In a recent debate, two polar positions again clashed and the noise generated, even if they have interesting aspects, was not pleasant to capture. On the one hand, in order to discredit once more Marx's "rate-of-profit rate" law, David Harvey strove to prove the following point: "There is not – I do think – a single cause of crisis formation in the work of Marx." On the other hand, Michael Roberts, to dispute this kind of position that advocates pluri-causality in explaining capitalist crises, considered that Marx's Law shines because it provides a clear and unitary explanation for crises: "law provides an explanation of the underlying, indicates the ultimate cause of the crises of the capitalist mode of production."

Now, the book that is reviewed here begins by showing that this dispute is not new in the history of Marxism and that it is completely wrong. In it, we read at the beginning:

In general, several commentators were concerned to find in the Capital texts a particular passage, which would show what the "main

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1 The excerpts cited in this opening paragraph are found respectively in the articles by David Harvey and Michael Roberts published in The Great Financial Meltdown - systemic, conjunctural or policy created?, organized by Turan Subasat, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016. Incidentally, this reviewer could not fail to mention that he regards Michael Roberts' empirical research as valuable for understanding contemporary capitalism; moreover, it is appropriate for its theoretical position that it, in spite of the inescapable positivist bias, is closer to that sustained by Marx.
cause" would be, in Marx's view, which would drive capitalist production into a crisis. Using just this notion of "cause", classic authors such as Tugan-Baranovki, Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Rudolf Hilferding, Henrik Grossman, Paul Sweezy, Ernest Mandel, among others, discussed for much of the 20th century the work Capital, trying to find in which text or canonical passage could reside the true conception of Marx on the crises of capitalism.

The basic defect of the dilemma question thus posed by the commentators of yesterday and today is that it is crucially attached to the mechanistic notion of cause, which does not suit the Marxian dialectic but as appearance. For by this notion one can only pretend to grasp the empirical threads of facts, that is to say, the external connections between phenomena, and thus remain within the limits of vulgar science.

The notion of efficient causality of modern science admits that things are objects separated from each other and that they act upon each other based on forces, in exteriorizations of themselves. Marx's ontology presupposes, however, that things are also determined by internal nexuses. Nexuses that they maintain among themselves, that is, by the internal bonds that constitute them as such. Connections these, incidentally, that also condition the way things interact with each other. Hence, if the understanding wants to read the results of interactions in general, the links between the facts, through the notion of "cause", still at this level of apprehension of reality, the dialectical thought apprehends them with the category of "reciprocal action". For Marx, for example, the abrupt drop in production (symptom of crisis) and the fall in the rate of profit (crisis prong) determine each other - and in a way that can be quite complex. Thus, in order to understand his theory well, as Benoit and Antunes point out, it is necessary to overcome the vision of crisis as mere facticity to arrive at its concept (evidently taking that word in the sense that Hegel gave it).²

² For Hegel, as we know, the concept is neither the abstract par excellence nor a mere tool of thought. It is, on the contrary, the principle of the real, but in a way different from that of Aristotle. In the Prologue of the Phenomenology of the Spirit, Hegel wrote: "the concept is the object itself, represented in its becoming; in this sense, it is not something quiet that gives immovable support to accidents, but rather that which moves and that which restores its determinations by itself."
Contrary to what many theorists think about the texts, these two authors fully demonstrate that one cannot speak of gaps in Marx's theory of crisis. Even if there are gaps in the explanation of the crises historically occurred, in the understanding of "Industrial cycles", in explaining, for example, the links between over accumulation in the sphere of mercantile production and in the financial sphere. For the theory of crises is set forth in Capital and preparatory works not here and there, in certain passages, but from the beginning to the "end," that is, in the work as a whole. Here the understanding of the concept of crisis in Marx accompanies the understanding of the concept of capital itself. Behold, capital itself always advances also through crises.

In order to understand this thesis, they caution, one must bear in mind that we do not find in Capital a formal theory that starts from definitions and postulates and arrives, through exact logical deductions, to propositions that have the power of grasping hypothetically the empirical nexus, the relations of causality among phenomena. On the contrary, we find a "dialectical presentation" of the concept of capital. Marx develops a crisis theory, they say, throughout the dialectical-expository course of Capital. It appears there in the very first pages of the First Book and ending in the last pages of the Third Book.

