

Marx's Learning Process: Against Correcting Marx with Hegel

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According to neo-Hegelian readings, Marx's theoretical exposition deteriorates after the Grundrisse. He is said to have sacrificed his (Hegelian) dialectical method on the altar of popularization. In arguing against such readings, this paper interprets Marx's writings as always a "work in progress" in which real advances are achieved. The author stresses the high stakes in these alternative readings. The neo-Hegelian readings tend to disconnect from Marx and Marxism. In contrast, the author articulates and develops the relevance of Marx (and especially his critique of political economy and historical materialist method) to Marxist analysis of contemporary capitalism. He focuses on the special importance of grasping Marx and Marxism as "works in progress" in this time of enormous structural ruptures and transformations.

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I have nothing to say, only to show.

—Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

It is said of the Swabians that they only become "bright" at forty. If we are to believe part of the literature, Karl Marx is an example precisely of the opposite. Soon after he

turned forty, his theoretical acumen, it is claimed, went downhill. In the main, it is the Hegelian-oriented interpretations that normally regard as regressive the progress Marx made after the *Grundrisse*, through the first (1867) and second (1872) editions of volume 1 of *Capital* and its French translation (1872–5), and culminating in the *Marginal Notes on Wagner*, since these in fact were steps that, for the most part, led further away from Hegel’s speculative dialectics. They claim that, in popularizing, Marx softened the theoretical core of his thinking (see Hoff 2004, 21–7). More particularly, Hans-Georg Backhaus (like Iring Fetscher before him) sees in the reworkings for the second edition of *Capital* a “vulgarization of his value theory produced by Marx himself” (1997, 297). Furthermore, Backhaus transposes to Marx a distinction Marx attributed to Adam Smith, such that Marx is split into a “logical,” “esoteric” side, on the one hand, and a “historicizing” and “exoteric” side, on the other (294; similarly, Kurz 2000). The latter is supposed to apply to the Marx who is committed to the labor movement, or tied to so-called “labor-movement Marxism,” typically regarded with a certain distaste. Since the collapse of European state socialism of Soviet origin, these critical approaches have, with increasing aggressiveness, been associated with a rejection of any kind of Marxism.

What is at stake here, along with the epistemology of the critique of political economy, is the concept of dialectics. To any attentive reader it is obvious that Marx achieved a change of paradigm, not only in the *Theses on Feuerbach* and, together with Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, but also between the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) and his last fragment dealing with theoretical foundations, the *Marginal Notes on Wagner*.¹ It is true that Marx did not undertake these shifts with the assertiveness of an explicitly declared break. The changes occur at different times on different levels of methodological understanding, in uneven batches not subjected to systematic reflection, “never producing,” as Jacques Bidet observes, “a new version if not because of the insufficiency of the former version in relation to the project he pursues” (2004, 10). As a whole, it is no exaggeration to speak of a paradigm shift that is neither a decline nor an adulterated popularization, but rather, the essential innovation that makes Marx’s work “contemporary” even today, understandable as an open theory-praxis project rather than a dogma, and indeed, makes it crucial to the theoretical understanding of the emerging transnational high-tech capitalism.

If it is true that the ever enquiring Marx underwent a learning process, then, for those of us who are affiliated with him, understanding this process is of greatest interest. The first rule for attempting a clarification is: most relevant for us is what Marx *does* as a critic of political economy, and only secondarily, what he *says* about what he does. The operational Marx ranks above the declarative Marx. It goes without saying that, in the space available to us, we can only offer a sketch of an explanatory thesis.

1. These notes were dated by the editors of MEW to 1879–80, but by Eike Kopf (1992) to Marx’s year of death in 1883.

Popularization

Did Marx sacrifice theoretical rigor to popularization?

Those who argue this refer, for the most part, to changes that Marx undertook for the second edition of volume 1 of *Capital*, in comparison with the first edition. Since I have treated this elsewhere, I will not repeat myself here but will address the popularization argument.² Those who introduce it almost always ignore the fact that Marx had already addressed in the first edition the problem that theorization and popularization can conflict with one other. The example is the expression “unpaid labor.” It is one of the capitalist basic “categories” in the Marxian sense of “social modes of being, existential determinations” (MEW 42:40) to “pay for labor.” When speaking with theoretical strictness Marx explains: (1) Labor possesses no value; rather, it creates value. (2) Wage as the “price of labor” is accordingly an irrational expression for value and price of the commodity labor-power. (3) Exploitation rests on the wagedworkers’ need to work beyond the point at which their labor has created an equivalent of the wage. (4) On a time scale, this can be registered as a succession of necessary labor and surplus labor. (5) Exploitation thus also takes place when the full value of labor-power is paid for.

