

Method and passion in Celso Furtado

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The method that Celso Furtado used was essentially historical; his passion—a measured passion—was for Brazil. In the second half of the twentieth century no intellectual contributed more than him to the understanding of Brazil. He was committed to its development, frustrated with its incapacity to achieve it, and always acute in analyzing the economic and political challenges that the country successively faced. In order to demonstrate these ideas, this paper presents a broad review of Furtado's work.

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I

Introduction

If there was an intellectual who, in the second half of the twentieth century, gave a most decisive contribution to the understanding of Brazil, I would not hesitate in stating that that person was Celso Furtado. He did not merely offer economic explanations for our development and underdevelopment. More than that, he situated Brazil in a world context, analyzed its society and its politics, and offered solutions for the major problems it faced. In order to achieve this task, as ambitious as it was frustrating—because, ultimately, Brazil fell short of his great expectations—Furtado used method as well as passion. He was rigorous in his method, but this did not prevent him from viewing with passion the subject matter of his studies, which has always been a republican project of life as well: the development of Brazil.

One of the books by Carlos Drummond de Andrade (2000) is called *A Paixão Medida* (The Measured Passion). This oxymoron, so deftly used by that great poet, helps us to understand Celso Furtado. The passion is strong, making his work and life full of energy and desire for economic and political transformation, but it is a measured passion which weighs costs and trade-offs—as economists usually do—and does not overlook political restrictions.

Celso Furtado was an economist devoted to development theory and to the analysis of the Brazilian economy. In those two areas he always thought independently, using mainly the historical method rather than the logical-deductive one. He had a powerful ability to infer and deduct, but he always started from the observation of reality, avoided starting from general assumptions on human behaviour, and tried to infer his theories from that reality and its historical evolution.

In this paper I will not try to make a general evaluation of Celso Furtado's work, but will only focus on three elements in it. One element is well known—his independence of thought—but the other one (the method) has not been studied much, while the third (the passion) is present in some form in all the analyses of his work, but always appears in a measured way, through expressions such as his love for Brazil and his personal and intellectual integrity. Furtado is all this, but he is much more. His struggle for the development of Brazil and for overcoming backwardness in his home region—the Northeast of Brazil—was conducted with a degree of intensity and determination that only passion could explain.

II

Theoretical independence

Celso Furtado was a development economist. He was part of the group of 'pioneers' of modern development theory, along with Rosenstein-Rodan, Prebisch, Singer, Lewis, Nurkse, Myrdall, and Hirschman.¹ His theoretical contributions focused on the understanding of the process of economic development and underdevelopment. And to achieve this, he used in the first place, as we will see, the most suitable method for the study of development: the historical-inductive one. But, before examining the method he used it is

important to highlight the theoretical independence that characterizes his intellectual path.

Furtado used the economic theory he learned from the classics, especially Ricardo and Marx, and also Keynes. He owed little to the neoclassics. He should not be taken for a Marxist or a Keynesian, however. He learned with the classics and with Keynes, but he had an independent line of thought and always prized this independence above everything. He is identified with Latin American structuralism, inasmuch as he was one of its founders.² But we must keep in mind that

¹ The 'pioneers of development' were identified by Gerald Meier and Dudley Seers in two books: Meier and Seers (1984), and Meier and Schultz (1987).

² Love (1998) incisively highlights Furtado's role as co-founder of Latin American structuralism, although Furtado has always insisted that Raúl Prebisch should be given this honour.

structuralism is not nor has it pretended to be an all-encompassing economic theory. It was an influential economic doctrine in Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s because it offered an interpretation for the underdevelopment of countries which, in the mid-twentieth century, were going through the transition from pre-capitalist or mercantile forms to industrial capitalism, and it presented their government leaders with a consistent development strategy.

The theoretical independence of Furtado's thought enabled him to use the theories he considered relevant to solve the problems presented by the interpretation of the economic facts he had to face. Marxism was important for him to the extent that it offered a powerful view of history and capitalism, but Marx's contribution to economic theory was less significant. When describing how he learned from Marxism in France, in the late 1940s, he says: *The remarkable view provided by Marx on the genesis of modern history cannot leave indifferent a curious mind. Yet his contribution in the field of economics seemed less important for someone familiar with Ricardo's thought and acquainted with modern economics* (Furtado, 1985, p. 31)

On the other hand, he did not believe in pure economic theory, whether neoclassical or Marxist. Furtado was never interested in this aspect of economic theory. For him, economic theories existed in order to solve actual problems. From his point of view, economics is *an instrument to penetrate social and political realms and further the understanding of history, particularly when it was still displayed as present before our eyes* (Furtado, 1985, pp. 15 and 51).

But how does Furtado seek to understand the world around him? Not by applying any system of economic thought uncritically. Nothing is more opposed to Furtado than the stereotyped thought of orthodox intellectuals, whatever type of orthodoxy they adopt. He wanted to see the world with his own eyes; to use the instruments of economic analysis without losing his own freedom of thought and creation, which was his greatest asset. As observed by Francisco Iglesias: *it is absurd to point to him as neoclassical, Marxist or Keynesian: labels that are frequently assigned to him. From every author or trend he takes what he considers to be correct or adaptable to Brazilian or Latin American reality. He adopts the models that seem correct to him, without orthodoxy, and does not try to apply them mechanically to*

different cases (Iglesias, 1971, p. 176).³ Furtado did not try in this manner to reconcile those theories, nor was he being undefined, as suggested by those who want a single, integrated view of economic theory: he was only saying that one school of thought may be more useful than another, depending on the problem faced. As for Keynes, Furtado was, as noted by Bielschowsky (1988, p. 60), an 'atypical Keynesian' because he generally characterized underdevelopment as a problem of shortage of saving. Shortage of demand would apply primarily to developed countries. Nevertheless, when describing the development process, instead of adopting the attitude—typical among the pioneers of development—of considering the concentration of income as a condition for the beginning of development, Furtado assigned wage growth a fundamental role in ensuring an increase in aggregate demand and the capitalists' own profits. At this point he was already being fully Keynesian.

