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## **Marx's concept of labor.**

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MARX'S CONCEPT OF LABOR

A Dissertation Presented

by

CHRISTOPHER J. MULVANEY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in Partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

SEPTEMBER 1990

Department of Political Science

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MARX'S CONCEPT OF LABOR


A Dissertation Presented


by

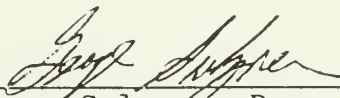
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I dedicate this work to Shirley J. Gedeon, Ph.D., in thanks for her love and support, and in memory of my father, John F. Mulvaney, Ph.D., and my mother, Gertrude M. Mulvaney.

ABSTRACT

MARX'S CONCEPT OF LABOR

SEPTEMBER, 1990

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This work examines Habermas' claim that Marx's theory is latently objectivistic due to a restrictive, instrumental understanding of the concept of labor. In this interpretation, Marx's work is a form of positivism and scientific in epistemological orientation. a related claim is that as a result of the above Marx's theory lacks a normative foundation adequate to support its claim of critique. An even further expansion of the claim, which makes clear its political dimension, is that this series of misconceptions on Marx's part lie at the root of the subsequent development of a technocratic variety of social theory embodied in the bureaucratic centralist Countries of Eastern Europe.

Ultimately, Habermas' work entails a fundamental misunderstanding of Marx's critique of capitalism and the

structure of Marx's thought. It is this failure to understand adequately the structure of Marx's theory that makes possible Habermas' reading of Marx. This work argues that Marx's theory is doubly bisected, first by the distinction between appearance and reality, and second, by a distinction between the metatheoretical and historical levels of analysis.

In conclusion, it is argued that although Habermas' interpretation of Marx is inadequate, both Marx and Habermas share a project that invites subjects to conceive of social relations free of the distortions of power, deception and self-deception on Habermas' part, and exploitation and alienation on Marx's part.



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## C H A P T E R   I

### HABERMAS' ANALYSIS OF MARX

#### Introduction

In Negative Dialectics Theodor Adorno remarks that material reality can not be subsumed by categories of thought without leaving a "remainder." He states further that "The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norms of adequacy...It indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived."<sup>1</sup> In a similar fashion, Marx's work has never fit well into the categorical containers constructed to house it by political theorists, social philosophers, and intellectual historians.

This work scrutinizes a claim, one that in different forms has reappeared consistently in the secondary literature on Marx. Most recently this claim has been

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<sup>1</sup> (1973), p. 5.

articulated with considerable force and clarity by Jurgen Habermas as a part of his project to clarify the epistemological status of critical theory.

The claim has been variously stated but is essentially this: Marx's theory is latently objectivistic due to a restrictive, instrumental understanding of the concept of labor. In this light, Marx's theory is a form of positivism and scientistic in epistemological orientation. A further and related claim is that as a result of the above Marx's theory lacks an adequate normative foundation and thus can not sustain a critique of capitalism. An even further expansion of this claim, and one which makes clear the political dimension of this debate, is that this series of errors and misconceptions on Marx's part lie at the root of the subsequent development of a bureaucratic and technocratic variety of social theory.

While there have been numerous scholarly works on Habermas and the Frankfurt School,<sup>2</sup> few have raised the issue of whether or not this interpretation is correct. Geuss correctly notes that this "...would require a full-scale analysis of Marx's work..." However, he states

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<sup>2</sup> notably by McCarthy (1978), Kortian (1980), Sensat (1979) and Geuss (1981).

that "...it isn't clear how the answer to this historical question would bear on...the possibility of a critical theory.<sup>3</sup> I will maintain that the answer to this question bears powerfully and centrally on the philosophical foundations of critical theory.

Marx was a philosopher who retrained himself as an economist. While Marx did not produce a work of philosophy that systematically elaborated his theoretical assumptions, he nonetheless held to certain assumptions that informed and structured his work. In fact, these philosophical assumptions infuse his 'mature' work and a reading of books like Capital that fails to account for a philosophic dimension are impoverished. What we think these assumptions are, and specifically the meaning we give to Marx's concept of labor, has a direct and significant impact on our understanding of the problem of the epistemological and normative foundations of critical theory that Habermas and others are investigating and wish to clarify.

Critical theorists draw upon two major figures in the Western intellectual tradition as prototypical of a social and political theory with an interest in emancipation:

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<sup>3</sup> (1981), p. 3.

Marx and Freud. Despite innumerable treatments of both theorists, there is little agreement to be found in the literature. Rather than agreement and consensus, what one finds in the secondary literature are deep philosophical, political and ideological cleavages. Debates on Marx, perhaps more than any other theorist, reflect these cleavages.

Precisely because of the fundamental issues raised in Marx's challenge to traditional theory much of the debate on Marx is carried out in highly reified terms. For example, debate is often cast in terms of schools of thought interpreting another school of thought's interpretation. Indeed, Geuss poses the question in precisely these terms: that is, is the 'Frankfurt reading' of Marx correct or not?

