

Western modernization and marxist political theory: an alternative to liberalism

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Abstract: starting from a critic to conservative liberalism's and to new left's notion of the Western modernization as systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, I argue that such model of systemic theory regarding the modernization leads both to the systemic institutional autonomy and closure in relation to a direct political *praxis* and to a binding notion of social normativity, and to the strong institutionalism in political economy and in institutional political *praxis*. Modernization from a systemic institutional perspective means that each social system has very proper and particular logic and dynamic, which are non-political and non-normative, just technical. So, systemic institutions become depoliticized, delegitimizing a model of radical democratic political *praxis* which can frame social systems from an inclusive democratic participation based on a conception of social normativity. As consequence, systemic institutions centralize and monopolize the constitution, the legitimation and the evolution of their own field of social reproduction, closing and autonomizing it concerning the democratic political *praxis* and the social normativity. I argue that such conservative understanding of the Western modernization can be substituted by the marxist understanding of the Western modernization, which is based on the comprehension of the society as a totality imbricated in its parts, i.e. the intersection between infrastructure and superstructure as the epistemological-political starting point both to a critical social theory and to a democratic political *praxis*. Such marxist theoretical-political starting point enables a critical social theory and a leftist political *praxis* founded on the politicization of the social systems, as their profound linking and rooting in the social world and as a political-normative dynamic.

Key-Words: Western Modernization; Systemic Theory; Conservatism; New Left; Marxism; Politics.

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Resumo: partindo de uma crítica à noção de modernização como auto-diferenciação, autorreferencialidade e autossustentação institucional sistêmica, assumida pelo liberalismo conservador e pela nova esquerda, argumento que tal modelo de teoria sistêmica referente à modernização leva tanto à autonomia e ao fechamento institucional sistêmico em relação a uma *práxis* política direta e a uma noção vinculante de normatividade social, quanto ao institucionalismo forte em economia política e em teoria política. A modernização, desde uma perspectiva institucional sistêmica, significa que cada sistema social tem uma lógica e uma dinâmica muito própria e particular, que é não-política e não-normativa, apenas técnica. Assim, instituições sistêmicas tornam-se despolitizadas, deslegitimando um modelo de *práxis* política democrática radical, que possa enquadrar os sistemas sociais a partir de uma participação democrática inclusiva, baseada em uma concepção vinculante de normatividade social. Como consequência, instituições sistêmicas centralizam e monopolizam a constituição, a legitimação e a evolução de seu próprio campo de reprodução social, fechando-o e autonomizando-o em relação à *práxis* política democrática e à normatividade social. Argumento que tal entendimento conservador da modernização ocidental pode ser substituído pelo entendimento marxista dessa mesma modernização ocidental, que está baseado na compreensão da sociedade como uma totalidade imbricada em suas partes, isto é, a interseção entre infraestrutura e superestrutura como o ponto de partida epistemológico-político para uma teoria social crítica e para uma *práxis* política democrática. Tal ponto de partida teórico-político marxista possibilita uma teoria social crítica e uma *práxis* política de esquerda fundadas na politização dos sistemas sociais como sua profunda ligação e enraizamento no mundo social e como dinâmica político-normativa.

Palavras-Chave: Modernização Ocidental; Teoria Sistêmica; Conservadorismo; Nova Esquerda; Política.



1. INTRODUCTION

There is a hegemonic comprehension of the Western modernization which is shared by so different and conflictive theoretical-political positions such as the contemporary conservative liberalism (Friedrich August von Hayek, Milton Friedman and Robert Nozick) and the current new left (Jürgen Habermas and Anthony Giddens)¹. Both theoretical-political positions have in common not only the opening contraposition to real socialism and here to marxism, but also the very same understanding of the Western modernization – truly, that is the sense of the Habermas' and Giddens' affirmations that conservative liberalism has reason regarding to its critic against socialism's excessive political centralization and totalization (see HABERMAS, 1997; GIDDENS, 1996). Now, which is that *same understanding of the Western modernization shared by conservative liberalism and new left*? That is the notion of Western modernization as systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence. And what it means? It means that Western modernization – first in the Europe and after in the rest of the world colonized by such kind of modernization – emerge and consolidate social systems which, as institutions, centralize and monopolize specific fields of the social reproduction as particular social fields with very proper logic and dynamic of functioning and programming, whose structuration and legitimation is strongly and basically internal to the very own social systems – capitalist market and modern State are the main examples of the Western modernization's specificities, both in the new left and in the conservative liberalism.

I will argue in the paper that such comprehension of the Western modernization based on systemic self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence leads directly (in the conservative liberalism) or even indirectly (in the new left) to the *strong institutionalism* regarding the legitimation and the performing of the social evolution. Indeed, systemic institutional comprehension affirms a double starting point as the condition to institutional constitution and to social evolution, namely: (a) each social system centralizes and monopolizes the constitution and the legitimation of its specific social field, becoming the very own social field which it represents; and (b) because of that, each social field, from a systemic institutional comprehension, has a very proper logic of functioning and programming, which means a specific process of constitution and legitimation that cannot be intervened from outside or substituted by alien mechanisms and principles. Here comes the strong institutionalism: each systemic institution centralizes and monopolizes its specific social field, becoming closed, self-referential and self-subsisting in relation to other contexts, and acquiring a very technical and logical constitution and legitimation; self-referential and self-subsisting systemic institutions deny their normative-political constitution, dependence and legitimation, in that they cannot be framed by political *praxis* nor by a bidding notion of social normativity (they are fundamentally technical and logical institutions and processes, a non-political and non-normative structure).