Now, to the problem: This presentation conflicts with the categories in which daily practice is expressed. What primarily outrages the labor movement (as also any other social movement) is perceived injustice. That the rich get richer while the poor stay poor or become poorer is understandably experienced as injustice. If labor is paid, this appears to be just; if it is not or is underpaid, this appears to be unjust. In the labor movement, which had to avoid being reduced to its politically and theoretically schooled core, political discourse breaks away from the theoretical. Surplus value, the final source of all profits, is traced back to “unpaid labor.” Outrage at bourgeois form speaks bourgeois language.

How does Marx deal with the given political-economic semantics? Does he polemicize against it, as his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* did against ignoring the role of nature and glorifying labor as the sole source of wealth? Not at all. Instead, he adopts the popular way of speaking in his theoretical language. In the first German edition and in the second, which he edited, he has surplus labor = “unpaid labor,” surplus value = “from the point of view of its substance, the materialization of unpaid labor time” (MEGA II.5:432, II.6:496; MEW 23:556; Marx 1977, 672). He comments: “unpaid labor/paid labor is only a popular expression for surplus labor/necessary labor.” It is as if he wants to soothe his theoretical conscience by using an “as if” construction: If, during necessary labor time, a product is created of the same value as the labor power, it is for the capitalist “as if he had bought the finished product on the market. However, in the period of surplus labor the utilization of labor power represents value for the capitalist, without costing him value compensation. He gets this fluidity of labor power gratis. In this sense, surplus labor can be called unpaid labor.” Delio Cantimori’s Italian translation cushions the scandal by saying,

2. See my article “Historisches/Logisches” in *Historisch-kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus* 6, no. 1: 360 ff., as well as the abridged offprint in *Das Argument* 251, 45, no. 3 (2003): 392 f.

instead of the popular “non pagato,” “lavoro altrui non retribuito,”³ while in the English translation overseen by Engels the simple and accurate phrase is “other people’s unpaid labor” (MEGA II.9:466). In his Spanish translation, Pedro Scaron has “trabajo ajeno impago” (1975, 2:642), even (as in Cantimori) in italics, as Marx had it in the first edition. “The misconception,” Marx says in closing, “to which the formula unpaid labor / paid labor can lead, as if the capitalist paid the labor and not the labor-power, is avoided, after the earlier given development” (672). This is not a theoretically satisfactory explanation; rather, it is a bridge to colloquial language. Here we find Marx’s real theoretical sin. Those who accuse him of popularization do not pay attention to this point. On the other hand, precisely at the point where they accuse him of popularization or vulgarization in the sense of a debasement of theory, is where we find decided improvements.

De-Hegelianizing Dialectics

The critique of political economy must not, as often occurs, be conceived as a “system,” as if it arose in the time in which philosophers had to construct a system. If there is a system, it is the unsystematic system of the crisis-ridden process of capital itself. Its theoretical critique has to be understood as a research process along with the learning process of the researcher. It is not as if there wouldn’t be commentaries by Marx on the paradigm shifts he accomplished in the course of this work in progress. However, the commentaries on method are often too general and sometimes “relatively sketchy, and enigmatic” (Arthur 2002, 9), even misleading. Thus, Marx says, his “dialectical method” is “in its foundations not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite,” and Hegelian dialectics has to be “inverted [*umstülpen*], in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.” While Hegel is said to have “transformed the thought process ... under the insignia of the idea into an independent subject,” in Marx “the ideal” is “nothing but the material world as converted [*umgesetzt*] and translated in the human brain” (Marx 1977, 102 f., translation corrected; cf. MEW 23:26 f.). Should one, then, as the “direct opposite,” transform matter into an independent subject? The assertion that the ideal is the result of the conversion and translation of the material within the human brain misled Plekhanov, in *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* (1969), into confusing Marx in this regard with Feuerbach. Yet it ought to be clear that the first thesis on Feuerbach categorically forbids deploying a scheme in which thinking without hand and tool and without a social network of activities is directly counterposed to the “material world.” The image of “inverting” Hegelian dialectics or “turning it upside down” is actually completely deceptive. It suggests that it would remain intact but be turned around, or, like a glove or a shirt, simply be turned from right to left but remain unchanged in form and texture. In reality, the texture cannot remain here; everything must be disassembled and recomposed according to a completely different algorithm—namely, historical materialism. That Marx in fact

3. “In questo senso il pluslavoro può essere chiamato *lavoro non retribuito*” (Marx 1964, 582).

does this, at least in the decisive places and at least implicitly, is shown by the analysis of his operational dialectics (cf. Haug 2005).