Raising the question in this manner presupposes some untenable abstractions. Ignoring for the moment who is and is not a member of the Frankfurt School (or whose theory is an instance of Frankfurt theory) we must assume there is a theory separate and abstracted from the particular individuals who comprised the Frankfurt School. We must then look for that part of 'Frankfurt theory' which constitutes an interpretation of Marx.

This may be convenient in as much as it frees one from considering the history of particular theorists at particular stages of their intellectual development. In the convenience, however, lies the risk. The risk is the loss of the historical dimension. The loss of the rich context and historical diversity of individual intellectual development, the historical context of issues, debates and understandings, how they arise and how theorists responded, leaves our understanding impoverished.

For these reasons I will not focus on such issues as the relationship of Habermas to the Frankfurt School, Marx and Marxism, the Frankfurt School and Marx, or Habermas and Marxism. Nor will the subsequent analysis be cast in terms of "being informed by" or "derived from" any theorist or school of thought.

The focus of this work is Habermas and Marx. The analysis presented below will deal with Marxism briefly and only to note the extent that Habermas' analysis is weakened by a failure to adequately distinguish between Marx and his epigones.

I begin with a summary of Habermas' analysis of Marx. The claims Habermas makes with respect to Marx's concept of labor, scientific and positivistic tendencies in Marx, and emancipatory interest will be spelled out and some preliminary objections raised.

I then turn to a reconstruction of Marx's concept of labor in its anthropological, ontological, epistemological, and economic dimensions. I advance the thesis that Marx's theory is coherent and that each of the above dimensions is structured by an appearance/reality distinction and a distinction between metatheoretical and historical levels of analysis.

The term 'reconstruction' means the reproduction of an author's meaning and argument by the discovery and elaboration of the 'rules' the author follows in constructing his or her theory. The rules of a game constrain a participant to known or knowable patterns of thought and/or action. An observer, who may not know or only partially know the rules, must attempt to construct the rules from the players actions. In this vein, I attempt to read-off the rules that structure Marx's work and to re-present Marx's work. I will, in Habermas' terms, "explicate the meaning of a symbolic formation in

terms of the rules according to which the author must have brought it forth..."<sup>4</sup>

On the basis of the analysis in Chapter Two, I argue in the concluding Chapter that Habermas' analysis of Marx's concept of labor is, at best, partial, and at worst results from a fundamental misunderstanding of the structure of Marx's thought. In effect, Habermas falls prey to the problem that animates Adorno's epistemological theory: non-identity. In other words, Marx's theory can not be subsumed by Habermas' framework of knowledge constitutive interests. I will then examine the implications of this for Habermas' project of reconstituting the normative foundations of critical social theory.

### The Terms of the Debate

There is no concept more centrally important to the interpretation of Marx's social and political philosophy than labor. The meaning of the term has important consequences for an interpretation of all aspects of Marx's theory. The ontological, epistemological,

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<sup>4</sup> (1979), p. 12.



anthropological, ethical, political and economic assumptions of Marx are all closely bound up with the meaning of the concept.

The problem of interpreting Marx's theoretical assumptions has occupied the attention of scholars and polemicists, a distinction frequently hard to make, for the better part of the last century. Not surprisingly, there is little consensus. On a general level of interpretation, one cannot help but be intrigued by the starkly contradictory claims made about Marx. To his adherents he is the greatest of the classical political economists but to his opponents he is a minor post-Ricardian<sup>5</sup>. He is either a "great systematic philosopher in the tradition of Aristotle, Kant and Hegel"<sup>6</sup> or a largely confused, unclear contradictory thinker.<sup>7</sup> His literary abilities are equally suspect; either the man's style is opaque and utterly lacking in clarity or it is rich, lucid, powerful and evocative.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Sameulson (1957), p. 911.

<sup>6</sup> Gould (1978), p. xi.

<sup>7</sup> Plamenatz (1975), p.449-450.

<sup>8</sup> for an analysis of the interrelationship of philosophical, literary and economic themes in Capital see R.P. Wolff (1980). For a summary of the widely held view that Marx's work lacks rigor and coherence see McMurty (1978).

The situation improves little, if at all, when one examines more specific areas of debate over Marx's assumptions. With respect to ontology, Marx is undoubtedly a materialist but what kind of materialist is in doubt. Is Marx's epistemology simply an inversion of Hegel replacing spirit with matter or is the question more complicated? Did Marx hold a copy or reflection theory of knowledge or does the theory of false-consciousness and fetishism imply a more sophisticated and highly mediated theory of the relationship of being and consciousness? Did Marx hold any theory of human nature and if so what was it, i.e., was he a humanist or theoretical anti-humanist? In the realm of ethics, was Marx's critique of capitalism based solely on moral outrage or was it scientific and therefore more effective and valid because it was not compromised by emotion, values and other infections of irrationality? What political position did Marx hold: was he a radical democrat, totalitarian or, perhaps, an anarchist? Finally, is the labor theory of value metaphysical baggage that can be discarded with no harm to Marx's theory of capitalism, or is it the key to unlocking the mysteries of capitalist development?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> see Steedman (1977), Lippi (1979) and Bowles and Gintis (1981).

