical process of separation between the producer and the means of production. It appears as “primitive” because it constitutes the prehistory of capital and the mode of production corresponding to it. The economic structure of capitalist society arose from the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter liberated the elements of the former (Marx, 2022, p. 786).

In this sense, Marx understands that the interaction between landowners and serfs tied the worker to the land in a symbiotic and cultural bond that took centuries to change.

However, this transition to “modernity” should not be understood as a “blessing” or as a mere “liberating gift” to workers, given the expropriation carried out against workers. Since then, those who sell their labor force have been subordinated to capital, in this case, in a nascent, incipient dynamic of premature capitalism during the end of feudalism.

The direct producer, the worker, could only dispose of his person after he had ceased to be chained to the land and was no longer a serf or vassal of another person. In order to become a free seller of labor power, who takes his commodity wherever there is a market for it, he had, moreover, to free himself from the yoke of the guilds, from their regulations concerning apprentices and officers, and from the restrictive labor regulations. Thus, the historical movement that transformed the producers into wage laborers appears, on the one hand, as the liberation of these workers from servitude and corporate coercion, and this is the only aspect that exists for our bourgeois historians. On the other hand, however, these newly freed people only became sellers of themselves after they had been robbed of all their

means of production, as well as all the guarantees of their existence that the old feudal institutions offered them. And the history of this expropriation is etched in the annals of humanity with traces of blood and fire (Marx, 2022, p. 787).

Therefore, from a materialist-critical perspective, feudalism enabled the factual-ideological emergence of capitalism, since it was a long period of major economic, demographic, labor and organizational changes in society. In this vein, still according to the materialist conception, as every structural change causes modifications in the abstract and/or ideal sphere, the referential shifts in the feudal period gave rise to profound changes in humanity.

### **MODERNITY, MERCANTILISM AND PRIMITIVE CAPITALISM**

The transition between medievalism and modernity was not an immediate and striking rupture, but rather a process of incorporations, persistence of certain practices and technical-cultural innovations.

This book, for example, has the title “Modern History” on the cover, referring to a period that, in the West, is usually dated between the capture of Constantinople – now Istanbul – by the Turks on May 29, 1453, and the outbreak of the French Revolution on July 14, 1789, when Contemporary History would begin. If this division were taken with absolute rigor, it would be possible to state that a baby, born in the last minutes of the night of May 28, 1453, began to cry in the Middle Ages, only calming down at the dawn of modern times... This is also why historians resort to concepts such as “eras”, for example, which allow for a less narrow understanding of historical temporality. For the French historian Jacques le Goff, “eras are generally events considered as founding, creating, with a more or less magical value” (Miceli, 2022, p. 10).

The Modern Age, in effect, is the time in which there is intense political-economic expansion, especially with the advent of the “great navigations”, which represented the dissemination of European values throughout the world and, in a certain way, integrated the nations, under the preponderance of the “Old Continent”.

...it was through the voyages of expansion and conquest that the old continent leapt beyond its borders to promote the “birth of Europes outside Europe” – in the happy image conceived by historian Jean Delumeau. According to this author, voyages represented, for Western civilization, the lasting victory over the sea, and it was thanks to this conquest that Spain, Portugal and soon after England, France and Holland exported techniques, books and men. Furthermore, voyages were a basic condition for the formation of the capitalist world market, promoting a new and lasting design of relations between the various regions of the planet, giving Europe its universal primacy, preserved for centuries (Miceli, 2022, p. 11-12).



Now, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, when analyzing the period, identify the dynamic continuity of the confrontation between social classes, since they perpetuate themselves, but with new names, with new guises and with new sociological actors.

Modern bourgeois society, which arose from the ruins of feudal society, did not abolish class antagonisms. It did nothing more than establish new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of those that existed in the past. However, our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, is characterized by the simplification of class antagonisms. Society is increasingly divided into two opposing camps, into two great classes in direct conflict: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. From the serfs of the Middle Ages sprang the inhabitants of the first towns; from this municipal population emerged the first elements of the bourgeoisie (Engels; Marx, 2010, p. 40-41).