Sometimes only small traces, which signal a change of terrain, appear in the manifest texts. Where the change remains implicit, gathering these hints becomes a reading for symptoms. A symptom that invites such a reading is found in the second chapter of the French translation of volume 1 of *Capital* by Joseph Roy, whose revision occupied Marx for five years and definitively cost him his linguistic innocence, as Jean-Pierre Lefebvre rightly observes.⁴ The “seduction” of thought by language, to which Nietzsche called attention in the 1880s, was suffered for by Marx between 1871 and 1875 in his own chief work. Precisely someone like Marx, who is able to move so masterfully within the idiomatic physiognomy of his mother tongue, tends to regard concepts that seem automatically articulated in language as having been fully established theoretically. Günther Anders asks of us contemporaries that we write in a translatable way. Marx showed a similar concern as he, in his time, came up against the limits of the translatability of his own text. This experience pushed him to sharpen and sometimes even to renew his theoretical thinking. Driven away from his native language (and, by their very nature as self-evident to native speakers, native languages obscure meanings), he had to become clearer about his own moves. Those who, like many German authors, cling to the original version in a linguistically unreflexive way, will experience all clarification as a flattening of meaning. Even for Engels *die ganze Bedeutung*,⁵ “the full import” (MEGA II.9:12), appears to be something connected to the German “original”; and where the French translation diverges from it he only sees an “indication of what the author himself was prepared to sacrifice” (MEW 23:37). Such a German myth of origin should not influence international Marxism.⁶

Now to our example. It is found in chapter 2 (“The Exchange Process”). The context is how, in the course of the development of relations of exchange, the dominant determination in each commodity to be a means of exchange, crystallizes into a “money commodity”—indeed, as the “necessary product of the process of exchange” (focusing more on the process involved, the French translation by Marx/Roy says, “se forme spontanément”). Later we read: “The need to give an external expression to this opposition [of use-value and value] for the purposes of commercial intercourse produces the drive towards an independent form for commodity-value, and [this need] finds neither rest nor peace until [the external expression to this opposition] is finally achieved by the doubling [*Verdopplung*] of the commodity into

4. See his introduction to the French translation of the fourth German edition (Marx 1983).

5. Ben Fowkes translates: “the full impact of the original” (Marx 1977, 110).

6. However, so long as the international Marxist scientific community is lacking in multilingual reflexivity, it is inclined to take national-linguistic particularities for theory. The English translation of *The German Ideology* engenders, as it were, the “individual”: where Marx and Engels expressly use the neuter pronoun “es,” thus including both genders, the English version has the masculine “he.” Jan Rehmann (2000) has traced the hopeless muddle that Marx’s *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (bourgeois society) has caused as “civil society” in English-speaking Marxism.

commodity and money” (my translation; cf. MEW 23:102).⁷ Thus, a Hegelian reading, particularly of Marx’s analysis of the value-form,⁸ attaches itself to what Backhaus (1997, 142) calls the “well-known Hegelian term ‘Verdopplung.’” Through “doubling,” we are told, the unity in diversity of commodities is designated. The subject of the process is then, as in the first edition, the “immanent contradiction of the commodity,” which in the course of a series of “Verdopplungen” generates the determinations of the bourgeois world, including capital and state. Forgotten here is the fact that “commodity” is the form by which private division-of-labor relations stamp the products, and that for historical materialists, insight into the structure-creating dynamic can only result from the reconstruction of human activity within these relations. The “inner contradiction” of the commodity only reflects the antagonism within these relations. The “need to give an external expression to this opposition for the purposes of commercial intercourse,” of which Marx speaks, is, by the ‘Hegelo-logical’ reading, regarded as a popular-didactic, but theoretically misleading, concession. In fact, we still see in the first edition: “This immanent contradiction . . . does not rest until it is finally resolved through the doubling [Verdopplung] of the commodity into commodity and money” (MEGA II.5:54). For the second German edition, Marx substitutes the subject “This immanent contradiction” with “das Bedürfnis, diesen Gegensatz für den Verkehr äußerlich darzustellen” (MEW 23:102), and for the French translation with “le besoin même du commerce” (MEGA II.7:66). Marx’s thinking had been processed through the interlinguistic ‘transformator’. Now it is the “need” of “commercial intercourse,” “which finds neither rest nor peace” until the value of the commodity has received its “independent form.”