Implicitly, the question of Marx's theoretical assumptions was raised when he declared to La Fargue: "One thing is certain--I myself am no Marxist." With this remark Marx distanced himself from the positions of the growing socialist labor movement in Germany. From that point on, the extent to which the socialist movement could be identified with Marxian theory, regardless of the self-understandings of Bernstein, Kautsky, Plekhonov and generations of others, is in doubt.

Explicitly, the question of Marx's presuppositions became a heated and central issue following the collapse of socialism at the outbreak of World War I, the failure of socialist revolutions in Western Europe following the war, and the emerging criticism of Lenin's political theory. The major figures in this re-evaluation of the presuppositions of Marxist orthodoxy are well known as are the debates they initiated over the theory and practice of Marxism: Georg Lukacs, Karl Korsch, Rosa Luxemburg and Antonio Gramsci. One central argument advanced by both Lukacs and Korsch was that orthodox Marxists had 1) fetishized facts and the laws of history, and 2) viewed scientific socialism more and more as a set of purely

scientific observations.<sup>10</sup> As Habermas would almost fifty years later, Lukacs and Korsch made the dissolution of Marxism into a kind of positivism concerned with facts, laws, and empirical, objective analysis, a primary target of their critique.

By the turn of the century, Marx's theory was clearly suffering from the vicissitudes of institutionalization: an orthodoxy had emerged along with the Social Democratic Parties.<sup>11</sup> Criticism emerged from the group of dissidents named above. Interestingly, they tended to have strong training in the German Idealist tradition and especially in the works of Hegel. They began a systematic re-thinking of Marx's theoretical assumptions and critique of orthodox Marxism. Their writing, not only provoked a serious re-evaluation of Marxism, but also the most significant division in Marxian intellectual history, the split between orthodox and Western, or Neo-Marist theory. The questions they raised still provide the framework for much of the theoretical debate among critical theorists.

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<sup>10</sup> Korsch (1970), p.60

<sup>11</sup> "...the history of Marxism as a theory and practice is marked by rather long periods in which formalism and/or dogmatism predominate (the rise of the German Social Democratic Party, 1880's-1914; Stalinism), punctuated by rather brief ruptures (the new Marxism expressed by the young Lukacs and some others in the early 1920's; the New Left in the 1960's). Arato and Breines (1979), p.210.

The criticism of Lukacs and Korsch was focused on two positions regarded by orthodox Marxists as central tenets of the faith, one ontological and the other epistemological. The ontological proposition was that the economic base determines the political, legal and cultural superstructure. In other words, that the forms of economic being mono-causally determine the other forms of social being. The epistemological proposition was that being determines consciousness. This was embodied in the infamous formulation that consciousness was a reflection of being, that the mind was a copy of reality.

In hindsight, the flaws of these positions seem almost obvious. For example, consider first the ontological assumption. The powerful Social Democratic Party in Germany was engaged in battles to affect the length of the working day, wages and unionization at the same time it was maintaining the theoretical position that its own activity, as a social and political organization, was strictly determined by the base that it was in the process of changing. Secondly, their epistemology was premised on a passive cognitive subject. With consciousness reflecting being, orthodox Marxism either had to abandon the possibility of a class conscious proletariat making its own history through revolution (and

fall back on the position that a party elite could engineer a revolution) or believe that revolution was automatic working out of the contradictions of capitalism with class consciousness as an automatic result.

Ironically, Marxism had developed into precisely the kind of philosophical materialism that Marx "had initially found defective: passive, contemplative, focusing exclusively on the supposedly primary world of external nature."<sup>12</sup>

In the orthodox view, the subject plays, at best, a very small role in his own history. Broadly speaking, the theoretical debate became a debate over the nature of the subject, his ontological role in the creation of social being and his status as a knowing subject. In other words, how does the subject constitute objectivity and does the subject actively or passively come to know its creation? These questions require investigation into the "active" side of the revolutionary equation: into the problem of subjectivity, human nature and labor in the constitution of social reality, and requires a theory of knowledge that transcended passive materialism.

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<sup>12</sup> Arato, Andrew, and Paul Brienens (1979), p.214. These authors are correct to note that Lukacs' critique of Engels and Kautsky was a close equivalent of Marx's critique of Feuerbach's materialism.