So an inclusive democratic political *praxis* regarding social systems is delegitimized by that notion of systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, because of the fact that systemic institutions have technical and logical constitution, legitimation and evolution which are non-political and non-normative. In other words, the root of all contemporary political and epistemological problems concerning the global social-economic crisis and the failure of the Welfare States is such liberal conservative hegemonic comprehension of Western modernization as systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, which depoliticizes the constitution, the legitimation and the evolution of the social systems, weakening an inclusive democratic political *praxis* based on a notion of social normativity to frame and to orientate systemic institutional dynamic from use values, not only from exchange values. Now, the marxist political theory can offer an alternative (and more effective) comprehension of Western



modernization against that liberal conservative comprehension: according to Karl Marx's fundamental epistemological-political starting point, society is a totality which cannot be separated in self-referential, self-subsisting, autonomous and closed social systems based on technical and logical constitution and dynamic. Society's constitution, legitimation and evolution depend of the material social reproduction which is very political: it is performed as economic life by conflictive social classes, not by autonomized, impartial and neutral systemic institutions – and here economy does not signify a technical and logical sphere, but a very political-normative world.

Therefore, marxist political theory, the moment it conceives society as totality, the moment it understands societal constitution, legitimation and evolution as a normative-political *praxis* streamlined by struggles between social classes, offers a normative-political basis to the understanding and to the framing of contemporary Western modernization's crisis. Such crisis is not a technical and logical problem, as it cannot be comprehended and resolved by technical and logical reforms which refuse economy's political and normative constitution; it must be politicized, i.e. modernization's normative-political constitution must be affirmed as basis for the democratic political *praxis* concerning such contemporary social-economic crisis, something that marxism does. Above all, marxist political theory teaches us that the comprehension of the Western modernization as systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence is *the liberal comprehension* of the Western modernization, not an idealized, or an essentialist, or a naturalized comprehension of *the* modernization at all. It means that the comprehension of the Western modernization is a political comprehension linked to political projects of class hegemony. That is, I repeat, the political-epistemological starting point to the understanding of the current crisis of the modernization, as to the grounding of an emancipatory democratic political *praxis* that faces the growing of the theoretical-political conservatism.

2. CONSERVATIVE LIBERAL COMPREHENSION OF THE WESTERN MODERNIZATION

Friedrich August von Hayek's conservative liberalism is a direct contraposition to socialist and to social-democratic theoretical-political positions (which are the same thing, according to Hayek) in two specific points: against social normativity as the general criteria to institutional legitimation; and against the institutions' interventive political characteristic, in order to conciliate capital and work in the context of the political institutions (and by institutional political action) (see HAYEK, 1987, p. 05-08; BUTLER, 1987, p. 27). Social-democratic theoretical-political positions have as their platform a model of institutionalist politics based on the centrality of the political institutions regarding the social-economic constitution and evolution over time. Here, there are economy's and politics' social linking and rooting, in the sense that both economy and institutional politics depend of the lifeworld's normative constitution, at least in an important way. So the institutional attempt to conciliate capital and work by Welfare State is the social-democracy's main characteristic, and this means practically the indirect political intervention into de market, the emphasis in the social rights, and the intersection between capitalist and worker classes with respect to reciprocal accords concerning wages and work regimes. The social-democracy's important epistemological-political point is its recognition that economy is a structural social field which influences and determines the social stratification and the access to political power, at the same time that it is rooted on the normative reproduction of the social world, defining strongly such normative social reproduction (see BERNSTEIN, 1982; ABENDROTH, 1977; OFFE, 1984, 1994; BOBBIO, 1996; HOOK, 1999;



KOLAKOWSKI, 1999; HARRINGTON, 1999; HABERMAS, 1991, 1997, 2009; ROSANVALLON, 1998; SPING-ANDERSEN, 2008; HARTMANN & HONNETH, 2009).

Now, Hayek's contraposition to socialism and to social-democracy is founded on the notion of a *spontaneous evolution of the society*. It means that the progressive social constitution and the consolidation of the institutions or social systems are not resulted from a direct political intervention or from a process of social-political engineering, but from an unconscious process of evolution based on the spontaneous individualism. Such idea signifies that the social and institutional evolution is not a political engineering based on institutions' political planning and on the conscious political *praxis* which chooses deliberately what one (*the society*) wants, how one (*the society*) wants, and where one (*the society*) desires to go. There is not such a kind of self-conscious political *praxis* made by *the society* as a whole, as if society were a very personal super-subject or a macro social class with conditions to decide for all people (and with all people) the very own constitution and evolution along the time. Contrarily to that, Hayek says, the social evolution is particularized, i.e. it is made by every single individual which seeks basically his very personal interest. This individual has not a structural view or a self-consciousness of the social totality of which he is part. He wants only the satisfaction of his egoistic interest, putting his own abilities for the use of other individuals. That is the only epistemological-moral-political pattern to the consideration of the social evolution and of the institutional constitution (see HAYEK, 1948, p. 01-32; 1987, p. 38-47).

Social evolution is a summation of individual and particularized actions which generate and consolidate over time codes, practices and institutions which define social interaction and normative claims. Above all, such evolution is not resulted from a collective and self-conscious political *praxis* or performed by political institutions which regulate all social systems based on political action, ignoring particular systemic institutional logic and dynamic. Social evolution is fundamentally spontaneous in the sense that each individual contributes with his particular actions and desires to the consolidation of intersubjective codes, practices and institutions that enable exactly such individual persecution of the own interest. Then intersubjective rules, practices and institutions are like a contract which regulates individual actions and demands, the same way that such intersubjective rules, practices and institutions impose the model of a contract *between particular individuals* as the normative-political paradigm to the institutional constitution and legitimation. And individuals are not philosophers or prophets with a messianic vision of the totality, but just particular beings with a proper and subjective worldwide – they do not act in name of all society and its groups, but only in name of the very own interest (see HAYEK, 1995, p. 49-59; 2013, p. 53-68; BUTLER, 1987, p. 36).