In fact, it appears that Marx had become aware, during his parallel preparations of the Russian and French translations while at the same time preparing the second German edition (see MEGA II.7:715–8), of the danger of a sort of relapse into speculative dialectics. Thus, in the following sentence of the French translation, he substitutes the indeterminate *von Ware* (“of commodity”) with the determinate *une marchandise* (“a commodity”): “À mesure donc que s’accomplit la transformation générale des produits du travail en marchandises, s’accomplit aussi la transformation d’une marchandise en argent” (II.7:66).⁹ This *one specific* “determinate commodity,” gold,¹⁰ is that which underlies the double determination of being at once the use-value gold in the commodity form and the “money commodity” (MEGA II.5:56;

7. Fowkes’s translation obfuscates the meaning by putting “the differentiation of commodities into commodities and money” (Marx 1977, 181). It is not “commodities” in general, which is doubled, but the “money commodity.” As if he wants to repair the error, he changes the next sentence, too. Where Marx speaks of the *Verwandlung von Ware in Geld* (“the transformation of commodity into money”; MEW 23:102), Fowkes translates, “one particular commodity is transformed into money” (Marx 1977, 181).

8. “This dialectic is modelled on that of Hegel” (Arthur 2002, 160) and it is operating in the “spirit world of capital” (163).

9. For Christopher Arthur’s Hegelian reading, it is not this one particular commodity, gold, which “doubles” itself into commodity and money, but the value-form (2002, 31).

10. Marx: “bestimmte Ware”; Fowkes: “single commodity” (Marx 1977, 184).

cf. Marx 1977, 184) par excellence, which embodies the exchange-value of all other commodities.¹¹

Why, then, did Marx not adopt for the second German edition the substitution of *von Ware* with the determinate *eine Ware*?¹² We can only speculate. One possibility is that it was so self-evident for him that here he dealt with the “money commodity” and not with commodity as such that the possibility of a Hegelianizing misinterpretation didn’t occur to him. Engels, on the other hand, replaces the “doubling of the commodity in commodity and money” with “the differentiation of commodities into commodities and money” (MEGA II.9:75). As if to compensate for the misleading plural, in the following sentence he replaces “the metamorphosis of commodity into money” with “the conversion of one special commodity into money” (76).

A Philosophical Anger

Louis Althusser introduced his 1968 lecture to the Société Française de Philosophie with an anecdote. Lenin, it is said, had declined, laughing heartily, when, during a sojourn in Capri, Maxim Gorki invited him to a philosophical discussion with a group of Bolshevik leftists to which he belonged. This group was convinced that “Marxism had to unburden itself of its pre-critical metaphysics, represented by ‘dialectical materialism’”¹³ and turned, in the search for an alternative, to the empirio-criticism of the Austrian physicist Ernst Mach. Lenin declined participation in the discussion. “One can then understand Lenin’s laughter,” Althusser said. “There *is* no philosophical communication, there *is* no philosophical discussion” (Althusser 1969, 10; emphasis added). And, he continued, “Today, I would like to comment just on this laugh, which is in itself already a thesis.”

A century later, still under the impression of precritical vulgar metaphysics, into which the Diamat was finally canonized by Stalin, most of us would share the point of departure of the group around Gorki, even if we wished that Lenin had not only laughed but had dealt seriously with the reasons which moved those comrades and had chosen a philosophical path that would have made it impossible for the future state ideology to derive its legitimacy from him. It may be that a philosophical thesis underlay Lenin’s laughter, but this thesis could generate a reasonable suspicion that in the name of Marx he fell behind Marx.

Nothing made Marx angrier than when he was confronted with such a reading. Perhaps we may say of Marx’s anger, with no less justification than Althusser of Lenin’s laughter, that *it is in itself already a thesis*. Although generally justified, this

11. In the name of “monetary value theory,” which seeks to derive the commodity form from money instead of the money form from commodities, Michael Heinrich has recently argued that the concept of “money commodity” should be eliminated (1999, 233; see my critique in Haug 2004), probably under the impact of the abolition of gold-backing of the currencies. For Marx, it is a key mediating concept to understand modern paper money.