Currently the debate over Marx's philosophical assumptions has come to center on the concept of labor. Labor, is construed by Habermas and Wellmer as having an instrumental meaning. Marx's theory, which is in their view latently positivistic and objectivistic, is compromised both morally and philosophically by this restrictive, instrumental concept of labor.<sup>13</sup>

The term 'instrumental' has played an important role in twentieth century social theory. In Max Weber, instrumental or formal rationality means the consideration of the "relatively unambiguous fact that the action is based on 'goal oriented' rational calculation with the technically most adequate methods" and, most importantly, calculations are made "without regard to persons."<sup>14</sup> Instrumental rational social action is calculated, efficient action. Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse argued that Weber's formal sociological categories contained implicit value judgements. Instrumental rationality subtly turns into capitalist rationality, i.e., the calculable efficiency of the capitalist enterprise. Weber argued that in Western society instrumental rationality was invading all realms of society, politics, social

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<sup>13</sup> Wellmer (1971), p.125 and Habermas (1973), p.281-2.

<sup>14</sup> Economy and Society Vol 1. (1978), p. 83.

relations, art, architecture and music, as efficiency won out in competition with traditional forms.

Agreeing, and tying this expansion to the dynamics of capitalist exchange relations, Adorno, Marcuse and Horkheimer argued that the 'rational' functioning of the social apparatus tends to abridge the critical faculty of reason in its place promoting instrumental or subjective reason. Appropriate thought and action are then defined by the objective requirements of the production process. They have "become completely harnessed to the social process...It is as if thinking itself had been reduced to the level of industrial processes, subjected to close schedule - in short, made part and parcel of production."<sup>15</sup> Habermas' claim that Marx's concept of labor is instrumental is set in this context of meanings and may be succinctly stated as follows: labor is social action whose rationality is defined 'in toto' by the requirements of the production process. The 'telos' of instrumentally rational action is power over persons and things; the ability to manipulate and control.

This fundamental inadequacy of Marx's concept of labor Habermas viewed as the basis for the subsequent

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<sup>15</sup> Horkheimer (1974), p. 21.



bureaucratic and technocratic deformations of socialist theory and practice that are manifest in Leninism and Stalinism. Wellmer, for example, claims that a socialist revolution conceived on the Marxian model can only lead to an abrogation of liberal political freedom in favor of "dictatorial centralism" in which an elite party organizes a socialist state with the clearly false view that social freedom is a technical, bureaucratic problem. Habermas states the implications as follows:

The danger of an exclusively technical civilization which is devoid of the interconnection between theory and praxis, can be clearly grasped: it is threatened by the splitting of consciousness and by the splitting of men into two classes--the social engineers and the inmates of closed institutions.<sup>16</sup>

Outside the tradition of the critical theorists these criticisms of Marx have been echoed by Charles Taylor. He has argued that Marx's work rests on an uneasy, if not untenable, synthesis of romantic expressivism and nineteenth-century science. Accordingly, Taylor claims, Marxists have adopted science, with its epistemological telos of manipulation, as the method for restructuring social relations. Thus, socialist planning treats persons as objects to be manipulated, dominated and controlled through the implementation of a technology of human engineering. "Marxist-Leninism began to be treated

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<sup>16</sup> (1973), p.282.

as a blueprint in the hands of master builders rather than the consciousness of a new age of freedom."<sup>17</sup>

If one accepts the premises of the above interpretations of Marx, i.e., that Marxism lacks a normative foundation and is fundamentally instrumental in its orientation toward both objects and persons, one could logically conclude that Marx's theory is at best morally and ethically vacuous and at worst reprehensible and dangerous. This implication is not lost on Taylor who states:

...Marx's variant of 'absolute freedom' is at the base of Bolshevik voluntarism which, strong with the final justification of history, has crushed all obstacles in its path with extraordinary ruthlessness, and has spawned again that terror which Hegel described with uncanny insight.<sup>18</sup>

Analogous arguments have, in the past, been derived from different theoretical starting points. One may start from Marx's supposed determinism and conclude that the theory fails to allow for human moral autonomy, responsibility, and freedom. Alternatively, one may start from Marx's apparent lack of a theory of human nature and claim that human beings are defined by their social

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<sup>17</sup> Taylor (1975), p.522.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.558.

relationships and are simply bearers of social roles. This can lead to the conclusion, nicely characterized by McMurty, that:

Since there is no human nature, then the capitalist society Marx opposes has no fault other than hindrance of productive forces, and the communist society he envisages has no human point other than growth of such forces. Hence Marx's vision is wholly technocratic, compatible with a communist society of robots.<sup>19</sup>

This interpretation of Marx's lack of a normative foundation for critique, instrumental concept of labor, inadequate theory of human nature and finally of a presumed identity between Marx and Marxism leaves the theorist with three possible alternatives. First, one may choose to reject or abandon Marxian theory as a confused, absurd, dangerous and morally irresponsible body of knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

Second, one may choose to limit the validity of Marx's analysis (to the extent it is not completely compromised) to a particular historical epoch, i.e., that it is adequate to the period of liberal capitalism. Piccone opts for this position. While agreeing with the above criticism of Marx's normative foundation and arguing

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<sup>19</sup> (1978), p.18.