Spontaneous social evolution is not programmable politically, as it cannot be framed by political institutions or by a binding notion of social normativity based on an idea of society as totality, because such idea is a phantasy: there are only individuals, not *the society*, and each individual is responsible by its own way and choices. Indeed, the Hayek's main argument is that there is not the society as a self-conscious totality imbricated in its parts, but only individuals. Here, society is not a totality or an infrastructure: an infrastructure is based on the fact that institutions define directly the social stratification and the distribution of the power; and the infrastructure is very political, determined by the class hegemony and streamlined by social struggles. That is the leftist (and particularly the marxist) epistemological-political starting point to a critical social theory and to a radical democratic political *praxis*. However, Hayek, the moment that he denies such society's and institutions' infrastructural sense and effects, refuses consequently the fact – basic to leftist theories – that society has an institutional organization and evolution which is defined by political hegemony and social struggles, as he refuses that such political institutional constitution determines both



the social stratification and the sharing of the power. According to Hayek, particularized individuals are the only fact scientifically verifiable, scientifically observable, and it means that the society as an infrastructure or as a super-subject is a leftist idealized construction purely and simply, as the centrality both of the political *praxis* and of the political institutions is not possible in individualized societies that have not a basic core from which they ground and influence all social dynamics (see HAYEK, 1987, P. 86-97; 1995, P. 61-72; BUTLER, 1987, P. 53; HARVEY, 2008, P. 31; HABERMAS, 2000, p. 82).

So, politics is not the center of the society, as it cannot substitute both the systemic institutional logic and dynamic, and the individual action with respect to social evolution and to consolidation of the *status quo*. Politics is not the center of the society because of the fact that society is not a totality or an infrastructure which determines social evolution and *status quo*. If it is not a totality or an infrastructure, *the* society or *the* political institutions cannot be held responsible by social inequalities and by any form of injustice at all. Indeed, Hayek argues that the basic leftist argument is that society as an infrastructure determines *status quo* and social injustices, exactly because it is an infrastructure streamlined by social struggles between conflictive social classes, so in this situation it is possible to make normative social claims to institutions – and they must perform such normative social claims. But to Hayek it is a leftist phantasy based on the idealization of the society as a political super-subject or as a political infrastructure, as I said above. In a society constituted basically by individuals, there are not institutions or infrastructures which define and determine both the social evolution and the *status quo*; the only *infrastructure* is the individuals, i.e. each individual is responsible by his own way and choices, as he is the only responsible by the consequences of the way and choices he made. In a society constituted purely by individuals, without a common core or infrastructure, the meritocracy is the fundamental epistemological, normative and political principle to legitimize both the institutional arrangement and the *status quo* (see HAYEK, 2013, P. 302-309; BUTLER, 1987, P. 108; HERRNSTEIN, 1975, p. 147-174).

One consequence – certainly the major consequence – of the Hayek's refusal of the notion of society as an infrastructure is the correlated refusal of a notion of social normativity as a political basis to the institutional constitution, legitimation and evolution. Indeed, according to Hayek's conservative liberalism, there is not social normativity and, therefore, the concept of social justice is a mirage, a leftist phantasy, if it signifies the political intervention on the *status quo*, on the market dynamic, what means the normative grounding of the political institutions – social justice is founded on the fact that society is an infrastructure which determines the *status quo*. Social justice only is possible as meritocracy, but the meritocracy does not impose to political institutions normative social claims or a political intervention in the market dynamic, because of the fact that meritocracy denies the notion of society as a totality or as an infrastructure which defines *status quo*. Contrarily to that, meritocracy performs a *negative politics*, i.e. the fact that political institutions lose their centrality, the same way that a bidding notion of social normativity is delegitimized as political basis to the framing of the market dynamic and of the *status quo* in general. In other words, meritocracy refuses political *praxis* and social normativity, as it denies the political planning of the social evolution as a whole (see HAYEK, 1987, p. 98-108; 1995, p. 73-94; 2013, p. 247-250, p. 273-275).

It is important to consider again the Hayekian notion of a spontaneous social evolution based on individualism as the epistemological-political platform of the liberal refusal both of the centrality of the political *praxis* and of a binding notion of social normativity. As I said above, such idea of a spontaneous social evolution has the aim at oppose itself to the socialist conception of society as an infrastructure. Consequently, the notion of a spontaneous social evolution refuses socialist emphasis on the political *praxis*



and on the normative constitution of the social (including here the sphere of the market). Here emerges the Hayekian idea of the *market as a spontaneous order made by particularized individuals*. The market as a spontaneous order means exactly the fact that economic relations are not resulted from a political planning, as they cannot be embraced or guided by institutional political actions and framed by a notion of social normativity. Also here individualism gives the motto to the market spontaneous evolution: each individual seeks his own interest *as an economic activity and in the economic sphere*. So we can understand the social evolution *as a spontaneous and non-programmable economic-productive activity and evolution*, in that society, its rules, codes, practices and institutions gain existence and sense from that economic sphere made by particularized individuals which have not a messianic or total self-consciousness of the society as an infrastructure – thus, social practices, norms and institutions are not resulted from a political engineering, but from a spontaneous economic action made by all individuals. Market as a spontaneous order means that the particularized individuals, when they seek their own interest as an economic practice, create over time the best codes, rules and practices which guarantee *such economic spontaneity* as basis of the social evolution. So here, there is not legitimacy both to the political centrality and to a binding notion of social normativity: market spontaneity and methodological individualism impose the self-referentiality, the self-subsistence and the autonomy of the spontaneous economic order regarding the democratic political *praxis* and to the social normativity (see HAYEK, 1995, p. 27-48, p. 95-122; 2013, p. 09-52).

