

OPEN MARXISM SERIES

Volume I

Dialectics and History

Edited by Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn and Kosmas Psychopedis

Volume II

Theory and Practice

Edited by Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn and Kosmas Psychopedis

OPEN MARXISM

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Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, John Holloway
and Kosmas Psychopedis

VOLUME III

EMANCIPATING MARX

Pluto  Press
LONDON • ANN ARBOR, MI.

First published 1995 by Pluto Press
345 Archway Road, London N6 5AA

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 7453 0864 3 pbk
ISBN 0 7453 0863 5 hbk

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Application made.

95 96 97 98 99 5 4 3 2 1

Designed and produced for Pluto Press by
Chase Production Services, Chipping Norton, OX7 5QR
Typeset from disk by Stanford DTP Services, Milton Keynes
Printed On Demand By Antony Rowe Ltd

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Acknowledgements

We should like to extend thanks to our translators: Julian Bees (Dalla Costa), and Gordon Finlayson (Reichelt, Part II and III).

1

Introduction: Emancipating Marx

WERNER BONEFELD, RICHARD GUNN,
JOHN HOLLOWAY, KOSMAS PSYCHOPEDIS¹

The present volume continues the themes developed in the first two volumes of *Open Marxism* (Pluto Press, 1992). The title of this volume, *Emancipating Marx*, is intended to be understood in a double sense, integrating the two main concerns of the Open Marxism project. The first concern is the emancipation of Marx (and Marxism) from the sociological and economic heritage which has grown up around it under the banner of 'scientific Marxism', the detrimental effect of which was discussed in our introduction to Volume I of *Open Marxism*. The emancipation of Marx implies at the same time the understanding of Marx (and Marxism) as emancipating: hence the second sense of the title and the second concern of the project. We regard (open) Marxism as the site of a self-reflection which clears the way towards a defetishised and emancipated social world. Only if we work to clear the massive deadweight of positivist and scientific/economistic strata can Marxism emerge again as a constitutive moment in that project of emancipation which is its heartland and its home.

Emancipating Marx continues the issues addressed in our first two volumes through a critical analysis of Marxism's false friends and through an emphasis on the emancipatory perspective of Marxism's thought.

The Open Marxism project does not aim to reconstruct Marx's thought, in the sense of presenting an interpretation which masquerades as the sole 'correct' one. Such an approach would not be helpful, for it would presuppose the possibility of a uniform and finished interpretation of Marx's work. Instead we wish to reconstruct the pertinent theses of his work with a view to freeing them from the ballast of their dogmatic presentation.

Central to our approach is an emphatic endorsement of Marx's notion of a unity between theory and practice.² In the tradition of Marxist 'orthodoxy',

the dialectical unity of theory and practice is taken as referring to a 'field of application': that is, the practical significance of theory is understood in terms of it being a scientific guide to political practice. This understanding of the relationship between theory and practice is highly misleading. Social practice is construed as something which exists outside the theoretical 'realm' and, conversely, theory is understood as something which exists outside the 'realm' of practice. There obtains thus a dualism between 'thought' and 'social practice', between 'philosophy' and the 'human world'. Just as in bourgeois theory, 'theory' is transformed into an epistemology which can be applied, from the outside, to a social world which remains external to – and which is at the mercy of – theoretical judgments. The dualist conception of the relationship between theory and practice not only presupposes the social validity of theoretical concepts, but also assumes that the application of these concepts supplies an understanding of a social world. Theory's capacity for supplying judgments on a social world derives from theory's own reified logical and epistemological approach. In other words, the dualism between theory and practice makes theory a reified 'thing' at the same time as the social world is perceived as a 'thing' of 'objective' inquiry. Value-judgments about the good and the nasty are excluded and deemed 'unscientific' and replaced by a value-neutral explanation of events, which merely serves to endorse the 'positive' as the only criterion of scientific work. Positivism and the relativism which is its obverse side only acknowledges formal contradictions, at best.

Within the orthodox tradition of Marxism, the dualism between theory and practice obtains in the form of a distinction between the logic of capital, on the one hand, and social practice, on the other. The contradictions of capitalism are seen as existing independently of social practice; they are conceived of as objective laws of capital. The development of these contradictions define the framework within which social practice develops. In this case, the specific contribution of Marxism to the comprehension of our social world is understood as the analysis of the objective conditions of social practice.

Modern versions of orthodox Marxism no longer even claim to be concerned with revolutionary transformation. In effect, they staked everything on the existence of a (communist or social democratic) revolutionary party. In the absence of such a party, therefore, revolutionary social change had to be postponed *sine diem*; and the concepts of the orthodox tradition, deprived of all revolutionary impetus, became transformed into the tenets of just another 'school' of social theory. With the abandonment of all revolutionary perspective, Marxist theory becomes just a more sophisticated theory of capitalist reproduction (or 'regulation'). The only political perspective is then a 'leftist' refashioning of the real world of capitalism: the acceptance of existing realities in order to articulate a viable hegemonic project and ensure its

popular appeal so as to reform the institutions of social administration in a fair and just way.³ In sum, the political implications of orthodox Marxism, and its modern variants, are that Marxism has to refrain from the scholarly work of negation⁴ in favour of supplying sociological knowledge concerning the reformist opportunities already inscribed in objective development.

The concept of experience is at the heart of the issue of emancipation. Experience, as used here, is quite different from, and opposed to, empiricist notions of experience. Empiricism construes experience as involving passivity, and endorsement of any *status quo*. By contrast, experience is here understood as constitution and negation and their unity:⁵ opposition and resistance against inhuman conditions which are the reality of capitalist relations of exploitation – slavery, genocide, dehumanisation of the social individual (especially women), the destruction of the environment, etc. This 'list', rather than being a sociological summary of a field of conflict-study and moral outcry, denotes a space of practice, opposition and resistance. As practical and negative, experience is inseparable from capitalist domination. It is the conscious attempt to theorise this experience, and to understand itself as part of this experience, that distinguishes emancipatory theory (open Marxism) from other approaches. Whereas structuralist or scientific approaches deny or suppress experience (in the name of 'objectivity'), emancipatory theory takes experience as its starting point and its substance. (This is not to fall into spontaneism, for spontaneism takes experience in its untheorised immediacy, forgetting that experience is shaped by, and shapes, the forms of the social world through which it exists). Furthermore, emancipatory theory implies the rejection of 'economics' since economics is constructed upon the supposition of constituted forms, that is, forms of social relations which are seen as finished, closed entities. Political theory – economic theory's complementary form – is likewise to be rejected, for it too is constructed on the presupposed formation of social relations; its project is that of constructing political norms and political institutions on the basis of proprietorial and individualistic rights. A theory which seeks to emancipate necessarily rejects explanations that entertain themselves with a scientific ordering of concepts in so far as the starting point of such explanations is the disqualification of the experience of resistance-to-dehumanisation.

Marxism is an emancipatory theory and, as such, must always criticise not only a perverted social existence but, and at the same time, the perversion through which it itself exists. For Marxism, there is a need to be critical about the pre-conditions of critical theory itself. Theory which is, or has become, uncritical of itself becomes, necessarily, part of the fetishistic world and of its crisis.

The crisis of theory takes different forms. One of these is the dogmatic teleology of history, according to which the objective laws of capitalism will

automatically lead on from capitalist necessity to socialist freedom. Another form is the romantic endorsement of the emancipatory subject which is seen as existing as unmediated human creativity, standing in a relation of direct confrontation with the capitalist world. In both cases, the revolutionary subject is seen as being external to its own perverted world.

These manifestations of a crisis of theory are characterised by the failure to mediate their practical concerns with the social form through which these concerns exist and which this practice sets out to transform. In contrast to an unmediated conception which ascribes objectivity to historical development, and against an equally unmediated notion of the subjectivity of historical practice, Marxism's continued self-reflection upon itself goes forward through the concept of mediation and the method of dialectics. Dialectical theory confronts existing social and theoretical forms with a comprehensive conception of content, materiality and humanity. These forms subsist in a reified and self-contradictory way.⁶ Thus, the contradictory integration between form and content underlies the possibility of critique and supplies materiality to the transcendence of existing forms. Social transcendence and social reproduction obtains as a unity (a self-contradictory unity) of unity and difference.

This dialectical tension between reproduction and transcendence cannot be addressed in scientific terms, because it questions the separation between 'is' and 'ought' upon which scientism is founded. Dialectical theory presupposes value-judgments which negate the existing perversions of social existence in favour of a human world of autonomy, cooperation and social solidarity. These value-judgments both inform and are informed by our understanding of the experience of opposition and of resistance alike.

In the past, emancipatory theory has been reluctant to address directly the problems of 'values' as a constitutive element of dialectics, and has sought to hide behind the scientific versions of Marxism. Values were derived from a social objectivity which, allegedly, was value-free and value-neutral. We wish to challenge this conception and propose a reassessment of this issue. It is of fundamental importance that the reconstruction of an emancipatory theory should not be drawn into the rejection of values as irrational. A Marxist theory which deems values to be irrational is treading the same path as bourgeois theory since Max Weber.

As in the previous volumes, the idea of *Open Marxism* is to mark out an area for discussion, rather than to lay down any theoretical or political line. This volume explores a number of thematic issues which are raised in each contribution in different form and with a different emphasis. These issues are: values and explanation, dialectics and history, theory and practice, as well as experience and emancipation. Our introduction has sought to indicate the coherence, and also the political and theoretical urgency, which underlie a thematising of these issues in an open way.

The contributions to this volume thus approach the issue of 'emancipating Marx' from different angles. In the opening essay of the collection, *Mariarosa Dalla Costa* focuses on the critique of contemporary capitalist development and argues vividly that the depredations of capitalist development (the escalating violence of so-called 'primitive accumulation') make it unsustainable as a form of society. Particular attention is paid to the doubly antagonistic position of women, as unwaged workers in a waged society. She demands an alternative version of social development, where the social individual defends existing wage levels and welfare rights and, at the same time, reclaims the resources – and the happiness – which capital has expropriated in the past and present.

The three contributions by Fine, Angelidis and Reichelt all try to develop the critical aspect of Marxism by going back to the texts of Hegel and Marx. *Robert Fine's* argument is centred on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. Against the traditional schools of interpretation associated with Colletti, Marcuse and Löwith, Fine emphasises the emancipatory and critical character of this work and shows the relevance of this understanding of Hegel for the development of an open Marxism. *Manolis Angelidis* analyses Marx's treatment of legal forms and norms, focusing in particular on the very early Marx. Angelidis argues that the analysis of rights relates to the cooperative character of the labour process and the manner in which this process is denied by the social form of capitalist society. The article by *Helmuth Reichelt* also goes back to the very early Marx, namely to his doctoral thesis on Democritus and Epicurus. By tracing the ambiguities of Marx on the question of consciousness of the philosopher as theorising subject (and therefore his own consciousness), from the doctoral thesis to the later work, Reichelt seeks to establish the nature of Marx's dialectic and especially to understand why Marx did not supply an explicit account of his own conception of dialectics and of the dialectical exposition of categories.

The papers by Wilding and Psychopedis address the critique of the social sciences. *Adrian Wilding's* discussion of the 'posthistorical' analysis linked with postmodernism and the end of history debate leads him back to a consideration of Marx's concept of historical time and to the analysis of the genesis of homogeneous, abstract labour time, which, he argues, is the basis of the concepts of causality and predictability constructed by both the natural and the social sciences. *Kosmas Psychopedis* addresses the shortcomings of scientific and relativist types of explanation in the social sciences. He takes the concepts of indeterminacy and contingency used by such theories and turns them back against the theories by showing their critical content. Against the background of a discussion of the Enlightenment understanding of causality

and explanation, he assesses the crisis of the theory of explanation in the social sciences, focusing especially on Weber and on post-Keynesian thought.

The last two papers, by Holloway and Bonefeld, are concerned with overcoming the dualist separation between objectivity and subjectivity. *John Holloway* argues that the orthodox tradition is fatally weakened as a theory of struggle by a dualistic separation between the 'objective' (the movement of capital) and the 'subjective' (struggle). For him the only possible way in which this dualism can be overcome is genetically, by understanding the subject as producing the object. *Werner Bonefeld* also focuses on the issue of human practice, and particularly on the way in which practice is conceptualised in structuralist and autonomist approaches. He proposes to go beyond the dualist separation between objectivity and subjectivity and explores this issue by reference to the work of Max Horkheimer and the goal of a society where humans exist not as a resource but as a purpose.

All the contributions are attempts to colour a picture, to put together a jigsaw which is still in the making, to create a territory which has yet to be explored. The task is clear and desperately urgent: to open a theoretical tradition which has tended to become closed and dogmatic, a tradition which, despite all its tragic history, remains the most powerful tradition of negative thinking that exists.

References

1. We wish to thank Peter Burnham for his advice and criticism.
2. We have explored this issue in our introduction to volume II of *Open Marxism*. See also the contributions by R. Gunn; H. Cleaver; J. Fracchia and Ch. Ryan; and J. Holloway in volume II.
3. See, for example, the Regulation Approach associated with Aglietta (*A Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, Verso, London, 1979) and the debate on Post-Fordism (Hirsch, 'Fordism and Post-Fordism' and Jessop, 'Polar Bears and Class Struggle'; both published in W. Bonefeld and J. Holloway (eds.), *Post-Fordism and Social Form*, Macmillan, London, 1991). Stuart Hall's (*Road to Renewal*, Verso, London, 1988) demand that the Left should learn from 'Thatcherism' is symptomatic.
4. Scholarly work is seen here, following Agnoli, as negation of all alienated social relations. See Agnoli, 'Destruction as the Determination of the Scholar in Miserable Times', *Common Sense*, no. 12, Edinburgh, 1992.
5. Hegel makes the same point: 'Inasmuch as the new true object issues from it, this dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object, is precisely what is called *experience*' (G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977).
6. On this issue see Bonefeld's contribution to volume I of *Open Marxism* and Gunn's 'Against Historical Materialism' in volume II.

2

Capitalism and Reproduction

MARIAROSA DALLA COSTA

The sphere of reproduction today reveals all the original sins of the capitalist mode of production. Reproduction must be viewed, of course, from a planetary perspective, with special attention being paid to the changes that are taking place in wide sectors of the lower social strata in advanced capitalism as well as in an increasing proportion of the Third World population. We live in a planetary economy, and capitalist accumulation still draws its life-blood for its continuous valorisation from waged as well as unwaged labour, the latter consisting first of all of the labour involved in social reproduction,¹ in the advanced as well as the Third World countries.

We find that social 'misery' or 'unhappiness' which Marx² considered to be the 'goal of the political economy' has largely been realised everywhere. But, setting aside the question of happiness for the time being – though certainly not to encourage the myth of its impossibility – let me stress how incredible it now seems, Marxist analysis apart, to claim that capitalist development in some way brings a generalised wellbeing to the planet.

Social reproduction today is more beset and overwhelmed than ever by the laws of capitalist accumulation: the continual and progressive *expropriation* (from the 'primitive' expropriation of the land as a means of production, which dates from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries in England, to the expropriation, then as now, of all the individual and collective rights that ensure subsistence); the continual *division* of society into *conflictual hierarchies* (of class, sex, race and nationality, which pit the free waged worker against the unfree unwaged worker, against the unemployed worker, and the slave labourer); the constant production of *inequality and uncertainty* (with the woman as reproducer facing an even more uncertain fate in comparison to any waged worker and, if she is also member of a discriminated race or nation, she suffers yet deeper discrimination); the continual *polarisation* of the production of *wealth* (which is more and more concentrated) and the production of *poverty* (which is increasingly widespread).

As Marx writes in *Capital*:

Finally, the law which always holds the relative surplus production or industrial reserve army in equilibrium with the extent and energy of accumulation rivets the worker to capital more firmly than the wedges of Hephaestus held Prometheus to the rock. It makes an accumulation of misery a necessary condition, corresponding to the accumulation of wealth. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole, i.e. on the side of the class that produces its own product as capital.³

This is true, not only for the population overwhelmed by the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. It is even more accurate today, whether capital accumulation passes through factory, plantation, dam, mine or the carpet weaving workshops where it is by no means rare for children to be working in conditions of slavery.

Indeed, capitalist accumulation spreads through the world by extracting labour for production and reproduction in conditions of stratification which end in the reestablishment of slavery. According to a recent estimate, slavery is the condition in which over 200 million persons are working in the world today.⁴

Those macro-processes and operations which economic forces, supported by political power, unfolded during the period of primitive accumulation in Europe – with the aim of destroying the individual's value in relationship to his/her community in order to turn him/her into an isolated and valueless individual, a mere container for labour-power which s/he is obliged to sell to survive – continue to mark human reproduction on a planetary scale.

The indifference to the very possibility of labour-power's reproduction shown by capital in the first phase of its history was only very partially (and today increasingly precariously) redeemed centuries later by the creation of the welfare state. Currently, the major financial agencies, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, have undertaken the task of re-drawing the boundaries of welfare and economic policies as a whole⁵ in both the advanced and the developing countries. (The economic, social welfare and social insurance measures recently introduced in Italy correspond precisely to the various 'structural adjustment' plans being applied in many Third World countries.) The result is that increasingly large sectors of the world's population are destined to extinction because they are believed to be redundant or inappropriate to the valorisation requirements of capital.

At the end of the fifteenth century, the bloody legislation against the expropriated⁶ led to the mass hanging, torturing, branding and chaining of the poor. So today the surplus or inadequately disciplined population of the planet is exterminated through death by cold and hunger in eastern Europe and various countries of the advanced West ('more coffins less cradles in Russia').⁷ They suffer death by hunger and epidemic in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere; death caused by formally declared war, by genocide authorised directly or indirectly, by military and police repression. The other variant of extinction is an individual or collective decision of suicide because there is no possibility of survival. (It is significant that, according to Italian press reports in 1993–94, many cases of suicide in Italy are due to unemployment or to the fact that the only work on offer is to join a criminal gang. In India, the 'tribal people' in the Narmada valley have declared a readiness to die by drowning if work continues on a dam which will destroy their habitat and, hence, the basis of their survival and cultural identity.)⁸

The most recent and monstrous twist to this campaign of extinction comes from the extreme example of resistance offered by those who sell parts of their body. (In Italy, where the sale of organs is banned, there were press and television reports in 1993–94 of instances in which people said that they were trying to sell parts of their own bodies for lack of money. There have been reports of how criminal organisations with perfectly legal outlets are flourishing on the basis of trafficking in organs, sometimes obtained through the kidnapping of the victims (often women or children) or through false adoption.)

An enquiry was recently opened at the European Parliament on the issue,⁹ and various women's networks are trying to throw light on and block these crimes. This is where capitalist development, founded on the negation of the individual's value, celebrates its triumph; the individual owner of redundant or, in any case, superfluous labour-power is literally cut to pieces in order to re-build the bodies of those who can pay for the right to live.

During the era of primitive accumulation, when the free waged worker was being shaped in England, the law still authorised slavery,¹⁰ treating the vagabonds created by the feudal lords' violent and illegal expropriation of the land as 'voluntary' perpetrators of the crime of vagabondage and ordaining that, if anyone should refuse to work, he would be 'condemned as a slave to the person who denounced him as an idler.'¹¹ If this reduction of the poor to slavery remained on a relatively limited scale in England, capital soon after launched slavery on a much vaster scale, emptying Africa of the equivalent of Europe's population at that time through the slave trade to the Americas and the Caribbean.

Slavery, far from disappearing, has remained as one of capitalism's unmentioned, concealed constants. The poverty imposed on a large part of the

planet by the major financial agencies chains entire families to work in conditions of slavery so that they can pay their creditors. Workers are made to work in conditions of slavery in livestock farms, plantations and mines. Children are made to work in conditions of slavery in carpet workshops. Women are kidnapped or fooled into working in the sex industry. But these are only some examples. It is significant that the problem of slavery was raised by the Non-Government Organisations at their Forum in Vienna on 10–12 June that preceded the UN's World Conference on Human Rights on 14–25 June 1993.

In the period of primitive accumulation, while free waged labour was being born from the great expropriations, there was the greatest case of sexual genocide in history – the great witch-hunts, which, with a series of other measures directed expressly against women, contributed in a fundamental way to forging the unfree, unwaged woman worker in the production and reproduction of labour-power.¹² Deprived of the means of production and subsistence typical of the previous economy, and largely excluded from craftwork or access to the new jobs that manufacturing was offering, the woman was essentially faced with two options for survival: marriage or prostitution. Even for women who had found some form of work external to the home, prostitution at that time was also a way of supplementing low family income or the low wages paid to women. It is interesting that prostitution first became a trade exercised by women at the mass level in that period. One can say that during the manufacturing period the individual proletarian woman was born fundamentally to be a prostitute.¹³

From this insoluble contradiction in the feminine condition of being an unwaged worker in a wage economy¹⁴ sprouted not only the mass prostitution in that period but also the reoccurrence in the context of current economic policies of the same phenomenon today, but on a vaster scale, in order to generate profits for one of the most flourishing industries at the world level, the sex industry. This led the World Coalition against Trafficking in Women to present the first World Convention against Sexual Exploitation in Brussels (May 1993). The women in the Coalition also agreed to work for the adoption of the convention by the United Nations and its ratification by the national governments.

Internationally, in fact, the sexual exploitation of women by organised crime is increasingly alarming. These organisations have already brought many women from Africa and eastern Europe to work in Italy as prostitutes. The tricks used to cover up exploitation by prostitution – for example, wife sales by catalogue or 'sexual tourism' in exotic destinations – are legion and well known. According to the Coalition's charges, various countries already accept forms of 'sexual tourism' as a planned component in national income. Thanks

to individual women and non-governmental organisations, studies of the direct government responsibility in forcing women to serve as prostitutes for soldiers during the Second World War have also begun.

Woman's condition in capitalism is born with violence (just as the free waged worker is born with violence); it is forged on the witches' pyres and is maintained with violence.¹⁵ Within the current context of the population's reproduction, the woman continues to suffer the violence of poverty at the world level (since her unpaid responsibility for the home makes her the weak contracting party in the external labour market). Because of her lack of economic resources, she also suffers the further violence of being sucked increasingly into organised prostitution. The warlike visage that development increasingly assumes simply worsens woman's condition still further and magnifies the practice and mentality of violence against women.¹⁶ A paradigmatic case is the war rape exercised as ethnic rape in ex-Yugoslavia.

I have mentioned only some of the social macro-operations which allowed the capitalist system to 'take off' during the period of primitive accumulation. Just as important was a series of other operations¹⁷ left unmentioned here for the sake of brevity, but which could also be illustrated today as aspects of the continual re-foundation on a world scale of the class relationship on which capitalist development rests. In other words the perpetuation of the stratification of workers based on separation and counterposition imposed through the sexual division of labour.

These considerations lead to one fundamental thesis: capitalist development has always been *unsustainable* because of its *human impact*. To understand the point, all one needs to do is to take the viewpoint of those who have been and continue to be killed by it. A presupposition of capitalism's birth was the sacrifice of a large part of humanity – mass exterminations, the production of hunger and misery, slavery, violence and terror. Its continuation requires the same presuppositions. Particularly from the woman's viewpoint, capitalist development has always been unsustainable because it places her in an unsustainable contradiction, by being an unwaged worker in a wage economy and, hence, denied the right to an autonomous existence. If we look at the subsistence economies – continually besieged, undermined and overwhelmed by capitalist development – we see that capitalist development continually deprives women of the land and water which are fundamental means of production and subsistence in sustaining the entire community.

The expropriation of land leaped to the world's attention in January 1994 with the revolt of the indigenous people of Chiapas in Mexico. The media could hardly avoid reporting it because of the crucial role played by Mexico's alignment with the Western powers through the agreement for the North American Free Trade Area. The perversity of producing wealth by expropriation

and the production of misery was there for all to see. It is also significant that the dramatic consequences of expropriation of the land led those involved in drawing up the *Women's Action Agenda 21* in Miami in November 1991¹⁸ to make a forceful appeal for women to be guaranteed land and access to food. At the same time, the process of capitalist expansion – in this case the Green Revolution – led many people to practise the selective abortion of female foetuses and female infanticide in some areas of the Third World:¹⁹ from sexual genocide to preventive annihilation.

The question of unsustainable development has become topical with the emergence of evidence of various environmental disasters and forms of harm inflicted on the ecosystem. The Earth, the water running in its veins and the air surrounding it have come to be seen as an ecosystem, a living organism of which humans are a part – they depend for their life on the life and equilibrium of the ecosystem. This is in opposition to the idea of nature as the 'other' of humanity – a nature to be dominated and whose elements are to be appropriated as though they were potential commodities waiting in a warehouse. After five centuries of expropriation and domination, the Earth is returning to the limelight. In the past it was sectioned, fenced in, and denied to the free producers. Now, it is itself being expropriated of its reproductive powers – turned topsy-turvy, vivisectioned, and made a commodity. These extreme operations (like the 'banking' and patenting of the genetic codes of living species) belong to a single process whose logic of exploitation and domination has brought the planet to such devastation in human and environmental terms as to provoke disquieting questions as to the future possibilities and modalities of human reproduction.

Environmental destruction is united with the destruction wreaked on an increasingly large proportion of humanity. The destruction of humans is necessary for the perpetuation of capitalist development today, just as it was at its origins. To stop subscribing to this general destruction, and hence to approach the problem of 'sustainable development', means, above all, to take into account the struggles that are moving against capitalist development in the metropolises and the rural areas. It also means finding the ways, and defining the practices to set capitalist development behind us by elaborating a different approach to knowledge.

In interpreting and taking into account the various anti-capitalist struggles and movements, a global vision must be maintained of the many sections of society rebelling in various forms and contexts throughout the planet. To give priority to some and ignore others would mean adopting the same logic of separation and counterposition which is the soul of capitalist development. The cancellation and annihilation of a part of humanity cannot be given as a foregone conclusion. In the metropolises and the advanced capitalist countries

in general, many no longer have a waged job. At the same time, the welfare measures that contribute to ensuring survival are being cut back. Human reproduction has already reached its limits: the woman's reproductive energy is increasingly dried out like a spring whose water has been used for too much land and water, says Vandana Shiva.²⁰

Reproduction is crushed by the general intensification of labour, by the over-extension of the working day, amidst cuts in resources whereby the lack of waged work becomes a stress-laden work of looking for legal and/or illegal employment, added to the laborious work of reproduction. I cannot here give a more extensive description of the complex phenomena that have led to the drastic reduction in the birth rate in the advanced countries, particularly in Italy (fertility rate 1.26, population growth zero). It should also be remembered that women's refusal to function as machines for reproducing labour-power – demanding instead to reproduce themselves and others as social individuals – has represented a major moment of women's resistance and struggle.²¹ The contradiction in women's condition – whereby women are forced to seek financial autonomy through waged work outside the home, yet on disadvantageous terms in comparison to men, while they also remain primarily responsible for labour-power's production and reproduction – has exploded in all its unsustainability. Women in the advanced countries have fewer and fewer children. In general, humanity in the advanced countries is less and less desirous of reproducing itself.

Women's great refusal in countries like Italy also demands an answer to the overall question we are discussing. It demands a *new type of development* in which human reproduction is not built on an *unsustainable sacrifice by women*, as part of a conception and structure of life which is nothing but labour time within an *intolerable sexual hierarchy*. The 'wage' struggle, in both its direct and indirect aspects, does not concern solely 'advanced' areas as something distinct from 'rural' ones, for there are very few situations in which survival rests solely on the land. To sustain the community, the wage economy is most often interwoven with resources typical of a subsistence economy, whose overall conditions are continually under pressure from the political and economic decisions of the major financial agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank.²² Today, it would thus be a fatal error not to defend wage levels and income guarantees – in money, goods and services. These are working humanity's rights, since the wealth and power of capitalist society has been accumulated on the basis of five centuries of its labour. At the same time, land, water and forests must remain available for those whose subsistence comes from them, and to whom capitalist expropriation offers only extinction. As different sectors of mankind seek and demand a different

kind of development, the strength to demand it grows to the extent that no one accepts their own extinction or the extinction of others.

The question of human reproduction posed by women's rejection of procreation is now turning into the demand for another type of development and seeks completely new horizons. The concept of welfare is not enough. The demand is now for happiness. The demand is for a formulation of development that opens up the satisfaction of the basic needs on whose suppression capitalism was born and has grown. One of those needs is for time, as against a life consisting solely of labour. Another is the need for physical life/sexuality (above all, with one's own and other people's bodies, with the body as a whole, not just the functions that make it more productive) as against the body as a mere container for labour-power or a machine for reproducing labour-power. Yet another need is the need for collectivity (not just with other men and women, but with the various living beings which can now only be encountered after a laborious journey out of the city) as against the isolation of individuals in the body of society and living nature as a whole. Still another need is for public space (not just the public parks and squares or the few other areas permitted to the collectivity) as against the enclosure, privatisation and continual restriction of available space. Then there is the desire to find a relationship with the totality of the Earth as a public space as well as the need for play, indeterminacy, discovery, amazement, contemplation, emotion ...

Obviously, the above makes no pretence of 'defining' fundamental needs, but it registers some whose systematic frustration by this mode of production has certainly not served human happiness. I think one must have the courage to pose happiness as a problem. This requires re-thinking the notion of development, in order to think again 'in the grand manner', and to reject the fear that raising the question of happiness may appear too daring or too subjective. Rigoberta Menchu²³ told how the mothers in her community teach their girls from the start that the life facing them will be a life of immense toil and suffering. But she also wondered why, reflecting on very precise, capitalist reasons: 'We started to reflect on the roots of the problem, and we came to the conclusion that its roots lay in possession of the land. We did not have the best land, the landowners did. And every time we clear new land, they try to take it from us or to steal it in some way'.²⁴ Rigoberta has raised the problem of how to change this state of affairs; she has not cultivated the myth of human unhappiness. The Christian teaching she has used alongside the Mayan traditions has offered various lessons, including that of the Old Testament's Judith.

In my view, it is no coincidence that, in these last 20 years, the women's question, the question of the indigenous populations,²⁵ and the question of the Earth have assumed growing importance, for they are linked by an

especially close synergy. The path towards a different kind of development cannot ignore them. There is much knowledge still in civilisations which have not died but have managed to conceal themselves. Their secrets have been maintained thanks to their resistance to the will to annihilate them. The Earth encloses so many powers, especially its power to reproduce itself and humanity as one of its parts. These powers have been discovered, preserved and enhanced more by women's knowledge than male science. It is crucial, then, that this other knowledge – of women, of indigenous populations and of the Earth – whose 'passiveness' is capable of regenerating life²⁶ – should find a way of emerging and being heard. This knowledge appears now as a decisive force that can lift the increasingly deadly siege capitalist development imposes on human reproduction.

This Chapter was presented at the seminar 'Women's Unpaid Labour and the World System', organised by the Japan Foundation, 8 April 1994, Tokyo, as part of the Foundation's 'European Women's Study Tour for Environmental Issues'.

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25. As was stressed by the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples at the NGO Forum in Vienna (10–12 June 1993), these peoples have worked especially hard during the last two decades to get their voices heard, to make progress on questions concerning them (the question of land, above all), to obtain greater respect for and a formalisation of their rights in written form. Significant stages in the process have been the Kari Oca Declaration, the Land Charter of the Indigenous Peoples, and the Convention of the International Labour Organisation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO Conv. No. 169). This growing liaison and promotion of their demands was a major factor in the speedy expressions of solidarity from the North American indigenous populations during the rebellion of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas.
26. See V. Shiva, *Staying Alive*.

3

Emancipating Explanation

KOSMAS PSYCHOPEDIS

In contemporary societies the appeal to liberties and rights goes hand in hand with oppression, exploitation and domination. The appeal to the right to information goes hand in hand with the suppression of criticism and the concealment of qualitatively significant knowledge about social contradictions; the appeal to autonomy with the imposition of hierarchies; the appeal to citizenship with the reproduction by capitalism of the social separations which proscribe it or disorientate the citizen. It is this which constitutes the *fetishism* of social relations, that is, the reproduction of human freedom and spontaneous activity as domination and exploitation, as apparent freedom and apparent spontaneity. Finally, it is reproduced as critique of social relations, which however is separated from those relations and powerless to change them. In other words, social theory is not exempt from this fetishism. Thought about the crisis of the object partakes of this crisis while at the same time striving to transcend it. The Enlightenment demand *Sapere aude* (Dare to know) is, thus, also apposite today. It is the demand for the emancipation of contemporary theory of society from its crisis, a crisis which takes the forms of scientism, relativism and decisionism.¹ This demand, however, is equivalent to the demand that society be emancipated from the fetishistic form of its existence. The nature of socio-historical events cannot be explained without recourse to such a demand. This demand refers to the constitution of the historical/social which is effected via the contradiction between the cooperative and collective character of human sociability, on the one hand, and the divisive and egoistic forms of action – of particular, mutually antagonistic, goals – on the other.

Can contemporary theory address the critical idea of a common and collective forming of the social conditions of life as a wider rational-social goal – which constitutes a condition for the construction of social action – and determine the relation which particular and egoistic goals and the mechanisms for realising them bear towards this wider teleology? This

question refers one to a classical dialectical idea: the conception of dialectics as a relation between teleology and mechanism, a conception which characterises both the Kantian *Critique of Judgement* and the Hegelian *Logic*, as well as the Marxian analyses of *Capital*.²

Contingency in Explanation

A symptom of contemporary 'critical' social theory is its inability to grasp this dimension of dialectics as an internal relation of mechanism and teleology, necessity and freedom, and exploit it for the construction of a theory of social explanation. The 'dialectical' and 'Marxist' dogmatism of twentieth-century actually existing socialism, in its attempt to secure itself from all possibility of losing control over the real, orientated itself to conceiving of everything in terms of necessity. The element of freedom thus took the form of the contingent, the non-controllable, the indeterminate. It was correspondingly impossible for these theoreticians to incorporate into the logic of the explanation of historical and social reality the element of contingency and indeterminacy. It is to this element that relativist and conventionalist epistemologies now appeal in arguing against any kind of binding criteria for comparing, checking and evaluating theoretical arguments. The prevailing relativist standpoint in social theory today echoes the historical relativism of the Dilthey school and the Weberian relativist epistemology. In particular, the Weberian historicist argument accepts that 'contingency' is already to be met with in value-choice, thus ruling out the possibility of rationally comparing and evaluating values. In contemporary 'realist' epistemologies the 'concrete' coincides with the contingent, since it is held that reality is empirically constituted as an arbitrary combination of abstract 'mechanisms'.³

The dialectical relation between mechanism and teleology endeavoured to connect the analysis of the mechanical process as contingent with the analysis of values (teleology). The contingency of the mechanical process is a result of abstraction from the values which constitute this process. Values make the real coherent and elevate it, they give it 'objective meaning' and render it practical. Conversely, the value relation of reality, when viewed from an empiricist standpoint, appears as a contingent relation. This relation was rejected by the dogmatist 'dialectical' tradition. Answers to theories of the contingent, of the indeterminacy of the object, and so on, insofar as they derive from dogmatic 'dialectical' standpoints, hold that particular mechanisms are abstractions from essential socio-historical relations and conceive of the 'concrete' as necessary and determined. There is, however, a hitherto insufficiently examined vagueness in the way in which the concepts 'necessity'

and 'determined' are used by dialectical theory itself, which has led to its being accused of dogmatism, determinism, etc. The dialectical argument is open to antinomies insofar as (a) it holds that there exists a reality independent of values on the basis of which values are produced, thus not taking into account that reality itself is axiologically constituted, and (b) it adopts the standpoint of necessity in juxtaposition to the contingent, thus not taking into account the internal relation between the two.

In this way dialectical theory faces difficulties in grounding its argument and limits itself to criticising relativism and indeterminacy while failing to come to grips with the relativism and indeterminacy of the object under critique. In other words, dialectical theory fails to constitute itself as critique of the structural determinations of its object and thus fails to question its justificatory basis (its claim to being a structured and functional whole). Negatively to these antinomies, there arises the problem of reconstructing the dialectical argument as the problem of developing both of the above dimensions of critique and as reflection on the manner in which the element of value and indeterminacy enters into the very constitution of the critical argument without, however, endangering its claim to bindingness. This reconstruction presupposes an understanding of the way in which relativist arguments of classical political theory have been interpreted and allows a critique of traditional and contemporary relativist justifications by raising the issue of the antinomies which characterise the 'ways of explaining' historical facts in contemporary theory.

In the history of political thought, from Montaigne to Kant, the problem of relativism and irrationality was posed as a methodological question concerning the instability and impossibility of constituting a (social) object *not* consonant with the axiological-rational demands of critical reason. Critique, on the contrary, was so conceived as to necessarily incorporate the problem of the nature of the symptomatic as one of its constitutive conditions. Let us take the basis of the Kantian analyses of the place of the contingent within the transcendental framework and the Hegelian approaches to the problem of necessity in its unity with the problem of the contingent. It is now possible to reconstruct a logic which will enlist the contingent on the side of reason and will secure against the ontologising of their difference and the dogmatic incorporation of the contingent in the rational. A culmination of this dialectic of necessity and contingency is the Marxian critique of political economy. The Marxian dialectical construction emphasises the structured coherence of socio-historical relations by investigating theoretical concepts such as that of capital and the division of labour, while at the same time undermining this coherence by bringing to light its reference to a class-separated structure. Both these aspects of the real are conceived as manifestations of

socio-historical 'necessity'. However, behind this opposition between the coherent and divisive dimensions of the social, a hidden issue raises its head: the questioning of the necessary character of all relations not conducive to the realisation of free and autonomous sociability. A necessary relation is that of autonomy with reference to which the historical articulations of exploitative relations are posited as contingent. This perspective runs throughout the analyses of the 'laws' of the critique of political economy of the mature Marxian *oeuvre* and gives to the object of the materialist analysis a dimension of *indeterminacy*. Every reconstruction of social relations (schemes of reproduction of society) is constituted as a description of an object open to doubt. The validity of this object is cancelled, without it being possible, owing to the nature of the methodological approach adopted, to determine the distance to the point at which this cancelling will take effect and emancipated social relations will be practically realised. The analysis of the kind of indeterminacy resulting here allows us to understand the production of dogmatic approaches to the social as a 'necessary' production of 'false' interpretations deriving from the antinomic nature of the critical socio-theoretical argument – a Kantian theoretical problem also addressed by the Marxian tradition.

The dialectical models of an axiological-emancipatory kind incorporated the problem of the contingent/accidental in their constructions. However, the relations of domination and exploitation they posited as accidental resisted historical development and survived into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and up to the present. The response of academic science to this was to divorce the axiological justifications of the theoretical constructions from their descriptive elements. There appeared new epistemologies which conceived of reality as non-coherent and indeterminate, and argued, with reference to its contingent character, against the necessity of transcending authoritarian relations and for the justification of atomisation. It is characteristic of the present crisis of theory that many theoreticians, such as Polanyi,⁴ used dialectical notions in order to explain the real, while abstracting from their practical character and turning them against Marxian critical method. One such notion is the idea that the historical can be explained as the process whereby its very preconditions are posited, reproduced and changed. Such a positing of preconditions, however, does not follow a functionalist logic, as Polanyi conceived it, but is practical and evaluative. The manner in which action is determined 'necessarily' by its determinations coincides with the manner of necessarily denying these determinations – the denial of every determination which humiliates, alienates or exploits human life. Denial consists in abstracting from the determination and in this sense 'positing' it as 'contingent'. The way in which the historical event was determined is a result in this sense of freedom (in the form of positing the obstruction of freedom as contingent), a result which appears and is

reproduced in the temporary form of the objective/structural determination. In other words, the historical event does not result additively from the combination of factors, but through this movement of averting and displacing the conditions of the real. It appears that the logical form of this movement is a presupposition of every socio-theoretical explanation. This movement takes place within relations which, although determined by private interests, constantly make manifest the lack of validity of every claim for private control of the social conditions of life. They make manifest that in present-day world society, every decision based on private 'interests' and particularised 'rights' may have immediate disastrous consequences for the life on Earth (reproduction and environment) of millions of people. This is the source of the opposing demand for the constitution, in every contemporary society and in world society, of a political and public sphere. Binding values, such as respect for life and the natural environment, social justice, self-determination, solidarity – which all presuppose the elimination of the private control of the conditions of social life – will be generated within this sphere. Values such as the above enter, rationally, into every attempt at the explanation of action either as rational motives for action or as reasons for rejecting actions and resisting them when they destroy such values. A result of the above is the corresponding demand for a reformulation of the character and the axiological bases of the social sciences for our epoch. They should reflect on the nature of the historicity of the contemporary world and on the way in which the issue of the relation between indeterminacy and its practical determination is raised today. They should rethink the possibility (which the Enlightenment and dialectics hoped could become reality in history) that society and theory be founded on reason.

On Axiological and Material Explanation

The crisis of contemporary theory is characterised by its divorce of the justification of explanation from a type of socio-theoretical explanation self-evident for classical natural law and dialectics. In this tradition, the problem of explanation is intrinsically related to the problem of praxis. The degree to which this issue is repressed (the degree to which the concept of praxis has become dogmatic) even in the most critical of contemporary theories can be seen in the claim of Adorno (formulated by inverting the Marxian thesis *ad* Feuerbach) that since philosophers have sufficiently tried to change the world, they should now once more try to interpret it.⁵ In raising such a demand, Adorno waives all claims to the investigation of the way in which the dimension of praxis/value enters necessarily and non-arbitrarily into interpretation. However,

this idea formed the central problem of critical social science from the moment of its inception.

In the tradition of the Enlightenment we encounter a type of explanation referring to binding evaluations with reference to which causal relations are developed. Thus, Rousseau in the *Social Contract* emphasised that the relations of domination and slavery cannot be considered causes of social phenomena, but are rather effects of a process of cancellation and abolishment of freedom and of obstruction of equality.⁶ In the same tradition, Kant connected explanation with the question of whether the demands of critical reason are satisfied by the historical fact under explanation and searched for a form of reality which corresponds⁷ to the demands of reason (and believed that in this way the indeterminacy of experience assumed by him⁸ could be overcome). Important structural elements of Enlightenment philosophy are received and put forward by dialectical theory of the Hegelian and Marxian kind. Within the terms of this paper we cannot go into the question of the Hegelian way of incorporating the problem of explanation into the dialectic of the categories. I will only address a neglected dimension of explanation in the Marxian work. Present day research emphasises the significance of a constant point of reference, a '*Kulminationspunkt*', towards which are concentrated the categories of the Marxian *Darstellung*, in order that the nature of the Marxian explanation of the character of bourgeois relations be understood.⁹ I believe that, in order to reconstruct a Marxian theory of explanation, we should also direct our attention in the opposite direction, to the problem of the loss of centre and of the loss of moderation which characterises the Marxian analysis as the other side of the *Kulminationslogik*. The loss of moderation is produced by the operation of critique, by the questioning of the possibility of applying the rational to the historical 'present'. This possibility forms the start of the Kantian search for the 'type'/sign of reason in history and of the Hegelian theory of the 'measure' governing the objectivity of mind. The object of the social sciences ('bourgeois society') is held by Marx to be an object in the mode of being denied,¹⁰ while he believes that critique cannot be consummated since it has not questioned the fundamental determinations of form of contemporary class society, such as atomisation, private property and money. Critique is exercised from the perspective of a contentual-material ('materialist') element which issues from a process of abstraction from the above determinations of form through which relations of exploitation are located. This contentual element consists in the relation of man to nature, the dedication of human life and time (the expenditure of brain, nerves, muscles)¹¹ to productive activity with the object of reproducing social life. This activity is of an intrinsically cooperative nature of which agents belonging to societies whose formal characteristics consist of commodity

relations are not conscious. The 'meaning' of the materialist foundation is interwoven with the demand for the institution of a collective social form corresponding to the cooperative nature of the 'content', of the collective social reproductive process.

The antinomy contained in the Marxian analyses of the 'Fetishism of Commodities' in *Capital* is characteristic of this type of justification. Here Marx argues that, in a capitalist society, 'the social characteristics of labour (contribution to the social division of labour) *do not appear* as such to the workers', but 'only through the relations into which the products of labour ... are brought by exchange'. That is why, writes Marx,

the social relations of their particular labours appear to the latter as *that which they are*, namely not as immediate social relations of persons in their labours themselves, but much more as reified relations of persons and as social relations of things.¹²

The antinomy contained in this formulation ('do not appear'/'appear as that which they are') refers to the form of dialectic judgment characteristic of the Marxian materialist theory, in which the praxeological justification of the construction is evident. In order to act, men orientate themselves towards the relations between commodities, thus falling into self-deception, since they do not discern the existing material social relations and the sociality of the labour process which manifest themselves historically in commodity relations. By orienting themselves towards the deceptive/illusory, they orient themselves towards that which now 'is' (as it ought not to be and in the mode of 'being denied'). The 'solution' of this antinomy consists in a praxeological project to transcend this society in the direction of a society of 'free cooperation'. This ideal is not introduced as an ought 'from the outside', but refers reflectively to the cooperative 'material' nature of existing reality, which is juxtaposed to its own fetishistic form, claiming a form corresponding to its material/axiological (rational) dimension.

This type of evaluative judgment leads Marx to the construction of conceptual schemes in which the juxtaposition of the fetishistic and axiological dimensions of the real are articulated by the phrase 'instead of'.¹³ The historical real, in its divisive and alienating character is valid as want and as temporary cancellation of its very axiological materiality which constitutes its teleology. This teleology, however, is *radical*. Contrary to the Enlightenment, it does not want to deceive the alienating mechanisms by keeping them within limits which guarantee their *common benefit*. It perceives the common benefit as residing in the total removal of these mechanisms and in the institution of a totally free and collective community.

On examining the form of the dialectical judgment, we find that the Marxian way of grounding socio-theoretical arguments has recourse to a *kind of explanation* of the Enlightenment type, which it radicalises, at the same time bringing to the fore the antinomies and the indeterminacy resulting from this radicalisation. The Marxian argument derives from the tradition of 'explanation by reason' founded by Rousseau in his critique of Aristotle and by Kant in his methodical exposition of the concept of the civil constitution.¹⁴ This type of explanation is already to be found in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844,¹⁵ in the methodological programme of 'explaining' the 'fact of private property' by the concept of alienation. Such a type of explanation is also used self-evidently in Marx's mature work in the case of the fundamental question of the materialist methodology concerning the explanation of the form of value (that is, the question why social value, the collective, social, labour process takes on this particular social form).¹⁶ Materialist analysis 'explains' the determination of form in terms of the development of content, of the forces of production and the division of labour, which at a certain level of development give themselves a corresponding frame of social relations and forms, such as the property relation, generalised exchange and the developed form of money as capital. This recourse to content – with its exclusive determination as organisation and as level of development of the labour system in order that social form be explained – would lead to an understanding of social reality as the result of the automated mechanism of the forces of production. It would thus not take into account the internal teleological dimension of the materialist explanation. This dimension refers social forms to the axiological/cooperative dimension of the content (of the social system of labour) and juxtaposes the historical social forms to the form of social and collective cooperation *corresponding* to these contents (and whose realisation is a practical postulate/demand).¹⁷ The explanation of the forms of private property or wage labour thus refers to the developmental level of the forces of production in order to show the necessity of the mediation of the social division of labour by them. This process is tantamount to the constitution of these forms through the exclusion of the possibility of the agents coming together amongst themselves directly to participate in common in the process of social reproduction. (That is, these forms are constituted so that the agents communicate through them 'instead of' communicating in solidary and direct community.)

The Marxian problem of the 'transformation' of values into prices constitutes an exemplification *par excellence* of this method. In contrast to the widespread scientific conception,¹⁸ the Marxian analyses do not pertain to the establishment of a relation between fetishised 'positive' aggregates, that is, the 'production' from certain aggregates of labour time (the 'values' of

Capital I) of aggregates computed in prices (developed in *Capital III*). On the contrary, their object is the reflective reference of the positive aggregates of prices constituted in markets in capitalist societies to the problem of the development of the division of labour in such societies on the basis of divisive (class) relations. This form suspends and cancels the rational realisation of the cooperative character of labour relations, and consequently undermines the coherence of 'positive' economic aggregates. It exhibits the radical negativity which theory juxtaposes to every positivisation.¹⁹

It is precisely in this radical repudiation of the divisive (positive) that the *antinomies* and the *indeterminacy* of the method which may crop up from this perspective (and which are reproduced by the 'explanation' of reality) are revealed. The demand for the completion of the critical argument may lead to the questioning of any mean between the historical and axiological (the application of the axiological to historical time), by interpreting it as a concession to strategies which obstruct the realisation of the materialist value system. The social object is thus rendered non-coherent and not amenable to explanation. Starting with the problem of the 'preservation of the social essence' of bourgeois society, one may, up to a point, reconstruct in Marx's *Capital* the outline of a preoccupation with a legitimate state policy not transcending bourgeois society, as the Marxian analyses of the 'working day' in *Capital I*, Chapter 10 evince. However, the theoretical basis of the analysis remains unclarified in view of the fact that the constitution of a 'right' normativity takes place within the framework of divisive social relations in the mode of being denied. Correspondingly, the demand for the total cancellation of separations is in danger of becoming indeterminate, since from its formulation it cannot be constructed as a 'quasi-positivism' of the present, following the example of the constructions of the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

On the Crisis of Explanation

With the development of the contradictions of capitalist societies since the middle of the nineteenth century, a number of hypotheses implicit in Enlightenment and dialectical theories appeared to have been historically refuted. One such central hypothesis was that in societies characterised by the institutional separation of social action from the means of the reproduction of social life and by the separation between social deliberation, decision and the implementation of decisions, it would be possible for the ideas of freedom, justice and dignity to be realised. Correspondingly, theoretical reflection on social reality abandoned frameworks of analysis which ensured

the connection between the analysis of social mechanisms and a teleology of reason. 'Dialectical' models were thus degraded into dogmatic philosophies of history awaiting the automatic production, through the self-acting dynamics of social mechanisms, of a final 'right' end at some distant future. As every claim to bindingness is abandoned, epistemology turns to historicist (relativist) and formalist solutions. The idea of contingency is no longer incorporated into the critical argument in order to cast doubt on the positive, but is now used as the foundation of a positivist way of thinking. This crisis of theory influences conceptions about the nature of explanation which have prevailed up to the present via relativist, formalist and positivist models.

The key characteristics of the crisis of contemporary theory of explanation had already appeared at the beginning of our century in the debates between the historicists and the formalists on the method of the social sciences. These were known as the debate on method (*Methodenstreit*) and the debate on value-judgments (*Werturteilsstreit*).

The conception of explanation propounded by Max Weber within the framework of his methodological formalism is likewise antinomic. In his 1917 work on values²⁰ Weber adopts methodological arbitrariness (contingency) in the choice of the 'last' values of the agents and social scientists. Weber's position with respect to the value problem does not imply the denial of the axiological constitution of the standpoints of action. On the contrary, it presupposes such a constitution, and indeed leads to its intensification to a radical point at which its relativist consequences become apparent. Values have meaning (*Sinn*) only as subjective choices and decisions, while no meaning can be attributed to historical relations. An implication of this position is that arguments which refer critically to unjust, unequal and exploitative relations are meaningless. Objective value-judgments, which were still possible in both dialectics and historicist philosophy, are transformed into decisionist options in favour of a political ideology ('socialism' as irrational value). The questioning of objective values further implicates the questioning of the possibility of constituting the object society as a coherent totality.²¹ Dimensions of society as a whole (for example, the macro-theoretic analysis of the relation between social needs and the means for satisfying them in the context of social reproduction) ensue as epistemologically problematic aggregates,²² which according to this position it is particularly difficult to address, while the strictly epistemological approach is perceived as that which starts from subjective choices. The discourse on the meaning of social relations is now replaced by atomisation, agnosticism and irrationality of praxis.