<sup>20</sup> see Berlin (1957), Historical Inevitability, and Kamenka (1962), The Ethical Foundations of Marxism.

that the Frankfurt School theorists failed similarly, Piccone limits the validity of Marx's theory to the period of entrepreneurial capitalism, the critical theory of Marcuse, Horkheimer and Adorno to a transitional stage, and a "yet to be developed" theory to the present period of advanced capitalism.<sup>21</sup>

The final alternative is to engage in a systematic reconstruction of Marx's theory, to re-work it, in order to preserve those remaining moments of truth, to make it adequate to an analysis of advanced capitalism and most importantly to provide a normative foundation to ground critique.<sup>22</sup> This, broadly speaking, has been the project of Habermas. However, as we shall see, Habermas' reconstruction is inadequate and largely determined by his attempt to develop a theory of knowledge constitutive interests rather than being determined by the object of investigation: Marx.

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<sup>21</sup> Arato and Gebhardt (1978), p.xx.

<sup>22</sup> I discuss the logical structure of Habermas' derivation of critique in language and Marx's grounding in labor in the chapter 3.

## Habermas and the Reconstruction of Marxian Theory

Habermas regards his work as being within the Marxian tradition and as a "reconstruction" of Marxian theory. With regard to the first point, Habermas argues that his investigations are 'materialist' in so far as they analyze crisis tendencies in the spheres of social production and reproduction. They are 'historical' because of the attempt to analyze causal relations effective in ushering in, maintaining and undermining historical structures of consciousness and social being.

Regarding the second point, Habermas understands his project as a reconstruction of historical materialism and distinguishes between reconstruction, restoration, and renaissance. His approach to the many social theoretic questions and controversies that have animated debate among Marxists during the previous century is not "dogmatic" or "philological." His intent is not to rediscover the 'real' Marx, whose theory had been distorted and 'corrupted' by the vicissitudes of subsequent adherents and epigones, though this is in important respects the case. The trap awaiting those who seek to proceed in this manner is the tendency to view Marx's works as a kind of bible, the exegesis of which will provide correct answers to problems even where Marx's

writings are mute on the topic. And while the study of Marx's work has suffered from a more or less hostile intellectual climate in the Western world, it is not a tradition long suppressed and buried by the intellectual and cultural hegemony of bourgeois traditions. Indeed, announcements of the death of Marxian theory have been frequent but, nonetheless, premature. Thus Habermas does not view Marxian theory as being in need of a renaissance.

Habermas defines his intention of "reconstructing" Marxism as taking the "...theory apart and putting it back together again in a new form in order to attain more fully the goal it has set for itself."<sup>23</sup> It remains a theory whose potential is not exhausted. Marx's theory thus can be said to be in need of reworking in order to be adequate to its task of liberating society from the domination of capital. If Marxism is in need of reconstruction one assumption can be made: the historical conditions Marx sought to analyze have changed. Thus Habermas investigates the nature of these changes and their consequences for Marxism.

The first of these changes is the relationship of politics and the economy. The liberal capitalist

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<sup>23</sup> (1979), p. 95.

separation of the state and society no longer obtains in advanced capitalist society. Rather, the state and society are closely intertwined. The growth of capitalist production outpaced the ability of the free market exchange of commodities to regulate production and distribution. Capitalist development in its more advanced states required greater administration in production planning, securing stable markets, etc., thus superseding some market functions. At the same time, capital-labor conflicts resulted in what Habermas calls the "...political mediation of...commerce."<sup>24</sup> Thus he argues that classical Marxist conception of the dependence of polity on the base is no longer adequate for an analysis of advanced capitalism.

In Legitimation Crisis this point is elaborated. A clear example of the interdependence of base and polity is the development, in reaction to endemic economic crisis, of a "quasi-political wage structure."<sup>25</sup> The institutionalization of capital-labor conflict through union recognition by the state and the establishment of a new state function of managing wage negotiations shifts a portion of the reproduction of capitalist relations to the

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<sup>24</sup> (1973), p. 195.

<sup>25</sup> Habermas (1978), p.38.

state. That is, the reproduction of labor power as a commodity and the price it receives are determined by a politically regulated class compromise. One significant result, beside a tendency toward labor peace rather than class conflict, is a flattening of business cycles "and transforming periodic phases of capital devaluation into permanent inflationary crisis with milder business fluctuations..."<sup>26</sup>

A further, and often discussed example of the changed relation of polity and economy is government subsidy by either direct spending or tax expenditures of the development of new technology such as nuclear power, semiconductors and computers and new aviation technologies. Without government support through procurement, assuming research costs, etc., the massive capital accumulation required for competitive production would be impossible through private capital market forces alone. One is led to conclude that judicious and well-planned government intervention in the economy is essential in advanced capitalism.

Whether the changed relations of economics and politics in advanced capitalism requires a reformulation

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



of Marx's characterization of the notorious base/superstructure relationship depends, of course, on what kind of position is either imputed to Marx or argued to be consistent with Marxian theory. As Habermas recognizes, there are three different accounts of the base/superstructure relationship.