Now, Hayek's conservative liberalism assumes the notion of the Western modernization as systemic self-referentiality and self-subsistence like its epistemological-political basis to the grounding of the contemporary political and social institutions, facing directly socialist and social-democratic theoretical-political positions, and attacking the Welfare State's constitution and legitimation, as well as the social rights' normative foundations. So, such conservative liberal understanding of the Western modernization conceives the emergence of the modern societies as an evolution which is dependent of the spontaneous development of the market like an autonomous and self-subsistent order. Such spontaneous order is non-political and non-normative, but just impartial and neutral concerning political-normative claims, because it is based on *economic spontaneity defined by meritocracy*. Here, there is nothing political, by the fact that there is not an institutional structure structured politically which defines the *status quo*; the meritocracy is the fundamental principle which determines such *status quo*, but it is not a political or a normative principle which requires an interventive institutional politics into market, based on social normativity. Meritocracy just demands the absolute respect to market spontaneity, to market self-referentiality and self-subsistence, what means the refusal of the centrality of the political *praxis*.

3. NEW LEFTS' COMPREHENSION OF THE WESTERN MODERNIZATION

Habermas' theory of modernity is an example of the contemporary new left which intends an overcoming of the marxism as epistemological-political basis to the understanding of the Western modernization, at least in three points: (a) its starting point is – similarly to conservative liberalism (although with different conclusions) – the idea of modernization as systemic self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence; (b) its notion of complex society without no core or center from which social dynamic as a whole would be streamlined; and (c) the rejection of the notion of social classes or social super subjects which can act politically in the name of all society, assuming a conception of social normativity as their motto to the political *praxis* (see HABERMAS, 2012a, p. 09-12, p.289, p. 387; 2012b, p. 278; 2003a, p. 17-18; 2003b, p. 105-106). Indeed, the starting point of Habermas' theory of modernity is the sociological finding that



European modernity emerges as a double and imbricated process of social evolution, i.e. as a universalistic normative culture based on institutional secularization and on the individualism (lifeworld, in Habermasian terms), and as a systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence (system, in Habermasian terms) (see HABERMAS, 2012a, p. 140-141, p. 387-424; 2012b, p. 278-280). This correlated process leads to the overcoming of the traditional societies, particularly in two points: first, traditional societies' naturalization of the *status quo*, in that all social relations and practices of the traditional societies are determined by myths and religions – there is not secularization and a notion of individuality (in modern sense, as separated of the culture and of the nature), so there is not social mobility, social criticism; second, traditional societies' profound imbrication among politics, economy and culture, meaning that all of these fields depend of a normative and global justification of their dynamic, as they cannot be conceived independently of the totality from which they are part of (see HABERMAS, 2012a, p. 94-121). So, European modernity is based on the separation among politics, culture and economy, which become particular social fields with very specific logics and dynamics of functioning and programming (see HABERMAS, 2012a, p. 139; 1997, p. 143-144, p. 163).

From here, the consolidation of the two more important and decisive modern systems gains sense, namely: modern bureaucratic-administrative State and capitalist market. They are institutions which monopolize and centralize the constitution, the foundation and the evolution of particular social fields, becoming the very own fields which they monopolize and centralize. It is very important and interesting to consider the fact that Western modernization, the moment that it is based on such separation among politics, culture and economy (systemic self-differentiation), assumes the systemic institutional dynamic as its basis to structuration and legitimation. In fact, the overcoming of the traditional societies' notion of normative totality and the consolidation of the Western modernization as systemic self-differentiation have as consequence both the profound separation among politics, economy and culture, and the systemic institutional self-referentiality and self-subsistence. Self-referentiality and self-subsistence signify that each modern institution (such as capitalist market and modern State) has very proper and closed logic of functioning and programming which is autonomous and capable to develop itself just by its internal mechanisms, so it needs no external contexts to its evolution and stabilization over time. The same way, modern institutions, based on and determined by such process of systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, have not a normative constitution and legitimation, especially the capitalist market and the modern State, at least in a strong way: each one of them can always affirm its self-referentiality, i.e. its internal and very specific logic of functioning and programming, as the only basis for its evolution and legitimation, denying, for example, political *praxis* and social normativity.

Therefore, Western modernization's systemic self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence institute two unsurpassable points to contemporary political theory, namely: the societal differentiation in autonomous and closed systemic institutions which have very internal, logical and technical dynamic of functioning and programming; and the depoliticization of these systemic institutions which become basically non-normative, just technical and logical institutions, dynamics and procedures. Any political comprehension and reformism must start from the fact of the systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence as the Western modernization's epistemological-political basis; they cannot interpret systemic social institutions from a political-normative notion – they must respect the fact that the changing of each social system is an internal procedure which must take into account its particular, logical and technical dynamic. Contrarily to traditional societies characterized as a normative totality very imbricated in its parts, which implicates in the centrality of the normative explanation and action as the



basic core of the societal dynamic, the Western modernization is marked by such systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, and that means both the refusal to reduce the social evolution as a whole to a unique normative-political fundament (or even reduce it to a political-normative *praxis*), and the systemic institutional closure and autonomy regarding a political-normative constitution and legitimation. Political *praxis* is highly delegitimized by systemic closure and self-referentiality, because of the fact that systemic institutional constitution and legitimation is basically technical and logical, very internal to each systemic institution.