The above Weberian options in favour of methodological atomism and value relativism have consequences for the theory of explanation which manifests the characteristics of crisis and is rendered irrational. This irrationality

expresses itself in the Weberian attempt to ground the explanation of action on the understanding (*Verstehen*) of action. In his classical definition of sociology in *Economy and Society*,²³ Weber writes that sociology aims at the hermeneutical understanding of social action and 'thereby' at the causal explanation of its course and consequences. Understanding is connected with the subjective meaning attached by the agents to their actions. This meaning should be as far as possible 'evident' – the highest degree of evidence being exhibited by mathematical-logical thought. The bindingness and exactness claimed by Weber for the theory of action is thus connected, on the one hand, with the bindingness of formal logical argumentation and, on the other, with the pattern of the rational action of a single agent. Correspondingly, the understanding of meaning is exemplified in the most valid way in a logical/tautological practical formula in which the intentional results of the action of an agent – who has used certain determinate means in view of the knowledge that for the realisation of such results these means are adequate – are derived.

The characteristic steps of this methodological approach to the problem of meaning are: the initial separation of the theory of explanation from a theory of objective meaning; the subsequent approach to the explanandum from the angle of the understanding of action within the framework of a theory of subjective meaning; the location of the nature of subjective meaning in an ideal of formal rationality; and, finally, the reinterconnection of the theory of explanation with the theory of understanding through the model of formal rationality. In this way, the possibility that the logical form, which is developed in the process of explanation, refers to totalities of relations is precluded and doubt is cast on the meaning of such totalities. The juxtaposition of networks of social mechanisms and socially produced systems of goals, through which the meanings attached to action by individual agents might be rendered understandable or subject to critique, are precluded *a fortiori*.

A result of this approach to the issue of explanation is the typically Weberian transpositions effected in the attempt to 'explain' the nature of contemporary capitalist/rationalist society: transpositions from the problem of the reconstruction of reproduction processes of the relations characteristic of this formation to the problem of the representation of its historical (historically unique) becoming.²⁴ Such transpositions preclude the possibility that the 'explanation of the novel' be based on a theory of the change in the external conditions of human existence (interests, historical relations, etc.) and orient it towards the 'change in meaning' of the 'novel',²⁵ according to its nature, action compared to the meaning of the preexisting action. A logical gap and discontinuity between the 'rationality' of the prior and the subsequent situations of action is thus introduced.

The elements of the crisis of explanation we located in the classical epistemological debates between historicists and formalists of the beginning of the century are reproduced and intensified in later and recent attempts to found conceptions of explanation. An irrational element is characteristic today of both historicist and formalist approaches. In view of the fact that conditions of free social relations have not been historically realised, historical (dogmatic 'Marxist' and historicist) theories in this century have been led to accept Stalinist bureaucratic regimes in the East or fascist ones in the West. Meanwhile formalist theories, which claim to offer the only alternative to dogmatism and historicist relativism, are unable to explain the options of individual social action which constitute their own starting point, since they reject problems of content-rationality arising from the analysis and evaluation of the historical conditions of action.

Present-day debates on the methodology of historiography and the logic of explanation of historical/social actions are manifestations of the crisis in the theory of explanation discussed above. It is characteristic of present-day arguments that they systematically reject nearly all the problems of the theory of explanation located by twentieth-century bourgeois (historicist and formalist) theory itself. In contemporary debates, a scientific scheme of explanation by subsumption, whereby an individual fact is derived from a set of other facts and laws (nomological-deductive explanation as propounded by Hempel and Oppenheim²⁶) is juxtaposed to a kind of explanation whereby action is explained with reference not only to laws but also to intentions, plans, motives, etc. of agents. This latter position, one of whose characteristic representatives is Dray,²⁷ approximates to the theory of *Verstehen* (in the tradition of Dilthey) and to the Weberian 'rational' theory of action. While it orients itself towards the 'internal' understanding of the subjective meanings of agents, it at the same time lays claim to a model of rational action and of a rational agent who, under given conditions, acts in a given, 'right' way. It is thus involved in both problems of historicist relativism reproduced by the theory of *Verstehen* as well as problems of indeterminacy reproduced in the attempts to formulate a coherent theory of rational action in the face of conditions not only of certainty but also of uncertainty and risk to which action is exposed.²⁸

The critique of the deductive-nomological model of explanation was complemented by von Wright²⁹ in the direction of a theory of practical syllogisms emphasising both volitional as well as cognitive dimensions of practical justification. Von Wright endeavoured to forge a connection between analytical approaches to the theory of action, as formulated by E. Anscombe, and the traditional teleological model of explanation as found in Aristotle, Hegel and Marxism. In those theories, the recourse of practical argument, in order to explain/justify action, to a dialectics of subjective ends mediated through their

'means' with objectivity (achieved end) is self-evident. This issue led von Wright to an insight into a most significant aspect of the nature of social explanation, documenting at the same time, however, his inability to deal with it in depth. For, an understanding of the nature of explanation cannot be achieved without a critique of theories of the kind suggested by Anscombe which orient themselves exclusively towards ordinary consciousness, thus precluding the critical consciousness which could expose this ordinary consciousness as 'ideological'. Furthermore, such an understanding would not be adequate unless it included amongst its critical questions about the nature of the explanation/justification of action the dimensions of the historicity and legitimation (evaluation) of purposeful action (that is, unless it raised the question of a content teleology for the contemporary world). These critical objections of ideology and axiology are immanent in the dialectical idea of practical teleology; if ignored, the type of teleological explanation necessarily becomes devitalised and is degraded to a 'rational' teleology of understanding of a Weberian type.³⁰

On Emancipation of Explanation

Confronting critical theory of society today is the task of emancipating socio-theoretical explanation from its involvement in formalism and historicism, and disclosing its axiological/practical dimension. Such an emancipatory attempt must have recourse to the issues raised by the Enlightenment and dialectical theory of society, while at the same time overcoming the dilemmas of this theory and reformulating its claims to explaining/freeing contemporary social relations.

With the present crisis of Weberianism, the claim of restoring an epistemology of an open socio-theoretical explanation – as an antinomic process of reflection on the value-suspending mechanisms constitutive of contemporary social relations and on the historical forms of suspension of these mechanisms – is raised anew. This issue raises again the neglected question of the validity of values in the historical present, a question posed in fetishistic form by Max Scheler in the 1920s.³¹ In the place of the fetishist Schelerian material *a priori*, questions regarding the validity of values have become relevant today. These questions are related to the challenge, for a critically oriented social theory, of consciously reconstructing this teleological framework as an inseparable and binding part of social explanation, that is of emancipating these values from the forms which annul them through 'scientific' politico-economic models and the periodisations of historical reality.

Contemporary politico-economic models (based on value-relativism and methodological atomism) are incapable of constituting their object which is demoted to a chaotic conglomerate of innumerable standpoints of particular agents. Such models claim that, in order that the system they describe (the processes they 'explain') be reproduced, the agents should receive the greatest amount of information possible concerning the situation of the other agents. At the same time, however, the absence of information is institutionalised through the market. In these models, the relations in market societies 'appear as they are': the values of agents are not known to other agents. Furthermore, processes which would increase the trust between agents and the credibility of the information every agent gives other agents are precluded because of the confrontation of agents with competitive interests (competing property owners). Although this theory does not use terms such as 'trust' and 'solidarity' (it abstracts from them), it is clear that such terms enter necessarily into its explicatory apparatus. For example, because individual agents do not trust each other within the existing social mechanisms (we have here the juxtaposition of the value of trust and mechanism), they try to increase their certainty by maintaining liquidity, aiming at further safeguards, etc. It is precisely this which increases the risk of instability of the system.³²

In Keynesian models, conscious state intervention at the level of social liquidity is propounded as an answer to the problem of indeterminacy. But such interventions do not bring about any alteration in the social isolation of the agents, which, in order to promote their individual interests, constantly bypass and neutralise the changes set in motion by the state. As a result state policies fail, the state of the social system is rendered indeterminate and uncertainty is reproduced.³³ The political activities aiming at redistribution, full employment and the ensuring of social wages by influencing effective demand, for example, can be viewed as manifestations of the internalisation (positing of preconditions) of certain functions. These functions were not regulated in the anarchic capitalism of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. However, regulation became necessary in contemporary capitalism with the dynamics of the division of labour. Values such as the realisation of comprehensive social rationality, the general interest, social dialogue, the acceptance of society by all its members and, in this sense, its legitimation are supposed to correspond to this redistributive mechanism. However, this claim to a correspondence between the mechanistic and the axiological transforms the antinomic dimension of capitalist relations into a dimension of ideological consensus (a 'social contract' for the contemporary world). It presupposes that the social partners mutually accept their relations of life and the existing type of democracy as satisfying a vital minimum of their interests, that labour accepts the principle of private property (profit)

and capital owners that of social wages, etc. In reality, of course, the elements mutually interconnected in such a model are not the elements themselves of social reproduction, but their beautified and optimistic versions, such as full employment, high profits, social wages, etc. In this sense the model is not descriptive but normative. Its unity is achieved as the articulation of particular properties correlated externally and contingently. We can thus take sides, along these lines, on the question of whether the Keynesian state is an accidental (contingent) result of favourable historical conditions or a manifestation of a permanent structural cohabitation of capitalism and democracy. For, the contingency of this type of model does not consist in the contingency of some favourable conditions which constituted its object, but constitutes an internal, intrinsic element of the model. As an articulative, contingent model it rejects just this element of indeterminacy immanent in contemporary social relations, in other words, the non-interpretation and non-acceptance of these relations as harmonic ones, the abstention from the social contract, the indifference towards conciliatory ideologies. In their place it proclaims a fetishistic holism of the harmony of macro-aggregates and of the values corresponding to them. For this reason the concept of 'Keynesianism' cannot be used to explain particular historical processes as is believed by neo-structuralist theoreticians of the Regulation School such as Aglietta, Hirsch and Jessop. Rather, it involves giving up all claims to explanation and substituting for it lists of properties which coexist in a given epoch, formation, and so on. If we rupture these lists of properties-in-coexistence in order that explanation be emancipated from its neo-structuralist embrace, one part of the Keynesian model will prove to be an ideology of social reconciliation. Another part will be seen to represent processes of incorporating into the political system the functional conditions of the reproduction and survival of society (conditions whose limits immediately manifest themselves in the impossibility of their being secured in capitalist societies). Yet another part will reflect the historically unique constellation of the coincidence of particular properties and their coexistence for some duration in a historical process after a crisis. Having ruptured this model, we may attempt to explain the phenomena which appear as its properties with reference to the historical constitution of the separations which characterise capitalist societies and to the cancellation through them of the possibility of a social life worth living.

We now turn to the reasons pertaining to the explanation of the so-called crisis of Keynesian consensus, such as the slowing down of the rates of growth, the pressure of the cost of labour which cannot be passed on to the consumer because of international competition, the strong bargaining power of labour, the increase in costs, etc. These reasons should, of course, be

reconstructed as claims of labour to appropriate the greatest possible part of its product – claims which are cancelled by the form of society.

It is important to reject the simplistic view that the transition from ‘Keynesian’ to ‘postkeynesian’ (neoliberal, monetarist, etc.) systems constitutes a transition from conditions of certainty to ones of uncertainty. Keynes himself had stressed³⁴ that his model presupposes uncertainty, indeterminacy, lack of knowledge, lack of information, and so on – elements which are intrinsic to capitalist societies. In this sense, Hayek’s critique of technical rationality and of the optimism of the technocrats of Keynesian intervention – who directly correlate particular political interventions and putative corrective effects at the level of society³⁵ – contains elements of a correct diagnosis of the indeterminacy which characterises the results of state policies and the constitution of macro-aggregates. This indeterminacy, however, is not explained by Hayek with reference to the particular type of society which fails to constitute the only possible determinable relation – namely, the relation of freedom and solidarity – but is attributed to historical totalities in general. The coherent dimension of society is questioned not only as to the coexistence and manipulability of macro-aggregates, but also as to the possibility of acquiring critical knowledge of the processes of social reproduction in societies of private appropriation of the social product.

In the case of the Keynesian welfare state it was claimed that it realised value contents as to the totality of society, although those claims were cancelled as it became evident that the problems of the constitution of this totality could not be represented within such an articulative model. While, in the case of neoliberalism, the axiological totality is denounced from the very beginning, social fragmentation is accepted as a natural characteristic of society and consequently society is conceived as a non-value-laden, historicist totality. This leads to the renunciation of politics, the restriction of redistribution and deregulation. Behind this theoretical agnosticism there prevails a very rational class politics aiming at a loose labour market, the dismantling of wages, underemployment and, because of all these, an increase in profits. The explanation of this ideology and practice has to show that the theoretical argument is grounded in the axiological deconstitution of its object and that the neoliberal monetarist practices are grounded in the destruction of the social value *par excellence*, namely, the conditions which guarantee social labour and the preservation of social life. As these value frameworks are destroyed, new such frameworks are generated in a fetishist, atomistic and historicist form (owing to the fact that the value element cannot disappear from the social, to which it is intrinsic, but will be transposed and will recur in an altered form). The new value frameworks consist in the values of the family, charity, education not as a social function but as a personal privilege,

liberty emphasised to the detriment of equality (which is conceived as coercion).³⁶ The element of tradition is recruited in order to fill in the gaps arising from the rupture of relations in the crisis of society. The neoliberal legitimisation process is connected to the real destruction of social values: it refers to the individual who is a member of the society of the two-thirds and who observes the societal crisis and credits his personal welfare and security to the dismantling of social politics.

Today, after the failure of the neoliberal and the monetarist projects, there is much talk of a return to a mild form of Keynesianism. Such talk, of course, only obscures but does not explain the nature of the transition towards the new. The nature of the problem becomes evident if we conceive of the crisis of neoliberalism, not as a return to some form of Keynesianism, but as an exposition of the limits within which the socialised conditions of social reproduction can be dismantled without social life being decisively threatened. However, as already stressed, this is not a purely functional issue, but a genuinely political one and a problem of values, namely the problem of setting limits and political preconditions to the neoliberalist attacks on the social tissue.

Open Problems of a Critical Theory of Explanation

The theoretical issues concerning the development of contemporary capitalist societies and the nature of and reasons for the collapse of the systems of existing socialism have revealed certain central methodological issues connected with the engagement of values in socio-theoretical explanation. Such is the problem of the moderation of values as a condition of socio-theoretical explanation. When a political system advocates ‘last’, maximalist, etc., values in situations of lack of information, lack of participation, presence of hierarchies, etc., this leads to the constitution of the system as a system of inverted sociality (for example, the Stalinist, bureaucratic system) which can be criticised from the point of view of the value of a non-inverted sociality. The nature of this value has not been clarified. This value is involved, on the one hand, in the issue of a ‘right’, but today necessarily abstract, final political ideal (human emancipation). It is involved, on the other hand, in the problem of confronting this ideal with considerations pertaining to that which is today possible, i.e., to the moderation of the framework of political values.

Many Marxist theoreticians were not able to give satisfactory answers to problems such as the above and were led to maximalist, spontaneist or reformist solutions. In particular, they failed to discern the specific dialectical form of the Marxian argument which reconstructs and criticises the

existing mechanisms of power and exploitation by referring to the preconditions of social life (such as securing the social labour process in conditions of peace or an undamaged, natural environment) as these are threatened and destroyed by the capitalist form of society. This reconstruction and critique can be translated into a practical claim of positing preconditions for the conscious ordering of relations within and between societies – consciously and responsibly dealing with the chasm between the developed and the underdeveloped worlds, with wars and with the threat to the natural environment. It seems that a number of socialist programmes and political documents in contemporary, industrial, capitalist societies are in essence no more than formulations at a high level of abstraction of explanatory frameworks for social-political processes of the type mentioned above. Formulations of this kind are also the ‘inversions’ of the theoretical paradigms of the social-democratic programmes, which in the place of the economism of the previous decades (cf. the Bad Godesberg programme of the SPD) argue now with reference to basic dangers for contemporary society, such as the threat to the environment, the problematic relations between North and South and the dismantling of the welfare state. The traditional formulations of these programmes ‘explained’ the real with reference to the dynamics of the system of industrial labour, neglecting the axiological dimensions intrinsic to the logic of this system and introducing the axiological element externally as a political decision in favour of the welfare state, etc. Now, however, they are forced to become involved in a wider logic of positing preconditions of social life which leads to a consideration of social life as a value (teleology) critically juxtaposed to the mechanisms which threaten, injure and devalorise it.³⁷

Pertinent to the above is a problem one could refer to as the problem of axiological elevation. Classical dialectical theory has recourse to a conception of ‘elevating’ the constituents of social reality which allows reality to present itself as a coherent totality whose constituent moments/relations become manifest.³⁸ In as much as concerns the objective side of reality, the cohesion of the real was held to be secured through politics and the division of labour. The cohesion of the object, however, also has a subjective aspect which consists of practical and cognitive processes of restituting this cohesion through purposeful action and institutions which promote their goals. In the Marxian tradition such processes were connected with the idea of the constitution of a conscious labour movement, an idea also to be found in a historicist version in Gramsci’s work. Part of this thought is an epistemological standpoint which stresses that a social-theoretical explanation is inseparable from the practical problem of making visible and giving reality to the axiological conditions of the explanatory framework. Although the idea of society as a process of educating/shaping (*Bildung*) agents towards certain goals was

rendered suspicious as an impermissible hypostatisation, a version of this idea, critical towards every kind of hypostatisation, is still valid today.

This version refers to a critical teleology of axiological conditions/postulates for the cancellation of the separations which render possible the constitution of mechanisms for social coercion and domination. By raising questions as to the possibility of limiting the power of such mechanisms, it refers to a critical idea of legal order and asks whether and how it can be realised. In what way can such an idea enter an explanatory framework? Will ideas of preserving society and nature, of justice, of tolerance and of critique prevail or will substitute fetishisms, such as nationalism and the ferocity of the capitalism of neoliberal markets predominate? A considerable part of the explanatory argument through which such issues are raised seems to be functionalist. In fact, however, it inverts functionalism by turning the idea of the interaction and interdependence of social phenomena and phenomena of domination in the direction of critique. By abstracting from critical teleology it appears as a purely functionalist argument which contains the antinomies characteristic of functionalism. The explanation of the development of international relations after the First World War, for instance, can be reconstructed on the basis of an interaction model according to which the leniency shown by the great powers towards the rearmament of Germany can be ‘explained’ by their fear of the establishment and development of the Soviet Union. Likewise, the fear of world revolution can be thought to have ‘led’ in a way to the formation in the West of welfare state structures, the development of parliaments, of trade unions, etc. The arguments remain functionalist as long as the axiological elements are introduced as separate causes at various points in the model and are not concentrated into a unified argument with reference to which the model is rendered coherent. Coherence here stands for the axiological elevation of the explanatory process as a ‘reason’ *par excellence* for the constitution of relations of interdependence and their *relata*. The critical explanatory argument stresses the historical practices, through which the project of social emancipation and preservation of social life is ‘formed’ by the bureaucratic mechanisms administering the revolution in the East, or by the mechanisms of the capitalist social (welfare) state manipulating life, health, employment, etc. in the West. One could, however, ask whether such a critical complement to functionalism can be transformed into *social praxis* – a question which refers to the problem of axiological elevation of the real. Can critical epistemology coincide with critical politics? (a question which Kant had already addressed).

The above question is equivalent to the question of how a critical value framework for the present time will find its non-inverted historical expression in practices which will respect and rationally order social values. This question is concealed by the factual projection of axiological demands in historical societies and appears under a fetishistic form of lists of values included in

the political programmes of socialist parties (values such as the reduction of unemployment, the overcoming of depression or the support of the welfare state). Correspondingly, these programmes presuppose a gap (a lack of axiological elevation) between the values they include (and strive to realise) and substantial social values whose realisation is systematically postponed or cancelled through such programmes. Such are mainly the values aiming at the overcoming of the separation of the members of society in the valorisation process of social resources and in the decision-making process (property and hierarchy). As such confrontational values are cancelled, the continuity of the axiological political/practical project is distorted and the values comprehended in the programmes are either rendered inactive or else realise themselves in a framework of particularisation and compromise which is hostile to reflection. The chasm of this lack of elevation is a condition for the explanation of the historical action of socialist parties. This action follows an inference (an explanation of the real) which dislocates the problem of the explanation of the production of alienated social forms transforming it into a problem of the realisation of particularist axiological demands raised under alienating conditions, of the combinations of such demands, of the hierarchical ordering of the parts of such demands to be realised, and so on. With this dislocation the issue of the explanation/cancellation of property ('the derivation of property from the concept of alienation' in Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*) is no longer raised. Instead, problems concerning the preservation of particular dimensions of social values under alienated forms in societies of private property are raised. The system of relations proposed by socialist parties is propounded as the only feasible (capable of being applied) system of relative social justice (as against Thatcherism, Reaganism, the eastern bureaucracies, and so on). This only feasible system, however, is neither capable of grasping the conditions of the crisis of society at the level of productive and hierarchical relations, of the environment, of social exploitation in one society and worldwide. Nor is it capable of acting in the direction of cancelling these conditions.³⁹ In other words, through this kind of action and omission is reproduced the *antinomy of mediation* (moderation, which consists in the fact that the only possible way of realising the axiological in the historical cancels its very axiological, founding conditions) without this antinomy being represented as a political problem.

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3. For a critique of realist epistemologies cf. R. Gunn, 'Marxism, Metatheory and Critique', in W. Bonefeld and J. Holloway (eds.), *Post-Fordism and Social Form*.
4. Cf. K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (1944), Beacon Press, Boston, 1957, who addresses in functionalist terms a theory of the positing of preconditions, and K. Psychopedis, 'Dialectical Theory: Problems of Reconstruction', in *Open Marxism*, vol. I, for an attempt to reconstruct the dialectical theory of the positing of preconditions.
5. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M, 1966, p. 15.
6. J.J. Rousseau, *Du Contrat Sociale*, Les Editions Du Cheval, Geneve, livre I, chap. II.
7. Cf. I. Kant, 'Streit der Fakultäten', *Kant, Werke*, Bd XI (Weischedel Edition) Frankfurt, 1968, 2. Abs., 8, p. 367: the methodical development of the *respublica noumenon* in experience as a *respublica phenomenon*.
8. I. Kant, 'Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in Weltbürgerlicher Absicht', *Kant, Werke*, Bd XI (Weischedel Edition) Introduction, p. 34, where Kant addresses the issue of the purpose of nature, and 'Streit der Fakultäten', 2. Abs., 5, p. 355, adoption of the point of view of reason.
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10. Cf. R. Gunn, 'Against Historical Materialism: Marxism as First-Order Discourse', in W. Bonefeld, R. Gunn and K. Psychopedis (eds.), *Open Marxism, Volume II: Theory and Practice*, Pluto Press, London, 1992.
11. K. Marx, *Das Kapital I*, *Marx-Engels-Werke*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, Bd 23, p. 85.
12. Ibid., p. 87, my emphasis. Cf. also the corresponding passage in A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and the Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Liberty Classics and Oxford University Press, p. 50.
13. Cf. K. Marx, *Das Kapital I*, p. 88: 'the social movement of man has for him the form of the movement of things which control him *instead of* being controlled by him'. For a discussion of 'instead of' cf. K. Psychopedis, 'Dialectical Theory. Problems of Reconstruction', in *Open Marxism*, vol. I, p. 93.
14. J.J. Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, I. Kant, 'Streit der Fakultäten', 2. Abs. 5-7.
15. K. Marx, *Okonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*, *Marx-Engels-Werke*, Ergänzungsband 1, Berlin, 1968, p. 510.
16. Concerning the question of the form of value, cf. chiefly H.G. Backhaus, 'Zur Dialektik der Wertform', in A. Schmidt (ed.), *Beiträge zur marxistischen Erkenntnistheorie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M, 1969, and H. Reichelt, *Zur logischen Struktur des Kapitalbegriffs bei K. Marx*, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, Frankfurt/M 1970.

17. The juxtaposition in the Marxian method of internal teleology to social mechanisms locates Marx's *Capital* within the epistemological tradition of *The Wealth of Nations*, the Kantian *Third Critique* and the Hegelian *Logic*.
18. Classical texts in the scientific (technical) tradition are: von Bortkiewicz, *Zur Berichtigung der grundlegenden theoretischen Konstruktion von Marx im dritten Band des Kapitals*, in *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik*, vol. 34, 1907, Bortkiewicz, *Wertrechnung und Preisrechnung im Marxschen System*, in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, vol. 23, 1906 and vol. 25, 1907.
19. Cf. H. Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution. Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, Routledge, London, 1955, who follows this line of argumentation. In the more recent literature, cf. J. Holloway, 'In the Beginning was the Scream', *Common Sense* 11, 1991, pp. 69 ff., especially concerning the concept of uncertainty cf. pp. 71f.
20. M. Weber, 'Der Sinn der Wertfreiheit der soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften', in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, 3. Aufl., Mohr, Tübingen, 1968, pp. 489–540.
21. Cf. for the problem of consistency from the perspective of the Marxian theory of value H. G. Backhaus, 'Dialectical Principles of the Marxian Critique of Economics', Ms., Frankfurt, 1994, and W. Bonefeld, *The Recomposition of the British State During the 1980s*, chapter 2, Dartmouth, Aldershot, 1993.
22. Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, engl. *Economy and Society*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978, chap. 1, parts 1, 9 and chap. 2, par. 9.
23. *Economy and Society*, p. 4.
24. Max Weber, 'Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus', 1904/1905, in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, Mohr, Tübingen, 1963, p. 37. Engl. transl. by T. Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Scribner, New York, 1958, p. 55.
25. *Economy and Society*, pp. 753f., 755.
26. Cf. C. G. Hempel, P. Oppenheim, 'Studies in the logic of explanation', in C. G. Hempel, *Aspects of scientific explanation and other Essays in the Philosophy of Science*, Free Press, New York, London, 1965, pp. 245–95.
27. W. Dray, *Laws and Explanations in History*, Oxford Classics, London, 1957.
28. W. Stegmüller, *Probleme und Resultate der Wissenschaftstheorie und analytischen Philosophie*, Bd. 1, Springer Verlag, Berlin/Heidelberg/New York, 1969, pp. 385f., 394.
29. G. H. von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1971.
30. M. Riedel, *Verstehen oder Erklären? Zur Theorie und Geschichte der hermeneutischen Wissenschaft*, Klett Cotta, Stuttgart, 1978.
31. Max Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, 6. Aufl., Francke, Berlin/München, 1980.
32. As has been noted (cf. A. Bhaduri, *Macro-Economics. The Dynamic of Commodity Production*, Macmillan, London, 1986, p. 91) retaining money as an individual choice for the reduction of uncertainty increases the impact of uncertainty at a social level.

33. Cf. D. Elson, 'Market Socialism or Socialization of the Market?', *New Left Review* 172 (1988), L. M. Lachman, *The Market as an Economic Process*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986 and F. Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1977.
34. J. M. Keynes, 'The End of Laissez Faire', in *Collected Works*, vol. IX (Essays in Persuasion), Macmillan, London, 1972, pp. 272–94.
35. For Hayek's critique of macro-aggregates, cf. his *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1967.
36. Cf. F. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1960.
37. On the issue of a theory of the positing of preconditions cf. n. 4 above.
38. On the issue of axiological elevation cf. K. Psychopedis, 'Dialectical Theory: Problems of Reconstruction', *Open Marxism*, vol. I.
39. Cf. E. Hobsbawm, 'Out of the Ashes', *Marxism Today* (1991), pp. 170 f. concerning problems which cannot be solved by social-democratic action.

4

Why did Marx Conceal his Dialectical Method?

HELMUT REICHELT

The meaning and importance of the dialectical method in Marx's *Critique of Political Economy* is even at the present day unclear. Some consider the dialectical method a superfluous philosophical relic, others are convinced that the object of science itself calls for the dialectical method. It has not yet been decided who is right. Unfortunately, it is not possible to follow the explicit declarations of Marx himself, since they are not only too few and imprecise to clarify this question, they are also contradictory. I would like to call attention to one of these contradictions which seems to me the most serious and attempt through the discussion of this contradiction to further contribute to the solution of this problem.

In his study of 'Marx's Reduction of the Dialectic'¹ Gerhard Göhler shows that important changes in presentation were made by Marx between the publication of the *Critique of Political Economy*, the first edition of Volume I of *Capital* and the second edition. Göhler detects genuine forms of the dialectic in the *Critique of Political Economy* but they become less prominent from one publication to the next, the dialectic is progressively reduced in importance. Is this to be attributed to Marx's intention to popularise his work as much as possible? There is the express declaration in the preface to the first edition, although this relates only to the substance and quantity of value. At the same time he stresses that the presentation has been much improved. But are both possible at the same time? The endless efforts to decipher the dialectical presentation in *Capital*, especially in the first chapter, suggest that they are not. Has Marx laid a false trail here?

A letter to Engels, written on 9 December 1861, contains a revealing remark concerning the connection between presentation and popularisation: 'My work progresses, though slowly. As a matter of fact, it was impossible quickly to finish off such theoretical things under these circumstances. However, it will be much more popular, and the method more hidden than

in first part.'² The far-reaching meaning of this remark has not yet been pursued in studies on Marx. If we take this indication seriously, this would mean that we must pursue the thought of popularisation more consequentially. This would also lead to the conclusion that not only between the first and second publication of the first volume of *Capital* is there an increased popularisation, but that even the *Critique* represents a popularisation, for this is the 'first part' to which Marx refers in his letter to Engels. Already here, in these texts, it is no longer possible to easily decipher the method. Consequently, in order to find out something about the hidden dialectic method, we must first turn to earlier writings, the *Rohentwurf* and the *Urtext*, in order to discover what is hidden and how. And how are we to reconcile Marx's often expressed wish (for example in a letter to Lassalle on 14 January 1858), 'to make clear to men of common sense the "Rationelle" of the method which Hegel revealed and at the same time mystified'³ But if we are to believe the letter to Engels, instead of using the obvious opportunity to clarify his method in the explanation and discussion of dialectical stages of argumentation in *Capital*, Marx chose to conceal his method. How is this to be explained?

If one pursues this question, a certain period of Marx's theoretical development obtains an importance which until now was not recognised. This is the period in which Marx prepared his dissertation on 'The Difference between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature'. Although it is often stressed that Marx was, at this point, completely under the influence of Bruno Bauer (that this is the case, and to what extent this influence continued in further works, is convincingly shown by Zvi Rosen),⁴ it would be wrong on these grounds to accord this earlier work little importance and autonomy, as McLellan does, for example. The important point is to perceive how Marx struggled with himself in attempting to define his own position.

In this context, the extensive preparatory works are of interest. Marx accompanied his excerpts from various ancient philosophers with comments and explanations designed to help him clarify their thoughts and he allows himself in this undertaking complete freedom from self-censorship. It is worthwhile looking more closely at these comments, because their spontaneity gives us a deeper revelation of the development of Marx's theory.

Marx's commentaries call for an 'interpretation on two levels'. On the one hand Marx attempts, following the theory of self-consciousness of Bruno Bauer, to reinterpret the history of Greek philosophy. On the other hand, in no other text does Marx refer so clearly to himself by speaking of other philosophers. His comments are aimed at the same time at these philosophers and at

himself. This takes place without his knowledge (or does he recognise this duality to a certain extent?). At certain points in the text, the reader has the feeling that Marx has noted this duality and is conscious of walking a tightrope. At the next moment he represses this thought. It almost seems as though he retreats in fear of getting too close to himself. The theory which he produces is, in its central elements of construction, a form of resistance (*Abwehr*) and the idea of the point of culmination which is created in this theoretical context is a part of this resistance. The dialectic – to summarise in advance – is a theoretical attempt to perceive and at the same time to repress the revelation of the real nature of the human subject, in this case the philosopher. This attempt is to a certain extent the ultimate effort of the theorist to give himself the illusion of autonomy.

Marx's view of sophos in his preparatory work is important in this context. In all probability, Bauer's critique of the gospel according to St John led Marx to a similar conception. Since Marx was under Bruno Bauer's influence the transfer of the structure of argumentation of Bauer's critique of religion to the critique of philosophy can be assumed. In his 'Kritik der evangelischen Geschichte der Synoptiker', which had appeared shortly before, Bauer attempted to interpret all supernatural phenomena in a radically human and psychological manner, and to explain the writings of the evangelist John as the expression of the wishes of the Christian community. Since both Marx and Bauer share the theory of self-consciousness, this connection between the community and the evangelist as its mode of expression points in the same direction as the 'realisation of philosophy'. Seen in the context of this specific relationship between evangelist and community, the 'revocable theory' (*Theorie auf Widerruf*) is already implied: theory which disappears with the disappearance of the conditions of its existence. The religious community dissolves with the coming of a generalisation of self-consciousness – and with it, the need for a theorising religious thinker or critic.

It is this view of theory and practice which is the basis of Marx's conception of sophos. Marx insists on the importance of seeing the thinker himself in his practice and to concentrate on his subjectivity, a view which in previous philosophy and history of philosophy was not taken into account. 'But it is precisely the subjective form, the spiritual carrier of the philosophical systems, which has until now been almost entirely ignored in favour of their metaphysical characteristics.'⁵ Here one should be attentive of the 'double structure' of the text. When Marx points out the importance of the subjectivity of other philosophers, he is at the same time pointing to himself: his perception of other philosophers applies also to himself. In this context, he shows a certain amount of self-confidence. There have been very few real philosophers, thinkers who may claim to be 'sophoi', for not everyone who does philosophy is a 'sophos'. The real philosopher is characterised by a unique difference,

the difference between the phenomenological and the essential, the exoteric and the esoteric consciousness. His reproach against the superficial critique of the other 'Young Hegelians' is exemplary of this point of view:

Also in relation to Hegel, it is mere ignorance on the part of his pupils, when they explain one or the other determination of his system by his desire for accommodation and the like, hence, in one word, explain it in terms of morality ... It is quite thinkable for a philosopher to fall into one or another apparent inconsistency through some sort of accommodation; he himself may be conscious of it. But what he is not conscious of, is the possibility that this apparent accommodation has its deeper roots in an inadequacy or in an inadequate formulation of his principle itself. Suppose therefore that a philosopher has really accommodated himself, then his pupils must explain from his inner essential consciousness that which for him himself had the form of an exoteric consciousness.⁶

It is, so to say, the first critique of the philosophy of consciousness; the critique must take the philosopher seriously and at the same time may not trust him, since the philosopher himself does not really know who he is. In his differentiation between essential and phenomenological consciousness Marx has already the psychological subject in mind, and he confirms this indirectly, for he specifically mentions the intruding psychological aspect only to denounce it as 'hair-splitting':

Philosophical historiography is not concerned either with comprehending the personality, be it even the spiritual personality of the philosopher as, in a manner of speaking, the focus and the image of his system, or still less with indulging in psychological hair-splitting and point-scoring. Its concern is to distinguish in each system the determinations themselves, the actual crystallisations pervading the whole system, from the proofs, the justifications in argument, the self-presentation of the philosopher as they know themselves; to distinguish the silent, persevering mole of real philosophical knowledge from the voluble, exoteric, variously behaving phenomenological consciousness of the subject which is the vessel and motive force of those elaborations. It is in the division of this consciousness into aspects mutually giving each other the lie that precisely its unity is proved.⁷

Marx is able to advance far and without danger onto psychological terrain – images such as the 'silent, persevering mole' are clear indications of 'inneres Ausland' (Sigmund Freud!), or the practice of rationalisation which is indicated in the formulation of the 'reciprocal lie' in the unity of the divided consciousness.

He is able to do this only because these thoughts are already immunised in the construction of the philosophy of history (the Hegelian would say 'negated'). For Marx it is certain that this division of consciousness expresses at the same time the unity in difference between the 'real will' of the philosopher and the 'objective must' of the historical process. This conviction is shown in an exemplary manner in his interpretation of Plato:

In Plato this abstract determination of the good, of the purpose [of Socratic philosophy], develops into a comprehensive, world-embracing philosophy. The purpose, as the determination in itself, the real will of the philosopher, is thinking, the real determination of this good are the immanent thoughts. The real will of the philosopher, the ideality active in him, is the real 'must' of the real world.⁸

It would lead us too far afield to trace Marx's argumentation in detail. In any case, at the end of this process appears the absolute transparency. The difference between the exoteric and the esoteric consciousness no longer exists, and neither does the philosopher himself. As the world in the process of self-enlightenment finally achieved self-consciousness, that is, became philosophical, philosophy itself became worldly and thus disappeared as a separate production of theory. Marx claims to possess, at the end of this process, the surpassing consciousness, which allows him to understand retrospectively the complete philosophy of the western world as internally torn, as a split consciousness which is in a gradual process of alternating constellations of essential and phenomenological knowledge culminates in absolutely transparent knowledge, which is no longer characterised by this difference. The strength of Marx's self-assessment can be seen in a passage from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. 'We must see it as real progress that we have developed a surpassing consciousness of the limitation as well as the goal of the historical movement.'

Marx's theoretical treatment of the sophos in his preparatory work on the dissertation could be interpreted as the first articulation of the later concept of ideology. One would be following the path which he himself indicated: but it would be the path of the exoteric Marx. In adapting the differentiation of the essential and the phenomenological consciousness, Marx opens a new theoretical world: the consciousness of 'truth' of the free, autonomous, enlightened subject. The closer he comes to this truth, the more he represses it. In opening himself to the 'subjective form, the spiritual carrier of the philosophical systems, which has until now been almost entirely ignored in favour of their metaphysical characteristics',⁹ with the introduction of the difference of the essential and the phenomenological consciousness, Marx

also speaks of himself – but it is a difference that he no longer accepts for himself. For, if he accepted it for himself, then he would argue psychologically; but here he argues only in an implicitly psychological manner: psychological expressions are not acknowledged and accepted as psychological, but presented directly as philosophy of history. In other words, as his own exoteric consciousness of his insight into the difference between esoteric and exoteric knowledge. Thus, the point of culmination of absolute knowledge is no more and no less than the simultaneous confirmation and denial of the perceived difference in knowledge itself.

It is surprising how openly Marx reveals his interior world without developing a trace of suspicion that it is in no case the 'Weltgeist' which he is activating. It is an expression of an extensively substantial subjectivity which has no thought of inner heteronomy, that this often only slightly disguised presentation of unconscious remains almost unnoticed. In the foreword of the Dissertation it is apparent how much Marx's own self-consciousness plays a role in his young-Hegelian 'theory of self-consciousness'. Whatever conscious decisions were decisive in the choice of this theme, Marx's self-consciousness is in any case not to be surpassed: the tone of his words indicates the claim to absolute knowledge. His disgust with the other Young Hegelians, whom he very unflatteringly refers to as the 'hair-, nail-, toe-, excrement-philosophers' and as 'slugs',¹⁰ has another side, the idealisation of the great thinkers. Only they are more or less satisfactory and he sees himself as their obvious successor. Only he who compares himself to the great is himself great. But how can one justify the self-comparison with the greatness of Aristotle and Hegel without oneself having created a comparable system? How is it possible to express something as important as Hegel did, and at the same time to surpass him? In the foreword of the dissertation Marx announces: 'I believe that I have solved in it a heretofore unsolved problem in the history of Greek philosophy'.¹¹ What has been said before him can be forgotten: 'The experts know that no preliminary studies that are even of the slightest use exist for the subject of this treatise. What Cicero and Plutarch have babbled has been babbled after them up to present day.'¹² The only one who has applied himself competently to it is Hegel, but even he has missed the point. Marx attests generously that Hegel 'has on the whole correctly defined the general aspects of the above-mentioned systems', but the great and bold plan of his history of philosophy, and the speculative approach prevented him from recognising the great importance which the system of Epicurus and the stoic and sceptic philosophy had for the history of philosophy and the Greek mind in general. According to Marx, 'these systems are the key to the true history of the Greek philosophy'.¹³ Only when one has grasped their real meaning can one write the real history of philosophy, which in any case begins with

Hegel. In other words, Hegel has not grasped his own principle, and in indicating this, Marx not only places himself in the gallery of the great thinkers, he gives himself the preeminent position. His mouthpiece is Prometheus, whose confession: 'In simple words, I hate the pack of gods' is at the same time the confession of philosophy itself, 'its own aphorism against all heavenly and earthly gods who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity. It will have none other beside'.¹⁴ Similarly, Marx cannot allow another beside himself.

Marx disguises his critical discussion of Hegel as a scientific treatise on the difference between the Democritean and Epicurean philosophy of nature. To this end he constructs two world epochs, the course of which he parallels. The *apparent* high point in the Greek world was the philosophy of Aristotle, in the modern world that of Hegel. If he is able to succeed in proving the justification of the Epicurean philosophy as even more highly developed than the Aristotelian, this will secure his victory over the philosophy of Hegel. The question is: how is philosophy in Greece after Aristotle, the 'Greek philosophy's Alexander of Macedon'¹⁵ still possible? How are Epicureans, Stoics and Sceptics who 'are regarded as an almost improper addition bearing no relation to its powerful premises'¹⁶ to be seen not only as a form of adequate continuation of Greek philosophy but even as the key to the interpretation of the history of Greek philosophy, which permits one to show the greatness of Aristotle and at the same time to indicate his limited importance – a highly subtle form of devaluation in a psychological sense.

The proposed method for this form of the treatment of the history of philosophy, not to 'cast suspicion upon the particular conscience of the philosopher', shows also its psychological aspect. Since Marx claims that this method no longer applies to him, he represses his own pronouncement: he apologises for this attack because no one should be held to account for his unconscious. Hegel's dialectic of 'objectivation' (*Vergegenständlichung*) is turned by Marx against Hegel himself, an extremely subtle method of attacking the opponent without wounding him.

An important part of Marx's conception is not only the decoding of the theoretical systems of the Greek thinkers but also the explanation of their practice of life, which also must be seen as an important expression of the gradual process of enlightenment. The 'difference in the *theoretical judgements* of Democritus and Epicurus concerning the certainty of science and the truth of its objects *manifests* itself in the *disparate scientific energy* and practice of these men'.¹⁷ But what kind of practice is it that Marx describes here? One would expect that this practice – according to Marx's conception of history of philosophy – would be developed as proceeding from the interior tension between the philosopher and the spirit of the people. What Marx actually does

is nothing more than a psychological characterisation. And he makes no secret of his sympathies: they belong only to Epicurus. Democritus, on the other hand, a man full of compulsive restlessness, is only briefly described as a devouring monster which absorbs anything within reach.

Dissatisfied with philosophy, he throws himself into the arms of positive knowledge. We have already seen that Cicero calls him a *vir eruditus*. He is versed in physics, ethics, mathematics, in the encyclopaedic disciplines, in every art. The catalogue alone of his books given in Diogenes Laertius bears witness to his erudition.¹⁸

This mental voraciousness is matched by his compulsion to travel.

But since it is the characteristic trait of erudition to expand on breadth and to collect and to search on the outside, we see Democritus *wandering through half the world* in order to acquire experience, knowledge and observations. 'I have among my contemporaries,' he prides himself, 'wandered through the largest part of the earth, investigating the remotest things. I have seen most climates and lands, and I have heard most learned men, and in linear composition with demonstration no one surpassed me ...'¹⁹

An acute psychological commentary from Marx follows: 'On the one hand it is the *lust for knowledge* that leaves him no rest; but it is at the same time *dissatisfaction with the true*, i.e., *philosophical knowledge* that drives him abroad. The knowledge which he considers true is without content, the knowledge that gives him content is without truth'.²⁰ Marx's brilliant formulations would be unimaginable had he not unconsciously recognised the contradictions of Democritus. Marx points out the 'contradictory elements in his being' which is described in the 'anecdote of the ancients': 'Democritus is supposed to have blinded himself so that the sensuous light of the eye would not darken the sharpness of intellect. This is the same man who, according to Cicero, wandered through half the world. But he did not find what he was looking for.'²¹ Marx finds unerringly the suitable quotations which reveal what he at the same time must hide: the specific sharpness of intellect which continually seeks, and in seeking disguises that which is being sought, is born from fear of sensuality. The blinding is constantly confirmed, and in spite of this and at the same time, the constant effort made to see that which should not be seen. Sensuality arises as such in the process of repulsion – spirit and sensuality are constituted, as theoretical opposites, in the same process.

A letter to his daughter, Laura, shows that Marx in his old age recognises with resignation the traits of character which he attributes to Democritus as

his own. 'You must surely imagine, my dear child, that I love books since I bother you with this at such an unsuitable time. But you would be wrong. I am a machine condemned to devour them and then to dispose of them in a changed form on the manure heap of history. Just another barren obligation ...'.²² In this self-appraisal Marx repeats only what he – with much more emphasis – documented much earlier in the famous letter to his father, written approximately three years before finishing his dissertation, in which he described the progress of his studies. Dissatisfied with his excursions in the art of poetry, he turns to science: 'I had to study law and above all felt the urge to wrestle with philosophy'.²³ But this struggle leads to the self-critical statement: 'The whole thing is replete with tripartite divisions, it is written with tedious prolixity, and the Roman concepts are misused in the most barbaric way in order to force them into my system'.²⁴ His first system is too compulsive for him, it reminds him of the 'unscientific form of mathematical dogmatism ... in which the author argues hither and thither, going round and round the subject dealt with ...'.²⁵ A new attempt follows, for 'again it became clear to me that there could be no headway without philosophy. So with a good conscience I was able once more to throw myself into her embrace, and I drafted a new system of metaphysical principles'.²⁶ The inferior subjectivism must disappear: he seeks a system which seamlessly adjusts itself to the inner logic of its object.

On the other hand, in the concrete expression of a living world of ideas, as exemplified by law, the state, nature, and philosophy as a whole, the object itself must be studied in its development; arbitrary divisions must not be introduced, the rational character of the object itself must be developed as something imbued with contradictions in itself and which find its unity in itself.²⁷

He demands a great deal from this system. He seeks a construction which negates the abstract opposition of subjectivity and the totality of the world and brings the whole contradictory movement to repose and unity. But the new metaphysical system does not bring the repose for which he hoped, at the conclusion of it I was once more compelled to recognise that it was wrong, like all my previous efforts'.²⁸ Insatiably, he devours almost everything he can get his hands on.

In the course of this work I adopted the habit of making extracts from all the books I read, for instance from Lessing's *Laokoon*, Solger's *Erwin*, Winckelmann's history of art, Luden's German history, and incidentally scribbled down my reflections. At the same time I translated Tacitus'

Germania, and Ovid's *Tristia*, and began to learn English and Italian by myself, i.e., out of grammars ... I also read Klein's criminal law and his annals, and all the most recent literature, but this last only by the way.²⁹

But all his efforts led to nothing. He 'spent many a sleepless night, fought many a battle, and endured much internal and external excitement',³⁰ but at the end of the semester he was forced to admit that his voracious reading had 'not much enriched'³¹ him. Once again he turns to art, writes bad plays, then he collapses and, following the advice of a doctor spends time in the country. But his inner peace does not last long. He turns again to philosophy, this time to that of Hegel of which 'the grotesque craggy melody'³² does not please him. Again he drafts his own projects. In a new attempt he wrote 'a dialogue of about 24 pages. "Cleanthes, or the Starting Point and Necessary Continuation of Philosophy"'.³³ He constructs a comprehensive philosophical system which brings together sensuality and spirit, art and science. 'Here art and science, which had become completely divorced from each other, were to some extent united, and like a vigorous traveller I set about the task itself, a philosophical-dialectical account of divinity, as it manifests itself as the ideal-in-itself, as religion, as nature, and as history.'³⁴ But again his efforts fail and Marx is forced to admit angrily that someone has done all this before him and even better:

My last proposition was the beginning of the Hegelian system. And this work ... which had caused me to rack my brains endlessly, and which is so ... written (since it was actually intended to be a new logic) that now even I myself can hardly recapture my thinking about it ... like a false siren delivers me into the arms of the enemy.³⁵

All his attempts to calm his continuous restlessness and to find a term for everything threatening and to force it into a system have led to nothing. Hegel triumphs.

While I was ill I got to know Hegel from beginning to end, together with most of his disciples ... I came across a Doctors' Club ... and in controversy here, many conflicting views were expressed, and I became ever more firmly bound to the modern world philosophy from which I had thought to escape, but all rich chords were silenced.³⁶

But must the total theory really have the last word? There was another path – theory itself as deficiency. If it is not possible to achieve inner peace with the help of the total system, then perhaps it can be achieved by throwing overboard thinking itself. As Marx says in his dissertation on the thinkers

Democritus and Epicurus: 'It hardly seems still possible to presume that these men, who contradict each other on all points, will adhere to one and the same doctrine. And yet they seem to be chained to each other'.³⁷ What are these bonds which Marx perceives? Could they possibly be the two souls in his own breast, which he attributes to the two thinkers? Not only does Marx describe himself in Democritus (whom he rejects), he also describes Epicurus as a man who has found that which is sought by the other (and is the man Marx would like to be). 'Epicurus is *satisfied* and *blissful in philosophy*'.³⁸ Epicurus has achieved the reconciliation with sensuality which at the same time is desired and rejected by Democritus and Marx. Epicurus is able to open himself to sensuality, he is able to look about him: '*The wise man*, he says, takes a *dogmatic, not a sceptical* position'.³⁹ It is an advantage that he knows with conviction. 'All senses are heralds of the true ... *nor is there anything which can refute sensations* ... because the concept depends upon the sensuous perceptions'.⁴⁰ Marx stresses that, in contrast to Democritus, who turns the sensuous world into subjective semblance, Epicurus turns it into objective appearance without being bothered by the contradictions in which he involves himself – as Marx notes with envious amazement. Epicurus has a totally different conception of philosophy. In Marx's presentation he becomes an idealised figure, a complete contrast to Democritus. Marx quotes: 'You must ... serve philosophy so that true freedom will be your lot. He who has subordinated and surrendered himself to it does not need to wait, he is emancipated at once. For to serve philosophy is freedom itself'.⁴¹ Marx repeats contemporary reports in which Epicurus is described as having '*nothing but contempt for the positive sciences*, since in his opinion they contribute nothing to true perfection. He is even called an *enemy of science*, a scorner of grammar. He is even accused of ignorance ...'.⁴² And all these terrible faults claim to be an expression of freedom and autonomy!