The first, which one might call the strong, orthodox or economistic, version holds that there is an ontological priority of the base over the superstructure. In this version a social formation is conceived as a number of 'levels'; the forces and relations of production being the foundation upon which the polity, law, and culture (ideology) are built. There is, as Habermas puts it, a "causal dependency" of the "higher subsystems" on the base. This version, with its clear scientific and positivistic overtones has been under severe and cogent criticism for decades. Both Lukacs and Korsch, while taking slightly different approaches, rejected this version in the early 1920's. In orthodox Marxism, the various phenomena of the superstructure, law, policy, morality, and ideology acquired the status of a 'pseudo-reality' somehow less 'real' (since less 'material') than the base. As Korsch trenchantly puts it, the economistic version "...can be formulated concisely, with only a slight caricature, by saying...there are three

degrees of reality: the economy, which in the last instance is the only objective and totally non-ideological reality; 2) Law and the State, which are somewhat less real because clad in ideology; and 3) pure ideology which is objectless and totally unreal ('pure rubbish')."<sup>27</sup>

The weaker position is, in Engels famous phrase, that the base determines the superstructure only in the final analysis. This more plausible version asserts that the base sets limits or constraints on the development of, and actions by the agents in, the superstructure.

The third version, characteristic of Hegelian Marxists and generally of the western neo-Marxist tradition, is a conception of the totality of social relationships which eschews an architectonic model of levels of social organization. This version, which Habermas correctly ascribes to Lukacs, Korsch and Adorno, conceptualizes society as a totality in which different aspects, e.g., base, polity, etc., are defined by their determinate interrelations with all other aspects.

Recently, structuralist theorists have reconceptualized the base/superstructure problem in a

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<sup>27</sup> Korsch (1970), p. 82.

manner similar to the Neo-Marxists. This change was undertaken in order to prevent a theoretically induced blindness to the importance of social, normative and moral practices that characterized orthodox Marxism.

The second change reflected in advanced capitalism is that capitalist exploitation no longer coincides with the abject poverty of the working class. As Habermas states it: "The interest in the emancipation of society can no longer be articulated directly in economic terms. 'Alienation' has been deprived of its palpable economic form as misery."<sup>28</sup> The horrors of the work place documented so compellingly by Marx have been largely mitigated by increased power of trade unions and government regulation of the work place. Although, while the physical costs to labor have decreased, the psychic costs seem to grow; physical pathology seems to have been replaced by psychopathology.

The third change, which is the logical consequence of the "embourgeoisment" of the proletariat, is that its role as the catalyst of revolution "...has been dissolved." While the vast majority of the population is, by the objective standard of class position, still proletarian,

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<sup>28</sup> (1973), p.195.

as they do not own or control the means of production, the subjective conditions of class consciousness

"...especially a revolutionary class consciousness, is not to be found in the main strata of the working class today."<sup>29</sup> This disjunction between object and subject, which so profoundly influenced the Frankfurt School, still persists. Even where critical thinking is alive it lacks an audience audience whose collective self-deceptions, or perhaps self-understandings, are well armored and defended against cries for enlightenment.

The fourth and final change Habermas notes is the effects the Russian Revolution and subsequent institutionalization of the Soviet state have had on Marxian theory. The Russian Revolution, Habermas argues, originally had "no immediate socialist aims". However, by maintaining and expanding a state bureaucracy controlled by a party elite, it was able under Stalin "to initiate the socialist revolution from above."<sup>30</sup> The success of the Soviet system, both in maintaining its territorial integrity and in rapid industrialization, left it a formidable world power that was seen as a threat to existing capitalist states.

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<sup>29</sup> (1973), p.196.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.197.

Regardless of how one evaluates the course of Soviet history from the Revolution on, it is clear that a repressive state apparatus exists in the Soviet Union and it has no special exemptions from the historical requirement of all repressive states to legitimate itself. As this could only consistently be done using Marx's theories interpreted through Lenin's political practice, Marxist-Leninism became a legitimating ideology hegemonically and ruthlessly imposed on all spheres of social life. What Habermas calls a 'paralysis' of discussion with and among Marxists is a result of the institutionalization of Marxism in the Soviet Union and the different theoretical trajectories that resulted from the subsequent development of a "Western Marxism".

### Epistemology and Knowledge Constitutive Interests

In light of the four changes elaborated above, Habermas understands his theoretical project as a comprehensive reworking of Marxian theory in order to make it adequate to an analysis of advanced capitalism. This involves a reconceptualization of not just the issues discussed above but also such questions as: is the concept

discussed above but also such questions as: is the concept of social labor adequate for distinguishing between humans and animals and what is an adequate theory of social evolution? Habermas' interests do not, however, end there. He has also reformulated epistemological theory in a manner that accounts logically for the interests that inform, or constitute, knowledge. Finally, he has developed a theoretical construct that can, he argues, provide a normative foundation for critical theory--the ideal speech situation.

In Habermas' terms, Marx's theory is both instrumental and emancipatory in its orientation. It is instrumental because Marx failed to understand his theoretical assumptions completely thus miscasting his theory in a scientistic manner. Habermas' analysis, to which we now turn, is designed to locate this tendency within Marx.