His concern with the independence of his thought became clearly apparent when he decided to leave Rio de Janeiro and work in Santiago, at ECLAC, which had just been created. At that time, ECLAC was still an empty project. Furtado did not know Prebisch, who had not yet formulated his view of the development of Latin America. Even so, he decided to join ECLAC, in order to *escape the siege, gain an open horizon, even if I had to wander in search of a lost Atlantis*. He makes this statement in *A Fantasia Organizada* (The Organized Fantasy) (Furtado, 1985, p. 50), and goes on to manifest his conformity with Sartre and his philosophy of responsibility, according to which if we based our real choices only on reason, there would be no choices, and everything would be predetermined.

By deciding to go to Santiago, Furtado was telling himself that his own life was not predetermined. And he was thus consistent with his broader view of society and the economy. Since he never believed that a single economic theory was able to explain everything, he always rejected all kinds of determinism as well: whether Marxist determinism, based on the 'laws of history', or the neoclassical variety, based on the principle of rationality, which, by postulating the maximization of interests, leaves no room for decisions

³ It may seem surprising to consider Furtado also as a neoclassical, but this is what we see, for instance, in Mantega (1984, p. 90): *In the first place, there is a certain imprecision and even a good dose of indecisiveness in this thinker, who wavers between classical and neoclassical fundamentals, for me irreconcilable.*

or choices.⁴ On the contrary, if in the debate between determinism and voluntarism Furtado committed a sin, it was the sin of voluntarism, expressed in his belief in the ability of human reason to impose its will on the economy and society through planning, and, more broadly, in the key role he always attributed to decisions when it comes to thinking about the macroeconomic system. The market has a fundamental role, but the decisions taken are no less important. This view is very clear in *Criatividade e Dependência na Civilização Industrial* (Creativity and Dependency in Industrial Civilization) (Furtado, 1978, p. 18), where he asserts: *The profile of an economic system is defined on the basis of the identification of the centers from which emanate those decisions, destined to harmonize the initiatives of the multiple agents who exert power in different degrees.*

This rejection of determinism, including the determinism of the market, is related to the individualism and idealism of this great intellectual who decided to intervene in reality. He started from the conviction that he was part of an intellectual elite, of an *intelligentsia*, that would be able to reform the world. In this field, his master was Karl Mannheim. As Furtado says: *By following Mannheim, I had a certain idea of the intelligentsia's social role, particularly in periods of crisis. I felt myself to be above the determinants created by my social insertion and was persuaded that the challenge consisted in inserting a social purpose in the use of such a freedom* (Furtado, 1978, p. 19).

Gerard Lebrun, in his analysis of *A Fantasia Organizada*, points out Furtado's idealistic voluntarism, expressed by his unshakeable belief in planning – planning that would totally eliminate the unpredictability of decisions. “Well,” observes the philosopher, *“his idea of power (in a democracy, of course) seems so abstract, so well adjusted, a priori, to his ideal of a neutral planning, that he apparently hardly conceives that the planner might become a technocrat”* (Lebrun, 1985).

As a matter of fact, this outstanding economist of whom we are speaking is a scientist, but also a bureaucrat in the best sense of the word, a Statesman, a public policymaker who only ceased to be inserted

in the State apparatus when the military dictatorship suspended his political rights. Celso Furtado started his professional life in the DASP (Public Service Administrative Department), as a public administration technician. He went beyond that phase to become an economist and a university professor, but he never gave up believing in the rationalizing power of bureaucracy, including middle-level bureaucracy. He often said that the sole social group that was able to act as an interlocutor with international powers was the State bureaucracy. And for him it was essential to strengthen the bureaucracy in democratic regimes in order to maintain public policies and the effectiveness and legitimacy of the State power. As he says in *A Fantasia Desfeita* (The Faded Fantasy): *The process of bureaucratization does not only mean the growth of the State apparatus, it also means significant changes in political processes. By increasing the effectiveness of power, bureaucratization consolidates it at lower levels of legitimacy* (Furtado, 1989, p. 185).

With this line of thinking, Furtado is faithful to what he learned from such different thinkers as Mannheim, Sartre and his teacher Cornu.⁵ In capitalist democracies intellectuals may free themselves from ideologies and use their freedom to intervene in the world in a republican way. He knows that this is always a relative freedom, that we may build our own lives, but we cannot have any illusions regarding the social and political determinants to which we are subject. For great intellectuals such as Furtado, the dialectics between freedom and socially conditioned behaviour can be more conscious and, if accompanied by the virtue of courage, as in his case, this will be more favourable to freedom, but only more favourable, no more than this: nobody escapes his circumstances.

Intellectual courage is expressed primarily in moments when it is necessary to differ from one's environment and group. In 1962, right in the middle of the country's political radicalization, Celso Furtado published *A Pré-Revolução Brasileira* (The Brazilian Pre-Revolution). After praising the humanistic nature of Marx's work, Furtado does not hesitate to declare: *Since Marxism-Leninism is based on the replacement of one class dictatorship with another, it would be a regression, from a political point of view, to apply it to societies which have reached more complex forms of social coexistence, that is, to modern open societies* (Furtado, 1962, p. 27).

⁴ The deterministic nature of neoclassical thought was shaken only when microeconomics textbooks began to include game theory – that is, decision theory. But by then their authors were taking the healthy attitude of relativizing the maximizing postulate of neoclassical theory.

⁵ Quoted by Furtado (1985, p. 31).

Likewise, in the *Plan Trienal 1963-1965* (Triennial Plan, 1963-1965) (1963) he did not hesitate to propose a fiscal adjustment and a strict monetary policy, although he knew that he would be called ‘monetarist’ by the groups that supported the Goulart administration.

The use of freedom gains its full meaning in Furtado because it is marked by the gift of creativity. Furtado’s contribution to economic theory and to the analysis of Brazilian and Latin American economies may be explained in terms of method, but it is primarily the result of an enormous personal ability to think and create. Furtado knew this, and it is certainly not by chance that the epigraph of one of his books is a quotation from Popper in which he acknowledges that *scientific discovery is impossible without faith in ideas which are of a purely speculative kind, and sometimes even quite hazy*.⁶

Creativity was to be one of the bases of his intellectual independence from orthodoxy. Lebrun (1985), writing on *A Fantasia Organizada*, remarks: *It is the odor of heterodoxy that makes this book even more fascinating and makes Celso Furtado a great*

writer, as well as a thinker. As observed by Bourdieu (1983, p. 145) if in economic theory there is a “doxy”—a set of assumptions that antagonists regard as evident—there is also an orthodoxy and an heterodoxy. The heterodox intellectual does not deny his science’s most general assumptions, but refuses to subordinate his thought to the dominant one. The Right and the conventional economists insist on giving heterodoxy a negative meaning, identifying it with economic populism, but, in fact, to innovate in economic theory and analyses almost always involves some heterodoxy. To be heterodox is to develop new theories, often from the identification of new historical facts that modify a certain economic and social setting and make pre-existent theories inadequate. When Celso Furtado opted to use mainly the historical-inductive method, and when he became one of the two founders of Latin American structuralism, he was opting for heterodoxy and for independence of thought. In the next section, I will briefly present my view of the two methods used in economic theory, after which I will continue my analysis of the method used by Celso Furtado.