But while Democritus seeks to learn from Egyptian priests, Persian Chaldeans and Indian gymnosophists, Epicurus prides himself on not having had a teacher, on being self-taught. There are some people, he says, according to Seneca, who struggle for the truth without any assistance. Among these people he has himself traced out his path. And it is they, the self-taught, whom he praises most. The others, according to him, are second-rate minds.⁴³

It would seem that behind Marx's scorn for the other Left Hegelians, the eternal students who are not able to disengage themselves from the authority of Hegel, is hidden his own self-hatred. Positive science, despised by Epicurus, becomes in contrast to philosophy a symbol of the eternal pupil-teacher rela-

tionship; the unreachable infinity of positive science is an expression of the reliance on someone who might always know more than oneself, and at the same time of the endeavour to surpass him. What Marx unconsciously seeks is expressed in his admiration of Epicurus, who draws only from himself, never recognises another authority and never suffers from the anxious restlessness which would chase him through the world of science. 'While Democritus is driven into all parts of the world, Epicurus leaves his garden in Athens scarcely two or three times and travels to Ionia, not to engage in studies, but to visit friends'.⁴⁴

It is characteristic that hardly a word on Democritus appears in Marx's preparatory studies for his dissertation. Marx concentrates only on Epicurus. As already indicated, Marx wants to show that the Epicurean philosophy is not only a further development of Greek philosophy, it is its absolute culmination. But because of Marx's conception of the history of philosophy, this fact can be recognised only indirectly. What applies to the other sophoi applies also to the Epicurean philosophy: the difference between essential and phenomenological knowledge. Epicurus himself is not entirely conscious of what he really expresses, he also cannot avoid the objectification [*Vergegenständlichung*] of his knowledge. 'Vergegenständlichen', a term adopted from Hegel, receives in Marx's dissertation a psychological shift of meaning, which has its roots in the division of esoteric and exoteric consciousness. Objectification [*Vergegenständlichung* or *Objektivierung*] always means 'inverse presentation', in the sense that in the presentation of a thought its truth is revealed and concealed at the same time. This explains for Marx, why, among the many commentators on the new conception of declination in the Epicurean physics, only one was able to grasp its revolutionary novelty. Other than Lucretius, who is 'the only one in general of all the ancients who has understood Epicurean physics',⁴⁵ no other philosophy finds pardon in Marx's court of law. He charges them all with lack of understanding in the interpretation of Epicurus' conception of atomic movement – the declination. How does Marx interpret this deviation from the straight line?

According to Marx, Epicurus differentiates between matter and form-determination in the concept of the atom. The form-determination, the conception of individuality is, in contrast to Democritus, what is new. Marx attempts to show this in an immanent critique of the position of Aristotle. He uses to this end an objection made by Aristotle against the Pythagoreans: 'You say that the motion of the line is the surface, that of the point the line; then the motions of the monads will also be lines'.⁴⁶ The consequence is that atoms are in permanent motion, that neither monads nor atoms exist 'but rather disappear in the straight line; for the solidity of the atom does not even enter into the picture, insofar as it is only considered as something falling in a straight

line'.⁴⁷ Marx commented on this theory: 'To begin with, if the void is imagined as spatial void, then the atom is the immediate negation of abstract space, hence the point. The solidity, the intensity, which maintains itself in itself against the incohesion of space, can only be added by virtue of a principle which negates space in its entire domain ...'.⁴⁸ The refusal to agree with this would mean for Marx that the atom, 'insofar as its motion is a straight line, is determined only by space and is prescribed a relative being and a purely material existence'.⁴⁹ But this contradicts the conception of the atom, as negation of all relativity, of all relation to another mode of being.

Marx stresses that Epicurus differentiates between matter and form-determination in the concept of the atom but only in 'the domain of immediate being'.⁵⁰ Thus even Epicurus deals with conceptual contents [*Vorstellungsinhalten*]: the contrasting determinations which are part of the conception of the atom are objectified by him and are presented as contradictory movements. He finds that like the heavenly bodies, the atoms 'are purely self-sufficient bodies or rather bodies conceived in absolute self-sufficiency'.⁵¹ If their movement is seen as a falling movement in a straight line or oblique line, one has grasped only one moment, that of matter. In contrast, pure form-determination, individuality as negation of all relativity, of all relation to other forms of being, meaning self-sufficiency, is presented as declination. Thus he has 'given reality to its form-determination in the declination from the straight line'.⁵²

In this Epicurus exposes himself to criticism. But his critics are not able to see that this declination is not an accidental whim of Epicurus, it is a determination which 'goes through the whole Epicurean philosophy'.⁵³ Abstract individuality, the pure being-for-itself exists only by permanently abstracting from the being that confronts it. This process is the structural principle of all Epicurean philosophy, 'in such way, however, that, as goes without saying, the determination of its appearance depends on the domain in which it is applied'.⁵⁴

Thus, while the atom frees itself from its relative existence, the straight line, by abstracting from it, by swerving away from it; so the entire Epicurean philosophy swerves away from the restrictive mode of being wherever the concept of abstract individuality, self-sufficiency and negation of all relation to other things must be represented in its existence.⁵⁵

What is behind this 'deviation', this structural principle in the Epicurean philosophy which is generalised and found again in every possible form? It is not an abstract-theoretical method which is applied here, it is a psychological process: 'The purpose of action is to be found therefore in abstracting,

swerving away from pain and confusion, in ataraxy. Hence the good is the flight from evil, pleasure the swerving from suffering'.⁵⁶ What is described in superficial history of philosophy as a permanent pursuit of pleasure is exactly the opposite: the permanent avoidance of threatening pain. But Marx does not dwell on this point. What importance the Epicurean ataraxy had for Marx is hardly perceptible in the dissertation. In the preparatory works, however, he gathers a great many passages which refer to the connection between ataraxy, death and immortality. Marx feels that the Epicurean theory of the atom has a subterranean connection with the effort, compulsively repeated and doomed to failure, to escape death in life. Marx recognises that the unconscious goal of theory is immortality, but at the same time he is frightened by his own insight. The difference between essential and the phenomenological consciousness seems to disappear momentarily – he is grasping at truth. In this context Marx defines more precisely the concept of the *sophos*. It is no longer just the duality of the esoteric and the exoteric, it is the momentary crossing of the border between them, which can be achieved only partially and only with intense inner conflict and convulsions. In his apparently endless repetition of the same subject, Marx reproduces the suggestive magic of the Epicurean formulas, which in a certain sense intend to hold on to the fleeting moment in which the unconscious shows its truth.

Accustom thyself to belief that death is nothing to us, for all that is good or bad is based on sentience, and death is the loss of sentience. Therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes transient life worth living, not by adding indefinite time to life, but by putting an end to the yearning after immortality. For life has no terrors for him who has thoroughly apprehended that ceasing to live has no terrors.⁵⁷

Only he who can accept death is free in life. If we do not read the passages chosen by Marx as the exhausting attempt to fix the moment of crossing from unconscious to consciousness, they could appear to be a tautological-philosophical commonplace:

For that which causes no annoyance when it is present causes only imaginary suffering when it is expected. Death, which is indeed the most terrifying of all evils, is nothing to us since, as long as we are, death is not come, and as soon as death is come, we are no more. It is nothing then, either to the living or to the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no longer.⁵⁸

Marx emphasised with three lines in the margin the following statement by Epicurus:

An error-free consideration of these things can lead – to health of body and ataraxy of soul, for these are the aim of a blessed life. For the end of all our actions is to be free from pain and not to live in confusion. And when once we have attained this, every tempest of the soul is laid, for man no longer needs to seek for something which he still lacks or for anything else through which the welfare of the soul and the body will be complete.⁵⁹

Epicurean hedonism is resumed in the sentence: 'For we need pleasure when the lack of pleasure causes us pain, but when we feel no pain, we no longer need pleasure'.⁶⁰

The large number of the chosen passages which deal with fear, anxiety, pain, death and confusion of the soul, and all the efforts to avoid these evils, are characteristic of Marx. The continuous search for pleasure is the reverse side of the threatening pain, the fear of death. It is the veiled form of the eternal flight – the 'declination'. One of the strategies of avoidance in this pretended search for pleasure lies in the mental activity which in the permanent posing of these questions tries to escape from the threat. 'The peak of thought (as far as joy is concerned) is *fathoming* precisely those questions (and those related to them) which most alarm the mind.'⁶¹ – again emphasised by Marx with three marginal lines. But who is to say where these questions end, which questions are related, and which are not related, and if the discussion of the related questions does not create still more related questions? The 'declination' expands and spreads itself over all and sundry, and in this process, thinking becomes an existing contradiction: the various subjects are only the material for the unreachable infinity of continuous thinking itself. The never-ending fathoming of these questions holds the threat of death at bay. The desire for immortality is the code which, in ostensibly averting the conflict, only confirms it. What protects one better from death than one's own immortality – to be like the gods? '... you will never be disturbed, but will live as a god among men. For a man who lives in the midst of intransient blessings is not like a mortal being'.⁶² Can the human mind achieve this? The answer seems to be clear: '... but the mind, which has made clear to itself the aim and the limits of the flesh and has extinguished desires concerning eternity, has made a complete life possible for us and we no longer need infinite time'.⁶³ The expression 'extinguished' betrays him, allowing doubts if the mind has really been able to overcome these desires, or if the mind as such is the continuous attempt to overcome. Marx is on the trail of this contradiction and evades it at the same time. In his own evasion he repeats the Epicurean declination and

at the same time, as sophos, expresses its truth. This evasion is also objectified. His idealisation of Epicurus, who has at last found calm, is in obvious contrast to his theoretical diagnosis. And there is still another division: the practical life of the sophos is the overcoming of the fear of death, which has recognised the conflict and negated it. In the theory itself this is expressed only in its inner dialectic. Lucretius, who for him is the only one of the 'ancients' who understood the philosophy of Epicurus, gives him a helping hand. He makes clear to him the dialectic which characterises this philosophy: that fear of death does not permit us to live, that the philosophy, in the attempt to flee death is nothing other than the presentation of death itself. 'One who no longer is cannot suffer, or differ in any way from one who has never been born, *when once this mortal life has been usurped by death the immortal*'.⁶⁴ Marx comments on this with the farsighted remark: '*It can be said that in the Epicurean philosophy it is death that is immortal*. The atom, the void, accident, arbitrariness and composition are in themselves death'.⁶⁵ The philosophical constructions which develop around the conception of the atom all point in one direction. Not only is 'declination' the structuring process in the theory itself, but thinking, which consists of concepts and categories, and which develops theory into a system, is 'declination'. The 'theoretical calm' which Aristotle calls 'one of the chief characteristics of the Greek gods',⁶⁶ is at once desire and truth of theory. The desire for immortality, the wish to be like the gods, confuses the calming through theory with calm itself. Theory is in itself the expression of the never-ending attempt to escape from the threat. But real calm would become possible only through negation of theory, with its disappearance. However, this negation is dependant on the practical negation of the basic conflict.

Marx recognises the source of his own theory-production and at the same time represses this knowledge. He opens access to the psychological subject by differentiating between essential and phenomenological knowledge. But in refusing to apply this differentiation to himself, he represses this insight. This repression takes the form of phenomenological knowledge and presents itself as philosophy of history. Its central formula is: 'The result is that as the world becomes philosophical, philosophy also becomes wordly, that its realisation is also its loss, that what it struggles against on the outside is its own inner deficiency ...'.⁶⁷

In his Dissertation Marx set a course that created a kind of prestructuring system which serves as the basis of his further thinking. As already indicated, it is unimportant if his theoretical reflections on history are labelled idealistic or materialistic: what is important is the interior construction which he maintains consistently in all versions. One could show how the critique of Epicurus's atomic theory (which is too extensive to be discussed here), the

discussion of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and finally the *German Ideology*, where the first concluding formulations of the materialist theory of history appears, always contain the same interior construction. Marx sees himself as a thinker at the point of culmination of the history of the world, who at the same time is looking forward and backward. In looking at the new society, past history seems to him an 'inverted world' [*verkehrte Welt*], in whatever form he expresses it. For instance, in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*: 'But we must regard it as a real advance to have at the outset gained a consciousness of the limited character as well as of the goal of this historical movement'.⁶⁸ In this anticipated point of culmination of world history, Marx identifies himself with the consciousness of a 'super subject', whether humanity [*Gattungswesen*] or the working class; in any case a 'super individual' [*Überindividuellen*] who as carrier of a completely transparent knowledge, not only possesses absolute knowledge but also exists as a 'universal' [*Allgemeines*] which is free from the limitations of the individual. Marx seems to find the sought after security in his identification with the universal, the eternal and the immortal.

From the perspective of the point of culmination – absolute knowledge – he presents changing versions of the entanglement of essential and phenomenological knowledge which finally, at the 'end of history', become transparent as a series of steps in this entanglement. Democracy takes the place of essential knowledge in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, and all previously existing forms of state are democracies in 'inverted form' [*verkehrter Form*], false forms of existence of the essence:

Democracy is the truth of monarchy, monarchy is the truth of democracy. Monarchy is necessarily democracy inconsistent with itself – Monarchy cannot be understood in its own terms, democracy can ... Democracy is the genus constitution ... (she) is the solved *riddle* of all constitutions. Here, not merely *implicitly* and in essence, but *existing* in reality, the constitution is constantly brought back to its actual basis, the *actual human beings*, the *actual people*, and established as the people's *own work*.⁶⁹

The same may be said of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. In this case it is the '*Gattungswesen*' and its productive forces, which existed until now in an inverted, alienated form from which it must free itself. This construction is presented in the *German Ideology* as the 'dialectics between productive forces and relations of production', productive forces as the social forces of humankind (*Gattung*), which are continuously in contradiction to the limited forms of social relations (*Verkehrsform*) in which they exist. Here again the essence in an inverted existence from which it must be freed.

It is always implied here that through practical action the 'inverted world' can be changed and abolished – in order that theory in itself can also disappear. Here again the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* may be mentioned where this is clearly and directly expressed:

The *material*, immediately *perceptible* private property is the material perceptible expression of *estranged human* life. Its movement – production and consumption – is the *perceptible* revelation of the movement of all production until now, i.e., the realisation of the reality of man. Religion, family, state, law, morality, science, art, etc., are only *particular* modes of production, and fall under its general law. The positive transcendence of *private property* ... is therefore the positive transcendence of all estrangement ... Religious estrangement [like the other above mentioned forms of estrangement: as such occurs only in the realm of *consciousness*, of man's inner life, but economic estrangement is that of *real life*; its transcendence therefore embraces both aspects].⁷⁰

With the disappearance of the inverted economic basis also disappear all forms of inverted consciousness.

The distinction between the materialist and the idealist Marx of the very early writings has no great importance in view of the fact that it is always the same construction, established from the beginning. The same construction serves as the organising skeleton, only dressed in various costumes. Of much greater importance however is the problem of the historical stages. The various attempts by historians of the former GDR to demonstrate Marx's conception of historical stages and to prove the 'dialectical relations between the productive forces and the relations of production' in an empirical way were not successful. Although a careful reading of the *German Ideology* would have shown that Marx himself stated that this contradiction exists uniquely in capitalist society.

... The contradiction between the instrument of production and private property is only the product of large scale industry, which, moreover, must be highly developed to produce this contradiction. Thus only with large scale industry does the abolition of private property become possible.⁷¹

At the same time he repeats later in the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* of 1859⁷² (which was the 'holy scripture' of dogmatic Marxism) the construction of a successive process of history, of which the last transition finishes the 'prehistory of man'. Why the repetition of this construction, and with it the repetition of the idea that there is a necessity in history, which implies that a higher step necessarily proceeds from a lower step? The conception of

historical stages as 'necessary transitions' is obviously a kind of unconscious self-insurance: Marx can be sure of the transition to the ultimate closing form only when the 'prehistory of man' has until now always developed in the same way as the alleged final transition to socialism. The repression of his insight in the entanglement of the esoteric and exoteric consciousness takes here also the form of an objectified exoteric consciousness, and he establishes and reveals the necessity of this repression by objectifying the repression itself as an historical process.

II

What are the ramifications of all this for the dialectic in the critique of political economy? Earlier we referred to Gerhard Göhlers analysis of 'Marx's Reduction of the Dialectic'. In the light of the argument developed above, the French structuralist interpretation of Marx looks quite plausible. This interpretation draws a distinction between science and philosophy, in which philosophy is identified with dialectics. The more Marx frees himself from philosophy, the more scientific he is deemed to be. As is well known however, even Althusser was forced to admit that this distinction is not quite as clear cut as he first thought. Jacques Bidet⁷³ has shown in minute detail, with reference to Althusser that the intertwinement of science and philosophy persists right into the final draft versions of the critique of political economy: 'at some stage he became tired and old', and gave up the attempt to put down on paper an entirely new scientific version of *Capital*, purged of dialectics. However, Bidet's attempt to keep the French structuralists at bay, does not raise the vital question of whether or not the object of Marx's critique itself requires a dialectical conceptualisation and thus demands a specific form of the presentation of the theory.

A little working knowledge of the mode of exposition in the *Rohentwurf* and in the critique of political economy which Marx eventually implemented in *Capital* reveals a discrepancy which has not yet adequately been dealt with by the literature on Marx's method. It concerns the systematic structure of Marx's presentation of the function of money. It is clear that the train of thought in the *Rohentwurf* contains a definite principle of exposition. This principle could be called the theoretical comprehension of the increasing autonomisation [*Verselbständigung*] of exchange value. In *Capital* only the bare bones remain, and the exposition seems to lack any meaningful systematic structure, unless, that is, one has prior knowledge of the ideas which Marx expounds in the *Rohentwurf*. This discrepancy is a fact which corresponds with Marx's explicit methodological remarks, which I began by quoting, and which the secondary literature on Marx's method of exposition has never deemed worthy of comment. On 9 December 1861 Marx wrote to Engels:

My work proceeds, slowly however. In actual fact I found it impossible, given the circumstances, to bring such theoretical matters to a hasty conclusion. In the meantime my work has become more accessible, and the method has been better concealed than in part I.

We must therefore examine even earlier texts, namely the *Rohentwurf* and the *Urtext*, if we want to find out about this method.

We shall do this here with a view to uncovering the method prior to its being 'concealed'. In addition, relevant remarks can be found in the brief conspectus, which he characterises in a letter to Engels as a 'short outline of the first part', published as the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* which appeared in 1859. There Marx defines value as an 'abstraction', 'reduced purely to quantities of labour', and he also stresses the following remark:

All objections to this definition of value are either evinced from less developed relations of production, or they rest on a confusion. The confusion consists in taking the more concrete economic determinations, from which, on the one hand, value is abstracted, and which, on the other, can be seen as further developments of value, and asserting these against value in its abstract and undeveloped form.⁷⁴

These remarks are important. Marx speaks of 'simple, undeveloped value' in contrast to its 'further developments', that is, its 'later more concrete forms'. In fact, in this letter he even goes as far as to term one form – the movement of the value of capital as stock-market capital – as 'the most complete form (turning into communism)'. This remark is of crucial importance to the method of exposition. (We should note at this point that in *Capital* this kind of formulation is nowhere to be found. Instead Marx speaks of 'de-ranged forms' or 'meaningless forms' when, in Volume III, he comes to expound the 'concrete forms'. If we search through the characterisations of his method from this period, we find expressions such as 'development of the form of exchange-value', 'genetic development of the determinacies of form', formulations which reflect the process of a real 'autonomisation of exchange-value' and which simultaneously make the method out to be a kind of pencilling-in, or a retrospective construction of the process of this autonomisation.

In this context Marx's résumé in the *Rohentwurf* at the end of the deduction of simple circulation is instructive.

Circulation does not carry the principle of self-renewal in itself. Circulation takes its point of departure from moments which are presupposed, not posited

by it. Commodities have always to be cast into circulation from new, and from the outside, like combustible material into the fire. Otherwise circulation would die down into indifference ...⁷⁵

'There is nothing left but the medium of circulation as a mere residue. As such it loses its form determination. It collapses into its material, which, like inorganic ashes, are all that remains of the process.'⁷⁶ Marx presents this decisive thought in the deduction of the transition between simple circulation and capital, whereby the next step is already contained in the previous one. The point is that value does not collapse into its material, the material of money remains as 'inorganic ash', or rather the value has to be preserved qua *value*, as capital. Capital is 'the unity of commodity and money, but it is the unity of both qua process; it is neither one nor the other (taken separately), nor *both one and the other*'.⁷⁷

Its passing into circulation must itself be a moment of its being-at-home with itself [*Beisichbleiben*], and its being-at-home with itself must be its passing into circulation. Thus exchange-value is now determined as process; it is no longer a form which merely vanishes ...⁷⁸

The conception of 'simple circulation' in the rough draft of *Capital* should not be confused with the idea of 'simple commodity-production' propagated by Engels. The theme of 'simple circulation' is exclusively concerned with the different determinations of form which affect exchange-value in the mediating processes of its material alteration, in which products become commodities, which are subsequently exchanged. The following formula is used repeatedly to characterise this process: products become commodities, commodities become exchange-values, exchange-value becomes money. As yet there is no 'mediated circulation' (this is the conceptual counterpart to simple circulation), that is to say there is no circulation mediated by capital itself. Only in 'mediated circulation' can value be maintained in the process of its 'self-valorisation', that is, in the constant alteration of its commodity and money forms, an alteration in which its increase also takes place.

In general the distinguishing mark of simple circulation is that exchange-value – as we saw in the above quotation – is a 'form which merely vanishes'. After the exchange the exchange-value collapses back into its 'material, which (remains), like inorganic ash'. The material of the money still exists, but the economic form-determination has dissolved. Of course, this is all thought out from the perspective of developed capital, which takes its point of departure from the question: how is it possible for value to become independent [*sich verselbständigen*] and, moreover, how can it be preserved and increased

as independent value. It is in this context that we have to discuss the various functions of money in the *Rohentwurf*.

The price-form is the first shape of the independent 'exposition of exchange-value'. But the price-form only exists in the heads of the affected parties, as the anticipated real independence. However this real independence of value in the realised price is merely a 'vanishing' independence. By contrast the first form of the preservation of value is suspended currency (which in contemporary economic language is called 'the means of value-preservation' [*Wertaufbewahrungsmittel*], although it is not clear what is supposed to be preserved here). Suspended currency is an existing universal form, but only outside circulation; within circulation it has a merely functional existence as 'the constantly vanishing reality' of value (since one use-value is only converted in order to acquire another). Hoarding is another form of the reality of value, but once again it is only outside of circulation that abstract wealth has actual existence.

Coin held in reserve and hoards constitute money only as non-means of circulation merely because they do not circulate. The distinctive form of money which we now consider circulates or enters circulation, but does not function as means of circulation. Money as means of circulation was always means of purchase but now it does not serve in that capacity.⁷⁹

The next 'more developed form' of exchange-value is that of its independence within circulation. Typically Marx gives it the title of 'money qua money' because, within the sphere of circulation, it is the first 'independent existence of value; the material existence of abstract wealth'.⁸⁰ This is how money functions as the means of payment:

But it does not come into the sphere of circulation, for it moves from the hands of the former buyer into those of the former seller. But it does not come into the sphere of circulation as means of circulation or means of purchase. It fulfilled these functions before it existed, and it appears on the scene after ceasing to perform these functions. It enters circulation as the only adequate equivalent of the commodity, as the absolute embodiment of exchange value, as the last word of the exchange process, in short as money, and moreover as money functioning as the *universal means of payment*. Money functioning as means of payment appears to be the absolute commodity, but remains within the sphere of circulation, not outside it as with the hoard. [suspended currency too, must be added here.]⁸¹

The final determination of the money form is world-money [*Weltgeld*]: 'Its mode of existence is adequate to its concept'.⁸² It is pure gold, the very materiality of which becomes the mode of existence of value within (external) circulation – 'the balancing of international accounts'.

This train of thought, which works out the forms of the autonomisation of value step by step, has close links with another, which plots the movement of the increase in value. Both are equally characteristic of capital and the genesis of the latter process also has to be expounded. Marx does indeed praise percipient economists like, for example, Sismondi who characterised the movement of the value of capital as a 'metaphysical, insubstantial quality ... in the possession of the same cultivator' ... 'for whom it cloaked itself in different forms'⁸³ – forms which will not yield the secret of the increase. 'It is damned difficult for Messrs the economists to make the theoretical transition from the self-preservation of the value in capital to its multiplication; and this in its fundamental character, not only as an accident or result.'⁸⁴ The increase is not to be inveigled, by means of hidden tautologies and circular definitions. For Marx calls the trick of defining capital as 'that which brings profit' nothing but a 'brutal form', precisely because 'the increase of capital itself is already posited as a special economic form, profit'.⁸⁵ Another explanation fares no better:

Drivel to the effect that nobody would employ his capital without drawing a gain from it amounts either to the absurdity that good capitalists will remain capitalists even *without* employing their capital, or to a very banal form of saying that gainful investment is inherent in the concept of capital.

Marx adds ironically, 'Very well. In that case it would just have to be demonstrated.'⁸⁶ This provides a perfect demonstration of what Marx means, when he rebukes economists for beginning with 'constituted forms' and uncritically assuming them without developing them. How does Marx then manage to develop these categories without smuggling the explanandum into the explanation? Marx proceeds from money as the unity of the first and second determination. This is the case when the immediate metallic existence of money coincides with the economic form-determination. The first and second determination is sublated in money and also negated. Since money itself in its metallic existence is the adequate reality of exchange-value, it is no longer the measure of other things such as exchange-value. At the same time money is negated as the realisation of price, since in this function it was only the 'constant vanishing' of the independent exposition of value. In its native metal existence it contains 'all material riches locked up (inside it)'.⁸⁷

As measure, its amount was irrelevant; as medium of circulation, its materiality, the matter of the unity, was irrelevant: as money in this third role, the amount of itself as of a definite quantity of material is essential.⁸⁸

It is the general form of wealth as immediately existing, and precisely because of this it contains 'no internal differentiation other than quantitative differentiation'. Thus its native metal existence is an existing contradiction. Formally speaking it is the epitome of all use-values, but at the same time it is only a determinate quantity of money, or, in other words, only a limited representative sample of general wealth. Hence it both is and is not wealth in general; it is a self-contradictory form. This contradiction leads to the bad-infinite movement, in which a fixed quantity of money strives to free itself from the burden of its own limitation by approximating absolute wealth through quantitative increase.

For value which maintains itself as value, multiplication and self-preservation are one and the same thing, and this value is only preserved by its constantly striving to transcend its own quantitative limitation, which contradicts its intrinsic universality.⁸⁹

As Marx sees it, the first form of this movement is hoarding, in which every limit appears as a limitation. Under the presupposition of simple circulation the hoard can only increase through the hoarder's labour and ascetic lifestyle. The hoarder effectively exploits himself by exchanging his own 'surplus-products' for gold in order to hold on to and to increase this surplus. However, this behaviour represents a further contradiction, for gold, the metal in its naked materiality, is itself only a 'pure abstraction' from the real wealth, which stands over and against it in the form of its multifarious use-values. Thus gold turns into its very opposite, when it is held onto in this way, namely into a 'mere fiction'. Where wealth seems to exist in a wholly material and palpable form, in fact it exists only in the head, it is a 'pure fantasy'.⁹⁰ Its reality lies outside of itself in the totality of particular items which make up its substance. If this wealth, which has become independent, is to maintain itself then it must be put into circulation, where it can be dissolved into a particular form of wealth. '[T]his disappearance is the only possible way to secure it as wealth.'⁹¹ However, if gold is hoarded because it is the universal commodity, or the universal form of wealth, the universal form surreptitiously becomes identified with a particular commodity, the value of which rises and falls with its production costs. Thus the belief 'that the measure of its value is its own quantity' proves to be false. Marx summarises the point in the following way:

'Money in its final, complete determination appears from all sides as a contradiction, which resolves itself or which strives towards its own resolution.'⁹²

Marx is following two trains of thought. The first has to do with the way in which exchange-value becomes independent with respect to use-value under the aegis of the exposition of the various functions of money right through to world money. This is expounded as the 'mode of existence which corresponds to the concept'. The other has to do with the movement of the increase in, and increasing independence of, value in the form of hoarding, in which fixed value, or value which exists for itself as the universal form of wealth, is resolved. How is it possible, though, that value can remain independent and still increase at the same time? The only possible solution is that,

[i]f money is to stay as money, then it must at the same time be capable of passing into the circulation process, which means that when in circulation it does not become a mere medium of circulation which vanishes in the form of a commodity instead of remaining mere exchange-value. Insofar as money assumes one determination, it must not be lost in another, that is, it has to remain money even in its commodified existence, and in its existence as money it must exist also in the transitory form of a commodity ... Its passing into circulation must itself be a moment of its being-at-home with itself, and its being-at-home with itself must be its passing into the circulation process.⁹³

This would be the shape of commercial capital, which in its turn constitutes another contradiction. For, in the constant mutation of forms, value is supposed to increase. But how is this increase possible, given that the total sum of value cannot be increased during exchange? Marx makes this point in the following manner:

It is for money alone that use-value is not yet an article of consumption, in which money can lose itself; rather, it is through use-value that money is preserved and increased. *For money qua capital there exists no other use-value.* This then explains its behaviour qua exchange-value in relation to use-value. The only *use-value, which can constitute an opposition and complement to money qua capital is labour* and labour exists in labour-capacity, which exists qua subject.⁹⁴

At this juncture I break off this brief sketch of the dialectical argument which can be found in the *Rohentwurf* and in the *Urtext* of the *Critique*, and which is still to be found, albeit 'concealed' in the *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy of 1859*.

The opening steps of the argument which this exposition presents do give the impression that Marx's train of thought operates exclusively on the categorial level. But it ought not to be forgotten that Marx is not constructing a Platonic model, which will eventually have to stand the test of how it corresponds to reality. Rather, in contrast to all previous economic theory, Marx sets his sights from the very outset on a difficulty which still bedevils modern economic theory, namely the methodical deduction of the existence of a real standard of value. One might say that the touchstone of any economic theory is whether or not it manages to constitute or even to construe this original form as a real, valid unity. Dialectical exposition understands itself as the theoretical comprehension of a process of abstraction which determines the real actions of human beings, and which cannot be reduced to the conceptual achievements of the subjects concerned.

This has important consequences for the relation between concept and reality. Marx's explicit reflections on epistemology are as sparse as his comments on the dialectical method. One has to go through the *Grundrisse* with a fine-toothed comb to find such reflections.

The exact development of the concept of capital is necessary, since it is the fundamental category of modern economics, just as real capital, whose abstract, reflected image is its concept, is the foundation of bourgeois society. The sharp formulation of the basic presupposition of this relation must bring out all the contradictions of bourgeois production, as well as the boundary where it drives beyond itself.⁹⁵

This statement ought not to be understood as a primitive correspondence theory, but rather should be taken in the sense of Adorno's statement, that one need not fear the charge of idealism just because one 'attributes something conceptual to social reality. It is not so much the constitutive conceptuality of the knowing subject, that is meant, but a conceptuality which inheres in things themselves.'⁹⁶ It is the process of a conceptual comprehension of an actual abstraction, of a real abstraction,⁹⁷ one which occurs, methodologically speaking, as 'a necessary form'.

From our consideration of simple circulation there has resulted the general concept of capital, since within the bourgeois mode of production simple circulation is itself only the presupposition of capital, and only exists as a presupposition of capital. The result of this is not that capital is the incarnation of an immutable idea, but rather shows how capital, in real life, only issues in labour, which posits exchange-value; in other words, capital only issues in production which is based on exchange-value, as a *necessary form*.⁹⁸

What does 'as a necessary form' mean here? I emphasised above that the exposition of 'simple circulation' is not to be taken in Engels's sense, as a kind of 'simple commodity production', in which the participants consciously exchange products according to the amount of labour that is invested in them – a process of circulation which would anticipate the capitalist mode of production. Rather, the exposition of simple circulation concerns both the genetic development of the determinacies of the form of independent exchange-value, and the contradictions which characterise these determinacies. These contradictions of simple circulation are 'resolved' through the surplus-labour of a class of free wage-labourers. (Later I shall examine why this gives rise to further contradictions.) From this perspective one could characterise simple circulation as a method for the exposition of the impossibility of maintaining and of increasing the universal wealth (and here we are only actually concerned with the form of universal wealth) that arises within the exchange process. This content also determines other statements about the dialectical method.

On the other side, ... our method indicates the points where historical investigation must enter in, or where bourgeois economy as a merely historical form of the production process points beyond itself to earlier historical modes of production. In order to develop the laws of bourgeois economy, therefore, it is not necessary to write the *real history of the relations of production*. But the correct observation and deduction of these laws, as having themselves become in history, always lead to primary equations – ... – which point towards a past lying behind this system. These indications (*Andeutung*), together with a correct grasp of the present, then also offer the key to the understanding of the past ... This correct view likewise leads at the same time to the points at which the suspension of the present form of production relations gives signs of its becoming – foreshadowings of the future. Just as, on one side the pre-bourgeois phases appear as *merely historical*, i.e. suspended presuppositions, so do the contemporary conditions of production likewise appear as engaged in *suspending themselves* and hence in positing the *historic presuppositions* for a new state of society.⁹⁹

In these remarks Marx refers to the above-mentioned transition to 'wage labour which posits exchange-value'. In this context it is made explicit that 'dialectical exposition is only correct, when it knows its own limits',¹⁰⁰ for the existence of a working class is an historical fact, which cannot be deduced abstractly:

This historical stage of the development of economic production, the product of which is the free labourer, is also the presupposition for the

becoming, and furthermore for the very existence, of capital as such. Its existence is the result of a lengthy historical process in the economic formation of society.¹⁰¹

However, Marx speaks of a dual transition. 'This movement appears in different forms, not only historically, as leading to value-producing labour, but also within the system of bourgeois production itself, i.e. production for exchange-value.'¹⁰² Commercial capital, which is generated by the circulation of commodities, takes hold of production and structures it in a particular way. This, too, is indicated in the letter to Engels:

The transition from capital to landed property is historical, since the modern form of landed property is an effect of capital ... Similarly the transition from landed property to wage labour is not just dialectical, but also historical, since the final product of modern landed property is the universal imposition [*Setzen*] of wage labour ...¹⁰³

When capital takes hold of production, it produces a very specific structure, in which the various elements are interrelated.

While in the completed bourgeois system every economic relation presupposes every other in its bourgeois economic form, and everything posited is thus also a presupposition, this is the case with every organic system. This organic system itself, as a totality, has its presuppositions, and its development to its totality consists precisely in subordinating all elements of society to itself, or in creating out of it the organs which it still lacks. This is historically how it becomes a totality. The process of becoming this totality forms a moment of its process, of its development.¹⁰⁴

As the process of the self-preservation of independent value which takes hold of production, capital is deemed to have a power of structuration, which not only produces the bourgeois system, but also leads to its demise. 'As the system of bourgeois economy has developed for us only by degrees, so too its negation, which is its ultimate result.'¹⁰⁵ In a letter to Lassalle, Marx refers to his 'critique of economic categories' not just as a critique of the discipline of economics (as it is often misinterpreted) but as an 'exposition of the system, and through the exposition, critique of the system'.¹⁰⁶ Marx is referring to the critical exposition of the real system, of this 'organic system as a totality'. The dialectical method which represents the immanent dynamic 'as a necessary form' – together with the correct appraisal of the present –

opens up the possibility of comprehending both the structure of past history and the dissolution of the bourgeois system itself.¹⁰⁷

Let us dwell on the former aspect. The categorial exposition in the *Grundrisse* up until the transition to wage labour is *also* at the same time an historical exposition, albeit 'as a necessary form'. It is what Marx calls 'the key for the comprehension of the past'. This much can be seen from the many historical examples Marx gives, as well as from the scattered passages which rely on a particular understanding of history, an understanding which also underlies the famous preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. It is an emphatic conception of history, which only recognises two structures: firstly, conditions in which wealth assumes a form different from itself and thus displays an immanent dynamic, and secondly, those in which it does not. However much the various social formations may differ from one another, insofar as they are based on the appropriation of wealth in its concrete form, they do not yet constitute a system with an internal dynamic. At their most extreme they are static and without history, like Indian society. For Marx the eternal return of the same does not amount to an emphatic conception of history.

Indian society for the most part has no history, at least no known history. What we refer to as its history is nothing but the story of the succession of intruders, who build up their empires on the passive basis of this defenceless and *unchanging society*.¹⁰⁸

Such societies are only torn from this unhistorical state of affairs when they are touched by the dynamic of the movement of value, which reaches out towards the sphere of production and attempts to take it over. Patriarchal, ancient (and indeed feudal) conditions decline with the development of commerce, luxury, money and exchange-value to the same extent that modern societies flourish with them. Marx states explicitly that this cannot be thought of as a linear process.

... The *mere presence of monetary wealth*, even the achievement of a kind of supremacy on its part, is in no way sufficient for this *dissolution into capital* to happen. Or else ancient Rome, Byzantium etc. would have ended their history with free labour and capital, or rather begun a new history.¹⁰⁹

The transition to industrial capitalism in Europe cannot be explained from the dynamic of the movement of value alone, as I explained above, because it depends on concrete historical constellations, which have no immediate relation to this movement. Yet Marx does argue that, 'already the simple forms

of exchange-value and of money latently contain the opposition between labour and capital'.¹¹⁰ So one must suppose that Marx thought of the process of history as one which is repeatedly set in train, on the basis of ahistorical structures, but which recoils upon and infiltrates these very structures, destroying them and transforming them from within. So only a very particular constellation of events leads to industrial capitalism. It is only against the backdrop of this assumption that we can understand why Marx – in the Preface – compiles a list, which seems to have no internal links. Marx lists Asiatic society (a geographical category), ancient society (an historical category) and feudal society (a structural category) as progressive epochs of economic social formation.

It lies outside the purview of this essay to trace Marx's dialectical development of the economic categories of bourgeois society 'beginning from its own presuppositions' to the point at which 'current conditions of production' prove to be 'self-sublating'.¹¹¹ A few brief suggestions will have to suffice. The thought which underlies the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* as well as *German Ideology*, lies also at the heart of the *Rohentwurf*. The thought is this: there is a structural form (that is to say a form within the alienated world), which is also ineluctable, a form of the inverted sociality of individual lives and the productive forces within them. All the preceding forms can be seen as 'restricted shapes' of this ultimate form of inverted sociality. In the *Rohentwurf* the ever more complex movement of value results in the constant production of new economic relations, as supports for the expansion of inverted social forms which goes on behind the backs of those affected. In the second volume of *Capital* it is no longer possible to tell what significance the theme of circulating and fixed capital had for Marx in the *Grundrisse*. In the *Grundrisse*, capital emerges as the secret leitmotiv of the whole exposition, in its contradictory unity as both circulating and fixed. Capital which is presented at first in the fluid unity of different forms, solidifies, fixes itself ever more, until the point at which the distinction appears not just at the categorial level, as fixed and circulating capital – but also on the material level.

While, up to now, fixed and circulating capital appeared merely as different passing aspects of capital, they are now hardened into two particular modes of existence, and fixed capital appears separately alongside circulating capital. They are now two particular kinds of capital ... The split within capital ... has now entered into its form itself, and appears as differentiating it.¹¹²

Only now has the dynamic of capital reached the point at which the inverted form of sociality appears in its extreme form, and makes itself known to the consciousness of those concerned, as the necessary culmination of the devel-

opment of productive forces and social relations. These in turn constitute 'two different aspects to the development of the social individual'.¹¹³ 'We said above that the social relation between different labours is posited as a property of capital in *circulating capital*, as the social productive power of labour in fixed capital.'¹¹⁴

In *fixed capital*, the social productivity of labour [is] posited as a property inherent in capital; *including the scientific power as well as the combination of social powers within the production process, and finally, the skill transposed from direct labour into the machine, into the dead productive force. In circulating capital*, by contrast, it is the exchange of labours, of the different branches of labour, their interlacing and system-forming quality, the co-existence of productive labour, which appear as *property of capital*.¹¹⁵

The idea of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* is that, with the existence of capital, of bourgeois landed property and of free wage labour, we have reached the ineluctable end point of false sociality and thereby also the culmination of world history. This thought is made more concrete in the *Grundrisse* with the help of the central motif of fixed and circulating capital. Unlike in the later *Capital*, these categories are decoded as unambiguous expressions of the inverted form of existence of the social individual.

In direct exchange, individual labour appears as realized in a particular product or part of the product, and its communal, social character – its character as objectification of general labour and satisfaction of the general need – as posited through exchange alone. In the production process of large-scale industry, by contrast, just as the conquest of the forces of nature by the social intellects is the precondition of the productive power of the means of labour as developed into the automatic process, on one side, so on the other, is *the labour of the individual in its direct presence posited as suspended individual, i.e. as social labour. Thus the other basis of this mode of production falls away*.¹¹⁶

The rough draft of *Capital* ends on this thought. In the adjoining additional pages Marx briefly analyses the form of profit, but there is no further development of the categories. The 'most complete form (which turns into communism)', stock-market capital [*Aktienkapital*]¹¹⁷ does not occur. Yet what Marx meant by the 'most complete form' can be relatively easily extrapolated from his explanation of fixed and circulating capital. Stock-market capital is the generalisation of property, but in perverted, capitalist form. The

sublation of individual property into social property; a higher form within the bourgeois world is inconceivable.

In the works which Marx himself prepared for publication – *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and the two versions of the first volume of *Capital* – only traces of these early thoughts survive. Explicit references to dialectical transitions are eliminated, without any comments as to why. For example, in the second edition of the first volume of *Capital* the following statement is deleted: 'The progress of the exposition leads later through its own inner dialectic to those more concrete forms.'¹¹⁸ On the other hand the subtle form of exposition of the first chapter of *Capital* gives the impression that the dialectical method is merely a 'technical problem of method'; and even this dialectic is one which was further simplified and popularised by Marx. If one has no knowledge of the *Rohentwurf*, the systematic succession of the functions of money remains a secret. The implicit connections with the various form-determinations of value, which come to the fore in the *Rohentwurf* are no longer thematised in *Capital*.

What is it then about Marx's method which he conceals in his published works? Obviously for the Marx of the *Rohentwurf* the dialectic is a method of generic exposition and is identical with the theoretical comprehension of the real dynamic – a process of abstraction which dominates human beings themselves. This dynamic is not the eternal return of the same but rather must be seen as a process with a direction, a process which continually revolutionises the mode of production and which eventually culminates in revolution and 'turns into communism'. The short timespan in which Marx brought this voluminous work to paper is very significant. It was completed in about six months, from October 1857 to March 1858, under the most difficult circumstances conceivable, with Marx working mainly at night. The occasion for this great effort was the outbreak of the crisis of 1857, which led Marx and Engels to expect a revolution. Engels even went so far as to write that the workers might strike out too soon, and so might not succeed.¹¹⁹ Marx himself had other worries, namely that his work would not be ready in time, and that the revolution could possibly take place without theory. Shortly before the completion of the *Rohentwurf* on 22 February 1858, Marx writes to Lassalle:

After all, I have a nasty feeling that now, at the end of fifteen years of study, when I am almost in a position to get my hands on the problem, tempestuous external events will most probably interfere. Never mind. If I finish too late to find the world paying attention to these things, the fault is obviously my own ...¹²⁰

Neither of these events came to pass. Neither revolution nor publication of the theory – the thoughts which were supposed to turn into material violence

[*Gewalt*]. The revolutionary certainty which had so inspired Marx, so that after 15 years of study he hastened to bring his thoughts to paper, turned to bitter disappointment.

It is worth asking how Marx dealt with this disappointment. For in all his formulations up until then the dialectic had been inseparably linked with the idea of a culminating point of world history, where historical human beings would be freed from the burden of pre-history. But is there a dialectic which can be thought of without this world-historical culmination, a 'reduced dialectic', more like a set of instructions for the method of developing the categories, which would be independent of this superstructural philosophy of history? Marx never expresses himself on this subject. He never undertakes to make such a distinction explicit. What would have been the significance of such a move? Marx would have had to give an account of the implications of his theory for the philosophy of history, and ultimately to have uncovered the hidden motives for the construction of a philosophy of history. This would have meant his grasping these motives as an (exoteric) objectivation of his (suppressed) insight into the intertwinement of esoteric and exoteric consciousness in his own case. He hesitates to take this step which would have brought him too close to the bone. Instead he reproduces the old contradiction. He prefers, according to his letter of 14 January 1858, to 'conceal' this method 'even further' to eliminate, and at the same time to express, the desire (never to be realised) 'to make intelligible to common human understanding the rational kernel in the method which Hegel discovered, and simultaneously mystified'. To whom does the term 'common human understanding' refer? His choice of words suggests that he is referring to his own understanding. It is the rationality of his own mysticism which he would like to make 'intelligible' and which is 'objectified', not this time in Greek philosophy, but in the philosophy of Hegel.

III

What does Marx mean by the formula which always seems to accompany the term dialectic: the development of the content itself [*Entwicklung der Sache selbst*], exposition not as the content of logic, but as the 'logic of the content'?¹²¹ Is it possible to conceive of an exposition of the critique of economy, which is not weighed down with the ballast of a philosophy of history? (Certainly French structuralism conceived of it in this way.) Is it the philosophy of history which prevents him from developing the dialectic in the way which the content itself requires, precisely because it is the manifestation of a defence mechanism?¹²²

Yet what is 'the content itself', when detached from the burden of the philosophy of history? Is there an existing core of economic problems, which

have lost nothing of their contemporary relevance or power, and can Marx contribute to the resolution of these problems? In the light of these questions I should like to draw attention to certain other questions, which have troubled and tormented academic economic theorists, in so far as they are even conscious that there is a problem here. Now these problems concern the fundamental categories of economics, 'not one of which is clear'. As Joan Robinson put it, 'money and interest rates prove to be incomprehensible concepts, as do goods and purchasing power, when we attempt to pin them down.'¹²³ In addition, she speaks of 'national income as a collection of contradictions'.¹²⁴ Joan Robinson puts her finger on the sensitive spot of economics as a scientific discipline:

This kind of pseudo-mathematics still flourishes today. It is true that economists have long dropped such terms as quantities of utility, but it is still common to construct models, in which quantities of 'capital' appear, without giving the slightest detail about what it is that these are supposed to be quantities of. Just as the usual way to give a practical content to the notion of utility is to draw diagrams, the usual way to duck the problem of making sense of quantities of 'capital' is to translate them into algebra. C stands for capital, delta C is the investment. But what is capital? What does it mean? Capital – of course! It must mean something, so let's get on with the analysis, and not bother ourselves with hair-splitting pedants who desire to know what we mean by it.¹²⁵

The problem can be sharpened by the following question:

If there does exist some tendency towards the equalising of rates of profit, then in general terms it must stem from the fact that capitalists can transfer their factors from one concrete form which offers a lower rate of profit to another which promises more. In this case it is not the concrete extant factors which are given, but an abstract quantity of capital. What one means by the statement that a determinate quantity of capital remains the same, even when it changes its form, remains an unsolved mystery to this day.¹²⁶

It is not only academic economists that have no answers to this question, for neither do their critics.

Schumpeter also poses this question:

Whilst other authors only occasionally describe capital as a sum of value – like Turgot, Say ... Storch, ... or struggle, as it were, with a similar kind of conception, ... Tuttle clearly and unambiguously declares that capital

is a repository of value, which can be expressed by but does not consist in money, without reference to its particular commodity form or its concrete application ... In fact the question arises: how is it possible, that the values of any good whatsoever appear as something independent [*Selbständiges*]? For the value is inseparable from the object which is valued.¹²⁷

The first passage quoted above (from Robinson) concerns an abstract amount which has increased, the second (from Schumpeter) concerns an abstract amount, the 'forms' of which have altered. But what do 'amount' and 'form' mean in this instance? In the former case the discipline of economics comes up with a whole host, indeed a 'quantity' of synonyms: it speaks of 'masses of value', 'volumes of value' and of 'homogenous quantities'. All these terms refer to an homogenous supra-individual unity which is absolutely valid, in other words which possesses a quasi thing-like existence independent of individual consciousness, and which furthermore 'remains the same throughout its changes of form'. It is not hard to see that the content which Joan Robinson addresses as the metaphysics at the heart of economics corresponds exactly to what Marx called the 'objective illusion' [*gegenständlichen Schein*]. The theoretical elucidation of objective illusion is an essential aspect of the critique of political economy. The term 'critique' in the title of Marx's major work, does not make an idle allusion to Kantian critique, for there, as here, the critique demonstrates the subreption, in which a mere function is passed off as objectivity.

This 'objective illusion' – which finds its expression in the talk of value-masses, amounts of value or homogenous quantities – is not a subjective way of speaking, but rather a language which is unavoidable, which is required. So what is this 'objective illusion'? If we assume that the practical economist cannot avoid this reifying terminology but is forced to adopt it, then we must ask which practical situations require him or her to adopt this *representation of objective materiality* which cannot be grasped as an 'object'? Our two quotations from Joan Robinson and Schumpeter respectively show that this situation is none other than the case of circulating capital, which – when deployed as the means of production, raw materials, labour power and so on – circulates at different speeds and in different forms. In all this fixed capital must be construed as capital which 'yields value' or 'transmits value' (therefore as capital which does not transmit prices). It is this 'amount without qualities' which exists in different forms, and is at the same time different from these forms. According to Robinson and Ammon the unavoidable use of the language of *supra-subjective materiality* amounts to the use of an unthinkable concept – there are no really existing quantities without quality. Thus they can only be 'opined', they are what Marx called 'intended' [*gemeinte*]

representations [*Vorstellungen*] or 'alternatively' 'vague, conceptless representations'. These are representations which have not been conceptually grasped, and which are at most reiterated metaphorically. Similarly Adolf Lowe speaks of 'economic material', a material which is no material, or which only *is* for economics. So what is specifically economic about this strange material, which only has objective existence for economics?

Marx himself does not go into the specific form of the objective illusion, which finds expression in ideas like 'volume of value', 'streams of value' and the like. But we can extrapolate from his exposition a picture of how this representation of an objective amount without quality is generated. Such a representation, rather like Plato's ideas, exists in a realm beyond individual consciousness and is not identical with the material form of capital. The objective illusion is mediated through money. It can be elucidated with the help of a typical dialectical formulation, which Marx frequently deploys when characterising the processual character of capital.

As the overall subject of such a process, value requires above all an independent form, through which its self-identity can be ascertained. Within the process it [capital-value] now assumes, now loses, the form of money and commodity, whilst yet maintaining and extending itself in this alteration. It is only in money that the subject possesses an independent form which guarantees its identity. Money therefore constitutes both the beginning and the end-point of the process of valorisation.¹²⁸

Circulating value is not therefore identical with the form of money, but different from this form (as Schumpeter correctly points out), for the money-form is actually only its form of appearance. The other form is the particular commodity for which the value of capital is exchanged, and which is then viewed as the 'embodiment' of this value. Both are forms of this value; it is both of these forms, and at the same time is different from them. Otherwise put: value exists only in the permanent alteration of forms, qua process. Marx says as much when introducing the concept of capital. 'In fact, value here becomes the subject of a process, in which it changes size, through the permanent alteration of the forms of money and commodity ...'¹²⁹ 'As the overall subject of such a process, within which it now assumes, now loses, the form of money and commodity, whilst yet maintaining and extending itself in this alteration ...'¹³⁰

Where does it come from, this *objective illusion of abstract quantity*, which appears as 'something independent' (Schumpeter) or as a 'metaphysical entity' (the opposite view, which Bailey propounds in his critique of Ricardo), though one which is neither identical with the sum of money (for

this is supposed merely to be its 'expression'), nor even with the quantity of concrete objects, from which it is equally distinct. The objective illusion is the commodity in the process of equivalence, a commodity which now assumes the immediate form of equivalence, now exists in its particular form as use-value. When the commodity is in one form it is not in the other and vice versa. The commodity is identical and at the same time non-identical with both forms. As this permanent alteration, the commodity is *represented* as an 'interior' at rest, as value which is independent, which maintains itself as 'eternal, everlasting' value. To a certain extent the commodity or equivalent is 'arrested' in its non-identity with both forms. It is fixed as an 'abstraction', in that it is abstracted from the movement, and this gives rise to the representation of an abstract quantity without quality, which 'somehow ... adheres' to real objects.