Habermas' epistemological theory is as suggestive as it is controversial. He posits three knowledge constitutive interests that are anthropologically deep-seated: empirical-analytic, historical-hermeneutic, and critical. The interests which lie behind these types of theory are technical control, practical understanding, and emancipation, respectively.

The empirical-analytic sciences have as their orientation the production of nomological, or law-like, statements that are deductive and predictive. The empirical sciences, which methodologically detach the subject from the universe of facts, separate descriptive from prescriptive statements and facts from values, functionally proscribe self-reflective knowledge and prevent the understanding of the social constitution of facticity.

The hermeneutic method, originally developed as a philological and historical methodology, differs substantially from the empirical-analytical method. Hermeneutics offers an approach concerned with the explication of meaning and the interpretation of texts. The interest of the investigator is not technical control of natural processes but the understanding of cultural phenomena. Knowledge is achieved through the confrontation of an interpreter, who necessarily brings along his or her own baggage of pre-understandings, and an object of interpretation, such as a text or work of art. The result is a process of contextual analysis that issues in a clarification of obscurities in the understanding of the text and a more coherent interpretation. The interest which guides hermeneutic inquiry is a practical interest

in sustaining traditional meanings and the "preservation and expansion" of intersubjectivity. "The understanding of meaning is directed in its very structure toward the attainment of possible consensus among actors in the framework of a self-understanding derived from tradition."<sup>31</sup>

Now while the social sciences have adopted the positivist goal of technical control through knowledge of the law-like regularities of social action, one tradition of social theory goes beyond that aim. Critical social theory remains profoundly suspicious of law-like regularities in conduct when such regularities can be demonstrated to be fetishized relations of domination ideologically understood (or misunderstood) as natural rather than social phenomena. Individuals can be released from such relations of domination because they are social products and can, in principle, be transformed through self-reflection undertaken to free "...the subject from dependence on hypostatized powers. Self-reflection is determined by an emancipatory cognitive interest".<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> (1971), p. 310.

<sup>32</sup> (1971), p. 310.



### Labor as Instrumental Reason

The question can now be raised: how does Marx's theory stand in relation to Habermas' epistemological typology? Or, to state it differently: what is the epistemological status of Marx's theory? Versions of Marxist theory that have evolved into legitimating ideologies clearly exhibit instrumental and positivistic tendencies. Habermas maintains that these scientific tendencies are, as previously noted, internal to Marx's theory. But he also maintains that Marx's theory is a paradigmatic expression of a critical theory with an emancipatory intent. Indeed, he argues that critical self-reflection is also part of the internal structure of Marx's thought. Thus, Marxian theory embodies two apparently contradictory knowledge constitutive interests. Furthermore, we may assume that Marxian theory lacks the practical interest in maintaining inter-subjectivity manifested in hermeneutic and interpretive theory. We shall now turn to an examination of Habermas' analysis of instrumental rational interest as manifested in Marx's work.

I shall begin with Habermas' discussion of the theoretical linkages between Marx and the German idealist

philosophers. In the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.<sup>33</sup> Marx breaks with Hegel on the question of the identity of spirit and nature. Nature is not the Mind externalized. Rather nature, both "objective and subjective," is a substratum "on which the mind contingently depends".<sup>34</sup> Here the mind presupposes nature, but in the sense of a natural process that "...gives rise likewise to the natural being man and the nature that surrounds him - and not in the idealist sense of a mind that, as Idea existing for itself, posits a natural world as its own self-created presupposition".<sup>35</sup> In this fashion Marx sunders the presupposition of identity in Hegel.

Habermas concedes that what Marx advances against Hegel is no crude materialism. In other words, Habermas does not attribute to Marx the simplistic reflection theories of orthodox Marxism. That he is no crude materialist is indicated by Marx's first "Thesis on Feuerbach",<sup>36</sup> wherein the concept of labor is revealed to be not only an anthropological but an epistemological or

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<sup>33</sup> Marx and Engels (1975).

<sup>34</sup> (1971), p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> (1971), p.26.

<sup>36</sup> Marx and Engels (1976).

knowledge-constitutive concept as well. It is here, Habermas argues, Marx's characterization of man as an objective being acquires the additional meaning of constituting the possible objects of experience.<sup>37</sup> Social reality as it appears is subject to the conditions of the social production of possible objects of experience. History then is not the product of transcendental consciousness in general but rather of individuals in society producing and reproducing their existence through interaction with nature.

Social labor is for Marx a perpetual necessity of human life and involves a "metabolism" between men and nature through which nature can be appropriated in a usable form. Because man is a natural being, this nature includes subjective human nature and the nature of the external environment. Thus this material exchange between man and nature is also a process of nature mediating itself.

