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Capitalism doesn't work: the 1930s proved that. Communism doesn't work: the 1980s proved that.

So what works? Socialism—of the democratic variety, of course.

But, viewed concretely, as it is applied in practice, what is socialism today? The answer is—the mixed economy.

Theoretically, that simplifies the problem. All we now have to do is to mix X parts of socialism with Y parts of capitalism to get the right prescription.

The search for the magic formula is on. Nothing can stop it, for it is in the nature of the human mind to believe that if there is a definable problem there is a findable answer. Without that conviction—be it myth or not—humans cannot act. The notion that we are helpless, playthings in the hands of an irresponsible Fate, is intolerable, at least to the Western and the Westernized mind.

So, comrades, on with the search. Without it, there is nothing. And with it, there will be something.

But something is not everything. "Something" carries us from one moment, one era, perhaps even one system, to the next, but it does not carry us to the "end of history," because there is no end.

Yet the notion that there is an "end" is implicit in classic socialism, defined as the collective ownership and democratic control of the socially necessary means of production and exchange. Prior to the coming of this socialism, history was a battlefield strewn with the carnage of class struggles. No exception to the rule: "The history of hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle." But when the proletariat takes over and establishes the classless society, the class struggle will end: the dynamic that drove history will die.

In holding to this faith, Karl Marx was more Jewish than he knew. He believed in a Messiah whose name was Proletariat and Marx was his Prophet.

For Marx to think—or feel—as he did, should come as no surprise. His "scientific" socialism

was the child of the age of "science," when that word was almost synonymous with "certainty." Like Einstein, Marx could not believe that "God's" universe is as chancy as dice: things happened in obedience to Nature's law. Like Einstein, too, he probably would have been appalled by a Heisenberg and the concept of uncertainty in the natural world.

For Marx, as for most of the great thinkers of his time, it was logical to translate the "laws" of the physical world to the world of social relations. Hence, both he and Engels looked upon their concepts as the social application of Darwin's theory of evolution. Inevitably, capitalism (the ape?) would evolve into socialism (*Homo sapiens?*).

This made Marx a "determinist." And, with his eye fixed on the economic factor in human behavior, he was an "economic determinist." The outcome of the struggle between the capitalist and the proletariat was as predictable as the outcome in the laboratory when two parts of hydrogen are mixed with one part of oxygen. You get water and not a gin martini.

Marx was also an Aristotelian. He described the great Greek as a "thinker who was the first to analyze so many *forms* [my italics] whether of thought, society, or nature." Like Aristotle, Marx thought in terms of forms such as *capitalism*, *feudalism*, *communism*. They were all "systems" (sort of generic abstractions), the first two of which were challenged by the "seeds of destruction" they carried within them, the third of which, presumably, would go on forever, because it did not spawn elements destined to destroy its creator.

Is Marx valid today? Yes, if we allow for the factor of uncertainty and if we admit that there are, in the real world, no pure forms. It is not true, for instance, that "a rose is a rose is a rose," for every rose is unique, probably without an exact replica ever. The notion that a "rose is a rose" is an invention of the human mind, since a "rose" as a generic concept is a nonexistent thing put together by the brain to make it easier to classify objects.

The Aristotelian method of playing around

with “forms” is very appealing to intellectuals, who are often more at home with the abstract than with the concrete. Forms, especially when they become formulaic, make the equations simple. Unfortunately, too simple. Life in the concrete is far more diversified, complex, unmanageable than life in the world of conceptual artifacts. In the stubborn realm of reality, the equations often contain more unknowns than there are letters in the alphabet.

In the Aristotelian world, these “unknowns” do not appear in the equation as variables but as constants. They are “knowns,” considered to be as tangible as if they were made of stone or concrete. When it turns out that the rock is really mush and the immobile is really mobile, the results baffle. For example:

Marx posited the class struggle as a “known” fact of life. He also assumed the steady and inescapable “immiseration” of the masses as a “known.” His conclusion was an apocalyptic ending with the chiliastic. He apparently did not allow for the fact that the proletariat, in its struggle, might (an unknown) violate the “iron law of wages” and might (unknown) find life less miserable—precisely because the proletariat enjoyed a measure of success in the class struggle.

Ironically, in the *Manifesto*, Marx sets forth a series of “immediate demands” that fall short of socialism. But, if each of these was realized, as most of them were in the first half of the twentieth century, then the “immiseration” of the proletariat, that *sine qua non* of the revolution, would not be part of the equation.

That the “State is the Executive Committee of the ruling class” was, to Marx, a “known.” He did not, could not, allow that the proletariat might have some seats in that committee or that the proletariat, in combination with other societal elements, might actually become the majority. The notion of a capitalist economy operating in a state where the proletariat was the Executive Committee (as in Sweden) was, to Marx, the Aristotelian, a logical impossibility.

As we move into a new century, it would be

timely to make two small adjustments in Marx: first, instead of economic determinism, substitute societal indeterminism; second, instead of “forms,” substitute norms to guide human behavior—individually and collectively.

All of the above is a plea to say farewell to hubris. It does not mean that we should avoid the battle with the bad. It does not mean that we should not plot and plan, scheme and strategize, protest and contest to do what is best and right at the moment and, as best we are able to see into the future, what is best in the years to come.

It does mean that we are not omniscient. Since Heisenberg, even God is no longer all-knowing. It does mean that into each utopia some chaos will fall. It does mean that the ethical impulse for the just society—economically, culturally—should be encouraged, applied, and pursued persistently in a world that will be changing unpredictably and unrelentingly.

It means that we must tap the human’s “social instinct” (whether we believe, with Aristotle, that it is inherent in man “by nature” or, with Darwin, that it is the outcome of “natural selection” or, with Adam Smith, that it is God-given) to maximize man’s humanity to man by fostering a societal environment (environments) in which that instinct may flourish. It also means that we dare not close our eyes to the darker side of the human, the antisocial instincts that a Hobbes, a Freud, or a Hsun Tzu believed were inherent in the species.

In a very profound sense, the mixed economy is a recognition that the biologic biped is also psychically bipolar and that humankind will go on for the foreseeable future trying to find the balance between id and super ego, between capitalism and socialism, between the capacity to produce and the propensity to consume, between the private and the public sectors. In our firm resolve to find the “right” mix, let us silently understand that there is no fixed formula and that there is no “final conflict,” just a continuum of contests, consensus, dissent, and consent. For as Thales said: “The only constant is change.” □