In addition, by "course" is meant a method capable of rigorously encompassing the "complex interactions" of the elements that make up the economic system, based on a plexus of structural relations centered on the capital relation, in a constant process of development. It is, therefore, a form of exposition that seeks to apprehend its immanent contradictions and its tendential laws of motion. The economic system, as an indeterminate concrete totality, is thus apprehended, after an enormous effort of theoretical reason, as a conceptual totality, now thought and determined.

The causal relations with which the purely analytic understanding is satisfied do not disappear in the comprehension of the totality; on the contrary, they now appear as apparent and superficial manifestations of the evolving of contradictions as they are apprehended by dialectical reason. An increase in demand may still raise the price of the commodity, but the formation of its price - to give a didactic example - is understood as evolving from the contradiction between the "armies" of buyers and sellers of the commodity under various
conditions of relative scarcity. Moreover, this contradiction is not a mere theoretical artifice, for the behavior of buyers and sellers is in fact determined by the nature of the commodity relationship, which is itself in itself very objective and well determined.

The presentation of capital - and crises - in *Capital* is developed, as is known in three books. In the first two, it is capital in general, that is, the relation of capital is exposed as an insatiable movement in its more abstract and more general determinations. In the first, the production of capital is grossly examined; in the second, the circulation of capital. Only in the third book does it show how this relationship concretely shapes the mode of being of decentralized and competitive sociability that characterizes capitalism as such. Here, capital, as it is indicated, exists only as a plurality of individual capitals struggling with each other, without respite and fiercely, for their own survival. Now the concept of crisis is presented in the same way, that is, first, in an abstract way as a mere possibility, and then in the last book, in a concrete form as a necessary occurrence for the very evolution of the capital relation itself.

Here is what we read about it, in summary, in the book reviewed here:

Thus the periodic renewal of fixed capital, the overproduction of commodities, the underconsumption of the masses, and the intersectoral disproportion - analyzed in the First and Second Books - can in no way be called "causes of crisis." These phenomena only constitute, from the point of view of the dialectical exposition, mere forms of manifestation of contradictions still abstract, formal, indeterminate and potential of the crisis. Likewise, the law of the rate-of-profit fall cannot also be called the "cause of crises," but must, from the standpoint of dialectical exposure, be conceived as the most complex and developed form of the multiple and partial contradictory determinations that are contained in the very contradiction between value of use and value.

Therefore, the trend fall in the rate of profit cannot be seen as a possible cause of crises, which would exist alongside others, also possible in principle. However, this is precisely what happens because a persistent and irritating vulgar reading sees it this way. In doing so, it spreads and perpetuates a brutal distortion of Marx's theory of crisis. On the contrary, "far from being a superior cause, the
tendential fall in the rate of profit," Benoit and Antunes say clairvoyantly, "would be the synthesis of the potential, formal, and abstract contradictions set forth in the First and Second Books, which Third Book] in actuality or act (en-ergon) ".

That is why those who are truly interested in understanding Marx are advised to read this introductory book carefully, leaving aside even certain manuals that are sold there as high quality goods. Here we have dealt only in broad strokes with the content of the very introduction of the book by Benoit and Antunes. Nevertheless, it has, in addition to this introduction, three chapters, in which the main movements, respectively, of the three books that make up Capital are exposed with simplicity and depth, respectively, with a view to exposing the concept of crisis. Reading this book, they will not free themselves from the "fatigue of climbing the steep slopes" of The Capital, but they will certainly take the first safe steps to "reach their luminous peaks."

Going back to the starting point, now under the light of the book by Benoit and Antunes, it must be concluded that there is neither a single explanation nor a plurality of explanations for the crises of capitalism found in Capital. Nor are there models to describe the feasibility, under certain conditions, of certain macroeconomic variables. Rather, it is a general presentation of the conditions of reproduction of the capital relation, and thus of the way of replacing the contradictions inherent in it. The synthesis that appears in the famous section III of the Third Book³ - which, incidentally, is not fixed and can be enlarged - articulates the main tendencies and counter-tendencies that operate in the advances and crises of the process of accumulation in general. From it and based on other considerations, it becomes possible to examine the real becoming of capital in its historicity always determined. In addition, it should not be necessary to say here the obvious: that the leaps forward and the historically concrete obstacles of the process of accumulation can only be well understood by examining the historical phenomena themselves in their dynamicity, actuality, and complexity.

³ Section that Engels, as it is well known, gave the name of The Law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.