III

Two methods in economics

Orthodoxy, or neoclassical mainstream, is primarily logical-deductive. It intends to deduce the balanced operation of market economies from the sole assumption that economic agents maximize their interests. If we classify sciences as adjectival or methodological, there is no substantive science more logical-deductive than neoclassical economic science, in spite of the statements that it is a positive science. Paradoxical as it may seem, not even physics is as logical-deductive. The supremacy of the logical-deductive method is such that I always recall the observation of a former student who had just returned from a scholarship in a foreign university. When I told him that, for me, in certain fundamental areas, such as macroeconomics and economic development, the economist should use predominantly the historical-inductive method instead of the logical-deductive one,

he immediately replied: “but in economics, the logical-deductive method is always dominant; we don’t study history, we study economic theory”. For him, as for the whole of neoclassical thought, economic theory is by definition logical-deductive.

Economic theory is abstract by definition, and cannot be confused with history. In economics we try to find models, theories, to explain the stability and variation of economic aggregates, the short-term economic cycle and development, inflation or deflation and the balance of payments, and the variation of relative prices, of interest rates and of the exchange rate. The subject matter of economic theory is therefore clear, as it is clear that the aim is to generalize with respect to the behaviour of relevant variables, and, through this generalization, to be able to predict the behaviour of economic variables. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that, depending on the subject discussed, the most appropriate method will sometimes be the logical-deductive one, and sometimes the historical-inductive one.

⁶ Epigraph to the *Prefácio a Nova Economia Política* (Preface to New Political Economy) (Furtado, 1976a).

In another paper, I advocated the idea that macroeconomics cannot be reduced to microeconomics because the former uses predominantly the historical-deductive method whereas the latter uses the logical-deductive method. The statement that the advance of knowledge depends on the joint use of the two methods is part of the introductory classes in philosophy. In the process of knowing, individuals make permanent use of induction and deduction, one following the other and vice versa. Induction and deduction are not, therefore, methods of knowledge, or, more precisely, opposite mental operations. They are complementary. This does not mean, however, that sciences use one method or the other with the same intensity. Mathematics, for instance, is only logical-deductive, while sociology is mainly historical-inductive. In mathematics everything is deduced from a few identities; in sociology and the other social sciences, with the exception of the neoclassical variant of economics (recently extended to political science), the observation of social facts and their evolution in time is the fundamental method of research, although the researcher is permanently forced to also use the deductive method to perform his analysis.

Therefore, I am not corroborating the belief—predominant in the nineteenth century—that the use of the inductive method would distinguish true science, which would begin with the observation of facts and the execution of experiments to ultimately arrive at general laws. As Hume's 'problem of induction' made clear, we may infer general laws from induction, but the inferences thus performed do not thereby become logically demonstrated.⁷ The historical-inductive method does not exclude the logical-deductive one. In macroeconomics and in the theory of economic development, however, it takes precedence over the logical-deductive method, whereas the opposite is true for microeconomics.

I consider the neoclassical theory of general equilibrium a remarkable contribution to the understanding of how market economies operate. But this does not mean that the whole of economic theory can be subordinated to it. A second branch of economic theory—macroeconomics—cannot be reduced to

microeconomics because one deals with the behaviour of economic agents and the other with economic aggregates—this is only a definition. Microeconomics, or, more precisely, the general equilibrium model that serves as its basis, approaches economy from a logical-deductive perspective, deducing the way by which resources are allocated and income distributed in a market economy from a single assumption: the rational behaviour of the agents concerned. Macroeconomics, on the other hand, was born and continues to bear its greatest fruits when it observes the behaviour of economic aggregates, verifies how this behaviour tends to repeat itself, and generalizes therefrom, building models or theories. Subsequently, macroeconomists try to find a logical reason, a microeconomic fundamental for the behaviour of macroeconomic aggregates, but at most they will find *ad hoc* explanations. The neoclassical hope of reducing macroeconomics to microeconomics cannot be achieved, because the methods prevailing in each of those branches of economic science are different.⁸ It is likewise impossible to reduce the third major branch of economic theory—the theory of economic development—to microeconomics or macroeconomics. In this case, the core of the thinking is still classical, just as the core of microeconomic thinking is neoclassical, and the core of macroeconomic thinking is Keynesian.

Economic theory tries to explain and predict the behaviour of economic variables. It is necessary, however, to determine the variable in which we are interested. If we want to understand and predict the behaviour of prices and the allocation of resources in the economy, microeconomic theory, with its logical-deductive basis, will be more effective; if we want to understand the distribution of income in the long run in the capitalist system, the reversal of classical theory, by placing the profit rate as given and the wage rate as a residue, will have a higher predictive power; if, on the other hand, we want to understand the behaviour of economic cycles, Keynesian-based macroeconomics will be the instrument *par excellence*; and finally, in order to understand the dynamics of development, classical history-based development theory will be the one with the highest power of explanation and prediction.

According to this reasoning, it is impossible to have an absolutely integrated view of economic science. Economic science has three major branches:

⁷ See Blaug (1980, pp. 11-12). This author uses Hume's problem of induction to reduce its role in economic theory. Like most economists, he presumes that there is only "one single" economic theory, and therefore the predominant use of one method or the other, depending on the approach—microeconomic, macroeconomic, or of economic development—makes no sense for him.