12. The use of the indeterminate article (*une marchandise*) is the form to speak about a determinate commodity (gold).

13. In Althusser’s original: “que le marxisme devait se débarrasser de cette métaphysique précritique qu’était le ‘matérialisme dialectique’” (1969, 9).

anger is occasionally unjust—for example, when Marx snubs a Russian, who cited him, in what we would today call a Eurocentric context, admonishing him to consult the *French* translation, not the *Russian* one. In fact, the former contains, in the chapter that interests us here, extraordinarily important adjustments of emphasis regarding “so-called primitive accumulation,” in which a paradigm shift to a no longer monolinear conception of history is expressed. It is on these changes that the undiminished actuality of Marxian theory for the emerging age of transnational high-tech capitalism rests, changes which Engels, contrary to his introductory assurances (see MEW 23:41; Marx 1977, 114), did not adopt in the fourth German edition. Let us look at one of these changes.

Where the fourth edition says of primitive accumulation, “The history of this expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries” (Marx 1977, 876; MEW 23:744), Marx narrows the scope in the French edition to England and Western Europe (“tous les autres pays de l’Europe occidentale”) and reduces the claims of the presentation to that of a “sketch” (*esquisse*) (MEGA II.7:634). Hence his reproach of the Russian Marxist Michailovski: “He insists in transforming my historical sketch of the origin of capitalism in Western Europe into a philosophy-of-history kind of theory of the general line of development that fate prescribes for all peoples” (MEW 19:111). Marx’s anger signals a leap in consciousness: He is horrified by certain interpretive possibilities of his own main work, *Capital*. His anger includes some unarticulated self-criticism. Yet he can claim to have publicly enunciated it: The French version possesses “a scientific value independent of the original and should be consulted even by readers familiar with the German language” (MEGA II.7:690).¹⁴ What “forced” him “to modify the edition,” he says, is in no way due to some inexactitude on the part of Roy. On the contrary, it was precisely Roy’s “very scrupulousness” “in producing a version that would be as exact and literal as possible” (Marx 1977, 105).

In this literal exactness, Marx becomes conscious of the fact that his own thinking, to quote *The German Ideology*, “is not ‘pure’ consciousness”: “The ‘mind’ [Geist] . . . is from the outset afflicted with the curse of being ‘burdened’ with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of . . . sounds, in short, of language” (MECW 5:43–4; cf. MEW 3:30). The linguistic materiality of thought, condition and medium of articulated consciousness, is at once its unconscious. Already Hegel, in the preface to the second edition of his *Science of Logic*, observes: “The unconsciousness of this reaches incredibly far.” Hegel here shifts the paradigmatic interpretation of his object of knowledge from “the thought of God before the creation,” as he said in the preface to the first edition, to the conceptual network of language. It can in no way be said of the intersections of this network, the categories in which forms of thought are regulated, that they “serve us, that we possess them more than they possess us,” as long as we have not provided ourselves a certain freedom of movement through reflexion. Marx and Engels take another decisive step here in the direction of the net of vital practices, articulated in historical materiality, a net that maintains a mobile

14. “Welches auch die literarischen Mängel dieser französischen Ausgabe sein mögen, sie besitzt einen wissenschaftlichen Wert unabhängig vom Original und sollte selbst von Lesern herangezogen werden, die der deutschen Sprache mächtig sind” (MEW 23:32).

processual connection with language and thought.¹⁵ They awaken from Hegel's dream of an immobile order of all movement and an abstract predestination of everything concrete.

The overlooking of this concept in the reception of his own work ignited Marx's final anger, which impelled him to undertake, in the *Marginal Notes on Wagner*, a series of further theoretical steps. This final anger, "which is in itself already a philosophical thesis," wells up in him in the face of the bourgeois-academic reading of *Capital* in Germany. Essentially, he takes offense that a conceptual-logical method is attributed to him in which, "through pure reason," the next "phase" is generated from the previous one, as he characterized it when fulminating against Proudhon thirty years earlier. Now he calls it the *Begriffsanknüpfungsmethode*, the method of drawing concepts from concepts, and reproaches the "obscurantist" Wagner with "not even having noticed that my *analytical* method . . . has nothing to do with the German professorial method of deriving concepts from concepts" (371). Even today Marx is often said to have started with the "concept of the commodity," in which "the concept of money is prefigured" (Altvater 1969, 17),¹⁶ and which is the most abstract category, and so on. In view of an analogous reading, Marx bangs his fist on the table: No, he tells us, he begins with the analysis of the "smallest concrete," the "simplest social form in which the product of labor of contemporary society appears" (MEW 19:369). It would be "scholasticism," he says, to derive exchange-value and use-value from the *value-concept* instead of developing them analytically, starting "from a concretum of the commodity" (*von einem Konkretum der Ware*) (19:362).