According to Habermas, what must be considered is that contemporary societies are *complex societies*, i.e. societies very differentiated in many particular fields, centralized and monopolized by their correspondent systemic institutions, with proper dynamics and principles of organization and functioning. So, contemporary complex societies are not a totality which is strongly imbricated in its parts: each one social field is streamlined by a specific systemic institution (especially modern State and capitalist market) which is highly self-referential and self-subsistent regarding the general context from which it belongs to. Mainly, contemporary complex societies are not a *self-conscious* structure or super subject, because of that systemic institutional self-differentiation, what means that they have not a basic core (whatever it is) from which the society as a whole can be linked and transformed by any kind of institutional action (and by political *praxis* in particular), as such contemporary complex societies cannot perform a macro action which embraces all particularized and closed social systems, substituting systemic institutional logics and dynamics by normative-political principles. The same way, a complex society, the moment it is characterized by the existence of different, autonomous and closed social systems, has not a center from which a general dynamic and a direct political or institutional action can frame all social systems as a whole. The complex societies represent basically the contemporary version and the definitive consolidation of the process of Western modernization based on systemic self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, and that is the epistemological-political starting point from which the political theory and *praxis* must start up. In other words, systemic institutional logic and dynamic cannot be ignored by a radical democratic political *praxis* which intends an emancipatory social action and a political transformation of these contemporary complex societies, based on systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence (see HABERMAS, 2003a, p. 17-20; 2003b, p. 23-25, p. 104-106).

Here emerges the sense of the Habermas' political-juridical procedural paradigm as contraposition to conservative liberalism (liberal political-juridical paradigm) and to socialism (republican political-juridical paradigm). According to Habermas, conservative liberalism is wrong to affirm the radical individualization of the society, denying the sociological-political existence of social systems with an objective structure which can influence and determine the *status quo* and the distribution of the power. Social systems are infrastructures which perform a macro social action, streamlining the social evolution and the institutional constitution. So the liberal negative politics is not sufficient to resolve all social-political problems concerning the poverty, the *status quo* and the effectiveness of the individual rights, as well as *laissez-faire* and meritocracy do not guarantee economic stability and social justice. It is necessary political institutions and social rights to orientate economic dynamic and social evolution – and that means the very centrality of the Welfare State (see HABERMAS, 2003a, p. 335-337; 1998, p. 18-19). Republicanism is wrong because of the fact that it does not recognize the systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence as basic characteristic of the contemporary Western modernization. As it does not recognize such specificity of the Western modernization, republicanism intends a direct political intervention in all social systems and particularly in the market dynamic, substituting social systems' internal logics and



dynamics by political-normative principles. Indeed, republicanism, according to Habermas, puts the direct political *praxis* as the basis of the social evolution as a whole, ignoring exactly the contemporary social complexity, i.e. the fact that current societies are founded on and streamlined by such systemic self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, which means that each social system has a very proper logic and dynamic of programming and functioning, as politics is no longer the center of the society. And the society is no longer a totality very imbricated in its parts, meaning that there is not a core and a central institution from which social evolution is determined and performed (see HABERMAS, 2003a, p. 331-332; 2003b, p. 18). Now, if a radical political *praxis* means both a direct political-normative intervention in the autonomous and closed logic of the social systems, and the centrality of the political institutions regarding the performing of the social evolution, then such a kind of radical political is no longer possible today in complex societies based on the Western modernization as self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence.

Besides, Habermas says that republicanism is wrong to conceive society as totality *and the political subjects as social classes*, i.e. as social super subjects, as social macro subjects. Indeed, in that last case, republicanism is rooted on an antiquated idea of the social division and of the political constitution in conflictive social classes, as marxism does (see HABERMAS, 2003b, p. 21). So from such epistemological-political starting point, republicanism emphasizes both a direct political *praxis* in all social systems, substituting their specific and internal logics and dynamics of functioning and programming by political-normative principles (as I said above), and principally the monopolization of the social normativity by emancipatory social classes, as the proletariat. Now, that last republican notion is very important to understand not only the republicanism itself, but also a new characteristic of the contemporary complex societies based on the process of the Western modernization' systemic institutionalism. According to marxism (which is a form of republicanism), as social dynamic and institutional constitution are determined by class hegemony, we must link social normativity with emancipatory social classes. Such social normativity cannot be centralized or monopolized by the institutions themselves, because of the fact that institutions are not neutral and impartial, but a resulted from the class hegemony. In other words, social normativity is not maintained, grounded and streamlined by political-juridical institutions, but fundamentally by emancipatory social classes, whose political-normative hegemony is made by social struggles.

Here the Habermasian political-juridical procedural paradigm gains form. On the one hand, it denies conservative liberalism's radical individualization of the society, affirming that Western modernization is characterized as a process of systemic self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, which means the fact that social systems are objective structures which determine the *status quo* and the social evolution as a whole, at least in a strong way. On the other hand, it denies the republican notion of the society as a self-conscious totality which is profoundly imbricated in its parts, exactly because of that affirmation of the Western modernization based on systemic theory as epistemological-political starting point to the understanding of the contemporary complex societies. It means that contemporary societies are divided in many and particular social systems, so that they have not a basic core or a political center from which all social dynamic could be regulated and streamlined. It means also that political *praxis* and political institutions are no longer the center of the contemporary societies, as they cannot substitute systemic institutional logic, dynamic and procedures by political-normative principles. Political system is a particular institution living side by side with other systemic institutions, just that. Besides, Habermas does not accept the republican idea of the social classes as social super subjects, and here he gives reason to liberalism: contemporary complex societies have no more class identity or class division (as marxism presupposes),



but only very particular individuals and social-cultural communities. So the social normativity cannot be centralized and monopolized by a specific social class – in fact social classes as social super subjects or as macro social subjects do not exist anymore.