This representation of an abstract mass of value, which has to be distinguished from its expression in money, becomes even more mysterious in this material objectivity, when we realise that the expression of money coincides with the function of money as a medium of circulation. For, as a medium of circulation, money can be replaced through worthless (valueless) signs, precisely because in this function 'its substance ... consists only in this constant appearance as disappearance'.¹³¹ Thus money constitutes the 'continually vanishing realisation' of value.

It is this *notion* [*Vorstellung*] of value which underlies all macroeconomic considerations, which operate with objective quantities, and thus presuppose objective value, without being able to fix its existence as a thing. For, in the view of the subjectivists, there can be no such thing as objective value. Wieser insists correctly that as far as academic scientific disciplines are concerned (and not just economics) only physical things and psychic processes can be said to exist, *tertium non datur*. So no objective material values exist in the sense in which objective exchange-value does. When Schumpeter stresses that in the case of macroeconomic quantities we are dealing with 'meaningless concepts', he holds fast to the thought of his teacher Wieser. According to his subjectivist convictions 'values (can only) ... live ... in a human consciousness'.¹³² So where does absolute, objective value come from? It ought not to exist. And yet it must be 'represented' as an amount of value, volume of value, stream of value – in quantitative equations.

Let us reiterate the point. Economics has hitherto not succeeded in adequately thematising its own metaphysical components. The way in which economics presents its *idea of value* [*Wertvorstellung*] – and I use the term 'idea' advisedly – namely, as a quantum with no quality, presupposes the existence of objective value. This idea of value exists, of course, in the consciousness of all concerned, but it exists as a representation within consciousness of a

quantum without quality, which itself exists outside consciousness. So economics cannot in fact 'comprehend' value – it can only 'opine', represent value in its idea of value [*Wertvorstellung*]. Objective value is presupposed or – in Marx's words – the categories are adopted as given, but not developed. But obviously this objective value is not something objective like the material, physical world. This kind of objectivity – a supra-individual, intertemporal existence – is objective in the sense of the *objectivity* of value, [*Wertgegenständlichkeit*] which is grounded in the social form of the production process. We have to establish a 'concrete connection' [*sachlicher Zusammenhang*] between 'labour and value' – to take up Friedrich Engels's formulation from his critique of Rodbertus.¹³³

We have already pointed out above that the *idea* of objective value underlies all macroeconomic approaches. Thus economics slips straight into a self-contradiction, for strictly speaking real price is already one of these supposed quantities. This is because the quantity of real price underlies the aggregate quantity of the total calculation.

We can elucidate this self-contradiction with the example of Say's theory of equilibrium. In an unreflected and self-evident manner Say, along with all economic theory, takes his point of departure from the doctrine of two worlds. He assumes his 'categories as a given'. One can set out the two worlds doctrine in various ways; for instance the neo-classical theory takes it as the dichotomy of the real and the monetary sector. But however one envisages the distinction, the sphere of reality must be thought of as a world which would be capable of existing not only independently of the existence of money but also without it. Money is thought of as a means, which facilitates exchange. Thus the doctrine overlooks the fact that this very conception is nothing but the existence of the self-contradiction of theory. The object of the theory is always given as the macroeconomic unity of society, a unity which it must always presuppose. This is precisely what is meant by Marx's dictum that economists always 'assume their categories to be given', and thus cannot adequately develop their genesis. Theory exists only because this unity both is and at the same time is not. However the individual formulations of Say's law are expressed, the condition of the possibility of the formulation of these laws is the existence of money itself. If, however, it is claimed that each sale is a purchase and vice versa, and if far reaching consequences are drawn from the postulate of economic equilibrium, then the decisive distinction between the universal and the particular, unity and plurality, is levelled in favour of an immediate unity. The multiple products are *in their very multiplicity* always already money: they are immediately exchangeable, every particular is immediately also universal. It is thus assumed that the unity of society or,

in the language of macroeconomics, the total sum of values, has always already existed.

The exchange of two equal values neither increases nor diminishes the mass of value in society. The exchange of two unequal values ... also does not change the sum of social values, for what it adds to the capacity of one, it subtracts from the other.¹³⁴

The precarious, practically constituted and simultaneously self-sublating unity of society, which is expressed in the actual existence of the categories – commodity, money, purchase, sale – is negated by the theory, insofar as purchase and sale are thought of as the immediate exchange of products. In this case each product is an immediate universal and not a particular. Therefore Say assumes already extant value, but value qua products. Marx ironically paraphrases Say's 'most famous sentence' as 'products can only be bought with products'. According to Marx, Say borrowed this sentence from the physiocrats, for the purpose of 'increasing his own "value" ... in the original physiocratic formulation the sentence runs: "creations can only be paid for by other creations".'¹³⁵ Products are thus immediately money. But if products were always already money, then the process of exchange would be made redundant.

This point receives indirect confirmation from Menger. For he perspicaciously recognises that the concept of equivalence also implies absolute exchangeability. The consequence of this is that every product must at any time be able to be exchanged back again for any other product. But this, Menger claims, is a nonsensical idea, and he concludes that equivalence (implying absolute exchangeability) could not possibly exist. Therefore he rejects the notion of objective value which is contained in the labour theory of value.

The theory thus assumes a social unity which it ought to have grounded, because its categories have been assumed in a wholly unreflected way. Subjectivism tries to ground a social unity by abstracting from all categories and constructing an abstract *homo economicus* and then introducing the category of price like a shot from a pistol (as Hegel would say) – as a purely empirical find. The aporias which such a construction involves have been beautifully set out by Gottl-Ottilienfeld.

But who actually does the measuring, when is it supposed to take place, and what is supposed to result from this measurement? ... *All measurement comes far too late, where the scales are, as it were, born ready calibrated?*¹³⁶

Thus what is discovered by all those involved in exchange is the 'real standard of value', that is, an extant index of this precarious unity of society, which

cannot be deduced from the acts of exchange which are performed by those concerned. And this 'real standard of value' – to borrow this term from academic theory – has to be grounded in its genesis. Schumpeter is one of very few economists who has precisely formulated this problem. Thus when he rebukes Gustav Cassel, above all others, for providing 'no trace' of 'any derivation or grounding' of the primary function of money, he notes the 'refusal to give any clarification to the problematic of the unity of calculation'.¹³⁷ Schumpeter is very clear about what must be done, yet he provides no solution either. The problem remains; how do we get to the real 'autonomisation of value'. Where economics ends inquiry, the Marxian critique of political economy begins, and this is as true today as it ever was.

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121. Translator's Note: '*Die Sache selbst*' means something like 'the fact of the matter' or the thing itself as opposed to the concept of the thing. I have translated it as 'the content itself' to avoid unnecessary resonances of Kant or logical positivism.
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5

Hegel's Philosophy of Right and Marx's Critique: A Reassessment

ROBERT FINE¹

Representation, the critique of representation and the critique of the critique of representation – all are present.

Introduction

Within Marxist scholarship, the *Philosophy of Right* is the least understood of Hegel's works. It is normally treated as an uncritical endeavour to justify the modern state, but it should be read as a critique of the modern state: one that is both closer to Marx's than Marx himself realised, and one which challenges the standpoint of 'true democracy' which Marx was inclined to hold as the foundation of political criticism. My contention is that *Philosophy of Right* should be considered a seminal text for 'open' Marxism.

Most contemporary Marxists accept the validity of the young Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State*, but I want to put forward the troubling proposition that the young Marx misinterpreted Hegel's work and as a consequence drew flawed conclusions concerning the substantive character and limitations of the state. I suggest that what is required is an integration of Hegel and Marx that does not presume the superiority of the latter in all matters.

Within the wider contemporary literature, we find many interpretations of *Philosophy of Right*. It has been read not only as an authoritarian apology for the modern state, but also as a conservative nostalgia for the pre-modern state, a precursor of a future totalitarianism, a promotion of social democracy, a theory of civil society and more. All these readings, however, miss the heart of Hegel's enterprise, which was not to prescribe an ideal state at all, but rather to analyse the existing state. It is not that Hegel refused to be prescriptive –

as his criticisms of leading conservative, liberal and radical doctrines of his day attest – but what is distinctive about his work is that he sought to ground his prescriptions in an 'objective' and 'scientific' treatment of the actual state. Hegel's design was to finalise the break from the natural law theories – modern as well as traditional, critical as well as conservative – which continued to dominate thinking about the state. In this respect, Hegel laid the foundation for a science of the state and the modern integration of political philosophy and sociology.

It is true that Hegel was critical of the forms of political radicalism which he confronted in his day, but his criticisms were not premised on acceptance of the existing political order, nor on a hankering for an even more authoritarian alternative. His project was rather to rework the foundations of political radicalism through a critique of the state which recognised its necessity. In this regard *Philosophy of Right* began to offer to the critique of politics what Marx's *Capital* was later to offer to the critique of economics: a scientific basis for the critique of political economy as a whole. Taken in isolation, either work will paint a one-sided picture of modern society; taken together, we have firm ground beneath our feet.

The Young Marx's Critique

The hostile reading of *Philosophy of Right* which has prevailed within contemporary Marxism has been deeply influenced by the young Marx's 1843 critique.² Here Marx read Hegel's 'dialectic' as no more than an irrational method of rationalising the modern state. He argued that Hegel reified the predicates of the modern state – its supposed properties of freedom, universality and ethical life – before deducing from them its institutional forms: the constitution, monarchy, parliament, bureaucracy, etc. Once Hegel treated the idea of universality as if it were the real subject and the modern state as if it were a 'moment' of this 'mystical substance', the dogmatic nature of *Philosophy of Right* seemed to Marx to be set.³ Hegel's concern appeared to be no more than

simply to rediscover 'the idea' in every sphere of the state that he depicted ... to fasten on what lies nearest at hand and prove that it is an actual moment of the idea.⁴

The resemblance between what he read as Hegel's ideal state and the actual Prussian state led Marx to despair of finding any critical edge in the substance of Hegel's later work. 'God help us all!' was his exasperated comment as the

unfinished text broke off.⁵ Marx acknowledged that philosophy of the state had been given its 'most logical, profound and complete expression by Hegel', but urged that criticism should be redirected at 'the imperfection of the modern state itself, the degeneracy of its flesh'. The rationality of the state, he argued, is contradicted at every point by its irrational reality; the real state 'shows itself to be the opposite of what it asserts'.⁶

At the centre of Hegel's mystification of authority, Marx argued, was the issue of representation. Marx summed up the key to both the modern system of representative government and Hegel's doctrine in the proposition that

matters of universal concern are now complete without having become the real concern of the people.⁷

According to Marx, Hegel sought to rationalise a conservative and restrictive form of political representation, but his failure served to reveal the general *illusion* of representation: that 'the affairs of the people are matters of universal concern'. Hegel inadvertently disclosed the hidden secret of modern representative government, Marx argued, that in it 'the real interest of the people ... is present only formally' and that it offers no more than 'the spice of popular existence, a ceremony ... the lie that the state is in the interest of the people'.⁸ The common core of the actual state and Hegel's doctrine of the state, Marx concluded, is that the people appear only as 'idea, fantasy, illusion, representation' and that the real power within the state is the bureaucracy.

Marx's youthful critique of Hegel's doctrine of the state is familiar ground to Marxists of our generation and has been widely vindicated in the New Left.⁹ Notably, Lucio Colletti located the distinctive character of Marx's critique in his 'critical analysis of parliamentarism and of the modern representative principle itself'.¹⁰ As indicated by the title of one of his collected works, *From Rousseau to Lenin*, Colletti distinguished between what he viewed as the revolutionary tradition of political thought – from Rousseau through Marx to Lenin, which advocated direct, participatory democracy – and the conventional tradition which Hegel expressed in his apology for representative government. According to Colletti, the substantive issue was whether sovereignty should be conceived as a power transferred to government by the people or as a power retained by the people themselves. He argued that Hegel advocated the former, Marx the latter: 'a direct resumption on the part of society of the power or sovereignty which ... was alienated to the separate and independent sphere of "politics"'.¹¹ In so far as parliamentary representatives are elected by the people, Colletti argued, it is recognised that the source of sovereignty lies in the people.

No sooner has the election taken place, however, than this principle is up-ended so that parliament appears as society itself while the real people appear as merely a 'formless aggregate'.¹²

In this reading, designed to assimilate contemporary Marxism to the ideas of 'direct democracy' characteristic of the New Left, Hegel served as little more than a negative reference point. It is this reading of the Hegel-Marx relation which I question.

Richard Hyland has shown that the main lines of the young Marx's interpretation of *Philosophy of Right* were already well established among contemporary Hegel scholars, including Eduard Gans, who probably taught Marx legal philosophy, and Arnold Ruge, who worked closely with the young Marx.¹³ It is my view that, in accepting the conventional wisdom concerning the failings of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, the young Marx was blinded to the critical qualities of the text. It was only later, when Marx reiterated his debt to Hegel for the scientific method which he adopted in his critique of political economy, that the relation between Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* and Marx's *Capital* became apparent. When Marx wrote to Engels that 'In my method of working it has given me great service that by mere accident I had again leafed through Hegel's *Logic*',¹⁴ he echoed Hegel's own comment in the 'Introduction' to *Philosophy of Right*: 'a familiarity with the nature of scientific procedure in philosophy, as expounded in philosophical logic, is here presupposed'.¹⁵ I shall discuss this connection below. First, though, I wish to say more about the relation of Marxism to this text.

Critical Theory and Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*

Within contemporary Marxism the main point of debate concerning Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* has not so much concerned the text itself as the relation of the text to Hegel's earlier political philosophy. 'Hegelian Marxists', like Georg Lukács and Herbert Marcuse, had registered a deep conflict between Hegel's idealisation of the state in *Philosophy of Right* and his overall philosophy of freedom, especially as it was promoted in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹⁶ In reply, Colletti argued that there was no contradiction between Hegel's philosophical principles and his political conclusions, between his 'dialectical method' and his 'conservative system'. In his view, Hegel's apologetic stance toward the Prussian state was a direct consequence of Hegel's 'uncritical' idealism. Against both schools of Marxism, I want to argue that the relation between the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Philosophy of*

Right was essentially one of continuity – more like the relation between Marx's early and late writings than between a young man's radicalism and an old man's conservatism. Furthermore, I want to argue that the main shift was one of focus: from experience and consciousness to existence and institutions. The radicalism of Hegel's more youthful writings did not desert him in his later years.

Marcuse decried the contemptuous and condescending readings of Hegel which dominated twentieth-century liberal thinking.¹⁷ Following a road set by Rudolf Haym and C.L. Michelet a hundred years earlier, liberal criticism emphasised Hegel's subordination of the rights of individuals to the authority of the state and characterised *Philosophy of Right* as a source-book for later doctrines of totalitarianism.¹⁸ Karl Popper focused on this book when he labelled Hegel as an enemy of the 'open society'.¹⁹ L.T. Hobhouse described its content as a 'false and wicked doctrine' which inverted the freedom of the individual into the freedom of the state against the individual.²⁰ Ernst Cassirer wrote that 'no other philosophical system has done so much for the preparation of fascism and imperialism as Hegel's doctrine of the state – this "divine idea as it exists on earth"'.²¹ And John Plamenatz warned in a very English way against the unpleasant tone of 'colossal arrogance' which ran through the text.²²

Against this morass of liberal abuse, Marcuse emphasised the classical liberal inspiration behind *Philosophy of Right* and the vulgarity of this form of criticism. He argued that Hegel presented the state not as the 'Idea' before which all individuality must succumb, but as a form of reconciliation between individual rights and social power. As is now widely recognised, Marcuse was right. Hegel located 'the right of subjective freedom' at 'the pivot and centre of the difference between antiquity and modern times'.²³ He wrote that:

The principle of modern states has this prodigious power and depth of allowing the principle of subjectivity to unfold completely to the extreme of autonomous personal particularity, while at the same time guiding it back into the substantive unity (of the state) and so preserving this unity in the principle of the subjectivity itself.²⁴

Hegel went on to affirm that the creation of civil society was 'the achievement of the modern age which for the first time has given all the facets of the "idea" their due', and that consequently the universal good embodied in the state must be bound up with 'the complete freedom ... and well-being of individuals'. This was hardly the stuff of totalitarianism.

The major influence behind this reading of *Philosophy of Right* was the Heideggerian scholar, Karl Löwith, who thus defined the task which Hegel assigned to the modern state:

to reconcile the principle of the *polis* – substantive generality – with the principle of Christian religion – subjective individuality. In this dialectical harmonisation of two opposing powers, Hegel sees not the peculiar weakness but rather the strength of the modern state ... Hegel considered this synthesis not only possible but actually accomplished in the contemporary Prussian state!²⁵

Modern commentators have generally accepted this interpretation of *Philosophy of Right* and criticised it from the standpoint of their own idea of 'reconciliation'.²⁶ According to Löwith, however, Hegel's 'reconciliation' failed fundamentally, because it had no answer to the social problems which were to

determine the future development of bourgeois society: the question of how to control the poverty brought about by wealth ... and the collision with liberalism of the increasing claims of the will of the many ... which now seeks to rule by force of numbers.

Löwith read *Philosophy of Right* as the high point of the classical liberal tradition, as it bowed under the weight of class divisions. It was small wonder to him that the Young Hegelians 'demanded decisions in place of mediations' and became 'radical and extreme': either in favour of communistic community (Marx), or primitive Christianity (Kierkegaard), or stateless democracy (Proudhon), or Christian dictatorship (Cortés) or a union of egoists (Stirner). These 'excesses' marked for Löwith the expiry of classical liberalism.

Against the follies of liberal misinterpretation, Marcuse counterposed Hegel's doctrine of the state to National Socialism, maintaining that in National Socialism the most powerful economic and political interests of civil society, the corporate trusts and Nazi Party respectively, assumed direct political power and used it to destroy working class opposition and wage expansionist wars.²⁷ The Nazi state had become an instrument used by one element of civil society to terrorise the rest:

Hegel's deified state by no means parallels the Fascist one ... Civil society under Fascism rules the state; Hegel's state rules civil society.²⁸

Marcuse reformulated the basic structure of Hegel's argument in classical liberal terms:

The anarchy of self-seeking property owners could not produce from its mechanism an integrated, rational and universal social scheme. At the same time, a proper social order ... could not be imposed with private property rights denied, for the free individual would be annulled ... The task of making the necessary integration devolved therefore upon an institution that would stand above the individual interests ... and yet would preserve their holdings.²⁹

The increasingly authoritarian tendencies, which Marcuse nonetheless perceived in *Philosophy of Right*, seemed to him to forewarn the crisis of modern liberalism. As class antagonisms intensified, the only solution *within existing conditions* was to turn the state into a more 'independent and autonomous power'. It was this imperative which, Marcuse argued, impelled Hegel to betray his philosophy of freedom. It could not be undone, he thought, so long as totality was conceived as 'a closed ontological system, finally identical with the rational system of history'.³⁰ What was needed was to detach Hegel's dialectic from its 'ontological base' and transcend his 'abstract, logical, speculative expression of the movement of history'.³¹ Marcuse argued that transcendence of the given historical reality was imperative because of its 'universal negativity', but that it was this negativity which was denied in *Philosophy of Right* where Hegel 'preserved and in the last analysis condoned' the existing state.³² Against Hegel, Marcuse proffered an 'affirmative materialism' which privileges 'the idea of happiness and material satisfaction' over that of law and the state.

Marcuse's antinomian critique misconstrues in my view both Hegel's earlier philosophy of freedom and its later development. In *Philosophy of Right* Hegel presents us not with a betrayal of his philosophy but with a philosophical working through of modern politics. Hegel's philosophy of right was not ontological but historical; not rationalist but critical; not static but dynamic. He did not see the forms of right as a 'closed system' identical with the 'end of history', but as the conflict-ridden social forms of modern society. He did not treat them as eternal and rational ideas which either affirm or negate the political forms of modern life, but as the very stuff of modern political engagement.

Philosophy of Right as Critique

I stated above that Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* was not designed to offer a prescription for what the ideal state ought to be, but a scientific analysis of

what the actual state is. That this was Hegel's intention was clearly stated in the Preface of *Philosophy of Right*:

As a philosophical composition, it must distance itself as far as possible from the obligation to construct a *state as it ought to be*; such instruction as it may contain cannot be aimed at instructing the state on how it ought to be, but rather at showing how the state, as the ethical universe, should be recognised.³³

The task of political philosophy is 'to comprehend *what is*', not to issue instructions concerning what ought to be. This distinction is crucial to our reading of the work. It means that Hegel's conception of the philosophy of right was to construct an 'objective treatment' of the modern state, a 'scientific discussion of the thing itself', where his own political opinions would count 'only as a personal epilogue and as capricious assertion' and should therefore be treated 'with indifference'.³⁴

There is no doubt but that the Preface of *Philosophy of Right* appears at first sight to support the conventional view of this work. In his famous aphorism – 'what is actual is rational and what is rational is actual' – it seemed that Hegel abandoned critical theory in favour of a positivism which dismissed all attempts to go 'beyond the world as it is and build an ideal one as it ought to be'.³⁵ When Hegel equated philosophical consciousness with 'reconciliation with actuality' and declared that the aim of philosophy is to comprehend that 'what is, is reason', the case for his 'quietism' seemed settled.³⁶ But how are we to interpret these words? To be sure, Hegel's language is nothing if not playfully provocative. Perhaps it was influenced by the censorship laws operating in Prussia at the time, according to which professors were forbidden under threat of discharge from exercising any form of political criticism. The so-called Karlsbad Decrees, announced in 1819 between Hegel's lecture course on *Natural Law and the Science of the State* and his publication of *Philosophy of Right* in 1820, imposed strict political controls on the German universities and pre-publication censorship on scientific works. It could be that there was in the text an opaqueness designed for the censors.

In any case, *Philosophy of Right* should be read as an ironic text: a text which ironised on the pretences of the state. Hegel aimed to shift the focus of political philosophy from the prescriptiveness characteristic of natural law theory – in both its conservative and its critical forms – to the scientific treatment of the actual state. Rather than award either the existing state or some imagined future state the philosophical prize of 'rationality', Hegel's call was for philosophy to pursue reason in the actual politics of its age: to

revolutionise philosophy, not to philosophise away the revolution. The search for eternal truths which had been the 'traditional' end of philosophy was to be relocated in the real world of social and political life.³⁷ Hegel's 'reconciliation with actuality' and 'delight in the present' was a call for a critical engagement with actual politics. The fuller quotation runs as follows:

To recognise reason as the rose in the cross of present and thereby to delight in the present – this rational insight is the *reconciliation* with actuality which philosophy grants to those who received the inner call to *comprehend*, to preserve their subjective freedom in the realm of the substantial.³⁸

Hegel described the present as a 'cross', a world of suffering. He aligned himself to the tradition of Luther's Protestantism, though 'at a more mature stage of its development': the tradition which upheld the principle that nothing should be acknowledged 'which has not been justified by thought'. Hegel described this as 'a great obstinacy, the kind of obstinacy which does honour to human beings and one which has rightly become the characteristic property of the modern age'.³⁹ For Hegel the aim of philosophy was both emancipatory and actual: 'to free itself in the present and thus find itself therein'. It meant pursuing reason as 'the rose in the cross of the present' and not as some other-worldly ideal, and resisting the twin dangers of political cynicism and idealism. 'Reason', he argued,

is as little content with that cold despair that confesses that, in this temporal world, things are bad or at best indifferent, but that nothing better can be expected here, so that for this reason alone we should live at peace with actuality. The peace which cognition establishes with the actual world has more warmth in it than this.⁴⁰

This was the stuff of political engagement with the actual world.

At a more philosophical level, *Philosophy of Right* was an exploration of the juridic forms of right characteristic of modern society. It was in the 'Introduction' to the work that Hegel began to spell out his method. By the concept of 'right' Hegel referred not only to rights in the usual Anglo-Saxon sense of that term (as opposed to duties), but to the many forms of right which emerge as the juridic expression of modern society: abstract right, private property, contract, wrong, punishment, morality, family, positive law, civil society, policing, political parties and interest groups, the state, the constitution, the legislature, the executive, monarchy, presidentialism, relations between sovereign states, etc.⁴¹ Hegel's object of study was the development of forms of right in the modern world.

Hegel began with 'abstract right' because he saw this as the simplest expression of right found in modern society, and not because it was an ontological category. He emphasised the historical character of this starting point:

The science of right is *a part of philosophy* ... As a part of philosophy, it has a determinate *starting point*, which is the *result* and truth of what *preceded* it, and what preceded it is the so-called *proof* of that result. Hence the concept of right, so far as its *coming into being* is concerned, falls outside the science of right; its deduction is presupposed here and is to be taken as *given*.⁴²

The starting point is presented as the product of a prior historical process, not something 'suspended in mid-air'. Hegel took abstract right as his starting point because he argued that it was the elementary form out of which more complex and concrete forms of right are constructed. It was modern society, not Hegel, which subsequently turned the right to own private property into 'the first embodiment of freedom and therefore a substantial end in itself'.⁴³ Step by step we are taken through the increasingly complex forms of right present in modern society. Hegel argued that relations between these forms of right are *intrinsic*: 'the science of right', he wrote, 'must observe the proper *immanent* development of the thing itself'.⁴⁴ The method of exploration is similar to that later employed by Marx in his critique of political economy. The theory of the movement of 'right' from private property through law and civil society to the modern state was the juridic equivalent of Marx's theory of the movement of 'value' from exchange-value through money to capital.

The object of study of *Philosophy of Right* was formulated by Hegel as the 'idea' of right, and this in turn was understood as the differentiated unity of the 'concept' and 'existence' of right. Hegel thus presents us with three categories – the idea, the concept and its existence – all of which can only be understood in relation to one another. To apprehend the idea of right, Hegel argued, 'it must be recognizable in its concept and in the concept's existence'. By this method he sought to integrate a theoretical and practical understanding of the state.

The subject matter of the philosophical science of right is the Idea of right – the concept of right and its actualization. Philosophy has to do with Ideas and therefore not with what are commonly described as *mere concepts*. On the contrary, it shows that the latter are one-sided and lacking in truth ... The *shape* which the concept assumes in its actualization, and which is essential for cognition of the *concept* itself, is different from its *form* of being purely as concept, and is the other essential moment of the Idea.⁴⁵

Hegel's 'dialectical method' was based on the development of the idea of right, as driven by conflictual relations between its concept and existence. What

was at issue for Hegel was the impact of the actuality on the ideal. It is the concept itself which is opened to criticism through its relation to its existence. In opposition to both formalism and vulgar materialism, Hegel argued that the idea of the state can only be grasped scientifically as the *unity* of its celestial concept and its earthly existence, its consummate spirit and 'the degeneracy of its flesh'.

The key term in this dialectic was 'sublation' (*Aufhebung*): the transition from a lower to a higher stage of development which also preserves the lower stage. Thus the first form of right discussed by Hegel, that of 'abstract right', comprising the freedom to do what one will, is contained within the larger framework of 'objectified' right or law. The further development of right into the form of the state gives body to the 'universal will' but contains within it the right of subjective freedom and positive law. The movement from one form of right to the other is conceived as both transcendence and preservation. The critical force of this concept, however, has often been missed in the literature. It lies in its conception of immanent development. Hegel sought to demonstrate that higher forms of right (like the state), far from resolving the contradictions inherent in lower forms (like the egoism of private property and the class divisions of civil society), actually inherit the contradictions present within them. These antagonisms are preserved and not simply overcome. The form of the state contains within itself all the contradictions immanent in civil society and accordingly cannot resolve its contradictions. In this *critical* sense transcendence is also preservation.

Hegel's theory of 'immanent development' was designed to show that the state is marked in its very form by its origins in civil society. Rather than counterpose the 'dark ground' of civil society to the 'light of the state', as the young Marx thought Hegel had done, Hegel posed the relation between light and dark, state and civil society, in a far more troubling way. He sought, for example, to understand the real inversion which occurs when the preconditions of the state become in the course of their development its 'objective moments'. He showed why private property, market relations and civil society should be understood as engineered political outcomes, and not simply as preconditions of the modern state.

Hegel's Critique of Representative Government

The idea that Hegel became in *Philosophy of Right* an uncritical apologist for modern representative government has become such a firm conviction within contemporary Marxism that it has enjoyed almost no scrutiny. In fact, Hegel remained what he always was: a critic of modern representative government.

It was to the end of exposing the illusions of representation that he stressed the narrow terrain which the modern state allocates to representative mechanisms: its exclusion from both society and from most parts of the state itself and its restriction to the legislature or, worse, to one house of the legislature.

Hegel emphasised that even the most democratic forms of representative government contain all manner of guarantees against the spectre of democracy. He argued thus that social classes are given political significance as 'estates' in such a way as to 'prevent individuals from crystallising into a powerful bloc in opposition to the organised state';⁴⁶ or that the organisation of private interests into 'corporations' is designed to keep them under the 'surveillance of public authority'. The key to the modern system of representative government, Hegel concluded, is that the people should at no point appear as a 'formless mass' uncontrolled by the state.

That representative government is shaped to limit popular participation was Hegel's first insight. For instance, he argued that choice of representatives is based on 'the confidence felt in them': they are not treated as 'agents with a commission or specific instructions' but enjoy a relation of 'trust' with their electors which allows them to reach decisions on the basis of 'their own greater knowledge of public affairs'. Further, the authority of the representatives themselves is carefully restricted by the state executive, one of whose major functions is to curb the 'excesses' of the popular assembly. The modern state treats any attempt of the elected assembly to create opposition to the executive as 'a most dangerous prejudice'.⁴⁷ The role of representation in the modern state is further limited by the rule that 'there must always be individuals at the head'.⁴⁸ Thus the constitutional monarch who has formal power of ultimate decision in some systems of representation, is also endowed with substantial powers over the survival of the state itself. Finally, perhaps, Hegel showed that in the modern state the representation is limited by the very nature of constitutional government. The state demands that the constitution 'should not be regarded as something made, even though it has come into being in time', but rather as 'something existent in and by itself ... and so as exalted above the sphere of things that are made'. The state limits the authority of representatives to that which is constitutionally permissible, allowing only for change that is 'imperceptible' and 'tranquil in appearance'.⁴⁹ What is beyond the constitution is beyond the powers of representation.

The real function of representation in the modern state, Hegel argued, is to admit the particular interests of civil society into the organism of the state as a whole as *one* of its several elements. Representation is a 'middle term' between the state and civil society, the function of which is to embody the 'subjective moment in universal freedom', preventing both the extreme

isolation of the government which otherwise might become an arbitrary tyranny, and the isolation of the particular interests of civil society which otherwise might crystallise into a 'powerful bloc in opposition to the organised state'.⁵⁰ Hegel recognised the advent of representative government was a great advance, since for the first time the pursuit of universal ends became the property of everyone, but he considered it utterly illusory to equate this achievement with 'popular sovereignty'. The key to representative government, Hegel reasoned, is that the 'democratic element' is refused admission into the organism of the state unless it is first dressed up in 'rational form'. The state treats the unmediated voice of the masses as 'always for violence'.

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, written just after *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel described the association of the idea of freedom with the 'so-called representative constitution' as the 'hardened prejudice' of our age.⁵¹ Hardly the stuff of an uncritical apologist. Beneath the appearance of popular sovereignty conveyed by representative government, Hegel wrote, 'we encounter a definite constitution which is not a matter of free choice but invariably accords with the national spirit at a given stage of its development'.⁵² All constitutions depend, not on the 'will of the people', but on the society in question and its relation to other societies.

The severity of Hegel's form of critique contrasts with the homage paid to representative government by Kant. It was *contra* Kant, who declared that 'every true republic is and can be nothing else than a representative system of the people' and that representative government is no less than the 'united will of all',⁵³ that Hegel revealed the authoritarian tendencies inherent in modern representative government. The outrage against Hegel expressed by conventional liberal scholarship may be explained as a symptom of the unease which it felt in the presence of a work which challenged the greatest shibboleth of liberal thought: its identification of representative government with the idea of freedom. Behind liberalism's furious indignation lay the trauma of seeing its own 'hardened prejudice' in favour of representative government brought to the light of day, laid out on a table for all to see and dispassionately dissected. Liberalism projected its anxieties about the message onto the messenger. Marxists should not fall into the same trap.

'True Democracy' and the Critique of Representation

In his *Early Theological Writings* Hegel had shared Rousseau's passion for the classical sense of political community.⁵⁴ By posing the 'general will' as the principle of the modern state, Hegel argued, Rousseau ushered in 'the revolution in the spirit of the age ... the right to legislate for one's self, to be

responsible to one's self alone for administering one's own law'.⁵⁵ He too celebrated the Greek idea of freedom, when citizens

obeyed laws laid down by themselves, obeyed men whom they themselves had appointed to office, waged wars on which they themselves had decided, gave their property, exhausted their passions and sacrificed their lives by thousands for an end which was their own.⁵⁶

Hegel too extolled the Greek belief that for citizens 'confronted by the idea of their *polis*, their own individuality vanished' and mourned the growth of private property as a result of which 'the end they set before themselves in their political life was gain, self-maintenance and perhaps vanity'. With the ascendancy of private property, Hegel wrote, political freedom vanished and in its place there arose the citizens' right 'to the security of that property which now filled his entire world'.⁵⁷

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel explored more critically the modern appropriation of this Greek concept of democracy, particularly its theoretical expression in Rousseau and practical expression in the French Revolution. He continued to give due recognition to the democratic impulse behind Rousseau's commitment to 'a real general will, the will of all individuals as such'⁵⁸ and behind the concept of direct popular sovereignty more generally:

Neither by the mere idea of self-given laws ... nor by its being represented in law-making ... does self-consciousness let itself be cheated out of reality, the reality of itself making the law and accomplishing ... the universal work ... In the case where the self is merely represented and ideally presented, there it is not actual; where it is by proxy, it is not.⁵⁹

In *Philosophy of Right* Hegel offered the same recognition, when he characterised the doctrine thus:

Every single person should share in deliberating and deciding on political matters of general concern on the grounds that all individuals are members of the state, that its concerns are their concerns, and that it is their right that what is done should be done with their knowledge and volition.⁶⁰

He also wrote of the potency of these ideas in the real world of practical politics:

When these abstract conclusions came into power, they afforded for the first time in human history the prodigious spectacle of the overthrow of the constitution of a great actual state and its complete reconstruction *ab*

initio on the basis of pure thought alone, after the destruction of all existing and given material.⁶¹

In the *Philosophy of History*, written toward the close of Hegel's career, Hegel continued to characterise the French Revolution as a 'glorious mental dawn' in which 'the idea of Right asserted its authority' and 'the old framework of injustice could offer no resistance'.⁶² He celebrated the 'jubilation' which affected all thinking beings and the 'spiritual enthusiasm' which thrilled through the world.

Between his own youthful enthusiasm at the time of the Revolution and his tribute to the Revolution in his old age, what happened of significance was not of course that Hegel grew older but that the Revolution itself had badly degenerated. In the wake of the French Revolution, Hegel wrote in *Philosophy of History*, came the dictatorship of the twin figures of 'virtue' and 'terror' (Robespierre and the exercise of power without legal formalities); then the ascendancy of 'suspicion' under the Directory of Five; then the rise of one who 'knew how to rule' (Napoleon); and at length

after forty years of war and confusion indescribable, a weary heart might fain congratulate itself on seeing a termination and tranquillisation of all these disturbances.⁶³

Hegel's re-examination of the Rousseauian doctrine expressed his endeavour to understand what went wrong. The decline of the Revolution impelled Hegel and all thinking beings to re-examine the ideas of freedom which informed it.

Rousseau had already acknowledged the deficiencies of his doctrine in modern society: especially the problem of quantity raised by the great size of modern nation states as compared to the classical *polis*, and the problem of exclusion raised by the relation of modern notions of equality to ancient slavery. Hegel too addressed these defects, commenting in *Philosophy of History* that such democratic constitutions as the Greeks possessed 'are possible only in small states' and that their necessary condition was that 'what among us is performed by free citizens – the work of daily life – should be done by slaves'.⁶⁴ The most fundamental problem, however, which Hegel raised was the lack of 'subjectivity' which was characteristic of Greek democracy. This absence of independent thought, manifest in the institution of oracles, meant that the particular interests of individuals and personal convictions could only appear as corrupting elements:

That very subjective Freedom which constitutes the principle and determines the peculiar form of Freedom in our world ... could not manifest itself in Greece otherwise than as a *destructive* element.⁶⁵

The general interest was the main consideration, while subjective morality and rights were not yet in evidence. This is why Hegel used the term 'adolescence' to characterise the Greek stage of freedom.

The historical consciousness which Hegel implanted into Rousseau's classicist doctrine proved to be a dangerous supplement. As he put it in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*,

No lessons can ... be drawn from history for the framing of constitutions in the present ... ancient and modern constitutions have no essential principle in common ... It is quite mistaken to look to the Greeks or Romans ... for models of how constitutions ought to be organised in our own times.⁶⁶

If the doctrine of direct popular sovereignty belonged to an ancient society based on forms of slavery among non-citizens and duty among citizens, Hegel asked what it means to transpose this idea of freedom to the modern world? Rousseau had argued that in modern civil society people are atomised, brutalised and corrupted by the antagonistic conditions of private property. Consequently there could be no immediate congruence between the 'will of all' as an aggregate of particular interests and the 'general will' as that which wills the good of the whole. It is only when the 'will of all' wills the 'general will' – a necessarily contingent phenomenon – that they are the same.

Rousseau argued (in a style that has been echoed in the works of many current political theorists – notably Jürgen Habermas) that the mediation between the 'will of all' and the 'general will' could, however, be effected by the assembly of citizens congregating and deliberating together under definite rules of communicative rationality. The rules he formulated included the presence of all citizens in the assembly, a prohibition on arguments posed in terms of self-interest, the demand that argument be posed in a general form concerning the good of the people as a whole, the imperative that deliberations be concluded in the form of general laws, a ban on caucuses, factions and parties, etc. For Rousseau it was the educative and disciplining effects of public discussion, under the banner of the 'general will', which formed the bridge from the particular to the universal.

Hegel claimed that this transition from the 'will of all' to the 'general will' was bound to fail because it reduced the union of individuals in the state to 'something based on their arbitrary wills, their opinions and their capri-

ciously given consent'.⁶⁷ If civil society is 'a battleground where everyone's individual private interest meets everyone else's', it is impossible for a substantial universal interest to arise within it.⁶⁸ The defect in Rousseau's argument was to regard the general will not as the 'absolutely rational element in the will but only as a general will which proceeds out of this individual will'.⁶⁹

Rousseau was no simple classicist. He sought to reconcile two principles: modern civil society based on private property and the Greek idea of political participation. Thus the aim he set political philosophy was to:

find a form of association which will defend and protect with the common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone and remain as free as before.⁷⁰

Hegel observed, however, that the conflict between the ancient form of democracy and modern civil society was resolved by Rousseau arbitrarily in favour of the old. Rousseau's project of investigating 'laws as they might be', taking 'men as they are', pointed to the divergence between his conception of 'ought' and 'is': 'laws as they might be' were Greek, 'men as they are' modern. To impose the former on the latter could only be a matter of 'forcing people to be free'.

Many commentators have read Hegel through a Rousseauian lens, as if his own philosophical project was, in the words of Karl Löwith, to 'reconcile the principle of the polis – substantive generality – with the principle of Christian religion – subjective individuality'.⁷¹ But the main point of Hegel's argument was that it was an illusion to think this synthesis either possible or desirable. Admiration for the Greek way of life was not to be confused with the needs of modern political life. In the modern world the architectonic of political liberty cannot be the simplicity of the Greek temple, but rather the complexity of a 'Gothic edifice' of which 'the Ancients knew nothing, for it is an achievement of the Christian era'.⁷² In modern times the 'system of freedom' is necessarily a differentiated entity, consisting in the 'free development of its various moments'.

Hegel argued that the doctrine of 'absolute freedom' contained within itself the seeds of 'terror'; thus the title of his discussion in the *Phenomenology*: 'absolute freedom and terror'.⁷³ This was evident in practice, when the doctrine was actualised in the French revolution and 'ended in the maximum of frightfulness and terror'. Why? Hegel's answer was that it was because 'only abstractions were used, the idea was lacking'. The *abstraction* was Rousseau's 'general will'; the *idea* that was lacking was real freedom of real individuals. It was because there was no middle term between the abstrac-

tion of the 'general will' and the actuality of individual experience that their relation became one of 'unmediated negation':

The sole work and deed of universal freedom is therefore death, a death which has no inner significance ... for what is negated is the empty point of the absolutely free self. It is thus the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water.⁷⁴

Because the general will was opposed to all particular wills, it could not achieve anything positive by way of 'institutions of conscious freedom'; all that was left to it was 'the fury of destruction'. The real antagonisms between individuals and the 'general will', Hegel argued, were dissolved by the illusion that 'each individual ... always does everything' decided by the general will and that 'what appears as done by the whole is the direct and conscious deed of each'.⁷⁵ Individuals are instructed to see their only purpose as 'the general purpose', so that the significance of individual personality is denied. Government, which is supposed to be the 'individuality' of the general will but actually stands opposed to it as a specific will of its own, becomes the target of rival claims to ownership, with the result that from the point of view of other parties what is called government appears merely as the victorious faction. All intermediate social groups and classes are abolished. In this world suspicion and guilt rule supreme; no one is safe.

The Hypertrophy of Representation

Hegel did not reject the Rousseauian doctrine of direct popular sovereignty because of its radicalism but because it was not radical enough. It could liberate from despotism but it could not constitute freedom. It was this same motif which Hegel pursued in *Philosophy of Right*. In the Preface he reserved particular scorn for the romantic nationalism of contemporary German radicals like the notorious Professor Fries, whose seemingly attractive doctrine Hegel summarised thus:

In a people among whom a genuine communal spirit prevails, all business relating to public affairs would gain its *life from below, from the people itself; living societies, steadfastly united by the sacred bond of friendship, would dedicate themselves to every single project of popular education and popular service.*⁷⁶

Hegel described this doctrine as 'the quintessence of shallow thinking' because it reduced the 'complex inner articulation' of the state

the architectonics of its rationality – which, through determinate distinctions between the various spheres of public life and the rights they are based on, and through the strict proportion in which every pillar, arch and buttress is held together, produces the strength of the whole from the harmony of its parts – to reduce this refined structure to a mush of 'heart, friendship and enthusiasm'.⁷⁷

Fries's anti-semitic nationalism expressed in extreme form the wider issue of political radicalism in the modern age. For example, Hegel explored in *Philosophy of Right* that form of democratic thinking which seeks to overcome the *limited* place occupied by representation in the modern state through the simple family remedy of extending representation into every nook and cranny of the state and society, recasting it in the form of a commission or mandate, and elevating it into the exclusive source of legitimate authority. Today this remains an extremely common model of radical democracy.

If the system of representation is hedged around with a thousand 'guarantees', Hegel argued, it is a 'natural' democratic response to demand their withdrawal:

Subjective opinion naturally enough finds superfluous and even perhaps offensive the demand for such guarantees, if the demand is made with reference to what is called the 'people'.⁷⁸

But Hegel maintained that this response misunderstands the nature of representation and is politically dangerous. His argument was that the appropriation of the *whole* state by the system of representation would not overcome the 'private point of view' endemic in representation; it would simply generalise it. Those who elevate the representative assembly over all other institutions of the state forget that it starts 'from isolated individuals, from a private point of view, from particular interests, and so are inclined to devote their activities to these'. A 'pure' form of representation would be slave to public opinion but public opinion by its nature is not only a repository of 'genuine needs' and 'substantive principles of justice' but is 'infested by all the accidents of opinion, by its ignorance and perversity, by its mistakes and falsity of judgement'.⁷⁹ Public opinion, Hegel wrote, is a 'hotch-pot of truth and endless error' which deserves to be 'as much respected as despised';⁸⁰ if 'to be independent of public opinion is the first formal condition of achieving anything great or rational in life or in science', so too in politics.

Hegel maintained that it is 'a dangerous prejudice' to suppose an essential opposition between the representative assembly and the executive, as if the former were all-good and the latter all-bad. It could equally be said that the representative assembly starts from private interests and is inclined to devote itself to these at the expense of the general interest, while the executive starts from the standpoint of the state and therefore devotes itself to the universal. Hegel argued that neither opposition is justified and that if the legislature and executive were really opposed, this would be a sure sign that the state was in the 'throes of destruction'.

An equally dangerous prejudice, Hegel argued, is that which opposes the 'general will' to the admission of political parties and other associations of civil society into the body of the state. Parties may appear partisan and self-interested, corrupted by wealth and property, incapable of subsuming their private point of view to the good of the whole. Alternatively, they may appear statified and incapable of truly representing civil society. Either way, radical political philosophy is inclined in the manner of Rousseau to be anti-party and to reject the official system of representation and its alien institutions. This radical populism maintains that the people must appear in the assembly 'in the form of individuals' but ends up treating the people as a 'formless mass'.⁸¹ Citizens are not just 'individuals' but members of social classes, groups and associations. If they are turned into a mass of individuals and if the state becomes the only legitimate association, the cry for democracy turns into its opposite. It is but a short step to suppress the associations of civil society at source because they put the private point of view before the universal.

It was the underlying idea of radical democratic thought, that 'all should participate in the business of the state', which struck Hegel as a 'ridiculous notion'. It was this response which so appalled the young Marx, who reaffirmed the basic parameters of Rousseauian political philosophy, even as he criticised Rousseau's focus on the state legislature as the *sole* focus of popular participation. However, in reading Hegel's argument as no more than an expression of elitism, the young Marx failed in my view to hear what he was really saying. Hegel argued that this notion of participatory democracy assumes that 'everyone is at home in this business'.⁸² The instruction that all individuals must participate in public life would either result in a 'barbarous and frightful commotion' or end up as a mask behind which there prevailed the rule of the few and the indifference of the many. The absolutely essential point is that the state requires objective deliberation on public affairs; it must go beyond 'subjective opinion and its self-confidence' where any prejudice or self-interest might rule.

In a manner that is characteristic of modern democratic thought, Jürgen Habermas reads this argument as a regression from Hegel's earlier recogni-

tion of intersubjectivity; that is from a search for second-order norms which recognise the heterogeneity and plurality of modern society and which regulate social difference without imposing any absolute conceptions of social morality. He read *Philosophy of Right* as offering an absolutist conception of the state, based on an 'emphatic institutionalism' according to which 'the individual will ... is totally bound to the institutional order and only justified at all to the extent that the institutions are one with it'.⁸³ When the demand of democratic self-determination reached the older Hegel's ears, Habermas declared, he could only hear it as a 'note of discord' which offends against reason itself.

This critique is symptomatic of the difficulties which modern democratic thought has had in coming to terms with the dark side of enlightenment. Habermas simply does not confront the decline of the Revolution *philosophically*, that is, in terms of the concept which informed it. For modern democratic thought, it is simply a matter of applying the same idea – that of 'true democracy' – in a better way next time. Hegel's criticism of Kant's notion of enlightenment – that thinking for yourself is only enlightened if *what* you think is enlightened or that the will of the people is absolute only if *what* the people will is absolute – may be summed up in the phrase which Hegel used: that in the end 'all is substance'. It is transparent to a generation which knows fascism that 'the will of the people' may be barbaric and that the democrat may be fated to be 'against the people'.

The whole issue becomes entirely confounded when the Hegel of *Philosophy of Right* is reinterpreted in a modern democratic mode as what Andrew Arato called 'the representative theorist of civil society'.⁸⁴ According to Arato, Hegel was committed to 'the autonomous generation of solidarity and identity' through the associations of civil society, their representatives in parliament and public opinion. Arato acknowledged that there was another Hegel present in *Philosophy of Right* – one who had faith in the state and its organs of power – but he held that Hegel's main emphasis was on 'civil society' and its capacity for performing the tasks of social integration with only peripheral help from outside. According to Arato, Hegel recognised that citizens play only a restricted part in the general business of the state, but regarded it as essential to provide people with activity of a political character over and above their private business. Hegel's innovation from this standpoint was to expand the rights of civil liberty in civil society into rights of political participation through mediating institutions like corporations and estates: the corporations involving high levels of participation in a particularistic mode, the estates being more universalistic but less participatory. The result would be a proper balance of direct and representative democracy.

Philosophy of Right is recast by this account as a normative sociology which reconciles the individual and the community, private property and the state, through the associational forms of civil society. But it was precisely the possibility of this form of 'reconciliation' which Hegel repudiated. He recognised that modern civil society is torn apart by antagonisms: it is because 'particularity and universality have become separated in civil society', that 'civil society affords a spectacle of (boundless) extravagance and misery as well as of the physical and ethical corruption common to both'.⁸⁵ Hegel admitted the antagonistic character of bourgeois civil society into the body of his political philosophy with a rigour which escapes modern democratic theory. If the state is confused with civil society, he wrote, the result will surely be that 'the interest of individuals *as such* becomes the ultimate end for which they are united'.⁸⁶ What is now called 'civil society theory' refuses to confront the violence of civil society.

Conclusion: The Contemporary Significance of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*

Hegel argued that modern democratic illusions concerning 'popular sovereignty' have their roots in aspects of the state that have been 'elevated into the realm of independent ideas and turned against the real'.⁸⁷ In a conservative mode the myth is perpetuated that the state is based on the will of the people; in a critical mode the idea of the 'will of the people' is set against the state. The former sells the illusion that humanity has reached the pinnacle of public freedom in the shape of representative government. The latter invokes the ancient cult of presence against representation, immediacy against mediation, to remedy the illusions of representation, but finds no miraculous physic. Hegel's premonition was that the defects of representation are not solved by its so-called 'abolition' and in any case what is repressed returns in more ghastly form.

Hegel's 'reconciliation with reality' pointed toward a more difficult, more anxious, more complex, but also firmer foundation for political criticism in the modern age. He sought to explain why the modern state, which starts life as the 'mind on earth consciously realising itself', becomes an 'independent and autonomous power' in which 'individuals are mere moments'. He shows us why the advent of representative government offered no lasting 'solution', but also why the radical critique of representation failed. 'When we hear speakers on the constitution expatiating about the "people"', Hegel wrote, 'we know from the start that we have nothing to expect but generalities and perverse declamations'.⁸⁸ Neither can the existence of the state be identified

with its concept, nor can the concept of the state be elevated into the heavens as something beyond reproach (a 'true', 'direct', participatory democracy) which the actual state must strive to attain. Such a strategy only repeats what is already present in the state: the myth of 'popular sovereignty'. In the actual political world, dominated by democratic phantasies and the spectre of fascism, a more critical alternative is needed.