From a sociological and historical perspective, according to the illustrious thinkers mentioned above, the origin of the worker and the capitalist originates in the subjugation carried out by the latter over the former.

The starting point of the development that gave rise to both the wage-worker and the capitalist was the subjugation of the worker. The next stage consisted in a change in the form of this subjugation, in the transformation of feudal exploitation into capitalist exploitation. In order to understand its progress, we do not need to go back so far. Although the beginnings of capitalist production already appear to us sporadically in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in some Mediterranean cities, the capitalist era did not begin until the sixteenth century. Where it first appeared, the abolition of serfdom had long since been accomplished, and the most brilliant feature of the Middle Ages, the existence of sovereign cities, had long since faded. In the history of primitive accumulation, what makes an epoch are all revolutions that serve as a lever for the emerging capitalist class, but above all those moments when great masses of people are suddenly and violently deprived of their means of subsistence and thrown onto the labor market as absolutely free proletarians (Marx, 2022, p. 787).

In this vein, in a materialist-historical approach, the entire new global situation served as a factual substrate for the advent of capitalism, that is, from the change in reality, as well as in socioeconomic relations, a new logic was adapted to the nascent modernity. Capitalism, therefore, in the form of mercantilism, would find a favorable environment for its dawn (Miceli, 2022).

The discovery of America and the circumnavigation of Africa opened up a new field of action for the emerging bourgeoisie. The markets of the East Indies and China, the colonization of America, colonial trade, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities in general gave commerce, industry and navigation a hitherto unknown impetus; and consequently rapidly developed the revolutionary element of the decaying feudal society. The feudal organization of industry, in which it was confined to closed guilds, no longer satisfied the needs that grew with the opening of new markets. Manufacturing replaced it. The industrial petty bourgeoisie supplanted the guild masters; the division of labor between the different guilds

disappeared in the face of the division of labor within the workshop itself (Engels; Marx, 2010, p. 41).

In this sense, the old servile and slave-owning dynamics are replaced by the logic of capital, that is, by the logic of wages and the formally free worker. In fact, despite apparently resembling a liberating action, this emancipation seems to be limited to the formal-political sphere, but it is not enough: Karl Marx supports the need for broad emancipation, that is, humanitarian and humane (Marx, 2020).

Thus, the historical movement that transforms producers into wage laborers appears, on the one hand, as the liberation of these workers from servitude and corporate coercion, and this is the only aspect that exists for our bourgeois historians. On the other hand, however, these newly freed people only become sellers of themselves after having been robbed of all their means of production, as well as all the guarantees of their existence that the old feudal institutions offered them. And the history of this expropriation is engraved in the annals of humanity with traces of blood and fire (Marx, 2022, p. 787).

It is in this context, therefore, that the modern idea of the Nation-State finds the real, practical and structural foundations to be affirmed as a standard of social organization, both in Europe and in the dominated overseas nations.

Until the States became the main entrepreneurs of the sixteenth century, each “national” case had its own characteristics, time and rhythm, which also advises against outlining any model of State, although this does not prevent us from summarily pointing out its main formative elements, namely: a unified legal system, a bureaucracy of specialized officials to draw up and enforce administrative norms and codes, in addition to a permanent army – all of this maintained at the expense of taxes and other collection mechanisms already mentioned (Miceli, 2022, p. 99).

Furthermore, this centralizing political-economic unification made possible the emergence of the personification of power in the monarch, an institute called absolutism (Higa, 2022b).

While some philosophers took it upon themselves to justify the divine right of kings, as we will see later, the word “State” gradually lost its abstract character and became highly unpopular. In some cases, such as in France – considered the model par excellence of an absolute monarchy –, in order to temporarily increase its resources, the Crown subcontracted the collection of agricultural taxes, placing the heavy hand of tenants on a large portion of the population, which generated deep dissatisfaction among the peasantry, already suffering from poor living conditions, aggravated by hunger and diseases to which their fragile bodies became easy prey. It was in the condition of victim or defendant, therefore, that the vast majority of the population related to the State, whose main function – far from being to protect the flock of subjects that the kings received by a supposed divine right – ended up being to look after the interests of the great merchants and businessmen, in a kind of patronage in reverse that, instead of encouraging any form of cultural creation,

transformed the rulers themselves into indebted hostages and aggravated the situation of misery of the vast majority of people (Miceli, 2022, p. 99).