So, a radical politics to a complex contemporary society starts from two epistemological-political points: (a) the fact of the Western modernization as systemic self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, which is a consolidated process; (b) the centralization and the monopolization of the social normativity and of the political *praxis* into and by the political-juridical institutions (see HABERMAS, 2003b, p. 72, p. 105, p. 147-148). In the first case, we have two consequences: politics must respect systemic autonomization and self-referentiality, so that it cannot perform a direct intervention in the capitalist market, but only an *indirect political intervention* (such concept is not so clear in Habermas' theory), as it cannot substitute logical and technical systemic institutional mechanisms by political-normative principles (see HABERMAS, 2003b, p. 147-148); and even political institutions are systemic institutions at least in a strong way, i.e. they are a formal arena with formal procedures, rules, practices and actors, what differentiate them in relation to civil society's informal spheres, practices and social subjects (see HABERMAS, 2003b, p. 105-106). As consequence, political institutions are not only autonomous and self-referential concerning civil society's political arena, practices and social subjects, but also *different* politically speaking, meaning that they are performed and streamlined basically by a representative politics centralized in the political parties and based on that systemic institutional dynamic which is proper of the Western modernization. In the second case, the inexistence of social classes as social macro subjects leads to institutional centralization and monopolization of the social normativity by the very own political institutions and their internal proceduralism and authorized staff (such as political parties and courts). Here, no social subject or individual political subject can centralize and monopolize the social normativity in the name of all society, nor perform an emancipatory social *praxis* based on such notion of social normativity – political-juridical institutions assume the guard, the foment and the grounding of the social normativity in the name of all society, from a representative politics which emphasizes the institutionalism as the condition to social legitimation and evolution over time (see HABERMAS, 2003b, p. 24).

As I think, Habermas' theory of modernity and its consequent political-juridical procedural paradigm lead to the *strong institutionalism* regarding the legitimation and the performing of the social evolution. With the concept of strong institutionalism I mean the fact that systemic institutions have a very proper and closed logic of functioning and programming which is basically autonomous, self-referential and self-subsisting in relation to an inclusive democratic political *praxis* and to a model of social normativity which can frame systemic institutional organization from outside and based on political-normative principles. A systemic institution is fundamentally technical and logical, and it has a complete independence concerning the political institutions and the spontaneous (and politicized!) *praxis* of the social movements and citizen initiatives. Therefore, each social system has absolute power about its own constitution, legitimation and evolution along the time, becoming closed to exterior contexts, principles, practices and actors. Strong institutionalism means that systemic institutions centralize and monopolize their specific social fields, particularizing them, and making them depoliticized. Habermas' theory of modernity, the moment it assumes the liberal notion of Western modernization as self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, must accept a very prejudicial political consequence, i.e. the systemic closure and autonomy regarding political *praxis*, exactly because of the fact that systemic institutions are non-normative and depoliticized structures, characterized by a very logical and technical dynamic of programming and functioning. Besides, when Habermas assumes that contemporary complex societies have not a core and a political center, as well as they have not social



classes as macro political subjects, he must accept the fact that political-juridical institutions centralize and monopolize the grounding and the foment of the social normativity, which implies in the consolidation of the representative politics as the epistemological-political basis to the legitimation and evolution of a democratic society. Here, civil society's social movements and citizen initiatives have a secondary and peripheral *status* – the more important is the institutionalism itself.

4. MARX ON WESTERN MODERNIZATION: A PROPOSAL AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

The new left's problem is exactly the affirmation of the conservative's notion of Western modernization as systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, which is a liberal epistemological-political presupposition. It submits the political *praxis* and the political institutions to systemic logic and dynamic, limiting the political capability to frame the social systems in general and the capitalist market in particular. And systemic institutional theory leads to the strong institutionalism, in that each social system centralizes and monopolizes the constitution, the legitimation and the evolution of its correlative field, closing and making it autonomous regarding political *praxis* and social normativity. The same way, strong institutionalism in politics (which is the consequence of that conservative notion of Western modernization) means that political institutions centralize and monopolize the social normativity, as they become the effective political arena, procedures, norms and actors from which social evolution is legitimized and performed, instituting the representative politics (which is limited by the depoliticized and non-normative social systems) as the basis to the democratic social constitution and evolution over time. So Habermas' intention to formulate a radical political paradigm to contemporary complex societies reveals itself as little radical and truly very conservative, because of the fact that it is attached to a conservative liberal notion of social system as an autonomous, self-referential and self-subsisting structure, which is non-political and non-normative, just technical and logical.

Here, we can make use of a Marx's intuition as the epistemological-political counterpoint to conservative liberalism's and to new left's systemic theory for the understanding of the Western modernization: there is a very strict interdependence between social reproduction and economic dynamic, in that economic field is in the social sphere constituted by the political *praxis*, which is a social and productive human activity, streamlined by conflictive social classes (see MARX, 2013; MARX & ENGELS, 2008). From here, there is not systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, nor as consequence the separation between systemic institutional dynamic and lifeworld. Truly, such very profound interdependence among social evolution, economic constitution and political *praxis* leads to the fact that social dynamic and institutional structuration are resulted from a political action which intends to perform and to create not just institutional codes and practices related to a single social sphere as separated of the society as a whole. It intends also – and that is the very impressive liberal contradiction – to structure the political institutions and the *status quo* based on that political notion of the systemic institution as a closed, autonomous, self-referential and self-subsisting field. So the idea of a systemic institution serves not only to legitimize the very own systemic institutional logic and dynamic, but also to determine the political constitution and the social evolution as an imbricated and dependent totality (something that conservative liberalism does and denies at the same time). That is the conservative liberalism's sense of the *negative politics* and of the *laissez-faire*: to orientate institutional political constitution and the social evolution as a whole, as dependent of the market logic and dynamic, not only to orientate the market self-understanding and



self-constitution. So, conservative liberalism's negative politics and *laissez-faire* limit political institutions and social evolution, submitting them to market dynamics.