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6

The Dialectics of Rights: Transitions and Emancipatory Claims in Marxian Theory

MANOLIS ANGELIDIS

The concept of right has been revived in modern political discourse and a main current in political theory today recognises itself as right-based theory. This revival, which arises from the protracted crisis of the welfare state, has given new relevance to the major issues which were of central importance for classical liberal theory. However, this modern revival has not reintroduced the critical terms which were considered essential to the theoretical legitimacy of any discussion of right. These terms include the unified principles of liberty and equality and their relation to the normative elements of the natural law tradition, from which they derived and upon which the very constitution of *civil society* was founded. This is reflected in the directions taken by the modern debates. On the one hand, the concept of right is approached on the basis of its immediate historical interpretation as an attempt at 'retrieving' its concrete historical meaning as imprinted in the relevant texts of the formative period of modernity.¹ On the other hand, the same concept is approached formally as an analytical device for understanding the formal relations between separate agents.² This formalist approach, prevalent in most theories of neoliberal persuasion, postulates social reality as a fragmented reality – this fragmentation being transmitted to its method of explanation. This is expressed in the eclectic character of the modes of explanation adopted. Within a single theoretical corpus there coexist such diverse methodological tools as the formalist, historicist, organicist and traditional explanation. Paradoxically enough, this confusion of types of explanation is also shared by neo-structuralist approaches which pretend to non-liberal aspirations.

The main feature of modern right-based theories is that they take as their starting point the individualisation in modern societies, the study of individual action. This starting point is an expedient tool for solving the embarrassing

problems arising from the question of values as a constitutive substratum of an antinomic social reality. This type of theorising may be traced back to Weberian and postweberian sociology, which in its most extreme versions destroys historical and dialectical theories referring to society as a totality of historical relations while arguing that in such theories objectivity is conceived as an attempt to smuggle in 'non-scientific' purposes. This way of theorising rights, irrespective of the way in which they are conceived, may be reconstructed as a set of approaches to separate levels of contemporary bourgeois society. However, the way in which this initial level is theoretically evaluated is not based on a relational conception of society, from which the separation between society and politics might be derived, but on a perception of society as a set of individualised actions and aims, the framework of which is considered to have been broken. In relation to their initial postulates, these approaches may be understood as ideological forms of consciousness related to the process of development of bourgeois society. In this sense, they either 'conceal' the fundamental separations within bourgeois society in relation to which the initial levels of their conceptualisation are constructed, or 'reveal' other separations, the suspension of which is favoured.

The critique of modern right-based theories presupposes a reconstruction of the grounding/foundation of rights repressed in modern debates and referring to emancipatory claims as well as to the ideas of liberty and equality. We argue here that the revival of rights theory is implicitly connected with the extended challenge to the classical idea of equality which constitutes a critical standpoint that transcends the restricted private premises of bourgeois politics. At the theoretical level, the concept of rights is developed in an even more confined framework than the one offered by early theory of natural law. This becomes more evident as these approaches appropriate, as a rule, from early theory no more than the form of individual action restructured as a game of choice while rejecting the binding framework of natural law norms by which the libertarian and egalitarian postulates are symmetrically developed. Moreover, the emphasis upon individual action obscures the *separating* foundation of rights and transforms the libertarian postulate into a principle of constitutive inequality for modern society. In contrast to these approaches, we attempt to approach the concept of rights from within a theoretical framework constructed as a dialectical field of social separations and tensions, hidden by the prevailing aspect of individuality. Against dogmatic versions of 'Marxism' which exorcise individuality as an aspect linked by definition to the suspension of social postulates, we understand it as an expression of human practice which is historically produced in an alienated form. This attempted approach brings us closer to the theoretical tradition of early modern theory of natural law and to its reception by 'early' and 'late' Marxian

theory. The study of this critical reception opens a perspective of conceiving rights as social separations historically produced and makes possible the understanding of the prevailing pattern of politics as a field of redefining even the minimal conditions guarding against the degrading of social labour.

The Problem of Rights in Early Modern Theory

In early modern theory the problem of rights is thematised within the wider frame of rational natural law discourse. The theoretical argument focuses on the critical examination of the historically positive socio-political order which introduces the criterion of rationality as a measure for legitimate institutions. In this theoretical tradition a political order is held to be legitimate in so far as it is constituted according to the rational norms of natural law, at the core of which the values of liberty and equality are inserted. Methodologically, the derivation of rational political order is successful in so far as the construction of the causal relation within the field of politics does not start from the historically posited, but, on the contrary, from the field of the norms of natural law. On the basis of this method we are not in a position either to construct the subject of political theory or to understand society rationally unless we link its description with the values of liberty and equality. This means that these values are presupposed not only for the right constitution of society but at the same time constitute political theory itself. John Locke argues in this sense when, in his *Second Treatise*, he refers the problem of the right understanding of political power back to its origins in a 'state of nature', defined as a state of freedom and equality. J.J. Rousseau's argument on man's freedom could be understood in the same sense since it implies that in real society this freedom has been abolished and has to be re-instituted.³ I. Kant had already emphasised the binding character of this derivation arguing that the 'republican constitution' is 'the *only* constitution which *can be derived* from the idea of an original contract, upon which all rightful legislation of a people must be founded'.⁴

This politico-theoretical programme, seen historically, corresponds schematically to the struggle waged by the newly formed bourgeoisie against the pre-bourgeois society of privileges and by legal order against a society characterised by an all-embracing penetration of politics into economics. In this sense, the bourgeois conception of society as a sum of freely deliberating individuals is supported by a fundamental *separation* between politics and economics. This separation is the founding element for the comprehension of rights within their historicity. At the same time, the distinction between politics and society is concealed by – and in its turn conceals – the fact that

the rights claimed are *collective* rather than individual. They are *political* rights, as a guarantee for the participation of the bourgeoisie in legislation, although these rights become an 'issue' for political theory with the emergence of the famous 'social question'.

The latent separating foundation of rights in early modern theory makes possible the conceptualisation of rights as impediments (a 'fence' according to the Lockean phraseology) to a retreat to a pre-bourgeois privileged order and hinders every effort to reinstitute this order through an excessive exercise of extra-legal force. This is the historico-theoretical background for the emergence of individuality as a fundamental tool for analysing society. This dissolution of society into separate individuals is equivalent to the dissolution of pre-bourgeois 'collective' rights and every and any individual action is held legitimate only if the binding framework of natural law is validated in the institution of *civil society*. This dual process of constructing human action as individual and of constituting *civil society* as an actualisation of natural law norms corresponds to the 'doubling' of society into society and politics. Through this 'doubling' the premature political rights are transposed to the *public* sphere that is instituted as an abstract, formal and binding sphere, as the *reservoir* of natural law norms, ready to be actualised whenever human action is violently interrupted.

The derivation of the political as an indispensable condition for individual deliberative action has proved historically to have as its target the protection of a specific and exclusive individual right linked to private property. Within the historical horizon of bourgeois society the very content of freedom is specified in relation to private property and sanctions the risky activities of the owner of capital.⁵ This specification of freedom, however, does not free theoretical consciousness from the obligation to reflect upon the content of freedom as wider than its conditions, a reflection that is in line with the claims of natural law theory and corresponds to its projection of liberty into human nature.

This approach to freedom has to confront, from its very beginning, two interrelated anachronisms. The first is related to the attempt by 'neoliberal' approaches to give an absolute priority to the idea of liberty as against the idea of equality, which is reduced to secondary status in political theory.⁶ The absolute character of liberty is gained at the cost of undermining the very unity of classical liberal theory, in the field of which the constitutive principles of liberty and equality were linked to a reflection on the very conditions of social reproduction in relation to social labour. According to the neoliberal arguments, liberty is redefined as being opposed to an ahistorical idea of a constantly intervening state power, and this redefinition is not followed by the slightest reflection on the conditions under which this intervention is introduced. In

this way any and every intervention by the state is criticised as linked with a distribution of privileges and, as a result, political theory is unable to theorise modern forms of privileges that are produced either as an 'anomaly' to the actualisation of social principles or as an 'excess' to the actualisation of private principles (as with monopoly capital).

The second anachronism is related to the type of ideological critique, under which the binding ideas of liberty and equality are perceived in their origin as ideological forms of concealing privileges linked with private property. Implicit in this critique is the rejection of the natural foundation of rights, and more precisely the ahistorical character of such a foundation. However, this critique has swept away liberty and equality as being values related exclusively to bourgeois man, since they are not considered to be values which define human identity in general. Within the Marxian tradition the consideration of the ideas of liberty and equality in their historical context is entirely different from a narrow historical conception of these ideas, according to which liberty and equality are reduced to their fetishised forms.⁷

The anachronism connected with current neoliberal arguments poses a major question which arises from the treatment of the preconditions which the early theory saw as crucial. These preconditions are, on the one hand, the interpretative framework of the *state of nature* and, on the other hand, the binding framework of *natural law*. Both these frameworks were used and developed rationally by early theory in an attempt to suspend the antinomic relation between norms and the *mechanisms* of selfish and/or traditional interests. Furthermore, this attempt was accompanied by an early politico-economic treatment of the crucial problem of instituting private property. The *locus classicus* of this treatment is the Lockean theory of property, where private property is understood as a division within society, a thesis supported by a theory of labour which makes possible the conception of society as labour activity.⁸ Although it may sound paradoxical, this conception has survived and been further developed in Marxian theory through its ties with classical political economy. This reveals the close link between early modern theory and Marxian theory, as parts of a wider rational theoretical tradition within the Enlightenment, as well as the double direction taken by Marxian theory in relation to the problem of rights. On the one hand, the Marxian argument absorbs the critical argument of early theory and on the other hand it undermines its ahistorical foundation, which made possible the transformation of the principle of individuality (division) into a permanent feature of human nature.

Current debates have shown the renewed relevance of the problem of placing the mechanisms of selfish action into frameworks of binding norms that transcend the narrowness of individual deliberation. However, the relevance of this problem is accompanied by a degrading of the bond between

the mechanisms of action and critical teleology. This degrading consists in disputing any and every possibility of placing human action in a framework of ends, since such a possibility is considered to be equivalent to the attempt to impose predetermined ends upon the field of human action, which inevitably results in a state of oppression (lack of liberty). On the other hand, it is argued that where there exists a framework of ends, this is validated as a result of spontaneity, as a non-intended result of human action, accepted on the basis of mixed functional and traditional criteria.⁹ The acceptance of these criteria corresponds, at the level of political theory, to the uncritical sanctioning of political and economic institutions on the basis of what has been delivered successfully until now.¹⁰

This degrading is clearly seen in the treatment by the theory of political anarchism of the crucial postulates of natural law theory. Within this theory the whole process of deriving the concept of the political from natural law premises (state of nature) is reversed and the political is perceived as if a state of nature of *bellum omnium contra omnes* will be the derived result. Under this conception of the political as prior to the state of nature, one may discover a very specific and historically determined sense of the political, linked with the functions of the state during the period of welfare policies. This argument deconstructs the rational natural law tradition and reshapes the Lockean derivation of the political on the basis of spontaneity, since the form of the conventional (social contract) between human agents is derived as non-intended and in abstraction from natural law norms. This line of argument has major consequences for the supporting structures of Lockean natural law theory and more specifically for the grounding of property in labour. This grounding is undermined on the basis of the 'non-mixing' device between an activity and a thing.¹¹ Within this new 'entitlement theory' the concept of the political is redefined as a result of the spontaneity of human agents through a process that is initiated by agents themselves (the 'creation of protective associations'). Those agents excluded from the lottery of creating titles are compensated in order that they should not hinder such a spontaneous outcome,¹² which obviously favours the implementation within society of the private principle as a basis for the whole entitlement process.

Marx's Critique of the *Ancien Régime*

A close inspection of Marx's theses during the formative period of the early 1840s makes clear that he entirely shared the liberal programme of German idealism, and that he was aware of the tension inherent in the attempts made by Prussian absolutism to reinstitute the restrictions upon liberty. Certainly,

the critical ideas presented in the texts of that period bear no trace of the criticism later put forward of the ambivalent and 'hesitant' nature of German liberalism, which was founded upon the separation of the 'will' from its materiality.¹³ The notion of the political supported by Marx is based upon the rational postulates of 'liberty' and 'equality before the law'. In this context freedom is defined in its 'colourful' variety, as against its disciplined, 'grey' official determination.¹⁴ The *Ancien Régime*'s regulations imposed upon the liberty of the press are presented metaphorically as an attempt to throw a shadow on the actualisation of the Enlightenment in politics. This critique is extended to and challenges the very constitutive principles of Prussian absolutism. Instead of promulgating general laws and instituting conditions of public discourse, Prussian absolutism introduces privileges directed against the body of freely deliberating citizens. Furthermore, it is argued that the whole political logic of the *Ancien Régime* reproduces a Hobbesian-type state of nature, which favours pre-bourgeois dependence amongst the subjects and places severe impediments on the actualisation of the principles of moral autonomy.¹⁵ In this critical context, Marx uses the censorship instructions as a paradigm for studying the confusion existing within the sphere of 'pre-civil' politics in all the instances in which authority is realised (civil, penal etc.). It is implied that authority is not constituted as *public*, but as *private*, and in this sense it is devoid of 'political spirit'.¹⁶ The notion of political spirit signifies a conception of the political as a mediating principle which hinders, on the one hand, the legitimisation of the traditional authority on the basis of 'paternalistic' criteria, and, on the other hand, links the instances of civil society within a unified, public spirited constitution. This double sense of the notion of political spirit makes possible the introduction of a set of value oriented criteria, on the basis of which it may be decided which institution is 'good' or 'bad'.¹⁷

In this connection, Marx develops the dialectics of rights within the *Ancien Régime* institutions as a process of transforming general rights into particular rights. This process is understood to include the appropriation of these rights by the privileged orders, which direct them against society in the same manner as the 'estates of the Middle Ages appropriated for themselves all the country's constitutional rights and turned them into privileges against the country'.¹⁸ The aforementioned dialectics are supported by an analysis of the dynamics of pre-bourgeois society presented as a net of interrelated interests and partial standpoints. Within these dynamics, the emergent contradictions seem to be summarised in one major contradiction between society and the traditional 'pre-civil' forms. Furthermore, this contradiction engenders an illusion as to the general character of rights, since, through the appropriation of rights, their particular character is hidden from society under a false form of generality.¹⁹ This continual transformation of the particular into the general is secured, on

the political level, by the 'aristocratic privilege of secret proceedings' and results in the total undermining of the political programme of the Enlightenment. More specifically, the dialectics developed by Marx, which produce the illusion that violates the form of generality, reveals that the basis of the *Ancien Régime* is a conception that regards 'freedom not as the natural gift of the universal sunlight of reason, but as the supernatural gift of a specially favourable constellation of the stars', that transforms freedom into 'an *individual property* of certain persons and social estates', that reduces 'universal reason and universal freedom' to the field of '*bad ideas* and phantoms of "*logically constructed systems*"', which in the end results in the proscription of the 'universal freedom of human nature'.²⁰ One realises here that the practical consequences of this proscription are connected with the irrational core of traditional theory, which questions the 'logical construction' and has recourse to the 'miraculous' and the 'mystical', to the 'theory of the other world, to religion'.²¹

Within this context, what secures 'universal freedom' against pre-civil fragmentation is the institution of publicity and criticism, in other words, the actualisation of the idea of freedom. It is argued that through this actualisation the relation between law and freedom is clarified. Publicity suspends the separation between society and the traditional political forms, since it undermines the logic of the secrecy of proceedings, making the Assembly of the Estates 'an immediate object of public spirit', and at the same time it reverses the process of transforming the universal into the particular.²² The status of criticism is impartiality, since it presupposes the abandonment of every and any particular standpoint/interest and introduces the necessity of *judging* between these standpoints. Judgment, in its turn, initiates a reflection on the relation between law and freedom. This reflection shares the typical *instrumentarium* of rational theory both in its theoretical and practical dimensions: in its theoretical dimension, since law is defined as a 'positive, clear, universal norm in which freedom has acquired an impersonal, *theoretical existence independent of the arbitrariness of the individual*'; while in its practical dimension we find resonances of the Rousseauian argument, since only when man, in his 'actual behaviour has shown that he has ceased to obey *the natural law of freedom does law in the form of state law compel him to be free*'.²³ Furthermore, the binding and natural character of law is constructed by analogy with the conceptual frame of natural science, since it is argued that the law itself is repressive against freedom to the same degree as the law of gravity is repressive against motion.²⁴ This analogy, which is also latent in Marx's mature work, is of decisive importance for a theory which conceives of rights as demediated forces of direct conflict between rival interests, produced in the context of what has been called the 'hastiness of theory'.²⁵ However, on this premature level,

this 'naturalistic' trend seems to be counter-balanced by the all-pervading practical character of freedom, which acquires its 'positive existence' and is constituted as 'right' through the law.²⁶ In this sense, positive freedom is the absolute measure of political institutions and its normativity is already included in its very idea, while freedom sustains, and presses for, the prevalence of publicity as an indispensable condition for itself. This scheme of making freedom positive according to its idea refers the factual to the normative, through which the first obtains the uniting force of the second. In this sense, the factual can only be actualised on the basis of its normative foundation and through this actualisation can find its right to exist.

Within this context, the critique of the *Ancien Régime* seems to reach a culmination point where the problem of the formation of rights is connected with the structure of social materiality. This crucial connection drives the early Marxian critique to its limit, since the treatment of the problem of rights seemed to require more than the conceptual frame of jurisprudence, even of a jurisprudence 'subordinated to philosophy and history'.²⁷

Here, the constitution of rights is attracted by the institution of property and the relevant civil and penal regulations in cases of property violation. It is argued that a modern definition of property rights requires a rational method of imputing punishment in cases of violation, and this in its turn presupposes a rational measure. The introduction of this measure presupposes implicitly that property is devoid of its political privileges and is constituted on the level of socio-economic relations. This historical development is reflected in the introduction of the measure of punishment, which is *value* as 'the civil mode of existence of property, the logical expression through which it first becomes socially comprehensible and communicable'.²⁸ Value in this sense has obtained an objective character following the 'nature of the object itself', although this objectivity seems to be exhausted at the level of the legal-political instance. In relation to this objective standard, which epitomises the civil state as against a pre-bourgeois state of war, the proposed regulation on 'wood thefts' is considered as lagging behind the practical claim for universality, since it is wanting in the ability of 'establishing differences'. This inability is manifested in the recognition by the Assembly of only one partial customary right, the right of the 'forest owner', and in the elimination of any other customary right.²⁹

In the context of forest regulation, Marx is shifting towards a dialectic of form and content in the definition of rights (customary or not), by which a criterion is introduced that makes possible the measuring of 'false' and 'correct' rights. This shifting reveals the collective or social determination of the repudiated rights on the basis of their content, while *Ancien Régime*'s confusion between the legal and the political spheres is ascribed to the human

prehistory of feudalism as a world of unfreedom that is equivalent to a world of 'divided mankind'. Critical analysis is oriented towards a field, wider than the one offered by jurisprudence, although not yet capable of being theoretically constructed. However, an attempt is made to interpret human prehistory on the basis of a pre-scientific scheme of social reproduction, which at the same time might explain the demand for the reinstatement of customary rights for the privileged classes. This demand corresponds, according to Marx, to an anachronistic claim for the reinstatement of the 'animal form' of right instead of its 'human content'. This animal form of right embodies the false separation of human life from human nature postulated by natural law theory, and links the state of unfreedom with its specific character of servility and dependence between the different species of the same genus, making possible the 'feeding of one species at the expense of another'.³⁰ This partiality also makes clear the line drawn between the propertied and the propertyless, who in the new historical circumstances belong to no social estate. This consideration is characterised by a reflection on the material conditions of the poor, whose rights are repudiated as *quasi* social rights, as rights which have to be constructed as a 'trump' over the abuse by property rights. It is implied that this trump needs to be constructed as a collective trump, and this necessity is derived, on the one hand, from an historical explanation of the natural law 'fiction' of transforming *jus in omnia* into exclusive property rights on the basis of the social contract. On the other hand it is derived from a dialectical exposition of the relation between the universal form of law and specific customary rights, through which an axiologically oriented measure is introduced in relation to the question of which customary right should or should not be abolished. In this context, an approach to the problem of rights is provided which gives emphasis to the question of the conversion of privileges into rights. The conditions of this conversion are linked to a pre-conception of this process as a complicated historical process of deinstitutioning, reinstating and delimiting frames of rights in relation to the core problem of constituting, securing and relativising private property. Of course, this pre-conception is not brought to its final conclusion, although it appears to anticipate major aspects of Marx's mature research on the dialectics of chance and necessity.³¹ In this formative period, this dialectic seems to be exhausted at the level of jurisprudence, while it is argued that the 'transformation of privileges into rights' is achieved through securing, on the one hand, the exclusive right to private property and leaving, on the other hand, a 'deficit' in social rights, at the level of society.

Within this dialectic, the traditional customary rights of the aristocracy are criticised as 'customary wrongs' in so far as their 'content is contrary to the form of law – universality and necessity ...' and any claim arising from such

a wrong is considered to be founded upon an irrational, 'idiosyncratic', basis.³² The major criterion for this conclusion is rationality itself, and in this sense

customary right as a *separate domain* alongside legal right is ... rational only where it exists *alongside* and *in addition to law*, where custom is the *anticipation* of a legal right. Hence one can not speak of the customary rights of the privileged estates. The law recognises not only their rational right but often even their irrational pretensions. The privileged estates have no right of anticipation in regard to law, for law has anticipated all possible consequences of their right.³³

As far as the customary rights of the poor are concerned, on the other hand, we find a reflection on the very essence of instituting the civil law, the scope of which is asserted to be confined only 'to formulating and raising to a universal level those rights which [have been] found already in existence'.³⁴ From this, in principle circumscribed, logic of civil law arises its inability to create new rights. And, although the constitution of civil law is tantamount to the abolishing of 'particular customs', it is accompanied by the inability to identify the fact that 'whereas the wrong of the estates took *the form of arbitrary pretensions*, the right of those without social estate appeared in *the form of accidental concessions*'.³⁵ So, civil law has been confined to converting 'arbitrary pretensions' into 'legal claims' and has turned a blind eye to the poor, since it has not converted the 'accidental concessions' into 'necessary ones'.³⁶ Marx's criticism of civil law seems to be wider and more far-sighted than the restricted historical horizon from which it has been engendered. Within this criticism there is room for crediting the civil law with divesting property privileges of 'their *strange* character' and with giving them 'a *civil* character',³⁷ as well as for pointing out the shortcomings of the so-called legislative mind, which 'forgot ... that a twofold right was present here: a private right of the owner and a private right of the non-owner'.³⁸ The far-sightedness of this criticism is revealed as the whole approach shifts to the problem of the state. The customary rights of the poor are now considered as a collective trump, possessing an 'instinctive sense of right', which brings them closer to nature as a social site sustaining survival, legitimising them, and revealing that 'the existence of the poor class itself has been a mere custom of civil society, ... which has not found an appropriate place in the conscious organisation of the state'.³⁹

The exclusion of the poor from the 'conscious organisation of the state' opens the theme of the relation between private interests and the state, as well as between public and private instances within society. The logic of the forest

regulations is demystified as a logic which 'turns the authority of the state into a servant of the forest owner'⁴⁰ and shows a characteristic pre-bourgeois penetration of the 'private' interest in the 'public' sphere. This confusion between these two spheres within society makes private interest the 'ultimate goal of the world', and in terms of punishment, raises the distinction, characteristic of early modern theory, between the 'restoration of the law' and the 'restitution of the value and compensation for loss', converting the 'public punishment into a private compensation'.⁴¹ It is argued that as a result, instead of restoring the law on the basis of its universality, its rationality and its dignity, the *droit du seigneur* is made active anew, by which the penalty of 'temporary serfdom' is imposed on the debtor unable to compensate. Furthermore, the procedure followed for the enactment of forest regulation is severely criticised as a 'non-political' enactment – as an enactment not connected with 'the whole of the reason and morality of the state'.⁴²

Obviously, within the arguments of that period one can trace several directions taken by Marx's critique, which were developed in his subsequent work. One such direction is linked to the criticism of the selfish interests connected with the traditional/patrimonial type of politics. This criticism anticipates to some degree major aspects of Marx's arguments presented in *The Jewish Question*. Another direction is linked to the idea of a 'deficit in social rights' created as a result of the destruction of pre-bourgeois social relations. This direction is fully developed in Marx's mature work and is connected with an approach to the formation of rights as a complex historical process through which the forms of rights are created or destroyed. This process is initially conceptualised in relation to the concept of the division of labour and afterwards within the wider theoretical framework of value theory.

Rights as Forms of Alienation of Human Essence

The problems arising from the critique of the *Ancien Régime* as well as the practical consequences of this critique led to a shift in the Marxian theoretical programme in the direction of critically examining the very postulates of rational political theory as ideological forms contrary to unified human nature. The historical process of bourgeois political emancipation is now conceptualised within a theory oriented towards the anthropological premises put forward by the Feuerbachian critique of the Hegelian theory. Marx now holds that what prevents human liberation from its actualisation is the inherent contradictions in instituting civil society, which may be reduced to the fragmentation of human essence into the *bourgeois* and the *citoyen*. This fragmentation is of course not as yet connected with an understanding of human

society in its relational 'material' basis. However, it is held that this fragmentation decisively determines the postulates of liberty and equality and gives to them a separating content. At the same time, it is emphasised that this content overlaps with selfish interests, on the one hand, and the political form which makes possible their actualisation in a 'society' of egoistic men, on the other. It is implied that this political form, to the degree that it widens the dissociation between men instead of suspending it, is a mistaken form, a form which produces human alienation. Thus, the constitution of rights in modern bourgeois society presupposes that this society is divided and reproduces these divisions as the very conditions of its existence. This theoretical direction is best revealed in the critical reconstruction of 'freedom'. The 'right of man to freedom' is criticised as 'not based on the association of man with man but rather on the separation of man from man. It is the *right* of this separation, the right of the *restricted* individual, restricted to himself'.⁴³

Of course, bourgeois individualisation is not theoretically produced from its historical conditions; on the contrary, what is under criticism here is bourgeois political emancipation in relation to an understanding of its 'essential conditions'. This understanding anticipates to some extent an idea which is more explicitly presented in the *Theses on Feuerbach*; it is the idea of reducing the ideological facets of modern society (for example, religion) to the 'antinomies' of its 'secular basis'. These facets are understood as separated facts, facts reduced 'to the essential contradiction between *bourgeois* and *citoyen*', between the 'political state' and 'civil society'.⁴⁴ Furthermore, this idea derives from a pre-dialectical epistemological direction, within which an inversion in the 'rank' within the rational faculty is indispensable as the very condition for 'real' science.⁴⁵ This inversion of course has major theoretical-practical consequences within the general Marxian tradition, one of which, at this level, is that it initiates the Marxian ideological critique on the basis of which the connection of the problem of political emancipation with the demand for human emancipation is rendered possible. Political emancipation is considered as 'the last form of human emancipation *within* the prevailing scheme of things' and human emancipation is understood as 'real, practical emancipation'.⁴⁶ However, the elevation of the human to the level of 'real' emancipation seems to be mediated by an alienated ('devious') and 'necessary' form of emancipation and as such lags behind the real one. This form is held to be alienated since it mediates human individuality as a value in itself and obstructs its elevation above its status as 'a profane being' and 'necessary', since this individuality is implicitly recognised as a condition for the derivation of the political in its universal form. Political emancipation, although alienated in principle, abolishes the pre-bourgeois relations of property, which were active in a distorted form and in confusion with legal-

political privileges. Now, the pre-bourgeois separation of the human from the political on the basis of distinctions such as 'birth, rank, education and occupation' is replaced by another separation between the political in its universality and (bourgeois) society.⁴⁷ Within bourgeois society, which is itself a part of the 'prevailing scheme', all these distinctions are declared to be 'non-political' and can survive as 'factual distinctions', which 'the state presupposes in order to exist, it only experiences itself as *political state* and asserts its *universality* in opposition to these elements'.⁴⁸ Thus, an antagonistic society is instituted, wherein each man recognises in other men 'not the *realisation* but the *limitation* of his own freedom'.⁴⁹

Marx's attempt to re-institute the axiological dimension of human, non-egoistic individuality as a part of the *Gattungswesen* (society) is linked with an understanding of the derivation of the duplication between the state and bourgeois society as a fundamental unity sustaining modern political and social institutions, which produces major separations taking the form of rights constituted either in the public or in the private sphere. These separations at the same time form the bonds linking egoistic men. However, these bonds as determined by the 'natural necessity' of 'need and private interest' fall short of the *Gattungswesen*, a shortcoming which is revealed as the latter appears as something external to individuals.⁵⁰ Thus, the horizon of the constituted rights is that of egoism. A problem arises now concerning the type of this egoism. In his attempt to give an answer to this question, Marx seems to withdraw from his initial conception of the political as a universal form of mediating private interests. However, this apparent withdrawal is the result of a dialectic oriented towards a presentation of the antinomic derivation of rights, through which the immediacy or not of the political is examined in view of the practical actualisation of the *Gattungswesen*. In this context, political emancipation is traced back to the dissolution of the *Ancien Régime*, and although its 'political system was estranged from the people', its 'elements of civil life ... had a *directly political* character'.⁵¹ Strangely enough, the immediacy of the political *in this sense* is exalted on the ground that the elements of civil life – property and labour – were constituted as 'separate societies within society' retaining their political character even in its feudal sense.⁵² In other words, it is implied that in this elementary instance within the old society, in the instance of the separate society within society, the practical aims of the *Gattungswesen* were actualised. Considered from this perspective, the political revolution seems to be discredited, for it 'abolished the political character of civil society', shattering it 'into its simple components' and bequeathing to the new, politically emancipated society its false 'consignment' of selfishness as its foundation.⁵³ This criticism of political revolution has, on the one hand, the merit of understanding civil society as a 'world of needs, of labour, of private

interest and of civil law'.⁵⁴ On the other hand, however, as far as this criticism is self-restricted to the demand of restoring the lost and romantic immediacy of the political, it abstains from any attempt at penetrating into the nature of this world of needs, of labour and so on. On this level, the emancipatory programme is linked with the demand of suspending the separation between *bourgeois* and *citoyen*, through which 'real, individual man resumes the abstract citizen into himself and as an individual man ... become[s] a *species-being* in his empirical life'.⁵⁵ The direction taken by this programme in recapturing the reality of man by himself still echoes the Feuerbachian criticism of speculative philosophy. The scope of this criticism, already adopted by Marx, is much wider than the emancipatory programme itself and goes back to the criticism of the very foundations of the philosophy of idealism, and more specifically of the Hegelian philosophy.⁵⁶ On this basis, the procedure, characteristic of the idealist dialectics, 'of going from the abstract to the concrete and from the ideal to the real' is denounced as a 'distorted procedure', since the very process of 'abstraction alienates the human essence from the human being' and thus hinders 'the immediate, evident, undecptive identification of the human essence to the human being'.⁵⁷

However, within this criticism the demand of recovering the immediacy of the human being within the *Gattungswesen* is connected with a reflection upon the world of needs as the notion of human alienation is specified in relation to the idea of human labour. The Marxian emancipatory ideal is shifting to the field of political economy – a field which is held to be identified with 'the process of reality itself',⁵⁸ where 'species-activity' is considered to be equal 'with the process of *exchange* both of human activity in the course of production and of *human products*'. Thus, human alienation expressed in the separations between men is the product of this world of needs, and the emancipatory ideal of the 'true community' is objectively determined since 'it arises out of the need and the egoism of individuals, i.e. it arises directly from their own activity'.⁵⁹ This shift to the field of political economy has major consequences for the Marxian critique since it raises the question of *historicity* as a central question in critical social theory, transcending the 'naturalistic' premises of economics and implying that from these premises derives a false (an alienated) objectivity, devoid of human existence as historical existence. Moreover, this shift means that the pretence of economics to 'natural objectivity' is 'a mere semblance while in reality it is a specific historical form of existence that man has given himself'.⁶⁰ Thus the Marxian conception of rights as separations (such as private property) acquires its historical foundation, which also gives a basis of necessity to the axiological project of suspending the alienated forms. The theme of alienation is supported by an analysis of the exchange process, which anticipates in many respects the elaboration

developed in *Capital*. On this basis, the structure of individualisation in bourgeois society is critically approached as alienated, expressing at the same time the underlying contradiction within political economy, that 'the establishment of society' is carried 'through unsocial, particular interests'.⁶¹ From this standpoint, the exchange process, measured against the emancipatory ideal, is analysed as a non-social and non-human relation, as an 'abstract relation of private property to private property' where 'men do not relate to each other as men'.⁶² The bond uniting men is held to be determined by the '*specific nature of the object* which constitutes their private property'.⁶³ This dialectic reveals the relation of the subject, as a 'total' and not as a 'particular being', to the 'products of the labour of others', a relation constituted within the 'context of private property', while exchange takes the form of an 'external, *alienated* species-activity', 'the very antithesis of a *social* relationship'.⁶⁴ Here private property is approached as the core separation within bourgeois society, from which all other separations follow and particularly its separation from itself. Private property is defined as a relationship between the bartering sides and each side 'embodies the existence of the *other*' existing 'as his own *surrogate* and as the surrogate of the other'.⁶⁵ This process seems to be intensified as the whole process of production is diversified and through it major transformations take place – such as the transformation of 'work into wage labour' and the 'transformation of man into egoistic', into 'a spiritual and physical abortion' – which result in the separation of labour, capital and landed property characteristic of bourgeois society.⁶⁶

One can discern several different attempts at producing these separations, organised either in relation to the emancipatory ideal of directly suspending the alienated forms of human essence or in relation to the critique of the theoretical programme of political economy, namely, the study of the relations of production and distribution in bourgeois society. As far as the second direction is concerned, one can foresee the engagement with the problems of social materiality as a basis for an understanding of property rights. It is argued that these rights are generated as production becomes more extended than the immediate needs and results in a 'possession of produce' produced as a surplus.⁶⁷ The scheme of extended production is conceptualised in the context of a Hegelian dialectics of recognition,⁶⁸ which in its turn transforms the whole logic of the exchange process as a calculating, plundering and/or deceiving process between the conflicting possessors who mutually recognise their power over their corresponding possessions. Implied here is a notion of the instituted political as relating to the neutralisation of physical force and derived from the necessity of bargaining.⁶⁹ Thus, the analysis seems to slip once more into a notion of the political as a mediating form, which affirms private property as an exclusive possessive right which impedes the actualisation of human

essence as a species-essence (the redefining of 'estrangement as *true admission to citizenship*').⁷⁰

These transitions in Marx's thought are already evident in the *1844 Manuscripts* where we find a closer contact with (and the critique of) the categories of political economy. In this context, one sees that 'private property is derived from an analysis of the concept of alienated labour' and that political economy is criticised on the grounds that although it starts from labour 'as the real soul of production' it yet '*gives nothing to labour and everything to private property*'.⁷¹ This early critique of political economy implies that political economy itself, as far as 'it merely formulates the laws of estranged labour', is constructed as a false theoretical consciousness, which studies the factuality of the estrangement of labour as it appears to the producers, to whom – to stress the connection with the theme of fetishism:

the social relations between their private labours appear *as what they are*, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things.⁷²

But the economic fact of estrangement, from which private property is derived and from which political economy also starts its theorising, bears with it the inherent separating nature between property and non-property. This separation crystallises both the '*relation of the worker to labour and to the product of his labour and the non-worker and the relation of the non-worker to the worker and to the product of his labour*' and, furthermore, engenders the '*political form of the emancipation of the workers*' as the form of 'universal human emancipation',⁷³ which will result in the suspending of this separation. This relational core seems to leave no room for any thematisation of rights as a separate field of theorising, since the whole argument seems to be subject to the all-pervasive emancipatory ideal. Certainly, in this context there is no room for such a thematisation in the tradition of legal normativism of the sort provided by liberal political theory. This type of normativism is negated as embodying in its very logic of deriving binding norms for human action the alienated factuality of politico-economic relations. However, the emancipatory ideal of *Gattungswesen* is gradually drawn in its turn towards the themes developed in the field of political economy and its content thus seems to be determined by the antinomic nature of objectivity: if the emancipatory ideal has to be actualised so that the 'devaluated' human world should be suspended, this devaluation has to be theoretically produced.

It seems to me that 'early' Marxian theoretical approaches, instead of putting forward a direct derivation of rights, are involved in a major theo-

retical programme of developing the separating substratum upon which the forms of society (including rights) are founded. Political economy is criticised insofar as it has embodied in its subject matter these separations as natural and ahistorical. In this context, the theme of rights is absorbed by the critique of the categories of political economy and in so far as the subject of this science is critically reconstructed one may discern a latent attempt to define the 'right of labour to welfare' not within a framework of norms related to the political form (state) but in the direction, later developed, of 'positing the preconditions' of social reproduction.⁷⁴

This direction is revealed when Marx approaches political economy from the standpoint of what this science includes in its subject as relevant and what it excludes as irrelevant, or at least as marginal. Thus, although political economy reduces the wealth of society to the labour needed for its production, it recognises the 'bearer' of labour '*only as a beast of burden*'. Moreover, in as much as political economy is held to ignore the relation between labour and production, it cannot realise that

labour produces marvels for the rich, *but* it produces privation for the worker. It produces palaces, *but* hovels for the worker. It produces beauty, *but* deformity for the worker. It replaces labour by machines, *but* it casts some of the workers back into barbarous forms of labour and turns others into machines. It produces intelligence, *but* it produces idiocy and cretinism for the worker.⁷⁵

This type of judgment ('but') reveals that political economy is not historically and theoretically prepared to encompass the axiological core inherent in the concept of labour, as it ought to do. The bearer of labour exists only as a worker, devoid of his human determination. The measure of his existence is capital

for it determines the content of his life in a manner indifferent to him. Political economy therefore does not recognise the unoccupied worker, the working man insofar as he is outside this work relationship. The swindler, the cheat, the beggar, the unemployed, the starving, the destitute and the criminal working man are *figures* which exist not *for it*, but only for other eyes – for the eyes of doctors, judges, grave-diggers, beadles, etc. Nebulous figures which do not belong within the province of political economy.⁷⁶

The contradictory and exclusive nature of political economy is driven to its limits as it is reconstructed as a 'science of *wealth*' and at the same time as

'the science of denial, of starvation, of *saving*, and it actually goes so far as to save man the need for fresh *air* or physical *exercise*'.⁷⁷

The delimitation put forward by Marx, between what is relevant and what is irrelevant to political economy, may be developed towards drawing up a 'list' of necessary preconditions for social reproduction. At the same time this 'list' of necessary preconditions is 'prohibited' from being actualised within the current, estranged conditions, from being actualised as a 'list of rights' securing labour from its total degradation. This 'prohibition' may be derived from the peculiar natural determinism assigned to the historical process, which is understood in this context as 'a preparation, a development, for "*man*" to become the object of *sensuous* consciousness and for the needs of "*man as man*" to become [sensuous] needs'.⁷⁸

Norms and Rights: The Tension Within Them

Rational natural law theory has proved to be the most contested field in political theory, mainly because it was linked with the revolutionary idea of an original social contract, which sanctioned the legitimate Commonwealth on the basis of the binding, strict, and enlightened postulates of human liberty and equality. Most of the critical efforts undertaken against rational natural law had as their focal point the crucial concept of *nature* and its rational foundation. Among them, the Humean attempt seems to be the most important since it stands between the limits of a functional foundation of politics and historicism. Strictly speaking, historicism is the main opponent of natural law rationalism. This tension found its full expression in the field of political theory, and more specifically within the burning area of instituting a political constitution according to rational postulates. Historicism favoured a political constitution based on the historical particularity of each national/cultural entity, which could incorporate traditional rights, the rights of the traditional orders. Marx was one of those who sharply criticised historicism, giving emphasis to a dimension of historicist argument neglected today – the extension of scepticism, with respect to the rationality of the existent, to every field in which rationalism could be implemented.⁷⁹

Of course, the derivation of natural rights on the basis of 'natural' norms postulated by reason shared the shortcomings of early rationalism, and more specifically the efforts to project the abstract ideas of liberty and equality on an irrational reality, fragmented by privilege, caprice and arbitrariness. It seems as if divided reality was reinstated on the basis of unified principles at the cost of introducing a division between the method of appropriating reality and reality itself. The lack of any reflection upon the problem of social *mate-*

riality and the denial of *history* – which characterised rational theory – were the two major points on which Marxian theory critically focused after the *German Ideology*. Furthermore, Marxian theory has to be credited with the demystifying of central concepts within natural law tradition, for example the notion of 'natural man', on the basis of which the individual is posited as 'history's point of departure'.⁸⁰ However, as a consequence of the *immediately practical* character of the Marxian critique and as a result of the scientific approaches by later Marxists, the theoretical standpoint of the Marxian tradition precluded any further reflection upon the problem of rights in modern bourgeois society except for reflection on the problem of rights viewed under the prism of conflict. It seems as if Marxian theory shared with its opponents – at least during its 'mature period' – the attempt to relativise natural law norms.

Marx concludes the second part of his first volume of *Capital*, where he has presented the issues relating to the sphere of circulation or commodity exchange, with an extended critique of the natural or innate rights of man as forms constructed on the 'surface' of bourgeois society. The themes of this critique may be seen as a development of the section on the 'fetishism of commodity' and the critique itself seems to be directed towards the 'unveiling' of the hidden secret of commodity production. However, this secret has been understood one sidedly by Marxist epigones as related to the process of exploitation of labour-power, at the same time excluding the treatment of the antinomic substratum upon which this process was founded. Within *Capital* Marx criticises the presentation – put forward by bourgeois political economy – of the sphere of commodity exchange, which determines the 'boundaries of sale and purchase of labour-power', as the harmonious realm where the values of early modern theory seem to be actualised, where the ideal of individuals 'working together to their mutual advantage' is actualised in spite of the 'selfishness, the gain and the private interest of them'.⁸¹ Moreover, a reflection upon the theoretical presuppositions of this 'harmonistic' idea is provided, the derivation of which traces back to the reduction of the 'relation between capital and labour' to the act of the selling of labour-power, where 'the buyer and the seller meet each other only as *commodity owners*'. This reduction at the same time overlooks the act of 'consuming the commodity obtained in this exchange by capital', which 'forms here a specific economic relation'.⁸² Contrary to this bourgeois 'harmonistic' idea, Marx argues that the very act of consuming labour-power in the labour process within the capitalist mode of production suspends the ideal of 'cooperation' between individuals (the 'working together'), which can not be actualised in so far as this cooperation is fragmented and nullified by private property. This suspension is not visible since the analysis is exhausted on the 'surface' of bourgeois society,

since the sphere of commodity exchange, the 'very Eden of the innate rights of man', conceals what is really happening in 'the hidden abode of production'.⁸³ The fragmentation of the cooperative character of social labour takes place within the capitalist mode of production in so far as the result of labour takes the form of commodities, in other words in so far as commodities are the 'products of the labour of *private* individuals who work *independently* of each other' and in so far as 'producers do not come into social contact until they exchange the products of their labour'.⁸⁴

In this critical context 'freedom', 'equality', 'property' and 'utilitarianism' are reconstructed as the very terms of exchanging equivalent quantities between freely deliberating and possessing private individuals, who intend to maximise their utility. In order to grasp that the process of labour consumption is 'a process qualitatively distinct from ... exchange', that constitutes 'an essentially *different category*',⁸⁵ one has to abstract from these political preconditions, which are indispensable for the institution of the exchange relation. However, this abstraction does not mean that these political preconditions are excluded from the Marxian axiological project of suspending the fragmented forms, which conceal the cooperative character of society. On the contrary, these preconditions are latent in the analysis, even in the analysis of the conceptual transition from use-value to exchange-value, in so far as the constitution of exchange-value presupposes an historically specific form of contract (Civil Code) indispensable for the formation of the exchange relation itself and secured by the institutions of bourgeois political relations in the form of the state.⁸⁶ Thus, contrary to the dogmatic misinterpretation, which used to discredit *en masse* any and every political institution based on liberty and equality as deceptive bourgeois values, libertarian and egalitarian values participate actively in the Marxian axiological project. This is more clear in the chapter on the 'Working Day', where Marx thematises the issues related to the conditions of the consumption of labour-power by capital.

Before turning to these issues it is necessary to look at the questions related to the introduction of cooperation as an axiological ideal, the actualisation of which is hindered by the separating conditions prevailing within bourgeois society. Cooperation is founded upon the very idea of labour (productive activity) as a set of 'functions of the human organism', which 'whatever may be its nature or its form, is essentially the expenditure of human brain, nerves, muscles and sense organs'.⁸⁷ This concept of labour as expenditure of the human organism-in-activity is inserted and developed into the dialectics of labour itself as a 'process between man and nature by which man, through his own actions, *mediates, regulates and controls* the metabolism between himself and nature'.⁸⁸ As the presentation of the conceptual framework is set forth, this abstraction is partially cancelled and new determinations are inserted into the

concept of labour, aiming at bringing its social form to the fore. Human labour is held 'to assume a social form as soon as men start to work for each other *in any way*'.⁸⁹ Human association through labour, on the one hand, is referred to the core Marxian concept of the division of labour independently of the mode of social contact between the producers. On the other hand, since the analysis focuses on the form of division of labour within capitalism, where social contact between the producers is mediated by the act of exchange, 'social relations between private labours', *instead of* appearing 'as direct social relations between persons in their work' (as they ought to), appear 'as material relations between persons and social relations between things'.⁹⁰ The theoretical elevation of the social form, in spite of its fetishisation, carries within it the axiological ideal of human cooperation as a 'conscious and planned' activity of 'freely associated men', and through its actualisation the mystical veil that covers 'the countenance of the social life-process' as materiality is removed.⁹¹ However, this ideal is not projected uncritically without any reflection upon the material preconditions which are required for its actualisation, although these preconditions are held to be historically condensed at the very moment when the Marxian standpoint is exposed.⁹²

As soon as the whole conceptual development shifts to the field of the labour-productive process, conceived as a process which creates value (process of consuming labour-power) a major separation is revealed between labour activity and the appropriation of its product by the capital owner. This separation (property) links the labour and the valorisation processes and necessitates the transition to the examination of the second process as a process of consuming labour-power by the capitalist on the basis of his private-property *right*. However, this right is only to be exercised under certain conditions that ensure firstly, the 'functioning of labour-power under *normal* conditions' and secondly, 'that the labour-power itself must be of *normal* effectiveness'.⁹³ As far as the objective factors of labour are concerned, their normal character depends on the capitalist, while the normal conditions of labour-power depend upon the 'average amount of exertion and the [socially] usual (*gesellschaftlich üblichen*) degree of intensity'.⁹⁴ Seen from the standpoint of the capitalist, what is 'average' and socially 'usual' depends upon his concern to 'ensure that his workmen are not idle for a single moment'.⁹⁵ Seen from the standpoint of the worker, what is 'average' and socially 'usual' expands to include the determination of labour as social labour threatened in its very essence by the prolongation of the working day. Thus, the analysis focuses on the issues concerning the determination of the maximum limit of the working day and the whole discussion reveals the antinomic nature of the valorisation process. Although the maximum limit seems to be of a very 'elastic nature', it is determined by physical and

social/moral standards.⁹⁶ At this level, the fluid and elastic nature of the maximum limit of the working day is approached from the standpoint of the law of commodity-exchange, which determines the involvement of the two *dramatis personae* in the exchange-process. The relation between these two 'persons' is theoretically reconstructed as an antinomy between rival *rights* mediated by force. Through this mediation, which is interwoven with the reasons each side of the relation adduces, a *norm* for the working day is instituted, which '*presents itself* as a struggle over the limits of that day, a struggle between collective capital, i.e. the class of capitalists, and collective labour, i.e. the working class'.⁹⁷

Leave aside for the moment the surface level of exchange, where the institution of the *norm* is itself presented in the form of the conflict between rival *rights* (class struggle). We discover not only that the conflict is conceived as oriented towards the *necessary* institution of the norm, but also that the necessary character of this institution stands on a wider objective basis, which determines the standpoint of the capitalist himself as a limited one. This limitation is produced from the very antinomic logic of the exploitation process, as a process where capital as a *social relation* reveals its inherent antinomies. Marx points out that

Capital itself is the contradiction [in] that, while it constantly tries to suspend *necessary labour time* (and this is at the same time the reduction of the worker to a minimum, i.e. his existence as mere living labour capacity), *surplus labour time* exists only in antithesis with necessary labour time, so that capital posits necessary labour time as a necessary condition of its reproduction and realisation. At a certain point, a development of the forces of material production – which is at the same time a development of the forces of the working class – *suspends capital itself*.⁹⁸

This antinomic relation between necessary and surplus labour time is reconstructed from the standpoint of the capitalist as a deliberation upon his own, partial and restricted interests, which suggest to him to accept a normal working day. The rationale of this suggestion is provided by his self-interest, since the uncontrolled exploitation of labour-power that shortens its life is equivalent to its more rapid replacement by capital, which means more expenses for capital, for its reproduction.⁹⁹ However, the regulation of the working day can not be initiated by the capitalist himself, in so far as he has to confront his competitors. This confrontation between rival capitalists demarcates the conditions of free competition, under which 'the immanent laws of capitalist production confront the individual capitalist as a coercive force external to him',¹⁰⁰ perceived by him as a set of dispersed and uncon-

nected data, which he has to take into account in order to survive as an individual capitalist. Within the unregulated turmoil of competition, the regulation of the working day can only take the character of a *universal* enforcement, imposed upon all individual capitalists by society.¹⁰¹

Shifting now to the standpoint of labour, one has to realise that it is reconstructed as conscious of its misery and unfreedom after the worker has witnessed the production process as a process which undermines his existence in its roots and hence 'the vital force of the nation'.¹⁰² In order to be protected, workers collectively have to 'compel the passing of a law, an all-powerful *social barrier* by which they can be *prevented from* selling themselves and their families into slavery and death by *voluntary contract* with capital'.¹⁰³ This standpoint is constructed so as to extend beyond its partiality and emerge as a potential 'guardian' of society as a whole. This extension is founded upon the conception of labour as social labour, as the very precondition of society itself, conceived not from the standpoint of individualisation but from that of its cooperative basis. The conscious attempts to secure and make active this precondition are connected with the claim to redefine the frame of human rights in the direction (the so-called 'pompous catalogue of the "inalienable rights of man"', according to Marx) of reshaping the formal constitutive principles of bourgeois politics on the basis of the axiological ideal of labour as cooperation, thus suspending the separations inherent in capitalist social relations.

Conclusion: *Aporias* of a Theory of Rights

Recent liberal theory set itself the goal of dealing with the *aporias* of the theory of rights and turned to a critique of the impediments to the libertarian principles, upon which modern democratic society is founded, supposedly placed by egalitarian postulates. In this way, these theories destroy the theoretical knowledge required for an approach to rights. They divorce the element of liberty from the element of equality and privilege the first over the second, thus ensuing in a formalistic conception of liberty divorced from sociability and exclusively oriented to defending property rights. At the same time, they avoid raising the question – already present in classical natural law theory – as to how society is to be defended against the unrestrained exercise of property rights.

