What is Dialectic?

You will have noticed that I did not mention Marx's name in discussing the Historical School, but that nonetheless more than one of the features I stated in connection with this school bears a resemblance to some passages from Marx's methodology. I did not mention him within the Historical School because Marx is rather a separate case, relatively isolated in that era. Yet this is nonetheless a good moment to consider Marx, for in my opinion there is, without a doubt, a clear kinship between him and the Historical School. Not in the sense that one may view Marx as a descendent of the Historical School. That is impossible for chronological reasons. Marx began to write earlier, but he was basically one of their contemporaries. On the other hand, the fact of the matter is that Marx was obviously an heir to the English classics, while the German Historical School was the adversary of those classics. One cannot imagine Marx without Smith and, above all, Ricardo, before him.

So it is that we cannot place Marx's economics and that of the Historical School in the same lineage. However, there is, to put it straightforwardly, a clear kinship with regard to the period and the explanations. For example, the idea of totality, characteristic of the Historical School, is likewise present in Marx. Marx's work as a whole is not pure economics in the sense that he also incorporates, as does the Historical School, political, cultural, institutional and historical factors. That kinship is obvious. The trouble is that Marx never denies the existence of a core of pure economics, of the deductive sort and in the style of Smith and Ricardo, while the Historical School denies that it has any validity.

Marx's methodological attitude evolved quite a bit over the course of his life. For example, the young Marx much more resembles the Historical School than does the mature Marx. By 'young Marx' I mean Marx up until 1856–7, those being the years in which his methodological change of outlook in economics occurs. The young Marx is convinced that classical English economics, as it appears to him in the author he knows best, namely, Ricardo, is a fictitious, even immoral discipline. It is an infamy because it works with abstractions, with averages, and with these it conceals socio-economic reality. This is a

view that any member of the Historical School would have shared. It is in that period when Marx's method is most akin to the Historical School's method. For example, 1843 is the year in which Roscher's course appears; the manuscripts in which Marx says that English economics is an infamy are also from 1843.\footnote{Marx 1981, p. 482. [The text to which Sacristán refers is not included in the English edition of Marx and Engels's \textit{Collected Works} (Ed.).]} They truly are contemporary intellectual products. The mature Marx, however, is a very Ricardian Marx, as it were. He constantly works with concepts related to averages: average rates, average figures, etc.; some of the fundamental concepts of Marx's system are based on the calculation of those average rates. Therefore, there was a clear inversion, though perhaps not in his inspiration. The mature Marx continues to aspire to create an intellectual product that is what we today would call, at one and the same time, economics, history, sociology and politics. Yet he does not go about this through the procedure of dissolving pure economics, but rather by integrating economics into this totalising whole, which today we would consider, from the point of view of the academic divisions, proper to several scientific fields at the same time. So, the inspiration did not change, but the method did.

And what is that totalising methodological conception? There are a couple of \textit{loci classici} for the study of Marx's methodological conceptions, and both have been translated. One is the 'Introduction', which he wrote in 1857 and then did not publish, to \textit{A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy}, a work from 1859 that is usually published with all of his introductions; the other passage worth studying is the epilogue to the second edition of Volume I of \textit{Capital}, from 1873.

Marx's methodological programme changed a great deal over the course of his intellectual life. Besides an important evolution, however, there is the fact that his methodological ideas were always rather confused and obscure (in saying this I am not passing any judgement on the quality of the work, but rather making a judgement concerning the philosophical appraisal of his method), and in my opinion this is due to the fact that in Marx's scientific mindset there are three different concepts of method and science that are operative: (i) the Hegelian concept of science and method; (ii) the Young-Hegelian notion of science and method; and (iii) the concept of science and method current in that period (for example, that of Ricardo). The fact that there are these three concepts of science and scientific method present in his work is a statement that we can make today, \textit{a posteriori}, but it is a fact of which Marx himself, in my opinion, was unaware, and hence the scant clarity of his expositions regarding method.