Thus, primitive capitalism – mercantilism – prospered. Its characteristics, pedagogically agreed upon in the Brazilian educational environment, are: 1) metallism – accumulation of wealth through precious metals; 2) favorable trade balance; 3) highly interventionist state (Higa, 2022b).

The stage of commodity production, with which civilization begins, is characterized economically by the introduction of: 1. metal money and thus money capital, interest and usury; 2. merchants as an intermediary class between producers; 3. private land ownership and mortgages; and 4. slave labor as the dominant form of production. The family form that corresponds to civilization, and which definitively comes to power with it, is monogamy, the domination of man over woman, and the individual family as the economic unit of society. The synthesis of civilized society is the State, which, in all the periods taken as an example, is without exception the State of the ruling class and, in all cases, is essentially a mechanism of repression of the oppressed and exploited class (Engels, 2019, p. 161-162).

Well, in this materialist-historical system, the Modern Nation-States, personified in the monarchical dynasties, accumulated wealth through the plundering of other peoples. There was, in effect, a kind of “colonial pact” between the dominator and the dominated, in which the latter would be culturally “civilized” by the Europeans through pecuniary, legal, commercial and human compensation (Prado Júnior, 2014).

It turns out that the bourgeoisie, according to the Marxist-Marxian sociological-historical understanding, is an intrinsically revolutionary social class and tends to dominate all others.

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and consequently the relations of production, and with it all social relations. The unaltered preservation of the old mode of production was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence of all previous industrial classes. This continual subversion of production, this constant shaking of the entire social system, this constant agitation and lack of security distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all previous ones (Engels; Marx, 2010, p. 43).

When examining the annals of Western European history, one realizes that the Modern Absolute State served bourgeois interests for a time, but the theoretical and practical guidelines began to change rapidly from the 17th century onwards.

There were, therefore, several bourgeois revolutions during the 19th century, in which the classical liberal pillars were insistently displayed and superimposed on possible social aspirations represented mainly by socialists and communists (Hobsbawn, 2012).

In the face of this social turmoil, the idea and practice of capitalism were slowly assimilated and fixed in the popular imagination in all nations of the globe, culminating in major changes in the course of humanity.

## **CONTEMPORANEITY, FINANCIAL CAPITALISM AND BIOCAPITALISM**

Contemporaneity is traditionally understood as a historical period that began with the French Revolution (1789) (Miceli, 2022). It should be noted that, despite the pedagogical distinction between supposed phases of history, this is a mere convention, in order to simplify and enable the scientific-systematic study of the subject.

Thus, Karl Marx, still in the 19th century, identifies contemporaneity as the most favorable historical moment for the development of the logic of capital, especially in England, the place from which the “Industrial Revolutions” originated.

England from 1846 to 1866

No period of modern society is so propitious for the study of capitalist accumulation as that of the last twenty years. It is as if it had found Fortunato's bag. Of all the countries, however, it is England that once again offers the classic example, and this because it occupies the first place in the world market, because only here has the capitalist mode of production developed to its fullest extent, and finally because the establishment of the millennial reign of free trade, from 1846 onwards, deprived the vulgar economy of its last refuge. (...) The accumulation of capital was accompanied by its concentration and centralization. Although there were no official agricultural statistics for England (but there were for Ireland), they were voluntarily provided by 10 counties. These figures show that from 1851 to 1861 the number of leases under 100 acres decreased from 31,583 to 26,567, that is, 5,016 of them were merged with larger leases. From 1815 to 1825 no movable estate over £1 million fell under the inheritance tax; between 1825 and 1855, however, there were 8 instances, and between 1855 and June 1859, that is, in 4 and a half years, 4 instances. The centralization may be best seen, however, by a brief examination of the income tax under Head D (profits, excluding tenants, etc.) for the years 1864 and 1865 (Marx, 2022, p. 723-725).