On the other side, the protracted crisis in Marxist theory and the predominance of its dogmatic version have left no room for the critically oriented question of a theory of rights for modern society. For a long period, any emphasis upon the libertarian postulate as a condition for social practice was

suspect as a deviation from ideological orthodoxy. Moreover, Marxist theory itself seemed to provide no clues for such a critical orientation in so far as most of its versions focused on the 'immediate' suspending of the exploitative relations through the intensification of the class struggle. Thus, the problem of the theoretical derivation of the exploitative relation itself as a relation which divides social agents (separating dimension) while deceiving them has been overlooked. However, the conception of society as a nexus of essential separations is intrinsically connected with the ideal of free social cooperation which is produced from these separations and made active by them as an emancipatory claim. Within Marxian theory, this ideal is not conceived as a set of formal conditions indispensable for the coexistence of separated individuals, but as the unified elements themselves of the process of social reproduction threatened by interruption in so far as 'false' rights are actualised. Thus, research on the relation between the separating dimension and the ideal of social cooperation is viewed as a question of deriving a binding framework of 'right' criteria for the critical evaluation of rights. Through such research it is possible to solve the *aporias* of a critically oriented theory of rights in a direction of conceiving the problem of social cooperation not as a problem of coordinating human activities from above but, on the contrary, as a problem of including the libertarian postulate in the very core of social cooperation.

From this perspective, following the transitions of the Marxian arguments as outlined in this paper, one sees, on the one hand, that the libertarian postulate is active and implicitly constitutive of these arguments. On the other hand one sees that it is not self-assertive, as in the classical theory of natural law, but is theoretically produced from the conceptual development of the emancipatory theory of the social subject. This constitutes one more open question for theoretical research, since one has to follow the levels of the Marxian theorising step by step so as to turn one's project towards a direction of suspending the distorted versions within Marxian tradition itself.

References

1. See for example R. Tuck, *Natural Rights Theories. Their Origin and Development*, Cambridge University Press, 1981 and J. Tully, *A Discourse on Property. John Locke and his adversaries*, Cambridge University Press, 1982.
2. See for example R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1980. For a discussion of the problems related to right-based theories see J. Waldron (ed.), *Theories of Rights*, Oxford University Press, 1984 and R.G. Frey (ed.), *Utility and Rights*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1985.

3. See J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, (ed.) P. Laslett, second edition, Cambridge University Press, 1980, II, §41. See also J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1978, p. 49.
4. See I. Kant, 'Perpetual Peace', in I. Kant, *Political Writings*, (ed.) H. Reiss, second edition, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 99–100. (Italics added.)
5. See E. Bloch, *Natural Law and Human Dignity*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1988, p. 164, where it is argued that freedom, as 'individual freedom' intends to 'sanction the entrepreneur'.
6. See also N. Stammers, 'Human Rights and Power', in *Political Studies* (1993), XLI, p. 74, where it is argued that '... liberal theorists have also reinterpreted early concepts of natural rights to "write out" any possibility that their work could be used to justify a challenge to economic power. They appear to have avoided those parts of the writings of Locke and Paine which indicate a wider view of economic and social rights beyond a right to private property'.
7. See G.della Volpe, *Rousseau and Marx and other Writings*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1978, p. 41ff where this anachronism is visible.
8. See J. Locke, *Two Treatises*, §§39–43, where the treatment of private property by Locke reveals an undifferentiated conception of division of labour. The derivation of private property within the Lockean discourse is presented as a problem of transforming *jus in omnia* into exclusive individual right to private property.
9. The above characteristic argument in neoliberal discourse may be traced back to the Austrian Economics. See C. Menger, *Investigations into the Method of the Social Sciences with special Reference to Economics*, New York University Press, 1985, p. 139ff.
10. See F.A. Hayek, 'The Errors of Constructivism', in F.A. Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1985, where the above 'sanction' is supported by a *quasi* social organicism.
11. See R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, p. 174ff.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–87, 149–60.
13. See K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p. 210ff.
14. See K. Marx, 'Comments on the latest Prussian censorship instruction', in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, vol. I, p. 112.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 120, where it is argued that 'the law against a frame of mind is *not a law of the state* promulgated for its *citizens*, but a *law of one party against another party*. The law which punishes tendency abolishes the equality of the citizens before the law. It is a law which divides, not one which unites, and all laws which divide are reactionary. It is not a law, but a *privilege*.'
16. See K. Marx, 'Debates on Freedom of the Press and Publication on the Proceedings of the Assembly of the Estates', in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. I, pp. 135–6.

17. K. Marx, 'Comments on the latest Prussian censorship instruction', in *ibid.*, pp. 130–1.
18. K. Marx, 'Debates on Freedom of the Press', p. 146.
19. Compare with K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, pp. 68–9.
20. See K. Marx, 'Debates on Freedom of the Press', pp. 151–2.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 152. Compare also with the current 'anti-constructivist' trends in social theory (see note 10 above).
22. *Ibid.*, p. 148ff.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 162 (Italics added).
24. *Ibid.*
25. See K. Psychopedis, 'Dialectical Theory: Problems of Reconstruction', in W. Bonefeld et al. (eds.), *Open Marxism. Dialectics and History*, vol. I, Pluto Press, London, 1992, pp. 31–2.
26. K. Marx, 'Debates on Freedom of the Press', p. 162.
27. See K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971, p. 19 (Preface), where Marx recognises that he found himself 'in the embarrassing position of having to discuss what is known as material interests'.
28. See K. Marx, 'Debates on the law on thefts of wood', in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. I, p. 229.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 228: 'The Assembly ... repudiates the difference between gathering fallen wood, infringement of forest regulations, and theft of wood. It repudiates the difference between these actions, refusing to regard it as determining the character of the action, when it is a question of the *interests of the infringers of forest regulations*, but it recognises this difference when it is a question of the *interests of the forest owners*.'
30. *Ibid.*, p. 230–1. See, moreover, the analogy with the 'drones' and the 'worker bees'.
31. On this level, Marx examines the problem of applying to the 'indeterminate forms of property ... the existing categories of abstract civil law, the model of which was available in Roman law' (*ibid.*, p. 233). On this issue, see the remarks by A. Schmidt, *History and Structure. An Essay on Hegelian-Marxist and Structuralist Theories of History*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1981, pp. 15–16, where it is observed that during the 1850s 'Marx asks how one can explain the fact that the modern relations of production, considered as legal relations, remain within the confines of Roman law, which, in turn, presupposes a completely different economy. This is a difficult question, one which caused Marx to pay attention to the complex dialectic of chance and necessity'.
32. See K. Marx, 'Debates on the law on thefts of wood', p. 231.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 232 (Text slightly altered).
35. *Ibid.*, (Italics added).
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, p. 233. Compare also with J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Bk. I, Ch. 8, p. 65, where it is argued that in relation to the idea of the social contract one

- has to distinguish 'between *natural* liberty, which has no limit but the physical power of the individual concerned, and *civil* liberty, which is limited by the general will' as well as 'between *possession*, which is based only on force or "the right of the first occupant", and *property*, which must rest on a legal title'.
38. See K. Marx, 'Debates on the law on theft of wood', p. 233.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
 40. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
 41. *Ibid.*, p. 252. Compare with J. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, II, §10, p. 291.
 42. See K. Marx, 'Debates on the law on thefts of wood', p. 262.
 43. See K. Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', in K. Marx, *Early Writings*, Penguin, Harmondsworth/New Left Review, London, 1977, p. 229.
 44. *Ibid.*, p. 221. In relation to the anticipation mentioned above see *ibid.*, p. 217, where it is argued that 'we no longer see religion as the *basis* but simply as a *phenomenon* of secular narrowness. We therefore explain the religious restriction on the free citizens from the secular restriction they experience ... We do not turn secular questions into theological questions. We turn theological questions into secular questions.'
 45. See K. Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', in K. Marx, *Early Writings*, p. 355, where it is argued that '*Sense perception* (see Feuerbach) must be the basis of all science. Only when science starts out from sense perception in the dual form of *sensuous* consciousness and *sensuous* need – i.e. only when science starts out from nature – is a *real* science'.
 46. See K. Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', in K. Marx, *Early Writings*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, p.221.
 47. *Ibid.*, p.219.
 48. *Ibid.*
 49. *Ibid.*, p. 230.
 50. *Ibid.*
 51. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
 52. *Ibid.*
 53. *Ibid.*, p. 233, where it is stated: 'Feudal society was dissolved into its foundation, into *man*. But into man as he really was its foundation – into *egoistic* man.' Moreover, on p. 234 is stated: 'The *political revolution* dissolves civil society into its component parts without *revolutionising* these parts ...'
 54. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
 55. *Ibid.*
 56. Of course, it has to be taken into account at this point that Feuerbachian criticism of the Hegelian philosophy is not a 'break with Hegel or with Hegelianism as such, *except* in specific ways'. See more in W. Wartofsky, *Feuerbach*, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 141.
 57. See L. Feuerbach, 'Provisional Theses for the Reformation of Philosophy', in L.S. Stepelevich (ed.), *The Young Hegelians. An Anthology*, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 161,159.

58. See K. Marx, 'Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*', in K. Marx, *Early Writings*, p. 266.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
60. See H. Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution. Hegel and the rise of Social Theory*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1969, p. 281.
61. See K. Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 374.
62. See K. Marx, 'Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*', p. 261.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
66. *Ibid.*, pp. 269, 270. Compare also with A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, (ed.) R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner, Liberty, Indianapolis, 1981, vol. II, pp. 781–2.
67. See K. Marx, 'Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*', p. 274 ff.
68. Compare with G.W. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1985, §§430–435.
69. See K. Marx, 'Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*', pp. 275–6.
70. See K. Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', p. 334.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 332. (Italics added.) See also Chris Arthur, 'Personality and the Dialectic of Labour and Property – Locke, Hegel, Marx', in R. Edgley and R. Osborne (eds.), *Radical Philosophy Reader*, Verso, London, 1985, p. 67, where it is explained why "alienated labour" must be given conceptual priority over "private property". On this issue see also the comments by S. Clarke, *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology. From Adam Smith to Max Weber*, second ed., Macmillan, London, 1991, pp. 66–70.
72. See K. Marx, *Capital*, Penguin, Harmondsworth/New Left Review, London, 1986, vol. I, p. 166. (Italics added.)
73. See K. Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', pp. 334, 333.
74. On this matter see K. Psychopedis, 'Dialectical Theory', pp. 40–2.
75. See K. Marx, 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', pp. 290, 325–6. (Italics added.)
76. *Ibid.*, p. 335. See also p. 336, where it is argued that '... the abstract existence of man as a mere *workman* ... tumbles day after day from his fulfilled nothingness into absolute nothingness, into his social and hence real non-existence'.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 360.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 355. Within this context it is claimed that 'natural science' should be 'human science' and that 'history itself is a real part of natural history and of nature's becoming man'.
79. See K. Marx, 'The Philosophical Manifesto of the Historical School of Law', in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, Progress, Moscow, 1975, vol. I, p. 205, where Marx, referring to Hugo, argues that 'with him, the eighteenth-

- century scepticism in regard to the rationality of what exists appears as scepticism in regard to the existence of rationality'.
80. See K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, Harmondsworth/New Left Review, London, 1981, p. 83ff.
 81. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, p. 280.
 82. See K. Marx, 'Economic Manuscripts of 1861–63', in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1988, vol. 30, p. 54.
 83. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, p. 279–80.
 84. *Ibid.*, p. 165. (Italics added.)
 85. K. Marx, 'Economic Manuscripts of 1861–63', p. 54. See also *Capital*, vol. I, p. 279, where it is emphasised that 'the process of the consumption of labour-power is at the same time the production process of commodities and of surplus-value. The consumption of labour-power is completed, as in the case of every other commodity, outside the market or the sphere of circulation'.
 86. See for example K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, p. 178, where an explicit reference is made on the form of the juridical relation between the commodity owners, instituted on the basis of their consent.
 87. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
 88. *Ibid.*, p. 283, 290. (Italics added.) See also K. Marx, 'Economic Manuscripts of 1861–63', p. 63. On this issue see Chris Arthur, 'Personality', pp. 53–6.
 89. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, p. 164. (Italics added.)
 90. *Ibid.*, pp. 165–6.
 91. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
 92. *Ibid.*
 93. *Ibid.*, p. 303.
 94. *Ibid.* (For this addition in the English translation see the German original in K. Marx, *Werke*, vol. 23, p. 210).
 95. *Ibid.*, p. 303.
 96. *Ibid.*, p. 341.
 97. *Ibid.*, p. 344. (Italics added.)
 98. K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 543.
 99. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, p. 377.
 100. *Ibid.*, p. 381.
 101. *Ibid.*
 102. *Ibid.*, p. 348.
 103. *Ibid.*, p. 416. (Italics added.)

The Complicity of Posthistory

ADRIAN WILDING

History has fallen upon hard times. In the past few years announcements of its demise, its obsolescence, have multiplied and gained popularity. More or less explicitly these proclamations have implicated Marxism in their diagnosis: the 'democratic revolutions' in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s were said to herald the failure not only of the 'Marxist experiment' (as Boris Yeltsin labelled it) but to signal the conclusion of history itself.¹ Alongside Fukuyama's now infamous thesis there has developed an analogous line of thought which shares his belief in the redundancy of history. This theory indicts any politics premised upon general claims about the historical process, a politics of which Marxism is said to be exemplary. It is a recurrent theme in contemporary post-structuralist and postmodern thought. Thus Foucault charges the philosophy of history with 'Platonism';² Lyotard in similar terms declares against 'meta-narratives' of emancipation.³ On the face of it the two strands of 'posthistory'⁴ seem incommensurable: whilst the former accepts a teleological philosophy of history (substituting liberal democracy where once stood communism), the latter rejects any general theory of history. Both however unite in concluding that Marxism as a theory and a practice is outmoded.

I propose to argue that Marx's account of history fits neatly into neither of these analyses, and that, moreover, in Marx we can find remedies for many of the flaws and lacunae in the doctrine of posthistory itself. Posthistory, it will be contended, is implicated in a history which it refuses to acknowledge, a refusal which leaves it impotent in the face of the very social developments it attempts to chart. A reconstruction of the unacknowledged history of posthistory reveals its recurrent complicity. Primarily this unacknowledged history is a philosophical one – whilst claiming precursors in Kant and Hegel (Fukuyama) and Nietzsche (postmodernism) neither strand of posthistory appreciates the complexity and radicality of these thinkers.⁵ At the same time posthistory's historical repression, is also a social and political world which it persistently fails to engage. To this extent a critique of posthistory also serves

to throw into relief the reflexive and practically engaged nature of Marx's writings on history. With this in mind it is to the philosophical lineage of posthistory that I turn first.

Narrating History

In 1784 Immanuel Kant published an essay entitled 'Idea for a Universal History From a Cosmopolitan Point of View'. Kant's was not the first attempt at a 'philosophy of history' (the phrase itself derives from Voltaire); however his essay was formative in that it established the terms upon which the discipline would develop. His argument centres upon the belief that out of the seemingly random and unconnected events of the past can be gleaned something of overall coherence and intelligibility. 'History' in this sense refers not simply to what is past but denotes the attempt to 'narrate' or to render coherent human actions. That a narration is possible stems in turn from the fact that human actions, like every other natural event, can be traced to what Kant calls 'universal laws'. With the discovery of these laws comes the

hope that if we attend to the play of freedom of the human will in the large, we may be able to discern a regular movement in it, and that what seems complex and chaotic in the single individual may be seen from the standpoint of the human race as a whole to be a steady and progressive, though slow, evolution of its original endowment.⁶

History thus amounts to a 'definite plan for creatures who have no plan of their own'. The laws of history are laws of unintended consequences. What then is the content of this regular movement of history? Kant proposes that it consists in the progressive working out of the 'natural antagonisms' between men and between states. History moves, according to Kant, because of a natural dialectic between man's sociality and his aggression towards others, man's 'unsocial sociability'. Further, it is a struggle which, properly speaking, *comes to a conclusion* with the establishment of peaceful coexistence between them – a 'universal civic society'.

Not only does Kant ascribe an overall meaning to the historical process; he argues for the possibility of its fulfilment, its completion and termination. The project of a philosophy of history is from the outset defined in terms of the twin possibilities of a general overview of history and the identification of its final resting point. The latter (an historical telos) is what makes the former (knowledge of history's meaning) possible. There is of course more than a hint of theology at play here. The philosophy of history, as Löwith⁷ notes,

bears the hallmark of the theology of history from which it derives. Universal history draws from (in particular Christian) theology a model of time which has both an origin (in creation) and an end (judgment day) wherein terrestrial existence will give way to the Kingdom of Heaven. Particular events are intelligible only in so far as they anticipate this future revelation. The end of man as historical being coincides with the disclosure of history's purpose. Kant's suggestion that the one message history teaches is 'contentment with Providence'⁸ serves to underline this theological heritage. The design of history is, for Kant, revealed only 'over the heads' of its actors who must unwittingly partake of the divine beneficence it progressively unfolds.

Hegel, a thinker who is otherwise Kant's most trenchant critic, retains crucial elements of this progressive history. Hegel's belief that 'universal history ... shows the development of the consciousness of freedom on the part of spirit, and of the consequent realisation of that freedom'⁹ has however been the source of many reductive interpretations by those keen to dismiss his 'teleology'. What is overlooked in such characterisations is Hegel's *opposition* to the sort of abstract schema he is usually equated with. Hegel criticises any model imposed on history from without, any thinking which 'approaches history as something to be manipulated, and does not leave it as it is, but forces it to conform to its preconceived notions and constructs a history *a priori*'.¹⁰ The development of freedom for Hegel is neither linear nor predetermined but complex and unpredictable.¹¹ Neither (*pace* Fukuyama) does he provide an apologia for liberal democracy. Bourgeois society for Hegel is in no way the 'goal' of history; whilst instituting a set of formal freedoms it is also understood to create a whole host of new unfreedoms. Hegel's phenomenology of misrecognition puts in motion both Kant's epistemology and his theory of history, placing a question mark next to the very idea of 'theory of' history, any approach which would demarcate separate realms for knowledge and history.¹² It should be noted that Marx, despite his criticisms of Hegel, always retained the simultaneous *reflexivity* and *motility* of this analysis.

It is with Nietzsche that the philosophy of history receives its most cogent critique. Nietzsche's essay 'On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life' is directed against the way in which attention to history, preoccupation with the past, can come to stifle thought and action in the present. Fixation upon history begins to substitute for any engagement with the here and now. 'When the historical sense no longer conserves life but mummifies it'¹³ then something is very wrong. Nietzsche's disagreement is with just that *narration* practised by Kant and Hegel. To narrate history into a coherent whole, he argues, is to compare phenomena which are often unassimilable. The historical dramatist would 'weave the isolated event into the whole always with the pre-supposition that if a unity of plan does not already reside in things it must be

implanted in them'.¹⁴ In the face of this generalising thrust of narrativised history Nietzsche attempts to resuscitate the integrity of the 'moment', which he sees as the locus of action and creativity. However, the implication of this move is not a rejection of history *per se*. On the contrary he argues that

we need history, but we need it for reasons different from those for which the idler in the garden of knowledge needs it ... We need it, that is to say, for the sake of life and action ... We want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life.¹⁵

What emerges from this (admittedly brief) account of certain themes within the philosophy of history is that contemporary ideas of 'posthistory' rather than being in any sense novel have merely recapitulated old moves with none of the sophistication. Whilst replaying motifs from this tradition (Fukuyama drawing upon Kant and Hegel's universal histories; Foucault and Lyotard upon Nietzsche's critique of 'narration') both strands fail to understand their own relationship to this tradition. Fukuyama produces in Hegel's name an abstractly teleological schema which Hegel had already critiqued in Kant. Similarly, postmodernism rejects in Nietzsche's name any 'metanarratives' (Lyotard) as totalisations of diffuse and incommensurable phenomena, failing to see Nietzsche's more subtle engagement with historical questions. Hegel was no teleological liberal and Nietzsche no enemy of history. In an important sense 'posthistory' thereby comes down to the following twin errors: abstract universal history is juxtaposed with abstract negation of history. However, this opposition denotes in turn a disjunction between attention to history as a whole and to particular historical events. Posthistory recapitulates instead of dialectically thematising this disjunction of universal and particular. It thereby remains unable to critically engage the social diremption ('divisions') to which its theoretical dichotomies correspond. An alternative approach is needed.

Time and Motion

On the face of it, Marx seems to fit into just the sort of abstract universal history recounted above. The famous statement from the *Communist Manifesto* that 'the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles' along with the remark from the 1859 Preface that with capitalism 'the prehistory of human society closes'¹⁶ appears to follow the pattern of 'narration' we found in universal history. However, Marx's most important insights into history are to be found not so much in these formulaic statements

as in the more concrete analysis put forward in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*.¹⁷ Marx's apocalypticism of 1859 is in many ways less helpful than the analysis of time we find in his account of the working day. Alongside the apparent abstract universality of Marx's account of history it is possible to detect an attention to the specific experience of time, an attention to the 'moment' which Nietzsche thought the philosophy of history had neglected. To demonstrate this it is necessary to follow Marx into the 'hidden abode of production' and to examine the temporality of the working day.

Marx's insight is to uncover the way in which capitalism itself transforms our experience of historical time. An example will illustrate this. In order to discover the origins of our sense of homogeneous 'clock' time it would be necessary to trace the subordination of free-time to labour-time which attended the birth of capitalism. As E.P. Thompson¹⁸ has shown the growth of clock-measurement techniques in the workplace (given doctrinal status by Taylor's 'scientific management'), rather than being some pioneering experiment, merely accentuated what was already a general correlation between the organisation of the labour process and the institutionalisation of homogeneous time. It is not an exaggeration to say that the origin of contemporary time-consciousness (most notably our conceptions of progression and repetition) is to be found here in the generalised imposition of work. The fact that modern mechanics finds homogeneous time in nature, rather than undermining this point, only serves to show the extent to which the origins of our temporal concepts have become obscured.

Marx's analysis of the working day in *Capital* provides just such an account of the subsumption of time to the valorisation of capital. With the encroachment of the working day, Marx notes,

even the ideas of day and night, which in the old statutes were of peasant simplicity, became so confused that an English judge, as late as 1860, needed the penetration of an interpreter of the Talmud to explain 'judicially' what was day and what was night.¹⁹

In its attempts to increase the amount of time spent in the production of surplus-value, capital revolutionises sidereal time itself. The result is a temporality of abstract quantity, since only the *extent* of surplus labour-time bears upon the valorisation of capital. Abstractly quantitative time is uniform and homogeneous. Since homogeneous time is the only time in which causality can have any purchase (only when each moment is equivalent can one be said to follow from the next), the equivalence of each unit of time brings with it the predictability (and hence the control) of the coming moment. The homogeneity of labour-time thus coincides with the predictability of surplus-value production.

But, as Marx shows, this is no unilateral process. Often capital's attempts to render time homogeneous (and thereby ensure uninterrupted accumulation) met with simple refusal on the part of workers.

The fact that they could live for a whole week on the wage of four days did not appear to the workers to be sufficient reason for working for the capitalist for the other two days.²⁰

Capital responded to this resistance both at the level of the workplace (by finding other sources of labour-power) and on the level of the state (with legislation aimed at extending the working day and combating 'indolence'). The lengthy struggles which ensued demonstrated both the growing organisation of working-class resistance and the ferocity with which capital would attempt to harness time to its own valorisation. 'The establishment of a normal working day,' Marx concludes, 'is therefore the product of a protracted and more or less concealed civil war between the capitalist class and the working class'.²¹

In an important sense the object of these struggles is time itself. The relevance of what Marx highlights here as a characteristic of the class struggle in nineteenth-century England is not restricted to that context alone. Marx's identification of a conflict over time can be seen as a general characteristic of capitalist reproduction. What is also clear is that capital's attempt to institute the rule of homogeneous clock time often meets with stern resistance. 'The time during which the worker works,' writes Marx, 'is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour power he has bought from him. If the worker consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist'.²² The disposable time which is rescued from abstract homogeneity is of a qualitative character, structured only by the nature of the projects it involves. These fragments of time, no longer subsumed under labouring or the reproduction of labour power, are thus directly subversive of capitalist reproduction.

Capital is riven by a contradiction between the quantitative time of valorisation and the qualitative time of autonomous projects, of 'self-valorisation';²³ between time sacrificed to surplus value production and time structured by projects which neither valorise capital (through work or consumption) nor simply reproduce labour power. The implications of this for our understanding of history are considerable. That self-valorisation constitutes communism *in the here and now*²⁴ disrupts the standard periodisation associated with historical materialism. Communism is not some future goal but exists already in contradictory (because stifled and denied) form in the present. Capital carries its own historical negation within itself. History therefore offers up no reassuring linearity, only the difficulty of contradic-

tion. Marx's critique of homogeneous linear time has yielded a critique of homogeneous linear history and set the scene for a correspondingly *critical* history.

Historical teleology in the sense normally attributed to Marx is an anathema to his thought, precisely because it colludes in the homogenising of time. It is to overlook the struggle, detected by Marx at the heart of capitalist reproduction, over the very nature of time itself, the dialectical tension which inheres in each historical moment. Marx provides an analysis of homogeneous quantitative time as the rule of labour-time, that is as the time of exploitation and domination. To see history developing smoothly towards some future goal is thus to ignore the reified continuum in which such development takes place. More significantly it is to overlook the moment of real advancement which comes only with the rupture of this alienated continuum.

Discontinuous History

Walter Benjamin writes: 'Marx says that revolutions are the locomotives of world-history. But perhaps it is completely different. Perhaps revolutions are the people in these trains reaching for the emergency brake'.²⁵ The image of a history violently brought to a halt is Benjamin's attempt to illustrate an experience of time he termed 'messianic'. As with many of the concepts we saw employed in the philosophy of history, the notion of messianic time has theological and eschatological origins. Benjamin's use of the concept however is equally secular and political. It names 'the characteristic revolutionary chance each historical moment carves out of the political situation'.²⁶ And it is in just such terms, Benjamin urges, that we must construe communism: 'In the idea of a classless society Marx secularised the idea of messianic time. And rightly so'.²⁷ Benjamin attempts to draw our attention to the political collusions involved in certain conceptions of history. He exposes history's apparent continuity as little more than a continuity of domination, as the attempt to eclipse the play of *fortuna* in history, to predetermine the future. However, and Benjamin's insight here is fundamental,

the temporal order which places its homogeneity above duration cannot prevent heterogeneous, outstanding fragments from remaining within it. To have combined recognition of a quality with the measurement of quantity was the work of the calendars in which places of remembrance are left blank, as it were, in the form of holidays.²⁸

Any attempt to control time and reduce it to homogeneity has to contend with the struggle against it, a struggle which the simultaneously quantitative and qualitative temporality of the calendar unwittingly reveals.

The recognition that communism as the time of self-valorisation exists in the here and now (albeit in the always-threatened interstices between times subsumed under capital) short-circuits any teleological or progressivist Marxism. The practical implications of this are crucial. This century has taught us the dangers of seeing in Marx an account of the necessity of traversing preordained historical epochs in order to pave the way for communism, that 'backward' economies should modernise their means of production. The experience of Stalinism and numerous modernisation experiments in underdeveloped countries bear witness to the ruinous implications of such a model. Against this progressivism, it is necessary to view what were previously thought of as discreet historical epochs as *overlapping*, feudal social relations, for example, being 'reformulated'²⁹ by capitalism, with the result that history becomes a mix of 'non-contemporaneous' social forms.³⁰ The displacement of a linear view of history gives rise to new political insights. With the recognition of history's discontinuity, surprise at the continuing appeal of, say, religious fundamentalism or blood-and-soil mythology no longer makes sense. As Benjamin remarked in a time when certain mythic ideas became all too topical,

the current wonder that the things we are experiencing today are 'still' possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical. This wonder is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.³¹

In a sketched note of the *Grundrisse*, Marx admits that his materialist concept of historical development 'appears to imply necessity',³² that is, it seems to eclipse chance. However, he goes on to stress that it also provides a 'justification of accident'. How is this possible? In the light of the above discussion we can proffer at least one answer. There are in Marx resources for a reading which would go against the grain of his apparently necessitarian account of history. With the analysis of the struggle against homogeneous time Marx provides the basis for a rethinking of his own historical views, the rescue of his notion of 'uneven development' from any connotations of disparagement, and the detection within his works of an account of a discontinuous history.

Benjamin contends that 'the materialist presentation of history goes hand in hand with an immanent critique of progress'.³³ Marxism 'has to abandon the epic element in history' and instead 'blast open the continuity of the epoch'.³⁴ Following Marx he finds this possibility realised nowhere else than in 'dialec-

tical experience' (Marx's 'revolutionary or practical-critical activity'). What practice dissipates is the twin myths of progress and repetition (the myth that capital's rule is continuous and eternal):

It is the unique property of dialectical experience to dispel the appearance of things being always the same, even the appearance of repetition in history. Real political experience is absolutely free of this appearance.³⁵

In other words homogeneous time is understood to be a 'determinate abstraction' in the same sense as Marx characterised the categories of political economy. Just as the category of labour is shown to have no ahistorical or eternal applicability,³⁶ but instead pertains only to a specific historical formation (capitalism), so abstractly quantitative time constitutes an abstraction from the capitalist subordination of time to labouring. Of course the 'determinacy' of determinate abstractions lies in their having a concrete existence within that particular sphere. To this extent homogeneous time has 'real' force: capitalism *is* in many respects repetitive, monotonous and predictable. However, once we recognise the contingency of this concept of homogeneous time, its immutability (like the categories of political economy) is brought radically into question.

Parenthetically it should be noted that the 'discontinuity' I detect prefiguratively theorised in Marx is not that 'epistemological break' of which Althusser writes.³⁷ This latter notion of discontinuity is merely structuralism's inadequate attempt to explain change with a transcendental model disarticulated from struggle. Structuralism's 'discontinuities' name no more than the incommensurability of different historical 'paradigms', structures which precede social action rather than in any way being created or transformed by it. The strength of Benjamin's notion of discontinuity is that it is understood to inhere not in any pre-given structure but rather in the struggle *against* capital's attempt to impose structural constraints upon social activity. 'The sense that they are exploding the continuum of history,' Benjamin writes in his theses 'On the Concept of History', 'is peculiar to revolutionary classes at the moment they enter into action'.³⁸

Postmodernism and Posthistory

The postmodern disavowal of history involves from the outset a contradiction: 'postmodernity' is defined by means of an historicist periodisation. It is said to constitute the theoretical articulation of 'late capitalism',³⁹ an epoch in which the accelerated spread of media technologies and the cybernetic-

sation of production have led to the disappearance of any critical space from which opposition could be mounted.⁴⁰ The extent to which technological change has spiralled out of control means that any resistance can only take the form of parodying what has become an all-pervasive spectacle.

This diagnosis however merely replays the progressive view of history outlined above, only this time it is technological development which directs the progress of society and demands that we conform, practically and theoretically, to its dictates. As if updating Lenin's infamous formula that 'communism equals electrification plus Soviets', postmodernism calculates the apocalypse to be the sum of cybernetics and free markets. The mistake common to both views is to see social development as technologically driven. Technology does not direct history. Rather it exhibits all the contradictions which plague other areas of capitalist development: capital's attempt to homogenise human productive activity and render it programmable, and the opposition this inevitably meets. Technological determinism as an account of development assumes homogeneous time, the time of programmability and control; it sides, to use Benjamin's language, with history's victors.

Postmodernism, it should be admitted, identifies certain genuine alterations in the forms of authority in contemporary society, but it does so only *unwittingly*. It registers (for example in Foucault's generalised notion of 'power') capital's attempts to extend its influence to all areas of social life (what Marx had already foreseen as the 'real subsumption of labour'), and yet fails to theorise, fails to gain any critical purchase upon this process. Moreover, it is incapable of doing so because it has either written-out or rendered symbolic the conflict and struggle which would make such developments comprehensible. As Negri argues, 'in postmodernism, the antagonistic framework, which in Marx constitutes the dynamic key to the construction of subsumption, is in effect eliminated'.⁴¹ The resulting affirmation of capital's destructive tendencies which we find in much postmodern thought is at least consistent with this disabling of critique, but no more compelling for this consistency.

There is thus a dangerous prematurity to announcements of the demise of history. Since the struggle over the nature of historical time itself is central to capitalist development, it is surely hasty to announce history's termination.⁴² This said, opposition to posthistory needs to be equally wary of defending a position in which history is seen as 'inescapable', since often (and this has been typical of the Left's response to Fukuyama) this achieves no more than the reinstatement of an ethic of progress (in terms of Marx's locomotive metaphor we are said to be 'still on track'). It is a response which is also flawed in epistemological terms. Thus Niethammer rejects posthistory on the basis of its longing for an Archimedean viewpoint.⁴³ He criticises 'macro-theoretical' perspectives on history, perspectives which for him

purport to know 'something substantive about the beginning and the end' of history. Despite his professed opposition to poststructuralism Niethammer here replays Foucault's attack upon historical 'Platonism'. In the process he rules out the possibility of any historical knowledge which would not itself be embroiled in the particularities of time and place. The situatedness of knowledge is recognised but at the cost of sacrificing historical *reflexivity*, the hope of being able to make sense of the past on a wider scale. On this theory Marx's claim that 'the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles' becomes no more than an untestable hypothesis.

Equally problematic is the response which defends the 'unending' nature of history, since this view projects homogeneous time into an indeterminate future. Recognition of the fact that struggles in the here and now carry with them the capacity to breach the continuum of history gives the lie to any thinking grounded upon deferral, any philosophy, whether it is the Kantian 'infinite moral task' or its descendant, the deconstructive promise of democracy 'to come',⁴⁴ which has us continually falling toward some goal. The politics of what Ernst Bloch called the 'historical In-Vain' are gradualist and social-democratic.⁴⁵ In the name of openness such thinking paradoxically forecloses the future, since a democracy perpetually deferred (to the hereafter?) is an unrealisable democracy.⁴⁶

Historical Knowledge

The point Niethammer raises is an important one however, since the question of the epistemological status of historical claims is one which Marxism must address. Niethammer's own response to this problem is somewhat unsatisfactory though. His contention that 'meaningful history is created through advances in the interpretation of traces of real events from the past'⁴⁷ begs the question as to the truth content of 'interpretation'. His subsequent attempt (in Habermasian vein) to ground the truthfulness of such interpretation in a community of interlocutors who recount their life histories is equally problematic; for the alleged abstract universality of the philosophy of history he has merely substituted the partiality of perspectives. The purview of an historical analysis reliant upon living testimony would surely be highly restricted.

If Marxism finds conflict at the heart of historical development it also finds it at the heart of historical interpretation. If it is only as a *continuity of the victors* that the continuity of history exists⁴⁸ or, as Negri⁴⁹ puts it, 'the continuities are nothing other than discontinuities or ruptures which have been dominated,' then questions of the manner in which the past is interpreted will

be of paramount importance. First and foremost, what will need to be addressed is the fact that the history which is handed down to us is one in which the victorious in each social and ideological conflict have effectively *written out* those whom they have conquered. Any historical study will prove hermeneutically uncritical until it appreciates this violently exclusive constitution of its object. The task of the historian is not the recapitulation of what Nietzsche called a 'monumental history' of victories and triumphs but rather a meticulous study of what is left out in this account of the past. If the historian is to disturb this sedimented narrative of domination, her brush must be directed against the grain of historicism. What the critique of homogeneous time calls for is thus something like a 'history from below', a 'destruction' of history, understood not as abstract negation but rather as the reworking and reconstruction of the past.⁵⁰ This is not to offer a solution to the problem of history's epistemological content. But it is to underline the difficulties and the stakes involved in any Marxist historiography.

Is Marxism then, as its posthistorical detractors claim, a universal history? Clearly not in Kant's sense of a story of progressive emancipation towards perpetual peace. Given the catastrophes which seem to litter the twentieth century it seems only fair to concur with Adorno that it is 'cynical to say that a plan for a better world is manifested in history and unites it'.⁵¹ If however, following Marx, we rewrite universal history as the history of class struggles then we stretch the concept of universal history almost to breaking point, since to foreground class struggle is to identify rupture at the heart of history's continuity. In Marx universal history meets Adorno's requirement of being both 'constructed [*konstruieren*] and denied'.⁵² If anything unites history it is no more than the movement (always unpredictable) of class struggle itself. That 'the genuine concept of universal history is a messianic one',⁵³ implies that history's unity is thoroughly fragile. If Marx recognises without reconciling the tension between generality and particularity in historiography (a tension we have seen reproduced yet disavowed in posthistory), then it is in the knowledge that such a tension inheres in history itself.

'History', in Bloch's words,

is no entity advancing along a single line in which capitalism for instance, as the final stage, has resolved all the previous ones; but it is a polyrhythmic and multi-spatial entity, with enough unmastered and as yet by no means revealed corners.⁵⁴

The theological 'single line'⁵⁵ extending from creation to salvation can still be seen today secularised in gradualist social-democracy and modernising vanguardism. Against this, and as has been argued throughout, if Marx's notion

of classless society has any theological precedent it lies not in the teleology of the 'single line' but in the notion of the 'messianic', that is, teleology's very *dislocation*.⁵⁶ Since only a *mastered* history could be said to have come to its developmental conclusion, recent announcements of its end begin to seem naïvely imperious. Posthistory represents little more than the counterpart to the progressivist schemas we find in social democracy and vanguardism, it is 'an elitist, culturally pessimistic inversion of the optimism of progress'.⁵⁷ Attempting to attach itself to contemporary social changes – the spread of liberal democracy (Fukuyama) and the transformation of traditional forms of authority (postmodernism) – posthistory ends up disallowing comprehension of the historical precedents and preconditions for these developments. Whilst Fukuyama defends an abstractly universal history, postmodernism rejects its 'tyranny' in favour of a 'liberating' genealogy of the particular event. Both unwittingly reproduce in thought the very disjunctions Marx recognised at the heart of capitalism itself. At the end posthistory in both its guises – theory *after* history and theory *without* history – is left at the mercy of the very history it decries.

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to Keith Ansell-Pearson and the editors of this volume for their comments on a draft of this paper.

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42. Fukuyama's triumphalism has spurred Jacques Derrida to make the following polemical attack: 'Today, when some dare to neo-evangelise in the name of the

ideal of liberal democracy in which the ideal of human history has been realised, it is necessary to shout: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, hunger and therefore economic exclusion affected so many human beings in the history of the Earth and of humanity. Instead of extolling the arrival of the ideal of liberal democracy and of the capitalist market in the euphoria of the end of history, instead of celebrating the "end of ideology" and the end of the great emancipatory discourses, let us never forget this macroscopic evidence, made up of countless individual sufferings: no progress allows us to ignore the fact that so many men, women and children were conquered, condemned to hunger, or exterminated on the Earth' (J. Derrida, *Spectres de Marx: L'État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*, Galilée, Paris, 1993, p. 141).

43. L. Niethammer, *Posthistoire*, p. 144.
44. Cf. J. Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*.
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46. In an attempt to think of democracy in contradistinction to both conservatism (the view that democracy is already established) and revolution (democracy can be definitively established), Derrida's recent writing employs the motif of the *à-venir* ('to come'). He argues that the practice of democracy is *infinite* in so far as we can never claim to have realised it once and for all. Whilst laudably capturing the necessity that any democracy worthy of the name be continually re-protected if complacency is to be avoided, Derrida's 'infinite idea' proves uncritical when confronted with the fact that *capital itself strives to postpone real democracy*. Deconstruction makes a political theory out of that idea which in Rousseau appears only as a gloomy conjecture: 'Where there a people of gods, their government would be democratic. So perfect a government is not for men' (J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968, p. 114).
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8

From Scream of Refusal to Scream of Power: The Centrality of Work

JOHN HOLLOWAY

I

In the beginning was the scream.

A scream of experience. A scream of anger, a scream of horror. A scream that rises from what we live and what we see, from the newspapers we read, from the television programmes we watch, from the conflicts of our everyday lives. A scream that does not accept that mass starvation can exist with plenty, that so much work and so many resources can be devoted to the destruction of human life, that there are parts of the world in which the systematic killing of street children is organised as the only way of protecting private property. A scream of refusal.

A dissonant, discordant, often inarticulate scream: sometimes no more than a mumble, sometimes tears of frustration, sometimes a confident roar – but all pointing to the upside-downness of the world, to the untruth of the world.

But how do we move beyond the scream? How do we understand the world as upside-down, as untrue, as negative? In the media, in books, in schools and universities, society is almost always presented as positive. When we study social science, we study 'the way things are'. The 'way things are' may be criticised, but a clear distinction is made between what is and our emotional reactions. The scream does not feature as a central category of social science. Indeed, social science defines itself as scientific precisely by virtue of its exclusion of the scream. The study of the world as it is, as positive, bounces our negativity back at us, redefines the negativity as our individual problem, as the expression of our maladjustment. Rational understanding of the world, we are told, is quite distinct from our private sentimental reaction.

Negative theories of society set out to salvage the viewpoint of the scream, to construct an alternative picture of the world that respects and strengthens

the negativity of experience. Such theories inevitably arise through the discussions and struggles that clarify and establish the collective nature of our negativity. As the social experience of negativity takes different historical forms, so its forms of historical expression change.

The upsurge of struggle and rebellion throughout the world at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s led millions of us to look to the Marxist tradition as a way of making sense of, and strengthening, our existence-against-society. In turning to Marxism, we were looking not for a theory of society, but a theory against society.¹ We were not looking for a political science, a sociology or an economics but for anti-political science, an anti-sociology, an anti-economics: a negative theory of society in which the scream of experience would not be eliminated by the fragmentation of 'scientific' discourse.

Although the negative thrust behind the initial turn to Marxism is clear, the issues soon became muddled. A theory *against* society implies some understanding *of* society. A theory focused on the *rupture* of capitalist society must incorporate an understanding of the *reproduction* of capitalist society. As the wave of struggle receded, as the explosion of negativity that was 1968 started to become a memory, the lines separating a theory *against* society from a theory *of* society, *rupture* from *reproduction*, became blurred. This was accentuated by the fact that one of the effects of the involvement of students in the upsurge was that much of the theoretical discussion of the years that followed took place within the universities, where theories *of* society and of social *reproduction* dovetailed more neatly with the established university disciplines. The shift in emphasis was expressed in the rise of different currents of thought which sought to smooth the negativity of the original drive, to integrate Marxism within the framework of the social sciences, to still the scream.

Obviously it would be wrong to blame everything on the universities and on the disciplinary structures into which so many Marxists found themselves integrated. The tortuous paths of Marxist theory cannot be separated from the long history of the Communist Parties and of other political groups claiming to be guided by Marxist theory, nor, above all, from the history of the former Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union, Marxism ceased by and large to be a theory of negation, being selectively manipulated to legitimise the reproduction of existing power structures. This affected the understanding of Marxism and the development of the Marxist tradition, not only within the bounds of the so-called 'communist' states, but throughout the world, through the influence of the Communist Parties and, more indirectly, of the parties and groups which defined themselves by their opposition to the Communist Parties.

The difficulties of using Marxism to theorise the struggles against the established social order were further compounded by the nature of those

struggles. The traditional interpretation of the Marxist analysis of social conflict as class conflict between capital and labour was difficult to relate to the conflicts around education, housing, health, nuclear power, the environment, race and gender which were to be so important in the years that followed. The various sociological attempts (Poulantzas, Wright, Carchedi etc.) to patch up Marx's theory of class and make it more sophisticated did little to help, partly because, by interpreting Marx's theory of class as a sociological theory, they robbed it of its negativity.

It is little wonder that, for many, Marxism lost its appeal as a vehicle for expressing their antagonism to existing society. In recent years ecological theory and above all feminism have gained much wider acceptance and, in some ways, laid deeper roots in people's behaviour.

Now that the Soviet Union, the states surrounding it and so many Communist Parties throughout the world have collapsed, the question of the relevance of Marxism is posed in a quite new context. The collapse of the Soviet regime is both a liberation of Marxism and a threat to its continued survival. It is a liberation because so much of the dreadful baggage of 'Soviet Marxism' can more easily be thrown out. But at the same time it is a threat to the survival of Marxism because the collapse of the Soviet Union is so widely seen as the failure of Marxism that fewer people are likely to turn to Marxism as a way of expressing their antagonism to capitalist society.

There is little doubt that those of us who still use Marxist categories to try to develop a theory-against-society are getting older. At times it feels as though we are speaking Latin – a highly developed language that few understand and few want to learn. Compared with the situation ten or 15 years ago, there are, for example, far fewer people reading *Capital*, the key text for acquiring the basics of Marx's theory-against-society. Although the scream of protest against capitalism will certainly not fall silent, there is a real danger that Marxism will die out as a language for articulating that scream.

Does it matter? Can Marx not be safely left to the care of the teachers and students of the History of Political Thought, to be read alongside Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes and Rousseau? If Marxism has failed as an articulation of the struggle against existing society, is it not better to abandon it to the criticism of mice and teachers of political theory?

Marxism is not ready for such a fate. It is the argument of this article that Marxism retains its relevance as the most powerful theory-against-society that exists, the most powerful theory of the negation of capitalism that we have. For this to emerge clearly, an analysis of the tragic history of the communist movement is not enough: it is essential also to address some deep-rooted conceptual problems in the Marxist tradition.

II

What is special about Marxism as a theory-against-society?

If we start from the scream of experience, the experiential rejection of existing society, then Marxism is to be judged not as a theory-of-society but as a theory-against-society. Its relevance today must be considered in the first place not in terms of its explanatory power but in terms of its power to negate society. The theoretical frame of reference is provided in the first place not by the social sciences in general but by radical theories of society, theories which take as their starting point the rejection of existing society. The task is to show not the intellectual respectability of Marxism but the power of its unrespectability. It is only as a theory-against-society that Marxism can be understood to include a theory-of-society.

To argue that Marxism occupies a unique place among theories-against-society is to argue for the importance of its survival as a form of articulating the rejection of capitalism. What distinguishes Marxism from other negative theories of society is that it takes the negation of society much further than any other radical theory. This is not a question of the intensity of feeling or the violence of the language used, but of the all-embracing nature of the negation. Marxism dissolves the whole of society in negativity, in a way in which no other radical theory does.

The negation of society typically starts as an external negation, as us-against-them: women against men, blacks against white, poor against rich. The slogan 'Kill the rich!' expresses the point neatly. The rich are clearly defined as not-us, our struggle against them is clearly an external struggle. The appeal and the force of this approach is obvious. Its weakness lies in its timeless externality. We kill the rich today, they kill us tomorrow, then we kill them, then they kill us, and so on, biff-baff, ding-dong, back and forth. Our negativity meets their positivity in external, and potentially eternal, confrontation. It is clear that the rich oppress us, that we hate them and fight against them, but the approach tells us nothing of our power or their vulnerability. In general, radical theory tends to focus on oppression and the struggle against oppression, rather than on the fragility or movement of that oppression. Feminist theory, for example, has been extremely powerful in throwing light on the nature of gender oppression in society. What it has not developed is a theory of the vulnerability or historicity of that oppression. History, in radical theory, tends to be understood as an accumulation of external struggles – a concept which, by the weight accorded to tradition, can often end up being conservative in its effect.

Against this 'us-against-them' of radical theory, Marx cries out: 'But there is no "them", there is only us. We are the only reality, the only power. There is nothing but us, nothing but our negativity. That is why the scream of refusal is a scream of power'.

The essential claim of Marxism, that which distinguishes it from other varieties of radical theory, is its claim to dissolve all externality. The core of its attack against 'them' is to show that 'they' depend on us because 'they' are continually created by us. We, the powerless, are all-powerful.

The critique of the 'them-against-us' externality of radical theory is not some abstruse theoretical point but the core of the Marxist understanding of the possibility of revolutionary transformation of society. It is through understanding that 'they' are *not* external to us, that capital is *not* external to labour, that we can understand the vulnerability of capitalist domination. To move beyond the externality of 'them-against-us' is at the same time to go beyond a radical theory of oppression to the concern of Marxism: the *fragility* of oppression.

III

The claim made above (to be argued more fully below), that what distinguishes Marxism from other varieties of negative theory is the total character of its negation, runs counter to much of the Marxist tradition. It is more common to claim that what distinguishes Marxism from other radical theories is its superior scientific character. This is expressed, for example, in the distinction commonly made (first by Engels) between utopian and scientific socialism. 'Utopian' socialism here refers to the potentially endless struggle of radical militancy inspired by a dream of fulfilment at the end of the day. Marxism's claim to be 'scientific' refers in this context to the claim that the struggle is not endless because analysis shows us that capitalism is riven by contradictions which will lead either to its collapse or to its increasing instability.

At issue here is not the scientific nature of Marxism, but the understanding of 'scientific' on which this claim is often based. In the tradition of 'orthodox' Marxism, 'scientific' comes to be identified with 'objective'. 'Science' is understood in the positivist sense as excluding subjectivity. The claim that Marxism is scientific is taken to mean that subjective struggle finds support in the objective movement of the contradictions of capitalism. A distinction is thus made between (subjective) struggle and the (objective) conditions of struggle.

This understanding of 'scientific', based on a distinction between subject and object, subjective and objective, lays the basis for a dualism that runs right

through the Marxist tradition. It is expressed in a host of different ways, as a separation between struggle and contradiction, between struggle and structure, between class struggle and the objective laws of development, between politics and economics, between labour and capital, between the scream of protest and the cool appraisal of objective reality. Within the tradition, the importance of both terms of the dualism is always recognised – no Marxist would say that class struggle is not important – but the relation between the two terms is not in practice an equal one. In so far as ‘science’ is identified with objectivity, scientific analysis gives priority to the second term of each of the pairs: to contradiction, structure, objective laws of development, economics, capital, the cool appraisal of objective reality. Marxist theorists have generally understood their contribution to struggle to be the analysis of the objective, of the contradictions of capitalism.

In all of this, struggle is not denied: work in the Marxist tradition generally arises from some sort of participation in struggle. However, whatever the motivation, this sort of ‘scientific’ analysis accords a very subordinate role to struggle. Struggle is given a ‘but also’ role, to borrow Bonefeld’s phrase:² it is allowed effectivity in the interstices of the laws of capitalist development, it is allowed to shade in the gaps left undetermined by the objective laws of development, it is allowed to seize the opportunities presented by objective conditions. (It is allowed also, and unjustifiably, to provide an alibi, whenever Marxism is accused of determinism.) The importance of struggle is not denied, but Marxism, in its ‘scientific’ guise, becomes a theory not of struggle, but of the objective conditions of struggle, a very different thing.

One of the most pervasive forms of expression of this dualist tradition, running from the far left to the revisionism of the late Communist Parties, is the notion of ‘Marxist economics’. The idea of Marxist economics (as opposed to the Marxist critique of economics) is an extension of the separation of contradiction from struggle. Marxist economics is generally understood as the study of the objective laws of development of capitalism and their relation to current economic development. A distinction between economics and struggle is taken as given, as is also a distinction between economics and politics. Although this distinction implies the possibility of a distinct ‘Marxist political science’, as Poulantzas³ saw, or indeed of a ‘Marxist sociology’, Marxists have generally seen economics as the privileged sphere of study of the contradictions of capitalism.