When Marx, in *Capital*, examines the opposition between exchange-value and use-value, Rodbertus considers this a "logical opposition" (Marx 1977, 374). In doing so, Marx returns, Rodbertus reads their exposition in *Capital* in logical terms, and the two determinations of the commodity as "pure concepts." If not, he wouldn't have interpreted their opposition as a "logical" one. In reality, Marx continues, in every price list "each individual class of commodity" undergoes "the illogical process" of totally distinguishing itself from the others as a use-value, while "at the same time it presents its *price* as something qualitatively identical but quantitatively different of *the same nature*." "It is a matter here of a '*logical*' opposition only among . . . [those] who take as their point of departure the 'concept' of commodity, rather than the 'social thing' i.e. the 'commodity', and then make this concept split itself in two [verdoppeln], after which they argue about which of the two phantasms is the real McCoy!" (374 f.). The earlier ambiguity in Marxian language no longer prevails, an ambiguity of which Backhaus correctly says that it leads to "pseudo-theological disputes" (1997, 196). I would add: as long as one refuses, as the same

15. On this, see chapter 4 of my *Philosophizing with Brecht and Gramsci*: "'Epistemology must be above all critique of language'—Brecht, Gramsci, and Wittgenstein" (Haug 2006).

16. Similarly, see Lenin (1953–, 38:340), whom my *Vorlesungen zur Einführung ins "Kapital"* [Introductory lectures on "Capital"] (1974/1976, 79 f.) uncritically followed (cf. the completely revised version [2005b, 76 f.]).

Backhaus does, to see Marx's learning process and takes the earlier stage, which is closer to Hegel, as the real thing.¹⁷

In order to avoid the false dialectic of the value-concept, which appears, through the partial identity of words (use-*value* and exchange-*value*), to point to a contradictory unity of essence, leading to a cosmogonic series of doublings (*Verdopplungen*), Marx maintains a constant linguistic reflexivity in these notes.¹⁸

In the attempt to grasp the activities of "distinguishing or fixing in the representation" embedded in the net of vital activities, and consequently in language, Marx considers determinations that later are designated by the analytical philosophy of science as "disposition-predicates" ("salt is water-soluble"), yet with categorical reference to human praxis, in which he draws attention to the "for-us" character of these predicates in the sarcastic sentence: "it would hardly occur to a sheep that one of his 'useful' properties is to be edible for humans" (363). He explodes such disposition-predicates by making their anthropocentrism evident.

Here we can certainly no longer say with Althusser that Marx, as he "produced [these concepts] as in a flash of lightning, did not theoretically tie them together and work them out" (Althusser, Balibar, and Establet 1965, 175).¹⁹ No, Marx here is reworking historical-material conditions of validity in the bright daylight of his workshop. These reflections have (in opposition to an understanding of dialectics which often presents itself as a secret art) something liberatory about them. For our rereading today, it is advisable to look for the hints that Marx gives us and bring them to bear retrospectively in the manner of heuristic guidelines. Then one will be on the trail of something of strategic importance: a better understanding of the learning process of the "mature" and eventually "old" Marx. Maybe the main impact of this learning process is a historical materialist rethinking of dialectics.

17. Heinrich objects that in the *Marginal Notes* it is a "not at all a question of Hegelianisms [*Hegeleien*], not even a question of Marx having been accused of such Hegelianism. Rather, Marx criticizes some of the representatives of German vulgar economics" (2004, 94). Here, the decisive aspect is suppressed—namely, that Marx is grappling with the bourgeois reception of Marx, which understands him, according to the paradigm of *Begriffsanknüpfungsmethode*, as merely deriving concepts from other concepts.