Marx's notion of interdependence between infrastructure and superstructure – which is based (a) on the notion of society as an imbricated totality, (b) on a political evolution of the society and its institutions, and (c) on the existence of conflictive macro social subjects – enables us to face systemic institutional depoliticization and non-normative constitution by linking systemic dynamic and social-political evolution, which signifies that systemic institutions are not closed and self-referential regarding to politics and to social normativity, as they have not a technical and logical action which is always particularized and related to its specific field: they have both a political dimension and constitution, and a macro social-political impact. So, systemic institutions become macro structures which streamline and determine all social evolution (not only a particular and self-referential social field), as they become political structures which depend of the class hegemony. In other words, systemic institutions – and especially capitalist market – are basically structural political institutions. That is the very important marxist theoretical-political contribution: it enables us to understand systemic institutional constitution and action as a political *praxis* which has structural and macro consequences, as they involve social macro subjects. *The market* is not a particularized and closed field, but a totality which integrates and determines all social fields and subjects into its economic dynamic, defining them, as it defines institutional political constitution, legitimation and evolution. And the capitalist market as a political macro structure is streamlined by macro social subjects who, by acting as a social class, define the social evolution and the institutional political constitution as a whole from the economic logic and dynamic.

Based on that marxist intuition of the political constitution of the society as an imbricated totality, I argue that our contemporary big problem (both political and epistemological) is such liberal conception of Western modernization as systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, i.e. the non-political and non-normative systemic institutional constitution and legitimation, which leads to the strong institutionalism and to the particularization of the systemic institutional basis and effects. Indeed, such systemic institutional understanding of the Western modernization is currently the major tendency both in the conservative liberalism and in the new left, and it conducts to a very similar conclusion in both theoretical-political positions: it is not possible anymore a direct political intervention in the systemic institutions, as they cannot be framed by political-normative principles and practices, because of the fact that systemic institutions have a self-referential and self-subsistent dynamic which particularize and autonomize them regarding a direct political-normative *praxis*. In this sense, systemic institutions, as particularized fields, have a very technical and logical constitution, legitimation and evolution, which mean exactly their non-political and non-normative structuration – that is the reason why a direct political-normative intervention into systemic institutions is not legitimized by systemic theories (and even for Habermas). However, as I showed above, it is a false notion: systemic institutional constitution, evolution and consequences have a macro range which embraces and streamlines all social evolution and all the political structuration and legitimation. Therefore, systemic institutional logic and dynamic are not neutral, impartial, or autonomous and closed regarding both the social subjects, and the social rooting and effects – systemic institutional logic and dynamic are raised on the social and represent macro institutions which link and determine the evolution of all social fields, linking strongly also all social subjects in a common political project and social evolution.



It is interesting here to mention Thomas Piketty and Adriano Benayon as example of intellectuals who interpret economic theory concerning contemporary Western modernization (and even regarding to economy at all) *basically, fundamentally* as a political field, as a political theory². Indeed, both intellectuals have two imbricated ideas as epistemological-political starting point to the understanding of the contemporary process of economic modernization: (a) there is not *laissez-faire*; (b) all is politics and political (see PIKETTY, 2014; BENAYON, 1998). Such ideas signify the fact that economic constitution, legitimation and evolution are not separated from the society as a totality, and from the political institutions and the political *praxis* as the societal core, in a double sense: economy is a macro structure which determines the *status quo* and the institutional political constitution; economy is rooted into social world and defines it from internal economic logical and dynamic. That is the sense of the economy as a political-normative field and as a political-normative *praxis*: it performs the configuration of all social fields and of the political institutions, the same way that its structuration and evolution depend of the social struggles between macro social subjects. As a totalizing systemic structure which is resulted from and defined by social struggles between political macro subjects, economy becomes very politicized and normative. Here, a direct political-normative intervention is legitimized and necessary to economic stabilization and to social evolution – logical and technical economic structuration and legitimation are pure conservative phantasy.

Now, I think that *very central theoretical-political question for contemporary societies* is the dispute about the hegemonic understanding of the Western modernization. In other terms, our fundamental theoretical-political dynamic is grounded on and determined by the social-political struggles regarding the comprehension of the economic-political modernization, its specificities, its field and principles, its crisis – and the hegemonic theoretical-political position on it will define the way, the instruments and even the political actors which will assume the role of normative-political basis and force to the framing and to the evolution of such economic-political modernization. So, the definition of the Western modernization's sense is always and always the very political ground to contemporary politics and to perform our social evolution as society or as world globalization. That is the reason why a radical democracy, a radical critical social theory and a radical left must overcome that understanding of the Western modernization based on the systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, affirming an alternative theoretical-political conception founded on the society as a totality imbricated in its parts, which means the idea that there is a profound linking between infrastructure and superstructure which leads to the politicization and to the normative constitution of the social systems or institutions.

The conservative liberalism is very strong again and it is for now the hegemonic theoretical-political platform for the understanding and the *resolution* of the current social-economic crisis, both nationally and internationally. It emphasizes the market's systemic institutional specificities, autonomy and self-referentiality, i.e. market's logical and technical constitution and legitimation, as the basis and the starting point both to the comprehension of the Western modernization's constitution and evolution, and to the resolution of the current social-economic crisis. So, from a conservative perspective, political *praxis* and political institutions become a problem, because of the fact that they intend to politicize and to regulate economic dynamic based on a binding notion of social normativity. Well, in such a case, conservatism's intention is exactly to depoliticize the economic field, transforming it in a technical and logical world, and reducing the political-normative discussions on economy to technical and logical arguments: here, economy becomes a pure, exact and strong objective science and technique, monopolized by the systemic economic institutions. Such economic scientism depoliticizes economic constitution and legitimation, as it removes



from economy its normative structuration and dependence. So, from a conservative systemic institutional position, economy cannot be framed by political-normative arguments.