The implications of the notion of Marxist economics go very deep, because it assumes a certain reading of Marx’s work and of the categories used. *Capital*, in spite of its subtitle, *The Critique of Political Economy*, is seen as the key text of Marxist economics, and the categories developed there (value, surplus value, price, the law of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, crisis,

credit) are understood as economic categories, as having an objective validity which does not depend on class struggle. Again, of course, class struggle is not denied, but it is seen as distinct from the analyses of Marxist economics. Economic analysis is seen as providing the analysis of the objective conditions of struggle. Even in the case of what might be called far-left analyses, analyses which emphasise the role of subjective struggle in the transformation of society – as in the case of Pannekoek, Mattick or Luxemburg, for example – a dualism is assumed between the objective, economic analysis of the development of the contradictions of capitalism and the possibilities of subjective struggle which those contradictions open up. A dualism between subject and object, between struggle and contradiction, is inseparable from the notion of Marxist economics.

It is this whole dualism of the dominant Marxist tradition, which is now patently in crisis. It is in crisis on both sides of its separation. On the ‘objective’ side, the certainties that a ‘scientific’, objectivist approach seem to promise look unconvincing in the light of the upheavals of recent years. More important, however, the theoretical, and often practical, subordination of subjectivity which this sort of Marxism implies has undermined the credibility of Marxism as a theory of struggle, as a theory-against-society.

IV

If this dualism were the whole of the Marxist tradition, there would be little to argue about: Marxism could be allowed to die, a fatally flawed language for theorising the rejection of capitalist society. Fortunately, this is not the case. Quite apart from the work of Marx himself, there is a very long, often subterranean, tradition of political and theoretical struggle against the deadening and deadly dualism of ‘orthodoxy’. Politically and theoretically, it is a very disparate tradition, a mixture of people who were opposed to ‘orthodoxy’ in their politics, but did not always follow through the theoretical implications, and those who rebelled theoretically but sometimes conformed to the line of the Communist Parties. Any list of names is problematic, but obvious candidates for inclusion would be Luxemburg, Pannekoek, the early Lukàcs, Korsch, Mattick, Bloch, Adorno, Rubin, Pashukanis, Rosdolsky, Agnoli, Tronti, Negri – all reference points for a host of other heterodox Marxists.⁴

The starting point for considering the power of Marxism as a theory of struggle (and for overcoming the dualism of the orthodox tradition) has to be struggle itself, the subjective, experiential scream of refusal from which this chapter started, the scream that is muffled by the objectivist ‘scientific’

conception of Marxism. The emphasis on subjectivity has been a recurrent theme in anti-orthodox Marxism.

In recent years, one of its most powerful formulations has come from the current which developed, primarily in Italy, from the 1960s onwards, variously referred to as 'autonomist Marxism' or '*operaismo*'. The critique of the objectivist tradition of orthodox Marxism is sharply formulated in an article by Mario Tronti, 'Lenin in England', that was to do much to define the approach of 'autonomist' Marxism:

We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class.⁵

This must be the first step: to reverse the polarity of the Marxist tradition and to start clearly from below, from struggle, from negativity. But reversing the polarity is not enough: it is the polarity itself which must be examined. To reverse the polarity is to put us back at the correct starting point: to reassert that Marxism is a theory against society, not a theory of society, a theory of struggle and not a theory of the objective conditions of struggle, a theory of labour and not of capital, a theory of rupture and not of reproduction. The starting point of negativity is essential, but it does not yet show us what Marxism has to contribute to negative theory.

Tronti immediately takes the reversal of the polarity a step further. Starting from the struggle of the working class does not simply mean adopting a working-class perspective, but, in complete reversal of the traditional Marxist approach, seeing working-class struggle as determining capitalist development:

at the level of socially developed capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to the working class struggles; it follows behind them and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital's own reproduction must be tuned.⁶

This is the core of what Moulrier refers to as '*operaismo*'s ... Copernican inversion of Marxism',⁷ which, according to Asor Rosa,

... can be summed up in a formula which makes the working class the dynamic motor of capital and which makes capital a function of the working class ... a formula which in itself gives an idea of the magnitude of the inversion of perspectives which such a position implies politically.⁸

This inversion is essential if we are to think of the scream of struggle not as the cry of a victim but as a scream of power. But in a capitalist society, in a society which certainly appears to be dominated by capital and by the needs of the capitalist class, how can such an inversion be justified, how can capital be understood as a function of the working class?

There are two possible answers to this question, what one might call a weaker and a stronger answer. The weaker version would be to say that capital can be understood as a function of the working class because its history is a history of *reaction* to working-class struggle. In much the same manner one might see, say, the movements of a defending army at war to be a function of the movements of the attacking army, or, possibly, the development of the police to be a function of the activities of criminals. The stronger version would be that capital is a function of the working class for the simple reason that capital is nothing other than the *product* of the working class and therefore depends, from one minute to another, upon the working class for its reproduction. In the first case, the relation between the working class and capital is seen as a relation of opposition, an *external* relation. In the second case, the relation is seen in terms of the generation of one pole of the opposition by the other pole, as an *internal* relation. In the first case, the working class is seen as existing simply *against* capital, in the second case it exists *against-and-in* capital. These two interpretations, the 'reaction' interpretation and the 'product' interpretation, are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but in so far as the emphasis is placed on one rather than the other, the theoretical and political implications may be quite different.

Both of these elements are present in the autonomist analysis, but it is the first, the 'reaction' interpretation, which is more prominent.⁹ Typically, the dynamic of capitalist development is understood as a reaction to the power of the working-class movement. The development of capital is then understood as the defensive reaction by capital to the strength of the working-class movement revealed in moments of open revolt. Keynesianism, for example, in Negri's analysis¹⁰ is a response to the revolution of 1917, which made clear that capital could survive only by recognising and integrating the working-class movement. These analyses are immensely suggestive, but the point being made here is that capitalist development is understood as a process of reaction, that the relation between labour and capital is understood as an external relation.

The understanding of the relation between labour and capital as being external has extremely important political and theoretical consequences. Politically, the emphasis on the power of the working-class movement has an obvious appeal. Nevertheless, separating labour and capital in this way leads to a paradoxical (and romantic) magnification of the power of both. The

failure to explore the internal nature of the relation between labour and capital leads the autonomist analysis to underestimate the degree to which labour exists *within* capitalist forms. The existence of labour within capitalist forms, as will be argued more fully later, implies both the subordination of labour to capital *and* the internal fragility of capital. To overlook the internal nature of the relation between labour and capital thus means both to underestimate the containment of labour within capital (and hence overestimate the power of labour against capital) *and* to underestimate the power of labour as internal contradiction within capital (and hence overestimate the power of capital against labour).

The reversal of the polarity between capital and labour, essential though it be as a starting point, ends by reproducing the polarity in a different form. The traditional Marxist analysis emphasises the logical development of capital and relegates class struggle to a 'but also' role; autonomist theory liberates class struggle from its subordinate role, but still leaves it confronting an external logic of capital. The difference is that the logic of capital is understood now not in terms of 'economic' laws and tendencies, but in terms of a political struggle to defeat the enemy. The law of value, the key category in the Marxist economic interpretation of capitalist development, is seen by the autonomists as being redundant.¹¹ In the face of the power of the working-class movement, capital has now developed into integrated world capitalism, and its sole logic is the logic of maintaining power.¹² As is perhaps inevitable, the *reaction* understanding of the labour-capital relation leads to a mirror-image view of capitalism: the greater the power of the working-class movement, the more monolithic and totalitarian the response of the capitalist class. Autonomist theory has been crucial in reasserting the nature of Marxist theory as a theory of struggle, but the real force of Marx's theory of struggle lies not in the reversal of the polarity between capital and labour, but in its dissolution.¹³

V

One way of overcoming the issue of dualism has been to pose the question of the relation between the two poles of the dualism in terms of the interrelated categories of form, totality and critique, an approach that is often referred to as form-analysis.

The concept of 'form' is central to Marx's discussion in *Capital*, where he insists on the importance of understanding value and money, for example, as value-form and money-form – as forms of social relations. In the first chapter of *Capital*, Marx uses the concept of 'form' to distinguish his approach from that of the political economists whom he is criticising:

Even Adam Smith and Ricardo, the best representatives of the school, treat the form of value as a thing of no importance, as having no connection with the inner nature of commodities. The reason for this is not solely because their attention is entirely absorbed in the analysis of the magnitude of value. It lies deeper. The value-form of the product of labour is not only the most abstract, but is also the most universal form, taken by the product in bourgeois production, and stamps that production as a particular species of social production, and thereby gives it its special historical character. If then we treat this mode of production as one eternally fixed by Nature for every state of society, we necessarily overlook that which is the *differentia specifica* of the value-form, and consequently of the commodity-form, and of its further developments, money-form, capital-form etc.¹⁴

The concept of 'form' here carries various implications. As Marx indicates when he points to the limitations of Smith and Ricardo, the understanding of 'things' as 'forms' implies an understanding of their temporal nature, of their (at least) potential historical transcendence. To analyse capitalist society in terms of social forms is to see it from the point of view of its historical impermanence, to look at that which appears to be permanent as transient, to present that which seems to be positive as negative. To introduce the concept of form is to move from the photographic print to its negative. The shift from value to value-form, for example, is an inversion of the whole perspective of discussion, the move from political economy to the critique of political economy. That is why the category of 'form', perhaps the central category of Marx's discussion, is quite literally meaningless if the permanence of capitalist social relations is assumed (as in bourgeois social science).

The category of 'form' further implies the internal nature (non-externality) of connections between social 'things'. To speak of money as a form of value, to speak of value as a form of the product of labour, to speak of value and money as forms of social relations, is to emphasise the internal nature of the relation between value, money, labour, social relations. The apparently separate 'things' of society (state, money, capital, and so on) are social phenomena, forms of social relations, the interconnections between which should be understood not as external (causal relations, for example), but as internal, as processes of transformation or metamorphosis.

These various implications of 'form' (historicity, negativity, internality) are well captured by the term 'mode of existence'.¹⁵ Thus, for example, to say that money is a 'mode of existence' of social relations carries all the same implications of historical specificity, negativity and internality as the concept of 'form'.

The concept of 'form', as used here, implies a concept of 'totality'. If all aspects of society are to be understood as forms of social relations, then clearly they all form part of an internally-related whole, they are all moments of a social totality. Hence, to say that 'form' is the central category of Marx's theory tallies with Lukacs's famous saying that 'it is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality'.¹⁶

'Form' and 'totality' clearly imply a third concept, that of 'critique'. If things that appear to be separate (money and the state, say) are to be understood as discrete forms of a single totality, that implies that the process of understanding involves a critique of their apparent separateness. To criticise, in this sense, is to explore the interconnections between 'things', to show how aspects of society which appear separate and only externally related, are internally related as forms of the same social totality.

Form-analysis, the analysis of 'things' and 'facts' as forms of the totality of social relations, dissolves hard reality into the flow of the changing forms of social relations. What appears to be separate (the state, money, countries, and so on) can now be understood in terms of their separation-in-unity or unity-in-separation. It is now possible to see how the dualism of subject and object might be overcome theoretically, by reconceptualising the separation of subject and object as a separation-in-unity, by criticising the dualism to reach an understanding of subject and object as forms of the same social totality. That which previously appeared to be hard and objective is now revealed as transitory, fluid. The bricks and mortar of capitalist reality crumble, theoretically.

Form-analysis is central to any attack on the dualism that has characterised so much of the Marxist tradition, and has rightly been emphasised by a large number of theorists in recent years,¹⁷ influenced by the work of earlier authors such as Lukacs, Rosdolsky, Rubin and Pashukanis, all of whom were rediscovered in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Nevertheless, in the case of many of the approaches that could be loosely characterised as examples of 'form-analysis', little has been achieved in terms of leading beyond the dualism criticised. Often the result has been a purely logical understanding of capitalist development (sometimes referred to as 'capital-logic') which leaves little room for class struggle.

There are two sorts of difficulty here. At one level, what one might call the 'logical' level, there is the question of the understanding of 'form'. Clearly, the term 'form' can be understood in different ways. As it has been used here, in the sense of 'mode of existence', the concept is essentially critical: it asserts the unity of that which appears to be separate, the transitory nature of that which appears to be permanent, the untruth of appearance. If, on the

other hand, it is used, as it often is, to mean a subdivision in a genus-species type of conceptualisation, as in the usage 'wheat is a form of cereal', then the concept completely loses its critical character and does nothing to lead us away from the dualism which is the object of our concern.¹⁸

Yet, even if 'form' is understood in the stronger sense, as mode of existence, such that to say 'A is the form of B', means that B is the mode of existence of A, there is still a danger that form-analysis can become just an empty logic of categories, a form of discourse in which the only reality appears to be the logical relations between categories. It is clear that the categories of totality, form and critique are crucial in the attack on the dualism which was identified as the main theoretical/political problem of the Marxist tradition, but how are they to be understood? How is the scholasticism of so much 'form-analytical' discussion to be avoided? Totality of what, forms of what? What are we talking about when we speak of totality, form and critique?

The simplest answer is that the totality is a totality of social relations, the forms are forms of social relations. Thus, to speak of money, value or the state as money-form, value-form or state-form is to say that these phenomena, which present themselves as things, are forms of social relations. All social phenomena are to be criticised (demystified) as the mode of existence of relations between people. However, this does not in itself resolve the problem: in many cases of 'form-analysis' the reference to social relations is a purely formal reference, since it is assumed that social relations follow a logically prescribed path of development. As a result, the dualism reappears, understood now in terms of a separation between a logically pre-ordained development of social relations (the logic of capital), on the one hand, and class struggle, which is understood as distinct from the social relations of capitalism, on the other.

The separation between social relations and struggle can only be overcome by seeing that the social relations of capitalism are inherently antagonistic, inherently conflictive, that all social relations within capitalism are relations of class struggle. To speak of the totality as a totality of social relations is to speak of it as a totality of antagonistic social relations (class struggle). To say that money is a form of social relations is to say that it is a form of class struggle, that its development cannot be understood as a logical process, but only as process of struggle (a struggle which has a certain mode of existence, but is not pre-determined).

Taken in this way, the categories of totality, form and critique lead us to an understanding of all social phenomena as modes of existence of class struggle and, conversely, to an understanding of class struggle as existing in and through those social phenomena. To understand all aspects of society as modes of existence of class struggle takes us beyond the dualist separation of society and struggle, object and subject, but we are still at the level of

assertion. We could say, for example, that the state is to be understood as a particular form of the totality of class struggle. Or we could say that the relation between politics and economics must be understood in terms of the unity-in-separation/separation-in-unity of class struggle. Both of those statements are important for understanding political and economic development, but they beg a further question: why? What is it that constitutes the unity (in separation) of politics and economics, what is it that allows us to speak of a totality of social relations? Where does the unity implied by the concept of totality come from? What generates that unity, how do we understand its genesis? The concept of totality, taken seriously, leads us to the question of genesis (or constitution). It is only when we move on from the concepts of totality and form to the genesis or constitution of that totality (and those forms) that the issue of power emerges.

VI

The attempt to overcome the dead hand of dualism leads us to the question of the genetic understanding of the totality of social relations (as relations of class struggle).

The exploration of the genesis or constitution of social phenomena is crucial to Marx's whole approach. This not only structures the whole of his work (*Capital*, most clearly), but is stated repeatedly as his definition of the scientific method. One of the most famous passages comes from the 1857 'Introduction' to the *Grundrisse*, and should be quoted at length:

It seems to be correct to begin with the real and the concrete, with the real precondition, thus to begin, in economics, with e.g. the population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production. However, on closer examination this proves false. The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed. These classes, in turn, are an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest. E.g. wage labour, capital, etc. These latter in turn presuppose exchange, division of labour, prices, etc. For example, capital is nothing without wage labour, without value, money, price etc. Thus, if I were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception [*Vorstellung*] of the whole, and I would then, by means of further determination, move analytically towards ever more simple concepts [*Begriff*], from the imagined concrete towards ever more simple concepts [*Begriff*], from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I had arrived at the *simplest determinations*. From there the journey would have

to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the population again, but this time not as the chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations ... The latter is obviously the scientifically correct method. The concrete is concrete because it is the unity of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation [*Anschauung*] and conception. Along the first path the full conception was evaporated to yield an abstract determination; along the second, the abstract determinations lead towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought ... But this is by no means the process by which the concrete itself comes into being.¹⁹

The same point is made repeatedly in *Capital*, as, for example, in a concise remark in a footnote in which Marx starts from the critique of technology and moves on to the critique of religion:

It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly core of the misty creations of religion, than, conversely, it is, to develop from the actual relations of life the corresponding celestialised forms of those relations. The latter method is the only materialistic, and therefore the only scientific one.²⁰

But why does Marx insist that this is the only scientific method? That it is theoretically more demanding is clear, but why does this matter? And how are we to understand the genetic connection? The remark on the critique of religion suggests an answer. The reference to discovering 'by analysis the earthly core of the misty creations of religion' is a reference to Feuerbach and his argument that belief in the existence of a god is an expression of human self-alienation, that human self-alienation, in other words, is the 'earthly core' of religion. The second part of Marx's sentence, on developing 'from the actual relations of life the corresponding celestialised forms of those relations' refers to Marx's own criticism of Feuerbach, to the effect that self-alienation must be understood not in an abstract, but in a practical (and therefore historical) sense. Feuerbach is correct in pointing out that god is a human creation (and not vice versa), but the process of creation has to be understood practically, sensually. The concept of 'god' has to be understood as the product of human thought, and this thought, in turn, is not an individual ahistorical act, but an aspect of social practice in certain historical conditions.

The criticism of Feuerbach has important political implications. Religion presents humans as objects, as beings created by God, the sole creator, the

genesis of all things, the source of all power, the only Subject. Feuerbach's criticism of religion puts humans in the centre of the world, but they are not really empowered, for Feuerbach's human is trapped in a timeless self-alienation. Once the production of god is understood as a social, historical human practice, then humans are no longer objects, and no longer trapped in a timeless vacuum of powerlessness: *human practice, rather, is recognised as the sole creator, the genesis of all things, the source of all power, the only subject*. The critique of religion, understood in this sense as practical-genetic, allows humans to structure the world around themselves, as their own 'true sun'.

'The criticism of religion', says Marx, 'is the premise of all criticism'.²¹ His critique of the political economists follows the same pattern as his critique of Feuerbach. In *Capital*, Marx's attention has moved to a much more powerful god than the god of religion, namely money (value). Money, in everyday thought, proclaims itself as ruler of the world, as the sole source of power. Ricardo (taking the place of Feuerbach) has shown that that is not so: he has discovered 'by analysis' that the 'earthly core of the misty creations' of economics (the religion of money) is human labour, as the substance of value. However, Ricardo treats labour in the same way as Feuerbach treats self-alienation: as timeless, an ahistorical feature of the human condition.

Political Economy has indeed analysed, however incompletely, value and its magnitude, and has discovered what lies beneath these forms. But it has never once asked the question why labour is represented by the value of its product and labour-time by the magnitude of that value.²²

The result is that Ricardo, like Feuerbach, puts humans at the centre of the world, but leaves humanity entrapped in a timeless, unchanging vacuum of powerlessness. It is only by tracing the production of value and money by social, historical human practice that the critique of the power of money (and powerlessness of humans) becomes a theory of human power, of the power of human practice, or work.

These examples suggest that the genetic method is not just a question of applying a superior logic. Marx's method is sometimes described as based on the logical 'derivation' of categories (money from value, capital from money, and so on). This is the case, for example, in the so-called 'state derivation debate', in which it was argued that the development of a Marxist theory of the state involved the derivation of the category 'state'. This is correct, but in so far as the derivation, or the genetic link, is understood in purely logical terms, then the core of Marx's approach is misunderstood and the result is a theory which, by understanding social interconnections as purely logical, ends by disempowering rather than empowering social practice. The claim that Marx's method is scientific is not a claim that its logic is superior, or that it

is more rigorous, but that it follows in thought (and therefore consciously takes part in) the movement of the practical process of production. Genesis can only be understood as human genesis, as the power of human creation.

If, then, we return to the concept of 'totality' and ask what it is that gives foundation to the 'point of view of totality' (Lukacs's phrase)²³ – what it is that justifies the claim that the only 'scientifically correct' approach is to start out from the unity of the multiplicity of social phenomena – then the answer must be that what constitutes the totality as totality (and therefore what constitutes 'forms' of social relations as such) is the exclusive power of human creative practice (work). It is only when founded genetically-practically in work that the concept of totality (and form and critique) acquires meaning as a scientific/political concept of power.

If genesis (or derivation) is understood in this sense, as the movement in thought of the genetic power of human practice, then it follows that the 'simplest determinations' referred to by Marx in the passage from the *1857 Introduction* can only be understood as work (the creative power of human practice).²⁴ Marx's method (described by Gunn as 'determinate abstraction'²⁵) can only be grasped as scientific once all social connections, including the process of abstraction, are understood as practical.

The objectivity of capitalism, the 'that's the way things are' of capitalist reality, has now dissolved. The concepts of totality, form and so on provided a basis for overcoming the hard separation between subject and object, for conceptualising the separation as a separation-in-unity/unity-in-separation. However, it is only when those concepts are understood in a practical-genetic sense that the symmetry of subject and object disappears: it is only then that it becomes clear that there is no object, there is only a subject.

VII

The scream has now acquired a new dimension. From being a scream of negation, of refusal, it has now become a scream of power. The starting point was the subjective rejection of 'objectively existing society': now the objective has dissolved and there is nothing left but the power of the subject. The scream of the powerless victim, heard through the ears of Marxist theory, becomes the scream of the all-powerful subject.

The key to this transformation is the concept of work. The pivotal point of Marx's theory, that which gives power to negation, is the concept of the creative power of human practice, of work. For Marx, humanity is defined by conscious creative practice: 'free conscious activity is man's species-character'.²⁶ The concept of practice or work is in the first place a concept

of power. It emerges in the critique of the notion of human powerlessness expressed in religion: it is not god who is practical and creative, but humans. If humans are practical, creative beings, then all relations between them must be understood as practical relations, relations of work: 'all social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice' (Thesis VIII on Feuerbach). The comprehension of practice is the key to theorising about society because society is nothing other than practice. It is for this reason that Marx speaks at the beginning of *Capital* of the 'two-fold nature of the labour contained in commodities' as 'the pivot on which a clear comprehension of Political Economy turns'.²⁷

Work, creation and practice are used interchangeably here. Under capitalism, work exists in the form of the two-fold nature of labour, as concrete and abstract labour: the (contradictory and antagonistic) subordination of concrete to abstract labour (the production of value) means that work exists in a form which negates that 'free conscious activity' which is the 'species characteristic of man'. Marx's central criticism of capitalism is that it dehumanises people by depriving them of that which makes them human. Yet the existence of work as value-producing labour does nothing at all to change the all-constitutive power of work: since work is the only creative force in society (any society), it could not be otherwise. The force of Marx's theory of value lies precisely in that: it is simultaneously a theory of the subordination of work and a theory of the exclusive power of work.

Work, then, is the 'simplest determination' (to use the term of the 1857 'Introduction'). Work, so understood, is subjectivity – practical subjectivity, since there is no other; and work is negativity, since it involves the practical negation of that which exists. Work is all-constitutive. 'Objectivity' is nothing but objectified subjectivity: there is nothing but subjectivity and its objectification (its transformation into a mode of existence as objective).

The subjective scream, which first seemed to be anti-scientific (and would be so treated by most academic discussion) is now revealed as the essential starting point of scientific reflection. If society is nothing but subjectivity and its objectification, it follows that subjectivity (practice) is the only possible starting point for the comprehension of society, that the understanding of society is a process of tracing the (objectivising) forms of our own subjectivity – a path which is totally closed by the notion of 'scientific objectivity'. The world can only be understood subjectively, critically, negatively, from below. We started out looking for a theory-against-society rather than a theory-of-society: it is now clear that it is only through a theory-against-society (a theory which starts from the subjective critique of the 'objective') that society can be understood, as objectification of the subject. A theory-of-society, which

starts from a supposed (and inevitably fictitious) suppression (or distancing) of the subject from society,²⁸ cannot possibly reach an understanding of society in terms of the subjective power of work. It can only take at face value the objectification which disempowers the subject, thus contributing to that disempowerment. It is only negatively, only through a theory against society, that society can be understood.²⁹

VIII

From the pivotal concept of work, as practical (and theoretical) subjectivity, as 'simplest determination', it becomes possible to recompose society, to retrace the process of the objectification of the subject, the existence of the subject as object.

This retracing of the journey from the pivotal existence of work as concrete and abstract labour is the task undertaken by Marx in *Capital*. Starting from value, he traces the genesis of money, capital, profit, and so on as forms assumed by the product of work, showing simultaneously how the relations between people (practical relations, relations of work) take the form of relations between things. This, the existence of practical social relations as relations between things, Marx refers to as fetishism.

What does fetishism mean? If relations between people exist as relations between things, if, that is, relations between subjects exist as relations between objects, then what is left of the subjectivity which has been the theme of this argument? If the relations between people exist objectively, in a certain form, then are they not objective relations? If the criticism of capitalism is that it objectifies subjective relations, does this not mean that the study of capitalism must be the study of this objectivity?

The question of objectivism comes in again by the back door, through the notion of fetishism. The justification which can be advanced for the objectivist tradition of mainstream Marxism is now not a simple dualism between people and objective conditions, but rather that people, who are in reality, in their species-characteristic, practical creative beings, exist under capitalism as objects, as dehumanised, as deprived of their subjectivity. It is the existence of people as objects, the argument runs, that allows us to understand capitalism in terms of the logical unfolding of its 'objective laws of development' first analysed by Marx in *Capital* and subsequently studied by the tradition of Marxist economics. In this view, class struggle is struggle against the logic of capital and clearly distinct from it.

This justification of objectivism rests on what one might call a 'hard' interpretation of fetishism (or alienation, reification, objectification – all

different terms for basically the same process). Fetishism is taken as an accomplished fact. The fetishised forms are taken to be the exclusive mode of existence of relations between people.

Politically and theoretically, the way in which fetishism is understood is the central issue of Marxism. Politically, the hard concept of fetishism leads to the obvious dilemma: if people exist as objects under capitalism, then how is revolution conceivable? To this dilemma there are three possible solutions. One is to say that there is no way out, that there is no possibility of social revolution, that we can only criticise without hope: the pessimism often associated with the Frankfurt School. A second is to say that there is a way forward, through the action and leadership of those who manage to free themselves from their condition as objects, through the leadership, in other words, of a vanguard party: the Leninist position. A third possible solution is to argue that revolution should not be thought of in terms of subjective action, that the unfolding of the objective contradictions will themselves bring about the downfall of capitalism and the liberation of the subject: the position of the Second International. These strategies, for all their difference, share the same point of departure – the understanding of fetishism as accomplished fact. If people are understood as objectified, then, in one form or another, a politics of treating them as objects follows.

Theoretically, the way in which fetishism is understood affects the understanding of all other categories. If social relations are understood as objectified, then the forms of existence of those social relations (and their interrelation) will also be understood as objective, and their development will be understood as the unfolding as a closed logic. Thus, for example, value, in this tradition, is understood as an economic category (often as the basis for a theory of price) and not as a form of class struggle. Money, too, is understood as existing objectively, as creating conditions which affect class struggle, but not as a form of class struggle itself. These categories are understood as 'closed', in the sense of developing according to a self-contained logic.

This understanding of fetishism tends to lead to an analytical rather than a genetic discussion of capitalism. Indeed, if fetishism is complete, then it is not clear what significance the genetic approach (or form analysis) possesses. If people are objectified, then what is the point of tracing the objectification of their subjectivity? If value rules, rather than work, then what is the point of asking 'why labour is represented by the value of its product', as Marx insists we must? The dominant approach of Marxist economics has been simply to ignore the question of genesis and of form. In discussions of value, for example, very little attention has been paid to the form (as opposed to the magnitude) of value and Marx's all-important criticism of Ricardo has, on the whole, been forgotten.

A more sophisticated approach, which succeeds in integrating the idea of form with a 'hard' understanding of fetishism, is put forward by those who take the view that form-analysis should be understood historically. In this view, the importance of Marx's insistence on form is simply to show the historicity of capitalism. The genesis of the forms of social relations, then, has to be understood historically: the establishment of the rule of value or money was a historical process accomplished in the early days of capitalism.³⁰ From this perspective, value can be understood as a form of domination, but not as a form of struggle. Value production, as the form taken by work under capitalism, is a form of capitalist domination, to be contrasted with the past and above all future liberation of work.

There is no doubt that the hard interpretation of fetishism is the dominant one within the Marxist tradition, and that it has something to do with the treatment of people as the objects rather than the subjects of politics that has characterised the worst of the communist political tradition. To put it weakly, this interpretation of fetishism is consistent with the authoritarianism that has characterised much of the vanguardist tradition.

There is, however, an alternative way of interpreting fetishism, another way of understanding the 'retracing of the journey' that Marx undertakes in *Capital*. The point is made colourfully by Ernst Bloch:

alienation could not even be seen, and condemned of robbing people of their freedom and depriving the world of its soul, if there did not exist some measure of its opposite, of that possible coming-to-oneself, being-with-oneself, against which alienation can be measured.³¹

The concept of alienation, or fetishism, in other words, implies its opposite: not as an essential non-alienated 'home' deep in our hearts, but as resistance, refusal, rejection of alienation in our daily practice. It is only on the basis of a concept of non- (or better anti-) alienation or anti-fetishism that we can conceive of alienation or fetishism. Fetishism, therefore, cannot be understood as complete: it can only be understood as a process, as fetishisation.

If fetishism is understood as fetishisation, then the genesis of the capitalist forms of social relations is not of purely historical interest. The value-form, money-form, capital-form, state-form etc. are not established once and for all at the origins of capitalism. Rather, they are constantly at issue, constantly questioned as forms of social relations, constantly being established and re-established (or not) through struggle. The forms of social relations are processes of forming social relations.³²

Our existence, then, is not simply an existence within fetishised forms of social relations. We do not exist simply as the objectified victims of capitalism.

Nor can we exist outside the capitalist forms: there is no area of capitalism-free existence, no privileged sphere of unfetichised life, for we are always constituting and constituted by our relations with others. Rather, as the starting point of this discussion, the scream, suggests, we exist against-and-in capital. Our existence against capitalism is not a question of conscious choice, it is the inevitable expression of our life in an oppressive, alienating society. Gunn puts the point nicely when he says that 'unfreedom subsists solely as the (self-contradictory) revolt of the oppressed'.³³ Our existence-against-capital is the inevitable constant negation of our existence-in-capital. Conversely, our existence-in-capital (or, more clearly, our containment within capital) is the constant negation of our revolt against capital. Our containment within capital is a constant process of fetishising, or forming, our social relations, a constant struggle.

This understanding of fetishism as fetishisation, and hence of our existence in capitalist society as an existence against-and-in capital, affects our understanding of all the categories of Marxist thought. If the forms of social relations (expressed in the categories of the political economists) are understood as processes of forming social relations, and hence as struggle, it is clear that the categories must be understood as being open. If value, for example, is understood not as an economic category, nor as a form of domination, but as a form of struggle, then the actual meaning of the category will depend on the course of the struggle. Once the categories of thought are understood as expressions not of objectified social relations but of the struggle to objectify them, then a whole storm of unpredicability blows through them. Once it is understood that money, capital, the state are nothing but the struggle to form, to discipline, to structure what Hegel calls 'the sheer unrest of life', then it is clear that their development can be understood only as practice, as undetermined struggle.³⁴ Marxism, as a theory of struggle, is inevitably a theory of uncertainty.³⁵ The notion of struggle is inconsistent with any idea of a guaranteed negation-of-the-negation happy ending: the only way that dialectics can be understood is as negative dialectics,³⁶ as the open-ended negation of the untrue, as revolt against unfreedom.

IX

Marx's method is a movement of empowerment/ disempowerment.

A principal theme of this article has been the politics of method. It is not for theoretical reasons but for political reasons that it is desperately important to open Marxism, to question the received interpretation of the Marxist method. One of the principal obstacles to the project of opening Marxism is

that it is still very common to discuss questions of Marxist method as though they had nothing at all to do with politics. Many of the most important critiques of traditional Marxism have been written in a style which suggests that their authors float in a realm of pure theory and have little interest in the political implications of what they write.

The question of method is the question of revolutionary power – though not in the Leninist sense. I.I. Rubin, in a lecture delivered in Moscow in 1927 on 'Abstract Labour and Value in Marx's System',³⁷ referred to the passage already quoted from the 'Introduction' to the *Grundrisse* and described Marx's method in terms of two steps, the analytical and the dialectical or genetic. The political implications of Rubin's argument are never spelt out in his lecture, yet they were to cost him his life – he disappeared in the Stalinist purges. Possibly Stalin or his henchmen realised that the concept of power and of revolution implicit in Marx's method was totally incompatible with the direction taken by the Russian Revolution.

The analytical movement in Marx's method sets out to answer the revolutionary question: how can we conceptualise the power of the powerless? It is an absurd question because everything in society tells us that the powerless are powerless, that it is the politicians, the mafia, the drug barons, the rich who are the ones with power. It is a necessary question because, more and more, there is no other way of conceiving of a future for humanity.

Marx's answer is that, by analysing the forms of social relations which proclaim constantly the power of the other and the powerlessness of ourselves (god, money, capital, state, drug barons), it is possible to see that there is a power which constitutes all of these and on which they therefore depend: that all-constitutive power is labour, work, creative practice. The power of the powerless is constituted by that which makes them (us) human, namely work. The power of the powerless is the dependence of the powerful on the powerless.

This is an absurd answer to an absurd question, a necessary answer to a necessary question. The movement of analysis is a movement of empowerment: behind all the forms of our powerlessness lies the one thing that makes us all-powerful: work. That is the first, obvious, and generally overlooked, meaning of the labour theory of value. It is a great chest-thumping cry: 'we humans, as workers, are all-powerful'. That is the theme that resonates through all Marx's work, from the early critique of religion to its great elaboration in *Capital*. With this the world is turned upside down: from here we can begin to recompose the world in a manner quite different from the 'social sciences'.

The second step, what Rubin calls the dialectical movement, traces the disempowerment of our omnipotence, how it is that the omnipotence of labour exists in the form of the powerlessness of labour. Once we have seen that

labour is the substance of value, there follows the question, why is it that the product of labour takes the form of value?

Fetishisation, the process traced by the second phase of Marx's method, is a two-faced process. On the one hand, it is the disempowerment of labour. The product of labour, transformed into commodity, value, money, capital, no longer appears as the product of labour: the power of labour is extinguished (never completely) by the process of fetishisation. Fetishisation is the process by which the power of labour comes to exist (never completely) in the form of money, state, capital. It is the process by which labour is reduced (never completely) to abstract, value-producing labour, the process by which alternative futures are killed, but never completely.

On the other hand, the disempowerment of labour is impossible, since it is the source of all social power. Fetishisation is strictly speaking the transformation of the power of labour. No matter how successful capital is in its struggle to reduce labour to abstract, value-producing labour, capital always depends on labour for its existence. Capitalism is based on the objectification of subjective labour, but, no matter how complete that objectification is, it remains the objectification of the subjective. No matter how absolute and terroristic the domination of capital is, there is no way that it can free itself from its dependence on labour. The dependence of capital on labour exists within capital as contradiction.

The power of labour thus exists against-and-in capital, with no clear distinction between 'against' and 'in'. We start from struggle: the scream, our open opposition to capital, the existence of labour against capital, the disruptive power of labour expressed in strikes, sabotage, absenteeism and all sorts of militant action. The opposition to capital is not always open, it is often contained, often integrated: the disruptive power of labour is harnessed as productive power. There are no hard barriers here, no clear lines of distinction: there is a continuum between the power of labour against capital and the power of labour in capital. The productive power is always to some extent disruptive, revolt is never entirely absent. However, even fetishised, even contained, the power of labour is always there. It appears as contradiction between concrete and abstract labour, between use-value and value, between productive capital and money-capital: it appears as limitation on the extension of absolute surplus-value, as the contradiction of relative surplus-value production expressed in the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Contradiction is the fetishised expression of the ever-present power of labour. The transformation of the product of labour into value contains the power of labour on which capital depends, but it also reproduces it as an ineradicable chaotic fragility at the heart of capital.

The specific contribution of Marxism as a theory against capitalism is thus not that struggle against capitalism is supported by the 'objective contradictions' of the system, but that the power of labour, both overt and contained, constitutes the fragility of capitalism. The dynamic of capitalist development (that is, class struggle) is the ceaseless and hopeless flight by capital from its dependence on the power of labour. It is in these terms that the question of capitalist crisis has to be understood.

In times like the present, when the labour movement has suffered such defeats throughout the world, the power of labour seems to disappear from sight. The troubles of capitalism seem to be the result of economic laws which appear to have nothing to do with struggles which could create the basis for a different sort of society. Work may be the 'simplest determination' but it seems quite irrelevant to the present powerlessness of oppositional movements. In this situation, it becomes more important than ever to 'retrace the journey', to unfold the power of work not only categorially but historically, to interpret recent history as the struggle by capital to refetishise the power of work, to show how this refetishisation both disarms revolt and reproduces the power of labour as the instability of capitalism: a message of warning and a message of hope.

I have been fortunate in having been able to discuss drafts of this paper in Toluca, Mexico City and Edinburgh. My particular thanks are due to Javier Arzuaga, Cecilia Gayet, Gustavo Emerich, Werner Bonefeld and Richard Gunn.

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6. *Ibid.*
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9

Capital as Subject and the Existence of Labour

WERNER BONEFELD

Introduction

In his contribution to this volume, John Holloway emphasises the negative force of Marxism. This force entails the invocation of 'critique' as a destructive power and the understanding of social existence as a mode of existence of human practice. However, within radical thought, there are sharp divisions as to the 'status' of human practice. Is human practice a productive power, or is it merely attendant upon structural constraints and laws, or, finally, is it merely a cogwheel within a much broader system? What, indeed, does it mean to speak about human practice at all? What constitutes the relation between 'human practice' and the 'perverted and disenchanting world' of capitalism?¹

According to the contemporary criticism associated with critical realism, 'structures and social entities are often reproduced as unintended effects of individual actions'.² In other words, humans may be producers, but the product of their labours has not necessarily the anticipated result. Are structures constraining or is the 'individual' in the dark? According to Lovering, human action is not a self-determining action but, rather, either subordinate to structural relations, or incapable of applying itself with reason. Do structures prestructure human actions, determine the outcome and define the success of individual action? Or are human beings conditioned by forces outside their control? It seems that, for Lovering, structures are *extramundane* entities: we are born into them and they reproduce themselves, in modified form, through individual actions. The notion that structures reproduce through human activity seems bizarre. And yet, that seems to be Lovering's critical realist position.

Another recent contribution which seeks to trace out the constraints placed upon human practice by extra-human forces has been made by Bob Jessop. In distinction to Lovering, Jessop's approach emphasises subjective criteria,

rather than objective structural criteria which constraint human practice. For Jessop, the all important subject is capital.³ Social reality is seen as a result of the interaction between multiple social interests and causes. This interaction is constrained by the 'subjectivity' of capital which imposes upon human practice its own distinctive logical and/or natural requirements.⁴ Jessop explains the subordination of human practice to the subjectivity of capital in terms of the autonomy of the 'value meta-form'. This meta-form is conceived as a thing which provides the framework within which human practice unfolds. We will return to Jessop's approach briefly at a later stage of the argument. What is important at this stage is that approaches represented by both Lovering and Jessop depend on the notion of capital (or structures) as constituted things. This means that capital is presupposed as an existing entity. The question of what capital 'is' is no longer raised. Consequently, capital is identified as an historically active subject. This, however, would imply that the question of how capital is produced has been replaced by the question of how capital produces. Like Lovering, Jessop sees Marxism as a scientific, objective theory. While capital is conceived of as the subject, human practice is determined according to capital's own definition of social reproduction. And since capital is presupposed as the subject, labour can only express itself within the terms of capital. Human practice lies solely within the subjectivity of capital: all labour appears thus by its nature as wage-labour.

According to Marx, the main theoretical shortcoming of political economy is that it conceptualises social existence on the basis of constituted forms.⁵ This means that political economy accepts the historical existence of particular phenomena and seeks to establish causal connections amongst them. Marx's critique of political economy is that it presupposes what it intends to show, namely, it presupposes 'capital'. Political economy does not ask why social labour is represented by the value of its product. Rather, it seeks to define this value by presupposing exchange relations, that is, by presupposing the circuit of social capital. Political economy works with untheorised presuppositions. That is, the forms of capital are taken for granted as historically achieved forms which are no longer at issue in historical development. They control human action rather than existing in and through human practice. In short, these forms are understood to exist outside human practice and endowed with self-constituting capacities. Consequently, capital is defined as 'something' which produces capital.

The concepts of political economy are abstractions which relate to the fetishised forms of existence of capitalist society. As Marx puts it,

it is damned difficult for Messrs. the economists to make the theoretical transition from the self-preservation of value in capital to its multiplica-

tions; and this is in its fundamental character, not only as an accident or result. See, e.g. Storch, how he brings this fundamental character in with an adverb, 'properly'. Admittedly, the economists try to introduce this into the relation of capital as an essential aspect, but if this is not done in the brutal form of defining capital as that which brings profit, where the increase of capital itself is already posited as a special economic form, profit, then it happens only surreptitiously ... Driven to the effect that nobody would employ his capital without drawing a gain from it amounts either to the absurdity that the good capitalists will remain capitalist even *without* employing their capital; or to a very banal form of saying that gainful investment is inherent in the concept of capital. Very well. In that case it would just have to be demonstrated.⁶

Approaches, bourgeois or not, which are predicated on capital as a constituted form are caught in a vicious circularity of thought: they presuppose what they set out to define. They supply a scientific reinterpretation of the objective conditions of existence. These conditions are always, and necessarily so, those which lie solely within capital itself. This is because capital is presupposed not only as the dominant factor but, also, as the determining and historically active production relation. Human practice, rather than being at the centre of the theoretical approach, appears merely as an observable fact in the empirical world. Politically, the abandonment of the human subject leads to an accommodation to 'objective conditions', that is, it leads to affirmative and apologetic accounts of a 'perverted' existence. Horkheimer⁷ makes this point when he condemns theory for which 'subject and object are kept strictly apart ... If we think of the object of theory in separation from the theory, we fall into quietism or conformism'. The dualist conception of subject and object, of theory and being, belongs to what Horkheimer describes as traditional theory.

This article argues that Marx's critique of political economy supplies a critique of capital as a mode of existence of labour. We will look at Marx's notion of 'capital' as an autonomous subject and will assess this notion by emphasising 'labour' as a constituting power. It will be argued that labour exists against itself in the form of the perverted world of capitalism.

From Capital to Labour?

Horkheimer's remark that 'human beings produce, through their own labour, a reality which increasingly enslaves them', is of key importance for the issues raised in this paper.⁸ On first sight, the sentence provides a paradox. On the one hand, human beings are the subject of the sentence. They are active and

creative. They produce their own reality. They are the essence of the sentence. On the other hand, they are merely the object of reality, an enslaving reality. Human beings are reduced to a faceless 'them', to an appendix of a reality which stands above them, and which merely develops through human action. How do we understand human activity: subject and, as such, essence of reality; or merely the object of reality. In other words, is human practice merely an innocent bystander of a reality which determines social relations; or is human practice a productive power? Horkheimer's remark has a critical meaning: how can one understand the circumstance that human practice presents itself in seemingly extra-human forms? In other words, why is it that human practice has not only produced, but that it also exists against itself in perverted forms? Horkheimer inquires into the constitution of social existence. In distinction to his totalising thought, the two 'sides' of his 'paradox' establish the focus for structuralist and subjectivist versions of Marxism. Structuralist approaches see society as an 'organism' which develops according to its own immanent laws. Human practice is seen merely as an aspect of this organism. Social conflict is seen as a means of balancing a society and thus as a structure-reproducing entity. In this view, structures are endowed with subjective properties.⁹ They decide, determine and 'select'. On the other hand, subjectivist approaches depend upon the notion of a creative, non-alienated, and self-determining subject which stands in opposition to the demands emanating from the capitalist system. In other words, the 'subject' is seen as an authentic and creative being which stands outside, and is constantly forced to participate in, the capitalist project. The primacy of human practice is raised in neither case because the human practice is either compelled to reproduce 'structures' or it exists outside its own social world. In other words, the critical question of why does this content (human existence) take this form (capitalist social relations) is pushed to the side and replaced by a question which already presupposes that 'capital' is something: either a producer of itself or a 'powerful object' which cajoles the authentic subject into serving the capitalist cause.

Human Practice and Capital as a Constituted Form

With regards to an analysis which raises the question of how capital produces itself and regulates its own reproduction, the focus is on political economy's 'constituted forms'. Human practice is regarded as a mere element which supports and reproduces these forms in changing empirical circumstances. Thus, the human being is referred to as a human factor, a factor of production, or as a bearer of certain functions and interests, etc. In short the human being becomes a 'somebody' compelled to operate within the framework of estab-

lished forms which exist beyond the reach of human activity and which define and contain the scope of human practice. Within the dualism of object and subject, the object is the active element whereas the subject is the passive spectator and/or victim of selective structures. This view of human practice is very much expressed by Lovering. As he puts it,

individuals enter into a world which is not of their choosing, and once there they act in ways which partly reproduce, partly transform the structure of that world. But their understanding and ability to control these structural effects are severely limited.¹⁰

For Lovering, at best, the social individual is political economy's private individual born into a world which does not belong to it. Lovering's suppression of the social subject from society not only reinforces the view of structures as extra-human entities but, also, contributes to the attack on reason in contemporary radical thought. Lovering seems to accept that structures are founded outside the human realm and are thus transcendental entities. As Agnoli put it in his comment on contemporary radical thought: 'because of an affective feeling of discontent, the attack on reason leads to cheerful leaps into the spiritual, the mush of the soul'.¹¹ Where do structures come from, how have they been generated and what constitutes them? Should it indeed be the case that structures are transcendental 'entities', any search for their constitution is an inquiry either into prehistorical times or into invisible, occult spaces. Structures are there and humans are born into them and fate decides the consequences of action in a world of transcendental reason. Structures thus become sacrosanct entities which impinge upon human practice, reproduce through human practice but stand above human existence. The essence of existence is no longer the human being but rather a transcendental world of structures, a world beyond comprehension and a world which impinges upon social relations through invisible principles. The condemned human being is, in fact, a 'nobody'. As in the methodological individualism of rational choice Marxism associated with Elster,¹² subjects operate and calculate rationally and individually within a framework of unrecognised rules which they seek to transform but which they only manage to reinforce and affirm through strategic conduct designed to maximise their fortunes. For Elster, at least, occultism does not provide the answer to our problem. According to him, the answer lies in the transformative power of greed.

The emphasis on constituted forms affirms a form of thinking in which humanity is seen as a resource rather than a purpose. Human practice is defined by, and derived from, constituted forms: the human subject becomes not only a mere servant of an incomprehensible reality, it also becomes a

resource for the reproduction of invisible principles. The treatment of human practice as attendant upon 'essential', however transcendental, structures presupposes a social world which is founded upon rules and laws and regulations which preclude self-determination on the part of the social individual. The standpoint of constituted forms entails an inversion of the relation between object and subject: the system-properties become a subjective power and the human being transforms into the executor of the demands emanating from the 'system'. Structures apply themselves through human contact. Humanity thus becomes a resource for structural reproduction. Thus, structuralism's emphasis on humanity as a bearer, or agent, of commands emanating from structures.

The standpoint of constituted forms entails an understanding of 'capital' as an 'automatic subject', a subject which merely develops through class struggle. This characterisation of capital is often employed by Marxists to defend the primacy of the capital relation over the class relation. The former is said to include the relation between different forms of capital, such as money, productive and commodity capital, and the self-contradictory nature of this relation, including 'its' logic and laws.¹³ Fundamentally, the capital relation is the relationship between capital and capital. Its movement is 'governed' by the law of competition.¹⁴ On the other hand, the class relation comprises the relation between capital and labour. This relation is seen as an antagonistic relation which asserts itself in the form of class struggle. The notion of the primacy of the capital relation means, at best, that the self-contradictory constitution of 'capital' provokes class conflict and that this conflict ruptures capitalist reproduction and so produces 'crisis'. In this view, the contradictory character of the capitalist exploitation of labour is understood in terms of a contradiction internal to 'capital', the development of the contradictions being determined by the class struggle.¹⁵

At worst, the notion means that class conflict is merely a factor in the continuing reproduction of capitalism. The proponents of this view, such as Jessop,¹⁶ argue that capital stands above class relations, develops through class struggle but is not at issue in that struggle; capital is seen as something which subsists through its own logic. Class struggle is expelled from the analysis in so far as a proper understanding of the concrete, empirical, conditions of class struggle needs to be based on a specification of the capitalist framework within which class struggle obtains and unfolds. This emphasis on the primacy of the capital relation focuses on the objective lines of capitalist development. Structures are the only subject recognised by this approach. Class struggle is treated as a derivative of structural development. The dynamic of capitalist development is located in capital itself. Contradiction is seen as internal to capital, and capitalist development is a result of these contradictions. A

scientific inquiry has, consequently, to focus on the issue of how capital produces. Such an approach to social existence is founded on the presupposition that 'capital' is an active and self-constituting thing. In other words, the approach presupposes that capital is the automatic subject whose relation to itself establishes the objective framework within which the class relations subsist. The practical consequences are formidable. The association of Marxism with negation and the struggle for a world without antagonism is replaced by a scientific inquiry into the foundation of capital's self-constitution with a view to understanding capital's 'natural' requirements. The political implications are clear. As in traditional theory,¹⁷ theoreticians stand above the class struggle and offer their knowledge about the way in which (the unrecognised conditions of) structural development might be influenced by able and willing politicians so as to achieve a better world for all those 'victimised by structural selection'. Thus a scientific Marxism, a Marxism without value-judgments. In other words, the approach just criticised construes Marxism as a constructive, objective theory. Such a positive Marxism denies reason its 'historic role of, at any given time, provoking insubordination and destroying horrors'.¹⁸

Marxism as an impartial, positive, theory has a long tradition. In this tradition, it is alleged that Marxism has, because of its scientific method, a privileged access to the laws of motion of society. Thus, according to Korsch, Hilferding invoked the "insuperable reluctance of the ruling class to accept the results of Marxism" and therefore to take the "trouble" to study such a "complicated system".¹⁹ In other words, an approach predicated on the primacy of the capital relation over the class relation tends to invoke the notion that Marxism is a much superior science than bourgeois economics. It demands that Marxism's objective understanding of the secret laws which govern the anarchy of capitalist production be applied to a world in need of rational explanation and organisation. In sum, Marxism is seen as a scientific guide for a much improved organisation of capitalist society, rather than as a critique of exploitative relations.

Human Practice and Capital 'Is' Produced

Horkheimer's notion that 'human beings produce, through their own labour, a reality which increasingly enslaves them', can also be interpreted as an invitation to focus on 'labour' as the essence of social existence. Human activity would be seen as a constituting power. Rather than emphasising how capital produces, the emphasis would fall on how capital 'is' produced. The forms of social existence would be seen as a product of human practice, of human

labour. Rather than highlighting the formal rules of a 'system' – the objective conditions of reality – the emphasis falls on the notion of 'subjectivity'.