⁸ See Bresser-Pereira and Tadeu Lima (1996).

microeconomics, macroeconomics, and development theory. Each one of them provides us with a view of the operation of the economic system from a certain perspective, using one prevailing method. Of these three branches, only in microeconomics is the logical-deductive method dominant, and rightly so. It was this method that made it possible to build the microeconomic models of partial and general equilibrium, which constitute one of the major scientific achievements of universal thought. Through this method we can understand how a market economy allocates resources. Yet the theory of economic development—which explains the growth process of capitalist economies in the long run—and macroeconomics—which shows how economies behave in the economic cycle—although using the logical-deductive method, were built from the observation of historical phenomena. Smith and Marx, who founded the first of these, observed the transition from pre-capitalist forms to capitalism, and theorized on the basis of that observation. The classical theory of income distribution also has a historical nature, although, with the change in the behaviour of the wage rate from the mid-nineteenth century on, it only continued to make sense when it was inverted: the long-term profit rate proved to be stable enough to be considered constant, and therefore it is possible to predict that the wage rate will increase with productivity as long as technical progress is neutral. Keynes and Kalecki, who were responsible for the appearance of macroeconomics, began with the observation of the economic cycle after the First World War, and theorized from there on: they also primarily used the historical-inductive method. Ricardo's great contribution to the theory of economic development—the law of comparative advantages in international trade—was a great logical-deductive effort, but even in this case it was based on the observation of what happened in England and took into account the business interests of that country, rather than the rational behaviour of its economic agents.

Friedman's criticism of Keynesian macroeconomic policy—the discovery that through adaptive expectations the economic agents would partly neutralize that policy—started rather from the observation of reality, although it has an obvious microeconomic foundation. This criticism did not invalidate macroeconomic policy but limited its scope. When, however, macroeconomic theory detached itself from reality and radicalized the logical-deductive approach, as happened with the rational expectations hypothesis, we have an absurd and empty theoretical

construct, despite its apparent consistency, which transforms economic theory into a mere ideology. According to this distortion of economic theory, macroeconomic policies would be completely ineffective, since they would be neutralized by the agents' rational expectations. Well, this assertion contradicts daily experience, in which we see the economic authorities of all nations actively involved in economic policy. The radical use of the logical-deductive method led theory to ignore historical reality. For some time during the 1980s, economic policymakers in the ministries of finance and in the central banks accepted the radical version of monetarism proposed by the rational expectations hypothesis, but since the beginning of the 1990s they have abandoned monetarism and started to adopt the pragmatic strategy of inflation targeting.

Another common distortion that arises from the pretension of using the logical-deductive method to explain all economic phenomena is that resulting from the insistence on employing a certain model when reality does not conform to it. At that moment, economic theory becomes an obstacle rather than an instrument for the analysis of what is happening. When economists manage to overcome this obstacle and actually think, analyzing the new facts that demand new analyses, they are forced to abandon the pre-existent models. In this case, as observed by Tony Lawson, *the only thing that remains intact is an adherence to formalist and, therefore, deductivist closed systems of modeling* (Lawson, 1999, pp. 6-7).⁹

Therefore, I view with skepticism the attempts to unify microeconomics, macroeconomics and development theory. Those approaches are not mutually reducible, because they start from different methods. To want to unify them is mere intellectual arrogance: an arrogance that results in the impoverishment of economic theory. There is no need to find a model that unifies everything. We can perfectly well use one theory or the other, according to the point that we are trying to explain. A strictly neoclassical form of macroeconomics is a contradiction: it is macroeconomics without the very object of that discipline: the economic cycles. A purely neoclassical theory of economic development makes still less sense, since the general equilibrium model is essentially static.

⁹ Lawson adds: *Mainstream's insistence in the universal application of formalist methods presumes, for its legitimacy, that the social world is closed everywhere, that event regularities are ubiquitous.*

When the neoclassical economists finally arrived at a compatible model of development —the Solow model— this represented, substantively, only a small advance over what Smith, Marx, Schumpeter and the pioneers of development theory of the 1940s and 1950s had taught us on development. The same may be said of the Keynesian model of development of Harrod and Domar. The main merit of both models was the fact

that they were consistent with their corresponding theories, rather than the fact of explaining the development process. The Solow model eventually proved to be more useful, not because of that logical-deductive consistency, but rather because —since it was based on a Cobb-Douglas function— it made it possible to conduct a great deal of empirical research, not precisely historical, but predominantly inductive.

IV

Furtado's method

One of the ways in which Furtado evidenced his independence of thought was the fact that he remained faithful to the historical-inductive method, even though orthodoxy, over the last eighty years, became more and more logical-deductive. Of course, he made abundant use of his logical-deductive ability, but he always did so on the basis of the historical facts and their tendency to repetition, rather on a presumption of rational behaviour. As an economic historian, it was natural for him to use predominantly the historical-inductive method, but he also continued to do so when he took on the role of a theorist on development and underdevelopment.

I am not suggesting, therefore, that Furtado belongs to Gide's German historicist school, or to Veblen's American institutionalism. Those schools were characterized by their rejection of economic theory and by their efforts to analyse economic facts on a case-by-case basis, whereas Furtado used the available economic theory and tried to make it advance in the understanding of economic development.

Even as an economic historian, Furtado was, above all, an economist rather than a historian. He does not recount the history of the Brazilian economy, he analyzes it. No one made use of economic theory more brilliantly to understand the evolution of the Brazilian economy than Furtado in his *Formação Econômica do Brasil* (The Economic Formation of Brazil) (1959). As Francisco Iglesias, a historian, remarked: although this is a book on economic history it is a book *from an economist's point of view... in this analysis of economic processes one arrives at a great simplicity, at an ideal model, at forms that sometimes look as if they were abstract. This is what happens in many parts of Celso Furtado's book; the rigor of construction of this book*

is such that... it makes its reading difficult for those who lack a vast store of historical information and a certain knowledge of economic theory (Iglesias, 1971, pp. 200-201).

Along the same lines, Lebrun points out: *history, as it is practiced by Celso Furtado, is only worthwhile for its extreme accuracy (author's emphasis)... This is his method: no assertion that is not based on facts or on statistical data.* But, I would add, data that are used with great intelligence and deductive ability. One of the features that makes *Formação Econômica do Brasil* a masterpiece of history and economic analysis is Furtado's ability to deduce, from the scarce available data, the other variables of the economy and their dynamic behaviour. But, in doing that, Furtado is not abandoning the primacy of the historical-inductive method. He is only showing his ability to combine his creativity with his logical rigour in order to present, from the available data, a general picture of the historical evolution of the Brazilian economy which is as yet unsurpassed. *Formação Econômica do Brasil* is for me the most important book published in the twentieth century on Brazil, because in it Furtado was able to use economic theory and the other social sciences not to describe, but to analyze the economic history of Brazil.