18. In doing so, he seeks each time a starting point in reality, in the sense of the first thesis on Feuerbach: in activity, especially the appropriation process out of which the theoretical appropriation arises. Wagner's pseudo-conceptual dialectics recalls the practices of the alchemists, of the "old chemists before the science of chemistry": because cooking-butter is soft, they insist "on the butter character of all chlorides, zinc-chloride, antimony-chloride," and speak of "zinc butter, antimony butter." Or: because "salt" is the first known crystalline and water-soluble material, sugar, for example, is then counted among the "salts" (372). Thus, the philosophical alchemists count use-value as a value. In short, Marx takes cognizance here of similar processes of word stretching on the basis of similar properties, in order to destroy the false conceptual dialectics of "value."

19. "[L]es produisant dans le geste d'un éclair, il n'avait pas rassemblé et affronté théoriquement cette production, ne l'avait pas réfléchi pour l'imposer au champ total de ses analyses" (Althusser, Balibar, and Establet 1969, 175).

Open End

Those who believe in “correcting Marx with Hegel” (as Engels wrote in *Anti-Dühring*) cede this vital terrain to pre-Marxian philosophical ideology. For them, the dialectical point of view is situated at the end of history. Didn’t Marx himself declare that “the anatomy of man is the key to the anatomy of the ape”? Yes, he did in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*. But one has to understand that this fragment was never again touched by Marx and, it can be shown, is a failed text.²⁰ A “rigorously dialectical reading,” however, can only be such for historical materialists when it “doesn’t read the beginning in the light of that which follows” (Bidet 2004, 60).²¹ Indeed, for Marx, “the only materialist, and therefore the only scientific” approach (1977, 494 n. 4) will proceed in the direction of the process and never from what Marx, in volume 2 of *Capital*, calls “the standpoint of the accomplished phenomena” [*fertige Phänomene*] (MEW 24:218; my translation). Against Feuerbach’s critique of religion, Marx raises the structurally same objection as against the classical bourgeois economists: “It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly kernel of the misty creations of the religion, than to do the opposite, i.e. to develop from the actual, given relations of life the forms in which these have been apotheosized” (1977, 494 n. 4). Classical political economy has, on the other hand, “analysed value and its magnitude . . . and has uncovered the content concealed within these forms. But it has never once asked the question why this content has assumed that particular form, that is to say, why labour is expressed in value” (173 f.). This, however, cannot be developed “from the actual, given relations of life,” which are already structured by the value forms. A genetic reconstruction of the transition from more elementary “relations of life” to the actual ones is needed. This is the objective side of what Marxian dialectics is about. The subjective side can be understood as the practical philosophy of Marxism. Here, the approach to a problematic in research has common roots with conjunctural wisdom in social and political struggles as well as in the ancient *techné tou biou*, the art of living, “the greatest of all arts,” as Brecht says, whose understanding and practice of a truly new, no longer Hegelian dialectics is one of the most outstanding contributions to an undogmatic renewal of Marxist thought. This understanding of dialectics has not only accepted its limits, but has already incorporated the “aleatory” moment on which, much later, Althusser has insisted. Last but not least, it has inscribed subjective activity in the reality field and, together

20. Its formula of “ascending from the abstract to the concrete” as the “scientifically correct method” has its merits, but describes the structure of classical bourgeois science and by no means the specifically Marxian dialectical method as many commentators still believe.

21. Jacques Bidet shares the view that Marx’s concept of dialectics is basically Hegelian and that transitions have to be deduced from the ‘logical’, not practical, “insufficiency of a form, which remained insufficient as long as it was not completely developed” (*tant qu’elle n’était pas complètement déployée*). He concludes: “Therefore it is impossible in this sense to ‘pass dialectically’ from money to capital” (2004, 101). But when he follows the idea of an “insufficiency” in the sense of not being “completely developed,” he does exactly what he rightly condemns—namely, “read the beginning in the light of that which follows.” What is more: only in possession of “absolute knowledge” at the “end of history” could one be sure about a phenomenon being “completely developed.”

with this, a moment of indeterminacy. Brecht's philosophy of dialectics and dialectics of philosophy, which even among Marxist scholars is still widely unknown, is in many respects congenial to Marx. In a way, Brecht, learning from Karl Korsch, has taken up Marx's learning process. For us who are affiliated with Marx and must learn under pressure of enormous structural ruptures and transformations, plagued by all kinds of political correctness, identity politics, fundamentalisms and sectarianisms, which are as many symptoms of a lack of dialectics, insights into this "work in progress" with a clearer understanding of progress in this work are of vital interest. The task to elaborate a historical materialist understanding of a dialectics without guarantees has perhaps not yet been fully understood, let alone accomplished.

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