In this sense, it is this industrial logic that has driven capitalism for almost 3 centuries, reaching its peak through Taylorist and Fordist proposals in the 20th century, strengthening the dynamics of wages and shaping cultures.

From the moment that, as Weber explains, the entrepreneur decides to expand his business beyond traditional levels, he finds himself in a situation where he must change the “form” of his productive organization, he must organize the “closed factory” and receive the workers who previously worked from home, to use them according to logics different from the previous ones. “Wage labor” is born and, with it, a new rationality, the economic one in the strict sense. Weber even risks the statement that capitalist rationality arises from “an element of irrationality”, because the “economic man” chooses, from that moment on, an existence based on his work, on his company, “and not the other way around!” It is a fact that this economic rationality will later impose itself as the “only one”, while what Max Weber had been able to deduce from his reconstruction of the transition between the pre-industrial

and industrial eras was, differently, the existence of a “plurality” of rationalities (Marazzi, 2009, p. 28).

Now, it is in this environment that the clash between the proletariat and capitalists achieves greater visibility and, consequently, generates notable structural and organizational changes, with the emergence of the Welfare State, that is, a new meaning of State, in which Social Rights are, in theory, valued.

What, then, did the workers' struggle impose? It imposed precisely this transformation of capital, the fact that capital, in order to sustain itself, had to accept entering life, to build a “welfare”, the welfare state, the welfare state. At this point, however, a fundamental transition takes place, since as it extends in such a way, “welfare” itself becomes an element of production, transforming the material on which profit is built, transforming the material on which valorization begins to be built (Negri, 2015, p. 59-60).

After the Fordist-industrial phase of capitalism, the post-1970 world represents the metamorphosis of capital in its most prominent abstraction, that is, unproductivity and speculation reach their peak, encompassing the entire market, sometimes under the neoliberal ideological mantle, sometimes under the dystopia of anarcho-capitalism: we live purely and simply in and from the financial market.

The process of financialization that led to the crisis we are living in now is distinguished from all other phases of financialization historically recorded in the twentieth century. The classical financial crises were situated at a precise moment of the economic cycle, particularly at the end of the cycle, in conjunction with a fall of profit testing as a result of capitalist competition on an international scale, in addition to social forces undermining geopolitical equilibrium in the international division of labor. The typical twentieth-century financialization thus represented an attempt, in certain ways “parasitic” and “desperate”, to recuperate on the financial markets that which capital could no longer get in the real economy. (...) The accumulation and specific centralization of the “capital bearer of interest”, as Marx defined it in Volume III of Capital, also called “fictitious capital”, managed primarily by banks with autonomous production of money by means of money indeed epitomized one of the salient characteristics of the twentieth century financialization processes (as pointed out by Marx over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century). The financial crises were thus based on a contradictory relationship between real and financial economies, a relationship that today is no longer expressed in the same terms. The financial economy today is pervasive, that is, it spreads across the entire economic cycle, co-existing with it, so to speak, from start to finish. Today it is in the finances, to speak figuratively, even when one goes shopping at the supermarket, at the moment when one pays with a credit card. (...) That is, we are in a historical period in which the finances are “cosubstantial” to the very production of good and services (Marazzi, 2007, p. 27-29).

In this vein, from a materialist perspective, the change in the nature of work, as well as its dynamics and needs, is identified as the causes of the phenomenological change in capital.

Just as labor “produced” its society, its institutions and its government “through communication,” the latter (government) re-produces economic subjects, establishing rules of behavior, laws, norms, prohibitions, collective objectives and redistribution devices. Since post-Fordism, unlike what has just been described, “no longer” separates production from communication, but makes the coincidence between the two the very lever of economic development, the first thing to verify is the type of communication, or rather, the type of language we are talking about. The language we are talking about here is the one that “produces organization” within the sphere of labor, within the firm (Marazzi, 2009, p. 30).