A very urgent leftist critical political *praxis* must refuse such conservatism's ideological economic scientism, as it must reject liberal reduction of economy to technical and logical field, principles and actors. As Piketty and Benayon said, all is politics and political, including the liberal *laissez-faire*, i.e. the notion of Western modernization as systemic self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence. The conservative depoliticization of the systemic institutions is a political question, as it has political intentions and consequences, mainly the strong institutionalism regarding both the economic dynamic and the political institutions. So the leftist politicization of the Western modernization could stimulate a democratic political *praxis* which would have conditions to clarify economic constitution and legitimation as a political-normative field and practice, in order to offer a counterpoint to theoretical-political conservatism. That is the more important and urgent theoretical-political task both to the critical social theory and to the left: to democratize political economy, i.e. to turn it into a matter democratically discussed; to make it a political-normative issue, showing its political-normative dependence, structuration and legitimation. The critical social theory and the left cannot assume uncritically a systemic understanding of the Western modernization as their theoretical-political starting point, the same way that they cannot ground their political *praxis* and the theoretical diagnoses on the economy's technical and logical constitution and legitimation. The systemic institutional theory, based on the technical and logical constitution of the systemic institutions, leads to the depoliticization of the social systems and to the strong institutionalism regarding systemic constitution and legitimation over time. The critical social theory and the left must face such situation from a paradigmatic changing which can politicize systemic institutional structuration and grounding – the leftist refusal to conceive economy in particular and the systemic institutions in general as technical and logical structures is the basic political starting point to that.

Besides, critical social theory and the left must organize and empower the political forces from civil society, as social movements and citizen initiatives. Social movements and citizen initiatives are the fundamental political subjects for breaking of the systemic logic in politics, as well as to the delegitimation of that conservative notion of the Western modernization as systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, instituting an alternative political-normative model of social life. In other words, only social movements and citizen initiatives can politicize the comprehension of the Western modernization through the permanent struggle against conservative systemic institutionalism. They have a spontaneous vital organization which is not technical or logical, as their needs are basically normative needs. From that, social movements and citizen initiatives value the social life based on a general notion of society and on a significant sense of the life which cannot be reduced to the technical and logical understanding of the systemic institutions. As consequence, social movements and citizen initiatives politicize systemic institutional constitution and legitimation, submitting such systemic institutions to normative foundations. Here, only an inclusive democratic political *praxis* can offer the legitimation to systemic institutions, by substituting a technical and logical discussion and *praxis* by a political-normative *praxis* and discussion. Now, if the critical social theory and the left want to offer a theoretical-political contraposition to conservatism regarding the hegemonic understanding of the Western modernization, then they must walk side by side with the social movements and citizen initiatives, formulating and making hegemonic a political-normative notion of Western modernization which emphasizes the politicization of the social systems, and their social rooting and linking as well.



Above all, there is not a stylized process or notion of Western modernization as an essential or a naturalized evolutionary process, as conservative liberalism intends to affirm with its notion of the Western modernization as systemic self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence. Therefore, there is not a technical and logical systemic structuration, legitimation and dynamic (as there is not a technical, a very scientific understanding of the Western modernization); all is politics and political, including economy. So the critical social theory and the left must understand the Western modernization in general and the capitalist economy in particular as a political field and matter, not as a technical and logical matter and field, as presupposed by systemic theory (assumed by the new left). Critical social theory and the political left cannot ground their political *praxis* on such systemic notion of the Western modernization, even if they perform a conciliation between systemic theory and a normative-political *praxis* – as new left does. Indeed, the new left's great mistake is to assume the conservative liberalism's notion of systemic institutionalism as the theoretical-political basis to the understanding and performing of the contemporary Western modernization. As I showed above, systemic theory and a normative-political *praxis* cannot be reconciled, because of the fact that systemic theory is based on the depoliticization and on the technicization of the institutions, which lead to the systemic closure and to the strong institutionalism both in political economy and in the democratic political *praxis*. Thus, a radical political *praxis* for a critical social theory and for a political left refuses the conservative systemic theory regarding to the understanding of the Western modernization, assuming a political-normative notion of modernization based on the society as a totality imbricated in its parts and dependent of the normative-political social reproduction, which means both the intersection between infrastructure and superstructure, and the normative-political centrality of the civil society's social movements and citizen initiatives.

NOTES

1. I am using the concept of *new left* to signify the generation of thinkers related to European social-democracy, characterized by the refusal of socialism and particularly of Marxism as epistemological-political key to the understanding and the transformation of the contemporary Western modernization (see HABERMAS, 1991; GIDDENS, 1996). I ask the kindness of the readers to such generic concept which I won't explain more specifically along the paper.

2. Also Paul Krugman, who is a liberal economist, believes that the first condition to the understanding of the economy is the fact that it is a political economy, not a technical and logical field or *praxis* (see KRUGMAN, 2009). Of course, Habermas and Giddens, as example of the new left, also interpret the Western economic modernization from a political starting point. However, as I showed in the paper, their epistemological-political basis, i.e. the systemic institutional self-differentiation, self-referentiality and self-subsistence, leads strongly to the systemic depoliticization and autonomization regarding a radical and inclusive democratic political *praxis*, as it conducts to the representative politics as the political platform for contemporary democratic evolution (see HABERMAS, 1990, 1999; GIDDENS, 2000, 2001).

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