I will give an example of his independence and method in that book. From chapter 16 on, Furtado is writing about the nineteenth century. It should be noted, however, that although he had just participated in the founding of Latin American structuralism in Santiago, Chile, he was not led by imperialist explanations of our underdevelopment, and declares, with respect to the 1810 and 1827 privileged agreements with England: *the common criticism made*

of these agreements, that they precluded Brazilian industrialization at that stage, seems to be unfounded (Furtado, 1959, p. 122). On the basis of the country's export data and terms of trade, he observes that the first half of the century was a period of stagnation: in fact, per capita income fell from US\$ 50 to US\$ 43 (at the exchange rate of the 1950s). The next fifty years, however, showed great expansion, thanks to the increase in exports and the substantial improvement in the terms of trade. Once again the analysis starts from some historically verified facts, in order to infer the economy's general behaviour and, of course, to connect it with the social aspects. The landowners are not undifferentiated, as they are usually seen. The new ruling class of coffee growers was very different from the old patriarchal class of the sugar plantations. It had commercial experience, and therefore the interests of production and trade were intertwined. On the other hand, he devotes four chapters to the problem of labour, stressing the importance of immigration and wage labour. This may seem obvious, but it deserves emphasis to show that he was an author who did not transform the economy into mere abstractions, but thought of it as a historically situated political economy.

I will take my second example from his groundbreaking theoretical book: *Desenvolvimento e Subdesenvolvimento* (Development and Underdevelopment) (Furtado, 1961). In chapter 1, he summarizes his broader methodological view, and remarks that economic theory must be at the same time abstract and historical: *The effort towards higher levels of abstraction must be followed by another effort, which tries to define, based on historical realities, the validity limits of the inferred relationships. The fundamental duality of economic science—its abstract and historical nature—appears, therefore, in its entirety in the theory of economic development.*

According to Furtado, the fact that economics is taking on a more and more abstract nature is because, from Ricardo on, its aim has been virtually limited to the study of the division of the product, leaving in the background the issue of development. He points out, however, *economic development is a phenomenon with a sharp historical dimension* (Furtado, 1961, p. 22). He was to repeat this statement many times throughout his vast work, because it is a key issue in his thought. After introducing the "mechanism of development", in which he presents a few abstractions required for the understanding of development, in chapter 3 he gives one of the most remarkable analyses I know of "The

historical process of development". In this chapter, which was not included later on—in my opinion, due to an error of judgment—and which was thus lost during the transformation of *Desenvolvimento e Subdesenvolvimento* into the more systematic and didactic *Teoria e Política do Desenvolvimento Econômico* (Theory and Politics of Economic Development) (Furtado, 1967), he shows how the way the economic surplus is used determines the outcome of the development process. In pre-capitalist systems, the surplus was primarily used for war and for building religious temples. With the advent of capitalism, the surplus obtained by merchants was transformed into capital accumulation, which was henceforth to be intrinsic to the economic system. With the industrial revolution, however, capitalism spread to the sphere of production. In a world of ever more rapid technical progress and increasingly widespread competition, the reinvestment of profits no longer satisfies the businessman's desire for increased profits, but becomes a condition for the survival of enterprises. Development becomes self-sustainable: *When the production surplus of the social organization becomes a source of income, the accumulation process will tend to become automated ... The strategic points of this process are the possibility of increasing productivity and the appropriation of the fruits of this increase by minority groups* (Furtado, 1961, pp. 120-121).

The idea is simple yet powerful. But we should not imagine that Furtado would present only its bare bones. What he does is to present a historical process through which we see how development emerges side with side with capitalism, and with all the complex social, institutional, and cultural changes which are inherent to it. The economic phenomenon of productivity increase is a key issue, but it is intrinsically connected with the emergence of new social classes and new institutions.

The importance of institutions, which became a key issue for the study of development in the 1990s, was already clear for Furtado in *Desenvolvimento e Subdesenvolvimento*. He explains, for instance, the economic decline that follows the collapse of a pre-capitalist empire such as the Roman Empire in terms of the collapse of the Roman State apparatus, of its military power, and of its long-matured institutions. The surplus was appropriated by Roman citizens, and particularly by the patricians, through the collection of tribute from the colonies, and this gave rise to extensive trade underwritten by Roman law. When this whole system collapsed, economic decline was inevitable.

Furtado says in this respect: *The destruction of the enormous administrative and military machinery that constituted this Empire had profound consequences for the economy of the vast area it occupied ... Once the administrative and military system was dismantled, the security conditions that made trade possible disappeared; on the other hand, with the disappearance of tributes, the main source of income of urban populations, who lived on subsidies or rendering services, was over* (Furtado, 1961).

Institutions are therefore of fundamental importance, but they do not occur alone. First of all, they are part of the State, which, in the Roman case, took on the form of an Empire. Second, it is not just a question of ensuring economic activity—trade—but of making feasible a way of appropriating the surplus. In the absence as yet of capitalism and surplus value or capitalist profit, the surplus is appropriated by force, through tributes.

Development in the historical sense of the word only occurs when the expansion of Islamism forces Byzantium to turn to Italy. Powerful trade economies are then formed in the Italian city-states, and alongside the aristocracy, or in its place, a new bourgeois class appears. And this trade promotes political integration, which is eventually to lead to the emergence of national states. In this case, institutions emerge rather as a consequence than as a cause of development. Furtado is explicit about this, and remarks that whereas in the Roman Empire political integration led to trade and development, in Europe it was long-distance trade, adventurous and insecure, that caused political integration. This latter, however, would soon become a decisive factor of development itself.