In fact, in this new reality, capital finds in the maximum abstraction – the financial market – a favorable environment to expand and concentrate itself, at an almost instantaneous speed, without interruption. From this point on, society follows the changes of capital, whether in language, customs or culture in general. Thus, the postmodern society of fatigue is inaugurated in contrast to the old disciplinary Fordist society.

The postmodern performance subject is not subject to anyone. Strictly speaking, he is no longer a subject, since this concept is characterized by submission (“subject to, sujet à”). He becomes positive, freeing himself for a project. The change from subject to project, however, does not eliminate coercion. In place of alien coercion, self-coercion emerges, which presents itself as freedom. This development is closely linked to capitalist relations of production. From a certain level of production, self-exploitation is essentially more efficient, much more productive than alien exploitation, since it goes hand in hand with the feeling of freedom. The performance society is a society of self-exploitation. The performance subject exploits himself until he is completely consumed (“burnout”). In this process, he develops an aggressiveness, which often becomes more acute and leads to suicide. The project appears as a “projectile” that the performance subject directs against himself (Han, 2017, p. 101).

It is clear, therefore, that the change in reality directly modifies society and inaugurates a new phase of the logic of capital, more aggressive, with more pronounced and socially lacerating inequalities.

We are living in times of a true change of era, which causes much anguish in sick societies, beset by massive and structural unemployment. Social dualism appears as a common characteristic: while on one side there is a hyperactive minority, on the other there is a multitude of precarious, unemployed and excluded workers (Altamira, 2008, p. 45).

In this sense, this historical phase is the stage for innovations regarding capital itself, since the intellectual dimension becomes a commodity in itself, something that is called by several authors as a type of “cultural industry”.

Capitalist production has undergone major transformations in the last thirty years. Basically, it is no longer possible to separate capital as a producer of commodities and goods from the so-called superstructure, that is, from the production of ideas, beliefs, perceptions and tastes. Capitalist production not only reappropriates the



production of culture, beliefs and desires, but also – and this is the real turnaround – links them directly to the production and circulation of commodities themselves. It has become difficult today to think of a commodity as separate from its associated “lifestyle” component or subculture (Altamira, 2008, p. 45).

Now, the crisis of the Fordist and Taylorist system; the overcoming of the dichotomy “structure” and “superstructure”; the intense automation of the production process; the atomization of individuals and the corrosion of the collective sense mark a new era, a new macrosocial moment and, consequently, a period that deserves intense scientific investigation.

Historically, the so-called postmodern capitalism refers to a social process linked to the crisis of Fordist civilization. Analytically, it represents a horizon-concept that allows us to name a series of convergent developments that have strongly asserted themselves at the heart of advanced social formations, assuming particular connotations, although no less similar, in less developed countries. (...) Negri maintains the existence of a grand narrative, of a metanarrative. On the other hand, he reaffirms the Marxist analysis based on the permanent war between capital and labor, reinterpreting this antagonism from a horizon that now highlights the expansion of the spaces (social factory) on which this antagonism develops, giving particular importance in this conflict to communication practices. The development of social capital and, together with it, of the new information age configures a space of convergence between postmodernism and Negri (Altamira, 2008, p. 48)

In this vein, called “biocapitalism” by contemporary thinkers, the deterritorialization of work and the overcoming of the “workplace” are striking characteristics, that is, while in the Fordist period the factory was understood as the place where one works, currently the whole society is understood by the labor dynamic, the so-called “social factory” (Negri, 2015).