However, this emphasis begs the following question. Can one differentiate between, on the one side, 'subjectivity', and the way in which it exists, on the other? If, with Horkheimer, human beings produce, through their subjective power, a reality which enslaves them, then this subjective power can not exist outside the forms which it produces: it cannot be an innocent bystander to its own 'perversion'. This is Marx's argument in his early writings. Alienated labour, in his argument, is the 'cause', rather than the 'consequence', of private property and the abolition of private property presupposes the abolition of alienated labour.²⁰ The relationship between subjectivity and objectivity cannot be regarded as an external one. To argue that it is would presuppose what the argument set out to deny, namely that human activity is not the only social power which creates. This is because, in an external relation between subject and object, the notion of 'subjectivity' would mean that there is a 'power' which stands outside the 'subjective realm'. The standpoint of 'subjectivity' *sans phrase* presupposes not only that there is a constituting subject which is external to its perverted world. It presupposes also that the perverted world exists *qua* its own, as yet unknown and undefined, constitutive power.

Capital and labour do not oppose each other *simpliciter*. Capital is the product of labour's alienated existence, an existence in which the producer is enslaved in and through an apparently extra-human power, the power of capital. Marx's critique of political economy shows the dependence of capital upon labour. Living labour is the substance of value and exploitation the means of not only producing value but also of extorting surplus value. Capital exists only in and through labour. This does not mean that capital is merely using exploitation as a means of escaping 'its *de facto* subordination to the class of worker-producers'.²¹ Such a formulation destroys the insight which is entailed in the notion that capital *is* produced. This is because capital is conceived as a powerful, although limited, subject in its own right. This focus on labour presupposes what it wants to deny, namely the notion of capital as a powerful subject. The Marxian idea that alienated labour is the 'cause' of private property is turned on its head: capital produces alienated labour. Approaches predicated on the notion of labour's autonomy from capital tend to divide social existence into distinct spheres of, on the one hand, a machine-like logic of capital and the transcendental power of social practice, on the other. The subjectivist endorsement of social practice can amount only to a romantic invocation of the revolutionary subject's immediacy. Merely invoking labour's revolutionary immediacy tends to externalise structure from subject, so leading to a voluntarist conception which is the other side of determinism's

coin. Capital remains construed in terms of a logic which lies solely within itself and whose inconsistencies, alone, provide points of purchase for revolutionary practice. The capital-labour relation is understood merely in terms of a repressive systemic logic counterposed to subjective forces in a dualist and external way.²²

If labour is made the innocent starting point for the analysis of a dreadful content – exploitation – capital can only appear as a thing which has, indeed, its own constitutive power and logic. Labour is seen as a self-determining power at the same time as which capital is a self-constituting power: capital's capacity to undermine, contain, exploit and dehumanise something which, alone, is supposed to be constituting and generating, makes capital the supreme subject.²³ As a consequence, labour is conceived as external to its own mode of existence. The understanding of capitalist reproduction requires thus the understanding of capital's 'bewitching power' (Negri), or 'self-constituting power' (Arthur).²⁴ Thus, Horkheimer's emphasis that object and subject are separate-in-unity, each existing in and through the other without being identical with each other, remains untheorised to the extent that capital and labour are juxtaposed, and confront each other, as, together, different social powers. Theory is forced to swap between them, leaving the notion of 'constituting power' at the mercy of decisionism. This is a far cry from the Marxian contention that 'theoretical mysteries ... find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice'.²⁵

Capital as Subject and Constituted Forms

According to Marx, bourgeois theory feels at home in the estranged outward appearances of economic relations. It theorises constituted forms and relations which 'seem the more self-evident the more their internal relationships are concealed ... although they are understandable to the popular mind'. While it seems self-evident, to use Marx's examples in the quoted passage, that rent is the income from land, interest the income from capital and wage the income from labour, these relations are, however, 'three impossible combinations',²⁶ although they present the 'religion of everyday life'. Thus the need for what Marx calls, 'science': 'all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided'.²⁷ Marx emphasises that 'each, even the most simple element, such as, for example, the commodity, is already an inversion',²⁸ that is, it is a 'perverted form'.²⁹ The human content subsists in and through commodities in a mode of being denied. In other words, human relations take the form of relations between the products, or between things. The notion of capital as 'something' which

relates to itself, that is, a thing which has the capacity to self-valorisation, comprises, for Marx, the fetishism of capitalist production. According to this argument, the fetish character of capitalist production achieves its most completed form when capital is seen as a 'relation of the thing to itself'.³⁰

The 'capital-relation' comprises different forms of capital, such as productive capital, commodity capital, and money capital.³¹ The circuit of money capital is the most striking one as capital exists in its most universal form of abstract wealth and as capital appears directly as the source of its own increase: M ... M'. The relation of capital to itself is most clearly manifest in the formula of capital-interest 'with its occult quality of making a value unequal to itself'. Interest bearing capital is, for Marx, the 'most fetish-like form of capital', a form in which capital is reduced to a 'meaningless condensation'.³² In other words, an acceptance of the capital-relation as the focus of the critique of political economy repeats in thought the fetishisation of social relations as if they were 'the action of objects'.³³ The 'subjectivisation' of the object and the 'objectivisation' of human relations as relations between things are mutually dependent expressions of a perverted world in which humanity exists as a resource rather than as a purpose. And yet, this is the condition of human practice in capitalist society. Human relations exist – contradictorily – in the mode of private, abstract, individuals in a social context. The personification of the relations between things appears as an historically given condition of human existence.

In sum, the actions of the object seem to create a framework which stands above class relations and within which class struggle unfolds.³⁴ Were one to take this 'appearance' at face value, the class struggle would become an objective mechanism which merely mediates the reproduction of the capital relation. A contemporary elaboration of this view can be found in the debate on the post-Fordist state.³⁵ This debate is founded on the notion that class struggle unfolds within the objective framework established by the capital relation. For example, in Jessop's approach, class conflict 'does not as such create the totality nor does it give rise to [capitalism's] dynamic trajectory'. This is because the 'conceptual identity of classes is given by the capital relation itself rather than being constrained by classes which shape the capital relation'.³⁶ Thus, the capital relation stands above class relations. It is thus only logical that he insists that 'capital is the subject' and thus the *übergreifendes Subjekt*.³⁷ In other words, Jessop conceives of capital as 'essence', leaving the social relations themselves in the 'real' world of changing empirical circumstances.³⁸ For him the antagonism of classes arises only in the real world of multiple determinations. As a consequence, the concept of class-relations dissolves into the pluralist notion of interest groups, each of which relates to emergent structural ensembles in its own way. The Marxist notion of class

antagonism is thus destroyed in favour of a sociological conception of empirically observable modalities of a multitude of social conflicts. These conflicts are firmly located within the framework established by the capital-subject.

For Jessop, the class character of social subjects is defined through their relation to the value form. The key to deciphering the structural framework of class antagonism is the concept of surplus-value.³⁹ It is the dominance of the value form in a system of generalised commodity production which is seen as determining the conceptual identity of classes, the nature of class relations, the forms of class struggle and the totalising dynamic of class struggle and competition within the capitalist mode of production. For Jessop, the value form is better understood as a meta-form. The value meta-form is seen as standing above class relations as it describes the structural framework within which different forms of value – such as productive, money and commodity capital – compete with each other. Their competition unfolds within the circuit of capital whose structure is abstractly defined by the value meta-form. Within the circuit of capital we find, according to Jessop, different logics of capital. These logics connote different accumulation strategies of competing capital fractions. The value meta-form does not fully determine the course of accumulation but only the institutional logic and directional dynamic of capitalism, in itself indeterminate. It needs thus to be overdetermined by an 'economic class struggle in which the balance of class forces is moulded by many factors beyond the value form itself'.⁴⁰ As indicated by Clarke, Jessop understands the value form not as a process in and through which 'social relations appear in the form of relations between things, but as a thing-like structure which determines social relations'.⁴¹ The value meta-form defines the coherence of the capitalist mode of production, a coherence which is achieved, in practice, through the contingent forces of social conflict in the real world. The value meta-form is seen merely as constraining, externally, the room for manoeuvre of different capital logics. The conception of the value form as a value meta-form is tautological. This is because the determination of the value meta-form in the real world of contesting social forces presupposes the practical existence of the value meta-form, and vice versa. In Jessop's approach, the value meta-form is seen as external to its social determination.

Jessop's approach expresses in formal terms the experience of everyday life: social labour's life activity seems to reproduce a capitalist system-rationality which imposes itself upon the original producers behind their backs. Jessop's approach takes the perversion of everyday life as its starting point. Rather than raising the question why social relations exist in and through forms of commodified fragmentation, this fragmentation is presupposed and social relations are made attendant upon the laws of commodity production. Capitalist

reproduction is social reproduction in inverted form: private production in a social context. The social character of private production is not a matter of the conscious decision of society, since the latter exists only in the inverted form of private fragmentation (commodity production). Therefore, the social existence of private production confronts individual producers as an external and independent thing, which, as argued by Marx, is their condition of existing as private individuals in a social context.⁴² In other words, the social character of labour exists, contradictorily, in and through the categories of political economy. The economic categories, such as, for example, value, productivity and profit, can not be interpreted in a way distinct from their historical existence. Marx's acceptance of these categories does not entail their recognition as elements which are historically active. Rather, the recognition proceeds through (a destructive)⁴³ critique.

Marx's critique is not satisfied with an analysis of the operation of exchange relations. Rather, it seeks to understand the social constitution of exchange relations and that is of the social constitution of value. The act of exchange does not explain the generation of the 'thing' that is being exchanged, nor does it explain why the individual producers exist in the way they do. Political economy is an attempt to understand exchange relations and, from within exchange relations, the relations of production. Thus, the labour theory of value is perceived as a theory of private and individual labour embodied in the products of labour. 'Embodied labour' is conceived as a regulator of 'value'. The secret of the social constitution of 'value' remained unresolved because 'value' was merely conceived as a 'thing' rather than a social relation. And yet, the 'movement of value' manifests itself as an 'automatic' movement, 'acting with the force of an elemental natural process'. The movement of value appears as the movement of an 'independent thing'⁴⁴ and so as the movement of an historically active subject which stands above and 'structures' social relations. However, 'value' is this independent thing only if looked at merely in terms of its formal mode of movement. The social character of labour 'does not show itself except in the act of exchange'.⁴⁵ Human practice subsists in and through the world of commodities as if it were an object of the 'impersonal' relationships between the things themselves. There is, however, no 'form' without 'content'.⁴⁶ To argue that form exists without content is to say that 'form' is external to its own social determination. Like the notion of constituted forms, the notion of 'value' as 'form' without 'content' espouses the religion of bourgeois society: commodity fetishism.

In sum, approaches which focus on constituted forms can only describe what is already presupposed: private individuals operate within the framework of objective social rules whose rationality 'structures' their life. Approaches which seek to understand human practice as something which can be derived

from 'the action of objects'⁴⁷ reformulate in a reductionist way Smith's principle of the 'invisible hand'. Social reality is governed by something which we know is there but which we can neither see nor comprehend. Our scientific search for the last and most refined source of 'truth' was unsuccessful and had to be abandoned. We are governed by something invisible and this something is a principle, that is, it is a determining factor of our existence. However, we do know that this all-important principle operates with an iron fist: those unaware of its operation will feel the principle's cold and dispassionate 'hand'. We 'exist' thus according to something which transcends our understanding and is beyond our comprehension. In other words, social existence is a fate rather than a conscious social act, and not only a fate, but also governed by chance. The notion that human practice is governed by an invisible principle says that the human beings have not succeeded in secularising their worldly affairs and that they are ill-equipped to comprehend the constitution of their social existence and so to organise themselves according to reason. There is no foundation for reason in a world governed by rules which emanate from the womb of an invisible principle.

Approaches, Marxist or not, which proclaim in favour of invisible principles, be it in the form of teleological conceptions of history or by declaring capital as a subject, see human practice as something which can only follow the predetermined and 'inevitable lines of tendency and direction established by the real world'.⁴⁸ In other words, contemporary attempts at providing a positive and constructive Marxist science participate, alongside traditional theory, in the search for the last and most refined criteria of truth: the inevitable and the invisible. From this perspective, we can only contemplate 'society' due to our empirical knowledge provided by experience. 'Society' remains at the mercy of inevitable lines of development which merely appears to the human mind as a chance development (*Fundsache*).⁴⁹ In other words, social existence is presupposed as something without human content; the social individual is replaced by the 'value-thing' which governs in and through the application of its own laws [*Eigengesetzlichkeit*]. Thus, both Jessop's 'value meta-form' and the vulgar understanding of Smith's 'invisible hand' depend upon a conception of society as 'something' beyond reason and beyond labour's transformative power. As was mentioned above, structures are the only subjects recognised by approaches which are predicated on the notion of constituted forms. The rules of human existence are seen to emanate from somewhere outside the human realm, a 'somewhere' which has its own laws and ways to kill. Traditional theory's acceptance of a world governed by hypothetical judgment – judgments on the practical meaning of invisible and inevitable principles – amounts to an infinite regress of metatheories because what needs to be defined is presupposed as something beyond definition.⁵⁰ The

attempt to find 'truth' in eternity or invisible spaces has always been the characteristic of traditional theory, that is, of a theory which resists an understanding of our social world as a world made by humans and a world dependent upon human transformative power.⁵¹

Marx's Critique: an Analysis of Exchange Relations?

In political economy, the category of labour is seen in isolation from its social existence: Marx's labour theory of value is not a theory which proclaims that embodied labour is the regulator of the value of the product.⁵² Rather, for Marx, the value of the product is constituted by socially necessary labour-time. Marx's critique is not an alternative economic theory of exchange but a theory of the constitution of value. As Reichelt puts it,

one has to put the idea of constitution into the context of value as a permanently moving form of existence. If one fails to do so, value can only be identified as static, or as an historical automatically active subject.⁵³

The constitution, or substance, of value is labour. However, labour is not itself value. Rather 'human labour-power in motion, or human labour creates value'.⁵⁴ The labour process is the 'appropriation of nature on the part of an individual within and through a specific form of society'.⁵⁵ Thus, labour is not the only source of material wealth. However, it is the only source of value and thus the resource through which capital subsists.

The notion that labour is the substance of value and that this substance exists in and through a relationship between things means that the capital relation can only exist in and through the class relation. The exploitation of labour has to be realised in the sphere of exchange where the social constitution of value exists in the mode of being denied.⁵⁶ Thus the notion of capital as an 'automatic subject':⁵⁷ the social individual exists against itself in the mode of an abstract individual whose social existence manifests itself through the movement of value. The understanding of the circuit of the different forms of capital, such as productive, commodity and money capital, shows us the general movement of value from one form to another. In this general movement 'all the different kinds of private labour ... are continually being reduced to the quantitative proportions in which society requires them'.⁵⁸ Thus, the relationship between the various branches of the social division of labour appears not as a social relation between individuals but as a relation between the things themselves. Social relations appear attendant upon laws which seem to be internal to capital. Capital appears to be in relation with itself, a relation

whose common basis is the 'valorisation of value'.⁵⁹ However, the understanding of capital as a thing which relates to itself as a value creating value contains the 'fetishism of capital'.⁶⁰ Within the relationship of capital to itself, the constitution of value and thus capital, is lost out of sight. Labour, 'in its simple capacity as purposive productive activity', appears as a factor of capital rather than as 'value-creating'. Capital appears thus as a thing which exists independently from its 'substance, its essence'.⁶¹ And yet, that is precisely the condition, even necessary condition,⁶² of a capitalist form of social reproduction.⁶³ 'Capital thus becomes a very mystic being since all of labour's social productive forces appear to be due to capital, rather than labour as such, and seem to issue from the womb of capital itself'.⁶⁴ The perversion of labour exists; it is a real perversion. However, and importantly, capital is self-valorising only insofar as it is a 'perennial pumping-machine of surplus labour for the capitalist'⁶⁵ and, consequently, for as long as labour is contained in the social form of a value creating commodity: wage labour.

The Marxian revolution is entailed in the critique of value as a fetishistic concept which seems to possess extra-human powers. The critique of political economy shows 'value' as a social relation, as a mode of existence of labour in capitalism. The critique of fetishism supplies an understanding of 'value' in terms of its human content, that is, as a perverted form through which social relations subsist in a contradictory way.⁶⁶ The critique of economic categories shows that economic relations are, in fact, perversions of social relations. These relations do not simply cease to exist. Rather, they exist, contradictorily, in the perverted form of economic categories. In other words, in capitalism, the social character of labour has to be realised in and through the categories of political economy. These categories are adequate in so far as they are formal expressions of perverted social relations. In other words, they are the categories of a perverted and enchanted world. Thus, one cannot see the capital relation as primary and the class relation as secondary. This is because the category of labour is present in the category of capital. The idea of 'capital' as something which is 'self-constituting' only reinforces the fetishism of a capitalist world which sees labour only as a wage-earning commodity. 'Capital presupposes labour as wage-labour.'⁶⁷ In capitalism, human practice exists, against itself, in the form of an alienated subject. This means that the practical-critical activity of labour exists *against itself as itself* in the form of the fetishised world of capitalism. The constitutive power of social labour exists – as itself – contradictorily. It exists in a mode of being denied. Thus,

subject and object do not statically oppose each other, but rather are caught up in an 'ongoing process' of the 'inversion of subjectivity into objectivity, and vice versa'.⁶⁸

Capital as Subject

What meaning can be given to Marx's characterisation of capital as an 'automatic subject'? The conception of capital as an 'automatic subject' emphasises the achievements and shortcomings of political economy. Political economy conceptualised constituted forms and thus does not raise the question of why 'labour' exists in the mode of wage labour and why 'labour' is, apparently, represented by the 'subjectivity of capital'. Marx's critique of fetishism says that, in capitalism, human relations exist in and through relations between things. His use of the notion of capital as an automatic subject signals his acceptance of the subject championed by political economy. However, this acceptance goes hand-in-hand with its destructive critique that shows the vicious circularity of thought which the notion of capital as an automatic subject entails. Thus he challenges the notion of capital as a self-valorising subject, he undermines the idea of society as something which exists outside the social individual, and he accepts that capitalist society is a perverted form of existence. For Marx the social individual in capitalism has no existence outside perverted forms. These forms are those in and through which human relations subsist in capitalist society. However, this view already throws a spanner into the works of political economy because the economic categories, including the notion of capital as an automatic subject, are not only recognised by Marx as social categories but also criticised as perverted forms of social practice. In other words, Marx's treatment of capital as a subject accepts the 'everyday religion' of this society and recognises that the mysteries of this religion lie in the social relations of production.

Marx's critique of political economy is not a subjective or objective theory of exchange relations. It is an attempt to understand the social constitution of 'value' in all its elementary and meaningless manifestations. As Backhaus indicates, Marx's use of the above characterisation of capital makes 'explicit what he [Marx] already found in the works of the great economics'.⁶⁹ Further, the concept shows the shortcomings of political economy's mistaken identification of capital with itself: the attempt to explain how one capital can have more value than it had when it started to exchange itself with itself. Capital is an autonomous subject because it appears '*as a relation to itself*, a relation in which, as the original sum of value, is distinguished from a new value which it generated'.⁷⁰ Marx called the relationship between the things themselves the 'form of value'. This form belongs to a society 'in which the process of production has the mastery over man, instead of being controlled by him'.⁷¹ However, the form of value is only the determinate form of a determining content: 'labour is value creating'.⁷² Although labour transmits old value and

creates new value, 'this natural power of labour takes the appearance of an intrinsic property of capital'.⁷³ Thus, 'capital is not a thing, but rather a definite social production relation, belonging to a definite historical formation of society, which is manifested in a thing and lends this thing a specific social character'.⁷⁴ Capital cannot autonomise itself from labour and, yet, capital exists as an automatic subject with seemingly self-valorising potentials. The crisis-ridden autonomisation of capital from its substance is a mode of existence of capital. The potential for autonomisation presents itself in the circuit of money capital: M ... M'. In this circuit 'capital' manifests itself in its most elementary form: labour as the substance of value manifests itself only in money. It is in and through money that the particular individual concrete labour asserts itself as social, abstract, labour. 'That is to say it is the medium in which concrete labour becomes abstract labour. In a word it is money that is the form of existence of abstract labour.'⁷⁵ At the same time as it manifests the incarnation of abstract labour, money is the most meaningless form of capital because it manifests itself as a mere thing and so negated its own content.⁷⁶ Thus Marx called interest-bearing capital, capital *par excellence* and as such an 'obscure thing' (*Dunkelding*).⁷⁷ Hence the fetishism of capital 'as a value-creating value'.⁷⁸ All productive forces of 'social labour take the appearance of inherent properties of capital, and as the constant appropriation of surplus labour by the capitalists, [the natural power of labour] takes that of a constant self-expansion of capital'.⁷⁹ As was reported above, every category of political economy is treated by Marx as an inversion of human existence, and as such a perversion. Capital forms the dominant category because it is the determining production relation of a perverted society.⁸⁰ Labour's purposive productive power means nothing for as long as it does not express itself as value: 'it is value ... that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic'. At the same time, this hieroglyphic is the social form of labour in capitalism: 'the specific social character of private labour carried on independently ... assumes in the product the form of value'.⁸¹ The social character of labour does not rest with the conscious decision of the community but rather with the social action of a relation between things. Hence Marx's emphasis on the importance of the value-form. This form is

not only the most abstract, but also the most universal form, taken by the product in bourgeois production and stamps that production as a particular species of social production, and thereby gives it its special historical character.⁸²

In the form of value, labour exists in the mode of being denied.

For Marx, social antagonism can by itself have no existence. Antagonistic relations exist in and through forms, the mode of motion of class antagonism. Form is seen here as the *modus vivendi* of antagonistic relations and, as such, form is 'generally the way in which contradictions are reconciled'.⁸³ The term 'mediation'⁸⁴ is of vital importance here since it connotes the mode of existence of a dynamic relation of antagonism which allows antagonistic relations to 'exist side by side'. The existence of social antagonism in forms 'does not sweep away'⁸⁵ the character of antagonistic relations; rather, these forms are the mode of existence of the class antagonism between capital and labour. Labour is present in the concept of capital. They are mutually dependent and inseparable elements of the social process of production in bourgeois society. At the same time, however, they are mutually exclusive, antagonistic extremes – poles of the same expression. They are poles of the same expression because capitalist reproduction is a form of social reproduction which human beings have given themselves. The constitutive power of labour exists *qua* contradiction in the value-form. This view permits an understanding of capital as a form of social command in which labour assumes an existence as an alien being. This existence does not 'derive' from capital but from labour's alienation from itself. The critique of fetishism comprises an understanding of the social practice of labour as existing in a form in which the presupposition of social existence (labour's exchange with nature) is seemingly eliminated.

As reported above, Marx's theory of value is, foremost, a theory of 'social constitution'. This is because it looks at the 'genesis' of the perversion of labour's purposeful activity. In other words, Marx's theory is concerned with the 'human origin' of the perverted forms. Thus, the critique of political economy is based on the notion 'that human beings confront their own generic forces, that is their "collective forces" or "social forces" as an autonomous, alien being'.⁸⁶ The critique of fetishism shows that it is the 'peculiar social character of labour that produces' the commodity fetishism.⁸⁷ The notion of the 'genesis' of social forms emphasises labour as a constitutive social practice. The notion of 'constitution' says that the relationship between the things themselves is a historical presupposition because the foundation of this relationship is the historical struggle which led to the separation of the mass of the population from the means of production and subsistence during the process of primitive accumulation. This separation had to be accomplished historically before labour's productive power could exist in the form of a labouring commodity.

Capitalist exploitation rests on the social conflict which produced the alienation of labour in 'fantastic forms'.⁸⁸ The historical result of class struggle is constitutive of capitalism. However, the historical presupposition

of labour's alienation is also the premise upon which the exploitation of labour rests. Capital's exploitation of labour is a result of class struggle, a class struggle which is not only the presupposition of capital's existence as the dominant production relation, but also the premise of its continued existence. '*The exchange of labour for labour – seemingly the condition of the worker's property – rests on the foundation of the worker's propertylessness.*'⁸⁹ In other words, capitalist social relations presuppose 'primitive accumulation' which has to be reproduced continuously in order for these relations to exist. The social practice which led to the separation of labour from the means of production cannot be seen as an historical act which was once accomplished and which is simply presupposed in terms of capital as a constituted form. Rather this separation, and thus the social conflict which generated it, lies at the heart of the capitalist exploitation of labour.⁹⁰ The constitutive power of social practice is thus the presupposition of capital's existence as well as its continuous premise. The subordination of social reproduction to capitalist reproduction means the continuous alienation of labour from the means of production and thus the constitution of social practice in the form of the perverted form of capital. From the standpoint of accomplished capitalism, the latter serves not as historical result but as conceptual and historical presupposition. This presupposition attains generality in inverted form: it would be wrong to let the conceptualisation of 'forms' follow one another,

in the same sequence as that in which they were historically decisive. This sequence is determined, rather, by their relation to one another in the mode of bourgeois society, which is precisely the opposite of that which seems to be their natural order or which corresponds to historical development.⁹¹

Thus, Marx's 'abstractions' seek an understanding of the constitution and movement of a perverted world. As indicated by Backhaus, Marx's 'abstractions' are existing abstractions.⁹² The notion of social existence, or social objectivity, can be comprehended, as argued by Backhaus, only when objectivity is seen as an existing abstraction – an abstraction which exists in practice (*daseiende Abstraktion*). The notion of a 'really existing' abstraction points towards an understanding of a social world which develops from the actual social processes to the social forms in which they exist. Thus the existence of labour within the concept of capital is a historical result of primitive accumulation and inverts into the historical and conceptual presupposition of the social reality of capitalism's perverted world. Capital cannot produce itself. It depends upon the integration of labour's productive power into the capital relation as a value creating commodity. The constitutive existence of the social labour of the social individual exists in the form

of a perverted social practice. Were one to conceptualise constituted forms, labour's constitutive practice would remain at the mercy of 'capital' as the subject. In other words, labour's existence would merely be conceptualised as a commodity. The understanding of labour as a constituting social practice makes it clear that it is impossible for capital to be the automatic subject championed by political economy. Capital has no logic independent of labour's social practice. As indicated by Schmidt, Marx's work is foremost characterised by the primacy of 'practice'. The reality in which the social individual moves day in and day out has no invariant character, that is, something which exists independently from it. Thus the critique of political economy amounts to a conceptualised praxis (*begriffene Praxis*),⁹³ that is, a theoretical understanding of the totality of human action which constitutes, suffuses and contradicts the perverted world of capitalism.

Social relations are practical relations. This notion implies a quite different starting point from that taken by those who advocate the notion of 'capital' as a self-relation. The starting point is the *social constitution* of the *historical movement* of labour.⁹⁴ The historical development of labour holds the key to the history of society. While in every society human beings play the role of producers, the simplest category, labour, transforms in capitalist society into a mystifying character because the material elements of wealth transform from products of labour into properties of commodities and still more pronouncedly they transform the production relation itself into a thing.⁹⁵ The productive power of social labour exists not only in and through the 'perverted' form of value, it is also the producer of this form. Private property is the mode of existence of alienated labour. The 'objective', or factual, existence of 'capital' can thus not be taken as a conceptual starting point, as in those approaches mentioned above. This is because that which asserts itself to the economic mind as 'objectivity', or 'objective logic' or 'objective being' is, in Marx, understood as alienated subjectivity (as specified by Backhaus).⁹⁶ Any conceptualisation of 'capital' which focuses on its seeming formal logic disregards the distinctiveness of Marx's theory and tends to espouse, instead, the reified world of capitalism as the object and purpose of theory. Were one to focus, as Jessop does, merely on the notion of capital as an automatic subject, the contradictory character of capital would not be theorised. Instead theory would merely dwell on the formal contradiction presented by an allegedly extra-human power. The danger of treating capital merely in terms of its formal existence – as an automatic subject – is that 'value' becomes an historically active subject without social substance. The contradictory constitution of 'capital' would not be conceived of in terms of the social antagonism between capital and labour but rather in terms of capital itself. Consequently, the con-

tradictory constitution of capitalism would merely be seen as a formal contradiction constituted at the level of invisible forces.

The notion that capital is an automatic subject implies that a crisis of capital must be a constituent element of this same subject itself. Such a conception implies, as indeed it is argued in capital-logic approaches, that capital is in crisis with itself and that working-class struggle is merely a response, or reaction, to the way in which capital seeks to resolve its own crisis. Class struggle is merely seen as something which breaks into, and develops, the capital relation from the outside. As this paper has emphasised, capitalist society does not just develop through a class struggle. Rather, class struggle is a constitutive moment of the capital relation because of the existence of labour within the concept capital. The following critique of Clarke's approach attempts to clarify this point.

Class Struggle and Capital as a Power

According to Clarke, Marx offers, in *Capital* 'an analysis of the self-reproduction of the capital relation, within which the social relations of capitalist reproduction are regulated, albeit in a contradictory and crisis-ridden fashion, by the operation of the market'.⁹⁷ The capital relation seems to be seen as establishing the framework within which social relations are able to operate. As Clarke puts it, the 'starting point for the analysis of class struggle has to be Marx's analysis of the contradictions inherent in the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, on the basis of which the class struggle develops'.⁹⁸ Clarke does not raise the issue of the 'constitution' of social existence and the constitution of categories. His focus falls on the relationship between the productive forces and the relations of production. He sees the fundamental contradiction of capital as one constituted by the constant tendency to develop the productive forces without regard to the limit of the market and the need to confine accumulation within the limits of its capitalist form. This contradiction underlies the 'tendency to the global overaccumulation of capital, as the development of social production confronts the limits of its capitalist form as production for profit'.⁹⁹ Clarke seems to propose that capital is in contradiction merely with itself, and that the class struggle is not only a consequence of this but, also, the means through which the contradiction develops. For him 'the driving force of capitalist accumulation is the uneven development of the forces of production'.¹⁰⁰ Capitalists respond to competitive pressure by a class struggle from above as they seek, amongst other things, to reduce 'costs by lengthening the working day, forcing down wages, intensifying labour and, above all, by transforming methods of production'.¹⁰¹ Thus

the development of capitalism is determined by an endemic class struggle in so far as 'pressure of competition leads to an intensification of the class struggle'.¹⁰² Clarke seems to treat the relation between capital and labour as a causal relation: capital constitutes the contradiction which develops through class struggle. The class relation is thus not constituted by labour's existence in and against capital. Rather, the class relation 'breaks into' the capital relation during periods of 'capitalist' overaccumulation and crisis. Clarke appears to rearrange the internal relation between capital and its substance on the basis of a causal relation between capital, as the constitution of a contradictory world, and the class struggle, as the development of the contradiction. In sum, Clarke tends to differentiate between the movement of class antagonism and its constitution. While the movement is seen as one of class, the constitution of the class antagonism is one of capital. As a consequence, the contradictory character of capitalist reproduction tends to be understood in terms of a contradiction internal to 'capital' supplemented by class struggle over the imposition of the limits of accumulation upon the working class.

Were Clarke right to suggest that the contradictions of capital are constituted by capital itself, the category of labour would be subordinated to these contradictions and confront them merely from the outside. This, it seems, is Clarke's position: capital and the state are seen as a constant 'object' of class struggle. Objectivity, in Clarke, does not take the form of subjectivity and vice versa because object and subject are not internally related but, rather, externally connected. Clarke dismisses 'dialectics' by asserting that Marx 'is talking about causal relationships, not the mish-mash of "mutual inner-penetration"'.¹⁰³ As a consequence, for Clarke, Marx's method of abstraction is merely formal. Clarke characterises Marx's 'abstractions' as 'determinate abstractions' which 'correspond not to "essential qualities" embodied in things, but to determinate social processes'.¹⁰⁴ In other words, Marx's method of abstraction does not, according to Clarke, conceptualise the essential social relations and the forms through which they exist but, rather,

concrete generalisations, which describe the common feature of a multiplicity of particular relations, and are applicable to the extent that they are manifested in those particular relations.¹⁰⁵

Clarke's interpretation of Marx's method of abstraction is rather surprising since Marx uses the same argument and almost the same formulation to identify and to criticise political economy's method of abstraction. In other words, Clarke not only criticises the method of abstraction of political economy but also, and at the same time, endorses it as Marx's alternative to

political economy's method of abstraction.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, Clarke sees Marx's critique of political economy as providing the

analytical foundation on which to develop comparative and historical analysis of the more concrete (and complex) particular forms in which capitalist social relations are expressed and develop.¹⁰⁷

The analytical foundation is conceived of as the study of the general characteristics of the capital relation whereas the historical concrete seems to be seen in terms of a 'field of application' open to the unpredictability of the class struggle. Thus, the formal character of Clarke's 'abstractions': for him the abstract is not concrete and conversely, the concrete is not abstract, because the 'abstract' is merely the summary of the most general characteristics of the capitalist mode of production. In other words, Clarke's conception of 'abstraction' ignores that, in Marx, the most simple category, labour, is also the most abstract category.¹⁰⁸ Clarke's conception of 'abstraction' lacks content because he construes capital as something which exists externally to the social substance which constitutes it.

Unlike the theoretical suppression of class struggle in the approach put forward by Jessop, Clarke's emphasis on class struggle takes as its starting point the Marxian notion that all social relations are essentially practical. In that emphasis lies an important difference from structure-centred approaches. Although Clarke does see class struggle as being primary, the difficulty in his approach is that he does not develop this notion to its radical conclusion. Marx's critique of political economy is not understood as a critique of a perverted social practice but, rather, as an analysis of the contradictory relationship of capital to itself. Clarke introduces the class struggle as an all-important factor for the development of capitalism. Although he stresses that the capital is always the object of the constant force of class, he does not supply a convincing conceptualisation of the social constitution of the class struggle. Class struggle, rather than being seen as existing within the concept of capital, is merely conceived as a means through which the self-contradictory world of capital develops. As this article has argued, the fundamental contradiction of capital is its dependence on labour. Capital cannot autonomise itself from labour's existence. It is the resource through which capital exists. The 'power of capital' exists only in and through labour, this latter being the substance of value. Were one to deny labour's constitutive existence within the concept of capital, one would be forced to define 'capital' as a power which exists independently from its social substance. In other words, one would conceive of capital not only as a self-constituting power but, also, as a thing, and thus

as a constituted form. The conceptualisation of constituted forms amounts to conceptualisation of fetishised forms.

Conclusion

The understanding of 'labour' as the constitutive existence within the concept of capital entails an understanding of social form in and through a class-divided human practice. The class relation does not just break into the capital relation from the 'outside' during a crisis of 'capital'. The capital relation does not stand above class relations. Rather it exists in and through class relations. Class struggle does not merely mediate the reproduction of the capital relation. Rather the class relation is constitutive of the capital relation. The capitalist exploitation of labour does not stand above class relation, but, rather, in and through class relations. In Marx's critique of political economy, the class relation, and so the class struggle, has not to be introduced anew at the level of historical development because it is already inserted in the constitution of concepts and it already exists as the continuing historical precondition of social reality as a whole.

Marx's critique of fetishism shows that the economic forms are not extra-human forms. The critique of economic categories shows that these forms are the forms of a perverted human existence. This existence is the product of the social activity of labour in capitalism. However, perversion is and is not labour's fate. The abolition of perverted forms goes forward as a self-determination through which the social individual recognises that human beings are the producers of their own social world. The emancipation of 'social labour' from its own alienation, that is, the abolition of alienated labour is the presupposition for the abolition of a society in which humanity is merely a resource. The abolition of private property presupposes the abolition of alienated labour. Alienated labour is not consequent upon the existence of private property; rather private property is a mode of existence of alienated labour. This opens up the notion that labour is more than just wage labour.¹⁰⁹ Wage labour is not a presence in and against capital. The standpoint of capital and wage labour is the same.¹¹⁰ Labour is not just the producer of private property but, most importantly, a 'living, form-giving fire'.¹¹¹ In its simple capacity labour is purposive productive activity.¹¹² It is this activity which exists against itself as a value-creating, abstract wealth-producing commodity (wage-labour). The weapon of critique shows that the world we inhabit is our world, rather than the world of the capital-subject, a world created by human practice, dependent upon human practice and open to the form-given fire of human practice. Thus the Marxian notion that the emancipation of the working

class can only be the work of the working class itself. This emancipation cannot rely on the wage relation. The category of wage labour is already a perversion. However 'real' this perversion, it only supplies an understanding of the movement of fetishised forms. It does not provide an understanding of the constitution of these forms. We found the constitution of social existence in the social labour of the social individual. The criticism of fetishism is negative and destructive. As Agnoli puts it, 'Marx wanted neither to construct nor affirm. He wanted primarily to negate'.¹¹³ His critique of fetishism shows the absurdity of a world in which the human being exists in the form of personified conditions of production – the personification of things. The standpoint of critique shows the other side – the social constitution – of this strange, and murderous, personification. It shows human sensuous activity, an activity which exists against itself in the commodified form of wage labour. Thus the critique of capital amounts to a critique of 'labour', of individual, alienated labour, a labour whose social existence confronts the individual producers as an external and independent thing. The contradiction between, on the one hand, the capitalist determination of labour as wage labour, and labour's critical activity and social productive force, on the other, supplies not only an idea of the contradictory constitution of our social world. It supplies also the idea of the 'real movement' of this contradiction: communism.

According to the critique of political economy, the concept of 'social labour' is the most fundamental and simple category. All human activity in capitalism, including theoretical activity, is a moment of the class-divided mode of existence of social labour, of the social division of labour.¹¹⁴ Thus, the critique of political economy is not impartial. It is, in contradistinction to traditional theory's defence of the *status quo*, founded on an interest in the future. For Horkheimer, this means that philosophy's search for the good and reasonable organisation of life became Marx's critique of political economy. Horkheimer thus vindicated philosophy's negative and destructive role. He vindicated the right of the critique of political economy to announce the 'end of philosophy': philosophy cannot be abolished without being realised. Marxism's critique of fetishism is negative and destructive. It throws into relief the question of humans as ends in themselves. At the same time, it shows that capitalism's perverted and enchanted world is a form of human existence and dependent upon human practice. 'The constitution of the world occurs behind the backs of the individuals; yet it is their work.'¹¹⁵

Horkheimer characterised Marx's critique of political economy as a 'judgment on existence'. He saw philosophy as a destructive force which looks for the good and reasonable organisation of life regardless of the threats posed by political power.¹¹⁶ While, according to Lovering's critical realist account, the individual is confronted by impenetrable and transcendent

structures, Marx's critique of political economy deals with, according to Horkheimer, the social individual as the producer of its entire life. In distinction to approaches predicated on the formal logic of the capital relation, critical theory argues, like Marx, that all social relations are essentially practical. Marx's critique of political economy rejects the method of formal abstraction and abstract models of capitalism, which exclude history and describe an ideal world of perfect rationality. Against hypothetical judgments and the proliferation of formal knowledge, critical theory focuses on human conditions and troubles. Rather than dealing with abstract aggregates or quantities of abstract wealth, the focus is on 'the existence of Man and society', and the transformation of this society.¹¹⁷ Hence, he characterises the critique of political economy as a dialectical theory of society, a theory, which for him, unfolds a unique judgment on existence. In contradistinction to approaches which seek truth and eternal judgment on metatheoretical escape routes to nowhere, the critique of political economy understands that the solution of theoretical mysteries lies in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice. This insight contains the secret of the Marxian revolution. Thus, the 'abstractions' of the critique of political economy have nothing to do with abstract models or abstract generalisations which merely supply a summary of the general characteristics of constituted forms. They are existing abstractions. The judgment on existence is contained in the abstraction: the human and social content which exists in a mode of being denied. Thus 'the absurdity of a mode of production on which bourgeois purposive-rationality, profitability, and respectability feed, was exposed. It stood naked'.¹¹⁸ Marx's critique vindicated the negative role of philosophy according to which humanity is not a resource but a purpose.

References

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2. J. Lovering, 'Neither fundamentalism nor "New Realism"', *Capital & Class*, no. 42, 1990, p. 39. For a seminal critique of Critical Realism: R. Gunn, 'Marxism and Philosophy', *Capital & Class*, no. 37, 1989; and 'Marxism, Metatheory and Critique', in W. Bonefeld and J. Holloway (eds.), *Post-Fordism and Social Form*, Macmillan, London, 1991. See also K. Magill, 'Against Critical Realism', *Capital & Class*, no. 54, 1994.
3. B. Jessop, 'Polar Bears and Class Struggle', in W. Bonefeld and J. Holloway, *Post-Fordism*, p. 150.
4. B. Jessop, 'Regulation Theory in Retrospect and Prospect', 'Printed-Serie' der ZiF-Forschungsgruppe 'Staatsaufgaben' 1, University of Bielefeld, Zentrum für interdisziplinäre Forschung, Bielefeld, 1988.

5. The following argument was encouraged by H. Reichelt, 'Some Notes on Jacques Bidet's Structuralist Interpretation of Marx's Capital', *Common Sense*, no. 13; see also his contribution in this volume.
6. K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 270–1.
7. Cf. M. Horkheimer, 'Traditionelle und kritische Theorie', in M. Horkheimer, *Traditionelle und kritische Theorie*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt, 1992, p. 246. All quotes from M. Horkheimer as well as K. Marx (*Theorien über den Mehrwert*, vol. III, MEW 26.3, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1976 and *Das Kapital*, vol. I, German edition, MEW 23, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1979), are based on the German texts and have been translated by the author.
8. M. Horkheimer, 'Traditionelle und kritische Theorie', p. 229.
9. On this critique of structuralism see A. Schmidt, 'Der strukturalistische Angriff auf die Geschichte', in A. Schmidt (ed.), *Beiträge zur marxistischen Erkenntnistheorie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1969.
10. J. Lovering, 'Neither fundamentalism nor "New Realism"', p. 39.
11. J. Agnoli, 'Destruction as the Determination of the Scholar in Miserable Times', *Common Sense*, no. 12, 1992, p. 44.
12. Cf. J. Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, ch. 1.
13. In Jessop's work, the capital *relation* is no longer treated as a 'relation'. Rather, the various forms of capital are introduced as 'autonomous' entities characterised by different interests founded on different 'logics'. See B. Jessop, *Nicos Poulantzas: Marxist Theory and Political Strategy*, Macmillan, London, 1985. For critique: R. Gunn, 'Marxism, Metatheory and Critique' and K. Psychopedis, 'Crisis of Theory in the Contemporary Social Sciences', in W. Bonefeld and J. Holloway, *Post-Fordism*, and W. Bonefeld, 'Crisis of Theory', *Capital & Class*, no. 50, 1993.
14. See for example M. Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation*, Verso, London, 1979.
15. See for example S. Clarke, 'State, Class and the Reproduction of Capital', in S. Clarke (ed.), *The State Debate*, Macmillan, London, 1991.
16. See B. Jessop, 'Polar Bears', and his *State Theory*, Polity, Cambridge, 1990.
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21. M. Tronti, 'The Strategy of Refusal', in *Working-Class Autonomy and Crisis*, Red Notes-CSE, London, 1979, p. 10.
22. See W. Bonefeld and R. Gunn, 'La constitution et sa signification: Réflexions sur l'épistémologie, la forme et la pratique sociale', *Futur antérieur*, no. 8, Paris, 1991.
23. On this point see also Holloway's contribution in this volume.

24. Cf. A. Negri, 'Interpretation of the Class Situation Today: Methodological Aspects', in *Open Marxism Volume II: Theory and Practice*, Pluto Press, London, 1992 and C. Arthur, 'Wide Open', *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 64, 1993.
25. K. Marx, 'Thesis on Feuerbach', in *Collected Works*, vol. 5, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1975, p. 5. See R. Gunn ('Practical Reflexivity in Marx', *Common Sense*, no. 1, 1987) for an interpretation of this point and its implications for theory.
26. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, p. 817.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 830.
28. K. Marx, *Theorien über den Mehrwert*, p. 498.
29. Cf. K. Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. I, German edition, p. 90. In the German edition of *Capital* Marx uses the phrase 'verrückte Formen'. In the English edition of *Capital*, the phrase is translated as 'absurd forms' or 'fantastic forms'. These are misleading translations. In Marx, 'verrückt' has two-fold meanings: deranged (verrückt) and de-ranged (ver-rückt), mad and displaced. Thus, the notion of 'perverted forms' means that these forms are both mad and displaced. The two-fold meaning of perversion comprises the notion of an internal relationship between the abstract and the concrete. See Backhaus, 'Between Philosophy and Science: Marxian Social Economy as Critical Theory', in *Open Marxism*, vol. I, on the two-fold meaning of the term 'perverted'.
30. K. Marx, *Theorien über den Mehrwert*, p. 504.
31. On this: K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. II, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1978.
32. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, pp. 818, 391. In the German edition of *Capital* Marx characterises 'money' as a *begriffslose* form. In the English edition of *Capital*, 'begriffslos' is translated as 'meaningless'. This translation is misleading. The term 'begriffslos' connotes the notion of 'losing its grip' and hence as 'deprived of meaning'. This use of the term is much closer to the German term 'begriffslos'. On this see W. Bonefeld, 'Money, Equality and Exploitation', in W. Bonefeld and J. Holloway (eds.), *Global Capital, National State and the Politics of Money*, Macmillan, London, 1995.
33. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, English edition, p. 79.
34. J. Hirsch ('The State Apparatus and Social Reproduction: Elements of a Theory of the Bourgeois State', in J. Holloway and S. Picciotto (eds.), *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate*, Edward Arnold, London, 1978) provides an analysis of this kind. For critique: J. Holloway and S. Picciotto, 'Introduction', in *ibid.*; J. Holloway, 'The Great Bear: Post-Fordism and Class Struggle', in W. Bonefeld and J. Holloway, *Post-Fordism*; W. Bonefeld, 'Social Constitution and the Form of the Capitalist State', in *Open Marxism*, vol. I; and S. Clarke, 'Introduction' to *ibid.*, *The State Debate*.
35. On this debate see W. Bonefeld and J. Holloway (eds.), *Post-Fordism*.
36. B. Jessop, 'Polar Bears', p. 154.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
38. For a similar critique of Jessop's approach see R. Gunn, 'Against Historical Materialism', in *Open Marxism*, vol. II, p. 39, fn. 20.
39. B. Jessop, 'Polar Bears', p. 148.

40. B. Jessop, 'State Forms, Social Basis, and Hegemonic Projects', *Kapitalstate*, no. 10/11, 1983, p. 90; reprinted in revised form in S. Clarke, *The State Debate*.
41. S. Clarke, 'Introduction', in S. Clarke, *The State Debate*, p. 49, fn. 24.
42. K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, German edition, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1974, p. 909.
43. On 'critique' see: J. Agnoli, 'Von der kritischen Politologie zur Kritik der Politik', in J. Agnoli, *Die Transformation der Demokratie und andere Schriften zur Kritik der Politik*, Ça ira Verlag, Freiburg, 1990; J. Agnoli, 'Destruction ...'; M. Horkheimer, 'Traditionelle und kritische Theorie'; see also: 'Introduction', *Open Marxism*, vol. I.
44. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. II, p. 185.
45. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, pp. 77–8.
46. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 83 and *Capital*, vol. III, p. 392.
47. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, p. 79.
48. Cf. S. Hall, 'Realignment for What?', *Marxism Today*, December 1985.
49. This is one of the catch-phrases used in the postfordist approach. See B. Jessop, 'Regulation Theory, Post-Fordism and the State'; and J. Hirsch, 'Fordism and Post-Fordism', both published in W. Bonefeld and J. Holloway, *Post-Fordism*.
50. On this point see R. Gunn, 'Marxism and Philosophy'; 'Marxism, Metatheory and Critique'; and his 'Against Historical Materialism'.
51. Cf. M. Horkheimer, 'Zum Problem der Wahrheit', in M. Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 3: Schriften 1931–1936*, ed. A. Schmidt, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt, 1988.
52. The understanding of 'labour' as individual labour, or as embodied labour, rather than characterising Marx's own approach, is at the centre of Marx's critique of political economy. For a recent elaboration of this point: D. Behrens, *Gesellschaft and Erkenntnis*, Ça ira Verlag, Freiburg, 1993.
53. H. Reichelt, 'Some Notes ...', p. 74.
54. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, p. 57.
55. K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, English edition, p. 87.
56. Cf. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. II, chs. 1–4.
57. Cf. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, p. 152.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80.
59. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. II, p. 180.
60. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, p. 829.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 825, 823, 829.
62. On the notion of 'necessity' in Marx's work: M. Horkheimer's 'Traditionelle und kritische Theorie'; see also Psychopedis in this volume.
63. Cf. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, ch. 1, section 4 and *Capital*, vol. III, ch. 48.
64. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, p. 827.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 822.
66. A similar argument is made by K. Psychopedis, 'Dialectical Theory: Problems of Reconstruction', in *Open Marxism*, vol. I. His reconstruction of dialectical theory shows the contradictory integration of social presuppositions with capitalism's fetishistic and destructive inversion of human relations to relations of 'things'. See also H. G. Backhaus, 'Between Philosophy and Science', in *Open*

- Marxism*, vol. I. This section is indebted to H. G. Backhaus, 'Zum Problem des Geldes als konstituents oder Apriori der ökonomischen Gegenständlichkeit', *Prokla*, no. 63, 1986.
67. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, p. 824.
68. H. G. Backhaus, 'Between Philosophy and Science', p. 60. Backhaus is quoting Leo Kofler.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
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95. Cf. K. Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, p. 826.
96. H. G. Backhaus, 'Between Philosophy and Science'.
97. S. Clarke, 'State, Class, and the Reproduction of Capital', p. 188.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
99. S. Clarke, 'The Global Accumulation of Capital and the Periodisation of the Capitalist State Form', in *Open Marxism*, vol. I, p. 135.

100. S. Clarke, 'State, Class, and the Reproduction of Capital', p. 139.
101. S. Clarke, 'The Global Accumulation of Capital and the Periodisation of the Capitalist State Form', p. 135.
102. Ibid.
103. S. Clarke, *Marx, Marginalism & Modern Sociology*, Macmillan, London, second ed., 1991, p. 68. Clarke refers to Marx's 1844 manuscripts.
104. Ibid. p. 141. For an alternative conceptualisation of 'determinate abstraction' see K. Psychopedis, 'Dialectical Theory: Problems of Reconstruction'; W. Bonefeld, 'Social Constitution and the Form of the Capitalist State'; R. Gunn, 'Against Historical Materialism'. See also A. Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse*, Bergin & Garvey, Mass., 1984.
105. S. Clarke, *Marx, Marginalism & Modern Sociology*, p. 141, fn. 8.
106. Compare *ibid.* with Marx (*Capital*, vol. I, p. 352, fn. 2): 'It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly core of the misty creations of religion, than, conversely, it is, to develop from the actual relations of life the corresponding celestialised forms of these relations. The latter method is the only materialist, and therefore, the only scientific one. The weak points in the abstract materialism of natural science, a materialism which excludes history and its process, are at once evident from the abstract and ideological conceptions of its spokesmen, whenever they venture beyond the bounds of their own speciality.'
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113. J. Agnoli, 'Destruction ...', p. 45.
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116. M. Horkheimer, 'Traditionelle und kritische Theorie' and 'Nachtrag'.
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