Institutions and their stability are fundamental for development—especially the greatest of them all, the nation-state, from which the others depend. In this case Furtado was not being original, since there is a broad consensus about this. He adds, however, that the capitalist system will not only produce the nation-state, but will tend to adopt democratic institutions. This view appears clearly in his next book, *A Dialética do Desenvolvimento* (The Dialectics of Development) (Furtado, 1964), in which he criticizes the Marxist idea that in bourgeois society the limitations on freedom derive from the need to defend the privileges of the class that owns the capital goods. On the contrary, he says, democracy arises from capitalism and from the increasing institutional stability it provides. Such stability not only leads the bourgeoisie to adopt democracy as the political regime, but also ensures the

system's economic dynamism. According to Furtado: *The reason for the progress of liberties in democratic capitalist societies was their increasing institutional stability. The revolutions that were directly caused by class struggles in Western Europe completed their cycle in the third quarter of the nineteenth century ... Now, this institutional stability is due to the existence of a powerful class—the owners of the capital goods—with broad vested interests to protect ... The progress of civic liberties in bourgeois societies resulted less from the effective participation of the working class in political decisions than from the confidence that the capitalist class acquired in a setting of flexible political institutions* (Furtado, 1964, p. 45).¹⁰

Furtado's political economy, always based on the historical method, is remarkable. Not only development, but also democracy derives from capitalism. The workers' struggle will play a fundamental role not only in furthering democracy but also in ensuring, through the fight for better wages, the growth of aggregate demand, as profits grow. In the process of developing bourgeois democracy, which is initially just liberal, the essential role lies with the bourgeoisie itself and with the institutional stability it achieves. Perhaps this institutional stability is due less to the broad vested interests to be protected, and more to the fact that the bourgeoisie is the first social class that was able to appropriate the surplus without direct use of force to levy tributes and enslave colonized populations—which led it to become an agent of the liberal rule of law and to become open to the advance of democratic institutions. But in any case it is remarkable to observe the analysis of the role of the capitalist class in achieving institutional stability, a stability that promotes development, which, in turn, strengthens the democratic trends existing in society, thus establishing a virtuous circle of self-sustainable development.

For Furtado, the historical method is a key element in his analysis of development, inasmuch as it enables him to combine a grand overall view of the historical process with the specificities of each moment and each country. At the same time, the ability to predict facts, which is required from every social theory, is present here through the analysis of the historical process of development, insofar as the

¹⁰ In the *Prefácio à Nova Economia Política*, Furtado (1976a) once again gives the classical concept of the economic surplus a fundamental role in his analysis of the process of capitalist accumulation.

abstract definition of development, as the increase in productivity from capital accumulation and from the incorporation of technical progress, acquires historical substance, that is: it is complemented by political, institutional, and social elements. Development is not just capital accumulation but is also the incorporation of technical progress, which depends on the class structure, the political organization, and the institutional system. Therefore, there is no development outside history, and there is no economic development without political and social development.

By adopting the historical method, Furtado approaches Hegel's dialectics and Marx's historical materialism, although remaining independent of them, primarily because he attributes a greater role to human will: *The importance of dialectics for the understanding of historical processes derives from the fact that history ... cannot be reconstructed from the multiple phenomena that are part of it.* However, through it man intuitively in the historical process this all-encompassing view that is able to give multiplicity a unity. Marx boldly adopted this dialectical principle when he divided society into infrastructure and superstructure, and into two social classes. This strategy, says Furtado, had an extraordinary importance as a starting point for the study of social dynamics... However, it is necessary to admit that, at this level of generality, an analytic model is hardly worth while as an instrument of practical orientation. And the purpose of science—he concludes, evidencing the pragmatism that has always guided him—is to produce guidelines for practical action (Furtado, 1964, pp. 14-15 and 22).

I took these passages from *Dialética do Desenvolvimento* (Furtado, 1964), a book which he wrote in the midst of the crisis of the Goulart Administration, after resigning from the Special Ministry of Planning, and remaining only in charge of SUDENE (Northeast Development Agency). Among his autobiographical books this is perhaps that which received his greatest attention: a full summary.¹¹ In A

Fantasia Organizada (Furtado, 1985), he clearly states that one of his purposes was to delimit the utilization of Marxism and dialectics in the analysis of development. And by doing so, he restates his commitment to the rigour of scientific method: *The second goal (of Dialética do Desenvolvimento) would be to determine the scope of dialectics, which had come into fashion again with Sartre's Criticisme, while manifesting that its use would not exempt us from applying the scientific method with rigor in the approach to social problems.* (Furtado, 1989, p. 182).

To adopt the scientific method with rigour, however, does not mean to adopt analytical models based on the assumption of the stable equilibrium, as it is so common in economics. To analyze development we need dynamic models, such as the 'cumulative principle' proposed by Myrdal. More generally, Furtado concludes: *Even if we had made progress in modeling, we must admit that, to build models, we always start from a few intuitive hypotheses on the behaviour of the historical process as a whole. And the most general of those hypotheses is the one provided by dialectics, by which historical aspects are something that is necessarily in course of development. The idea of development appears as a hypothesis that organizes the historical process—as a 'synthesis of several determinations, unity in multiplicity', in Marx's words—through which it is possible to achieve an efficient effort of identification of relationships between factors and of selection of those factors in order to reconstruct this process through an analytic model* (Furtado, 1964, p. 22).¹²

With this exemplary text—which shows Furtado's elegance and ability of synthesis in expressing his thought—he makes clear his conception of the historical and dialectical nature of the scientific method he adopts. I could have begun the analysis of his method with this quotation, but I preferred to use at the end, thus concluding my analysis with his own words.

¹¹ See Furtado (1989, pp. 182-190).

¹² The quotation from Marx comes from his *Contribution to the Criticism of Political Science* (Marx, 1970).

V

Passion

In the way Celso Furtado worked with economic science there is not only a rigorous method, there is also passion. There are great expectations, and the corresponding frustration. Usually reason and emotion are seen as opposites. However, this is a misguided way of understanding the process of thought. Great scientists were very often people passionate about their work, their research. The really great economists were almost always passionate not only about their science, but also about its results. Some of them fell in love with the achievement of economic stability, others, with a fairer distribution of income, and most of them, with the development of their country.

Furtado's passion was the development of Brazil: a passion that was fed by the belief that this development was within the reach of his country at the historical moment when he graduated as an economist, in the late 1940s. World War II had just come to an end. New theories of economic development were appearing. A great hope was beginning to take shape before the eyes of the young man from Paraíba who had just gained his Ph.D. in economics in France (1948): Brazil, already in the course of rapid industrialization, would overcome the structural imbalances of its economy and, with the help of economic theory and economic planning, would reach the level of a developed country.