These were small groups that studied how capitalism not only exercised a function of controlling society, but also entered into the very fabric of life. And of course there are neoliberal elements that accompany this operation. With this quantification of life, a kind of destitution of the public state begins, of its classic function of mediating social relations and also of mediating the forms of exploitation, its quantity and its destination. Thus, the role of the State is diminished in the face of the advance of financial markets and international organizations that begin to intervene more strongly in the rules of the game. The direct exploitation of the “plus”, the exaltation of “Welfare” as the basis for financial valorization, the world of health production, of guaranteeing childhood and old age, the destruction of education, etc. A world that values the so-called production of man by man, which becomes raw material, or rather, the blood that circulates in the arterial system of global financial capital. The world of work exploits as “bios”, that is, no longer only as a workforce but as a living form, not only as a production machine but as a common body of society. This is the first step from the real subsumption of labor to capital to the subsumption of the entire society to capital. Later, alongside this transformation, other very important ones occur, linked to the globalization of markets beyond the old national units. But perhaps the most notable is the transformation of man beyond the factory, since value tends to no longer reside in the factory, because the criteria for valorization change (NEGRI, 2015, p. 60-61).

It is important to reaffirm that, in recent decades, the spatial boundaries between work and home have been overcome by new technological and labor dynamics. In fact, the advent of the internet, smartphones and 5G have condemned intersubjective labor relations to extreme individuality; to spatial confusion between work and home; to the end of the restricted productive environment and the beginning of the “social factory” in constant productivity.

In the last twenty years, important changes have also taken place in the labor market in advanced capitalist countries. The following new scenarios have contributed to this phenomenon: 1) the accelerated growth of a series of services typically suited to the employment of female labor (hotels, home health care, child care and recreation, nursing homes); 2) the increase in the number of people working from home, a phenomenon that tends to blur the boundaries between factory/office and home. At the same time that flexible production systems based on the intensive and extensive use of computers were developing, the Taylorist concept of a separate conception of execution was being modified, which promoted the relocation and revaluation of the worker's capacity to command productive social cooperation, now of a new type, in accordance with the also new nature of work (Altamira, 2008, p. 55).

Furthermore, in the face of so many changes, social scientists must adapt and educate themselves about the new material reality. It would be no different with regard to Marxism, therefore, it is necessary to adapt to modern times: in the face of technocapitalism – or biocapitalism –, a techno-Marxist – perhaps bio-Marxist – approach appropriate to the (new) object of analysis is essential.

There is no doubt, then, that, in the face of the process of capitalist restructuring, the categories used by Marxism require at least an update, if not their replacement by new categories to be developed and incorporated. Everything seems to point to the existence of a tendency of capitalism, even in its most current manifestation, towards greater abstraction, since only in this way can it be ensured that all production is mediated and made available for accumulation. In the same way, the development of capitalism in the last twenty years and the transformations that have been achieved, regardless of the name given – late capitalism, advanced capitalism, globalized capitalism, integrated world capitalism, etc. – as fundamental starting points for the development of any analysis, provide substantially different economic and social conditions from those faced by Marx in his time (Altamira, 2008, p. 55).

There are, therefore, substantial material changes that lead us to affirm that we live in a 21st century “biocapitalism”, with its own distinctive characteristics compared to the last century and, therefore, approaches must be adapted to the new reality.

## CONCLUSION

I hope this work provokes reflection and, to some extent, astonishment in those who read it. Capitalism has changed and it seems that it will continue to move towards concentration, expansion, abstraction and atomization, characteristics that its history makes explicit and elucidates. I believe, therefore, to have demonstrated how material changes have influenced human socioeconomic organization, but without the determinism characteristic of many thinkers who have based themselves on Karl Marx throughout history. In fact, to this end, dialectics are a constant in the construction of the text, especially with the positions of thinkers who do not fully share Marxist postulates. The main purpose of this work is, therefore, to present the evolution of capitalism and introduce a concept that is little discussed in Brazil: “biocapitalism”, that is, a proposal for an updated approach to Marxism, dialectics, in which the post-Fordist social organization confuses the workplace – “factory” – with society itself. In this sense, the challenge of the social scientist, therefore, is not to merely catalog, but rather to interpret history, with the duty to indicate the tools and methods used, always in good faith and, above all, always with curiosity and great diligence (Luca, 2021). I hope I have honored these characteristics.

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