Only this passion—the passion for the idea of the development of Brazil—explains the strength of his thought, particularly in his first books, from his first fundamental paper on the Brazilian economy—“Características Gerais da Economia Brasileira” (General Characteristics of the Brazilian Economy) (Furtado, 1950)—and his first book—*A Economia Brasileira* (The Brazilian Economy) (Furtado, 1954)—up to *Dialética do Desenvolvimento* (Furtado, 1964), written at a moment when hopes began to be shattered by the imminence of the crisis. All these works have a theoretical strength and a power of analysis that do not derive just from the creativity of their author, from his great culture, from his independence of thought, and from his preferential use of the historical-inductive method: they are clearly part of a life project identified with the project of development. In *Os Aires do Mundo* (The Airs of the World) (1991) he makes it clear that

his life project was directly related to the conviction that he developed in the late 1940s that a *favourable international scenario*—a consequence of the Great Depression of the 30s and of the world conflict of the 40s—had opened a crack through which perhaps we could sneak in to achieve a qualitative change in our history (Furtado, 1991, p. 63).

This qualitative change was the industrialization and the development of Brazil. But, says Furtado, recalling 1964, when he arrived in Chile as an exile, already by then he was convinced that, although *the intellectual has, as a characteristic, the boundless ability of devising reasons to live*, his life project, which was based on the existence of that crack, was ultimately *an illusion ... that was now vanishing* (Furtado, 1991, pp. 45 and 63). The fantasy was gone.

His hopes had been high, but his disenchantment and frustration were even greater, and they were going to be expressed in his next book, *Subdesenvolvimento e Estagnação na América Latina* (Underdevelopment and Stagnation in Latin America) (Furtado, 1966): a dense and pessimistic book that later proved to be mistaken, as the Latin American economies entered a new development cycle. That mistake, however, would eventually prove to be a relative success. The development cycle that was then beginning was artificially financed by the foreign debt—a debt that made the Latin American economies prisoners of international financial capital and eventually led them into the great crisis of the 1980s and the near-stagnation that continues to date. I say “relative success” because the book's key assumption, which is influenced by Marx and Keynes, still seems to me to be ill-placed. He considered that the stagnation or the development at very low rates was due, on the one hand, to the increase in the capital-labour ratio, and on the other hand to the decrease in the product-capital ratio, as a result of the capital-intensive nature of the investments made and their allocation to consumer durables. In those conditions, he felt, capital productivity would go down.¹³ This theory underestimates, in my opinion, the increased technical progress, which saves not only

¹³ See Furtado (1966, p. 80).

labour, but also capital, that is to say, it is a type of technical progress that increases the efficiency of capital.

In *Subdesenvolvimento e Estagnação na América Latina* (1966) the idea already appears that the concentration of income was preventing the operation of capitalism's virtuous circle, caused by the rise in wages as productivity increases. In two books, Furtado answered his critics, indirectly. In *Análise do Modelo Brasileiro* (Analysis of the Brazilian Model) (Furtado, 1972) he incorporates into his thought, with great elegance and accuracy, the new dependency theory that had come out from the critique of his works. This did not prevent him from clearly restating, in *O Mito do Desenvolvimento* (The Myth of Development) (Furtado, 1974), his theory on the consumption shortage that would occur in the long run. The concentration of income of the middle and upper classes would not solve the problem of demand in the development process. As he puts it: *My basic assumption is that the system has not been able to spontaneously produce the profile of demand that could assure a steady growth rate, and that long-term growth depends on government exogenous actions ... Although those two groups (the big companies and the modernized minorities) have convergent interests, the system is not structurally prepared to generate the kind of expansion of demand that is required to ensure its growth.*

Now, this theory, as Keynes showed when he criticized Say's law, is valid in the short run for explaining the economic cycle. And in my opinion it is only valid in the long run to the extent that the development rate attained in that time lapse depends on keeping the demand in constant tension with supply in the short run. The new model of technocratic-capitalist development that was then being established in Brazil, producing industrialized underdevelopment, eventually failed, but not due to a problem of lack of demand, but rather to an irresponsible excess of foreign indebtedness.

Hope was still present for Celso Furtado when, in 1968, before the adoption of Institutional Act N° 5, which definitively established the dictatorship in Brazil, he was invited by the Brazilian House of Representatives to present his views on what could be done. He could not resist the opportunity, and wrote *Um Projeto para o Brasil* (A Project for Brazil) (Furtado, 1968a), in which he proposes the resumption of development through a substantial increase in the tax burden and public savings. However, if once again there was hope—the refusal to accept dependency and

underdevelopment—pessimism persisted. The pessimistic analysis of the situation of Brazil was so consistent with the one in *Subdesenvolvimento e Estagnação da América Latina* that the first criticisms of that perspective's claims that the resumption of Brazilian development was taking place thanks to the concentration of income in the middle and upper classes, which created a demand for luxury consumer goods, were made on the basis of the analyses made in those two books.

The optimistic passion that had fed his actions now became the great frustration of someone who recognized not only that he no longer directly influenced the country's destiny, but that the country itself had lost the ability for endogenous development. The economic theory he used now became debatable as it involved a twofold pessimism: on the one hand regarding the ability of underdeveloped economic systems to achieve capital-intensive technical progress and not merely capital-saving progress or at least a neutral situation (i.e., not involving a decrease in capital productivity), and on the other hand, regarding the ability of supply to create demand in the long run.

His pessimism appears in the following quotation, taken from *Os Ares do Mundo*, in which he recalls his first months of exile in Santiago: *I couldn't escape the idea that history is an open process, and that it is naive to imagine that the future is absolutely contained in the past and in the present. But, when every relevant change is a result of the intervention of external factors, we are confined to a setting of strict dependency ... The trends that appeared in Brazil led to the thought that significant changes would no longer be the result of the action of endogenous factors* (Furtado, 1991, p. 63).

Um Projeto para o Brasil was Furtado's last clear manifestation of hope.¹⁴ His work from then on, according to Francisco de Oliveira, "may be called 'philosophical'" (de Oliveira, 1983a, p. 23). I would say that it becomes serene, to the extent that exile, first in Chile, then in the United States, in England, and finally, for a long time, in France, imposes emotional detachment. On Latin America, Furtado was still to publish in 1969 a fundamental work, *Formação Econômica da América Latina* (The Economic Formation of Latin America) (Furtado, 1969), but

¹⁴ In *O Brasil Pós-Milagre* (Brazil After the Miracle), Furtado still shows hope, when, after mentioning the bad governments of the 1970s, he writes two sections in which he looks to the future: "Os Desafios dos Anos 80" (The Challenges of the 80s) and "Esboço de uma Estratégia" (Outline of a Strategy) (Furtado, 1981a, pp. 56-90).

afterwards he became once again interested in the analysis of the historical process of development, and in the changes that the international economy was undergoing.

He returns to the development process in *O Mito do Desenvolvimento* (Furtado, 1974), *Pequena Introdução ao Desenvolvimento: Enfoque Interdisciplinar* (A Small Introduction to Development: Interdisciplinary Approach) (Furtado, 1980), "Underdevelopment: to Conform or Reform" (Furtado, 1987a) and in many other works. The changes in the world economy are analyzed, however, in a 1968 paper, "A Preeminência Mundial da Economia dos Estados Unidos Pós-Guerra" (The Global Pre-eminence of the United States Economy in the Post-war Period) (Furtado, 1968b). In 1981, in the first issue of the *Revista de Economia Política*, of which he became one of the sponsors (along with Caio Prado Jr. and Ignacio Rangel), he published the article "Estado e Empresas Transnacionais na Industrialização Periférica" (The State and the Transnational Corporations in the Industrialization of the Periphery) (Furtado, 1981b). All his other works on the subject were later to be gathered together in *Transformação e Crise na Economia Mundial* (Change and Crisis in the Global Economy) (1987b) and *O Capitalismo Global* (Global Capitalism) (1998).

In the 1970s Furtado once again took an active part in international meetings at which the developing countries demanded "a new international division of labour". This movement was successful for a while, but, with the foreign debt crisis, and the neoliberal wave that took over Washington and the world from the beginning of the 1980s, this project did not bear the expected fruits either. This was the beginning of the great crisis of the 1980s for Latin America, and in its presence, Celso Furtado's passion returned as strongly as his indignation. His books *Não à Recessão e ao Desemprego* (No to Recession and Unemployment) (Furtado, 1983) and *Brasil: A Construção Interrompida* (Brazil: The Interrupted Construction) (Furtado, 1992) are the evidence of such indignation.¹⁵

His return from exile and his participation in the Sarney administration, as Minister of Culture, did not change his feelings of frustration and indignation.¹⁶

But in 1999, when stability was restored and there were signs of some resumption of development, hope returned, although he remained a strong critic of the economic policy of the Cardoso administration. In his last book up to the time of writing this paper, *O Longo Amanhecer* (The Long Sunrise) (Furtado, 1999), he expresses his disenchantment strongly: *At no other moment in our history was the distance between what we are and what we wanted to be so great.* He restates his criticism of globalization, which, through irresponsible foreign indebtedness, led the country to the great crisis, but he observes that globalization itself and its lack of control are not to blame for our inability to resume development, but rather the way our elites have reacted to it, by deciding to *uncritically adopt an economic policy that privileges transnational companies, whose rationality can only be assessed in the setting of a system of forces that goes beyond the specific interests of the countries that are part of it.* An example of this alienation is the proposal made by ECLAC itself, in February 1999, for the dollarization of Latin American economies: a process that, according to that international organization, was already quite advanced (Furtado, 1999, pp. 18, 23 and 26).

In his short speech at a seminar held in São Paulo in his honour, "Reflections On the Brazilian Crisis" (Furtado, 2000), his criticism is not only directed against governments, but against the Brazilian elites in general. He particularly rejects the *explanations (for the nearly-stagnation) that pretend to ignore the moral responsibilities of the elites.* In face of the expressions of support for dollarization that were then current in the press (today probably forgotten in view of the Argentine crisis), he remarks that *"if we surrender to dollarization, we will revert to semi-colonial status.*

As in his last book (1999), however, in this paper we see that hope is back at last. In the book, in which there is a section whose title is "What is to be done?", he stresses the need to reverse the process of

Development in an Era of Crisis), whose key subject was still the crisis in the Brazilian economy, but which probably inspired President José Sarney to invite him to accept the post of Minister of Culture. I was a fellow-minister of his, between April and December 1987, when I was Minister of Finance. He was enormously concerned about the fact that the democratic government was not only unable to cope with the crisis, but actually made it worse. He felt as helpless as he was concerned, because he was in a ministry which, while it enabled him to give me strong support when I needed it, did not allow him to modify the direction of the Brazilian economy. Eventually, I served for only a short time in the administration, and I was not able to stabilize the Brazilian economy either.

¹⁵ Between those two books he wrote his three remarkable autobiographical books which I already mentioned: *A Fantasia Organizada* (1985), *A Fantasia Desfeita* (1989), and *Os Ares do Mundo* (1991).

¹⁶ In 1984 Furtado publishes a collection of essays under the title *Cultura e Desenvolvimento em Época de Crise* (Culture and

concentration of income, to invest in human capital, and, above all, to cope with the problem of globalization by strengthening the national State, which is *the privileged instrument for dealing with structural problems* (Furtado, 1999, pp. 32-34). In his brief speech he restates one of his key ideas: the importance of political creativity. *Only political creativity impelled by collective will can enable us to break the impasse* (Furtado, 2000, p. 4).¹⁷

The great master always continued to think along those lines. I don't always agree with him, as should have become apparent at some point in this paper, but I have always admired him. Celso Furtado was one of my masters, when —still very young— I became

interested in economics. I still learn from him. His contribution to the understanding of Brazil is unparalleled; his analysis of development and underdevelopment is a landmark in contemporary thought. In this text, which is not a general overview of his work, I have merely tried to define a few points regarding the author, the political economist: Furtado never made compromises with respect to his independence of thought; his method has always been rigorous and mainly historical-inductive; and he never ceased to regard and think with passion of Brazil and his Northeast.

(Original: English)

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¹⁷ In this paper I have not been concerned with eliminating prejudices regarding Celso Furtado. In view of this last quotation, however, I feel that it should be noted that one should not infer from it that Furtado was a partisan of State control – the usual accusation the Right Wing habitually makes against someone who defends the importance of a reconstructed State, able to promote the country's economic and political development. There still are a few partisans of State control, but he was definitely not one of them. In a debate promoted by the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, for instance, Furtado said: *The point is, therefore, to abandon the old idea that the State should solve all problems. We know perfectly well that when the State controls everything, few control the State* (Furtado, 1976b, p. 39).

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