External nature loses its facticity and becomes mediated by subjective nature through social labor. This gets at a basic point Habermas wishes to make: labor is an epistemological category because the social appropriation

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<sup>37</sup> (1971), p.27.

of nature both reproduces society and the objectivity of objects of experience that constitute consciousness. Habermas then states "The category of man as a tool making animal signifies a schema both of action and apprehending the world."<sup>38</sup> This indicates the appearance of what is the dominant theme of Habermas' analysis of Marx: social labor is instrumental activity which necessarily results in an instrumental mode of apprehending the world. The adequacy of this analysis is the central question investigated in this work.

Habermas warns the reader of an immanent "transcendental-logical" error, i.e., do not construe labor, as have Marcuse, Sartre and Kosik, as "world constituting life activity in general."<sup>39</sup> The fundamental importance of social labor is "...only as the category of mediating objective and subjective nature. It designates the mechanism of the evolution of the species."<sup>40</sup>

As defined by Habermas, the options are either to construe labor in a restrictive manner or as a general concept. Indeed, here is the conceptual bind: labor is instrumental and if it has any other apparent meanings or

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<sup>38</sup> (1971), p. 28.

<sup>39</sup> (1971), p. 28.

<sup>40</sup> (1971), p. 29.

levels of meanings the interpreter has made a philosophic error. Wherein lies the error: is it in a philosophical notion of labor as that which constitutes history and social being, or is it in the tightly defined economic definition of labor?

Habermas next raises the question of a philosophical anthropology. According to Marx, the human animal distinguishes itself by ensuring societal reproduction through social labor. Thus any anthropology that fails to comprehend human nature as a product of historical development should be rejected. In Habermas' words "...the human species is not characterized by any invariant natural or transcendental structure. The evolutionary concept of the 'nature of man' unmaskes philosophical anthropology as an illusion..."<sup>41</sup>

Now, while Marx saw social labor as both constitutive of social objectivity and social consciousness and further that self-reflective consciousness could lay bare the actual synthesis of subjective and objective nature, he did not, Habermas claims, "arrive at an explicit concept of this synthesis."<sup>42</sup> Habermas' task then is to

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<sup>41</sup> (1971), p.29.

<sup>42</sup> (1971), p. 30.

reconstruct a materialist concept of synthesis and differentiate it from its meanings in German Idealist philosophy.

In contrast to Kant, Fichte and Hegel, synthesis in Marx is neither a function of logic nor consciousness, but a result of social labor. The philosopher ought not turn to logic, language or symbols, but rather ought to look at political economy and production. "Synthesis no longer appears as an activity of thought but as one of material production. The model for the spontaneous reproduction processes of society is the production of nature rather than those of mind."<sup>43</sup>

In Habermas' interpretation, Marx's concept of synthesis retains something of Kant's distinction between form and matter. The difference is that the forms are not ahistorical but rather reflect the contours of social activity. But the most Kantian aspect of Marx's theory, Habermas argues, "is the invariant relation of the species to its natural environment, which is established by the behavioral system of instrumental action"<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> (1971), p. 31.

<sup>44</sup> (1971), p. 35.

The necessity of labor for continued existence leads to a fundamental, virtually apriori structuring of thought and action on instrumental lines. This Kantian aspect of Marx has its implications in the pragmatic or instrumentalist theory of knowledge elaborated by Pierce and Dewey. This type of epistemology can comprehend the relationship of materialism and the natural sciences because "...the technically exploitable knowledge that is produced and tested in research processes of the natural sciences belongs in the same category as the pragmatic knowledge of everyday life acquired through trial and error in the realm of feedback-controlled action."<sup>45</sup> Whether knowledge acquired in everyday life can be so understood is open to question. Less questionable, however, is Habermas' claim that the objectification of instrumental knowledge in the forces of production reacts upon subsequent generations and thus affects the development of new instrumental or technical knowledge.

There are, however, distinctly non-Kantian aspects to Marx's theory. As Habermas states it, Kant's "...pure apperception produces the representation 'I think', which must be able to accompany identically all other representations, without this representation being able to

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<sup>45</sup> (1971), p. 36.

be accompanied by and reflected by a further one."<sup>46</sup> Fichte's position goes even further by arguing that self-consciousness is achieved by abstracting from the content of thought while maintaining the self as an "identical ego." Thus, there is no primacy to either the ego or self-consciousness. The ego comes into existence through the activity of self-consciousness, and neither can be posited without the experience of being that is non-ego.

As "socially laboring subjects", individuals confront an environment (both social and natural) that is formed in the labor process. Thus for Marx social consciousness is formed by the historically existent forces and relations of production as they have been formed by the activity of preceding generations. It is through the synthesis of the labor process that the "species first posit(s) itself as a social subject."<sup>47</sup>

With the discussion summarized above, Habermas places Marx's position in the context of Kant, Fichte and Hegel. Marx rejects at least two of Kant's epistemological assumptions; that of a "fixed knowing subject and that of

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<sup>46</sup> (1971), p.37.

<sup>47</sup> (1971), p. 39.



the distinction between theoretical and practical reason." This is achieved through adopting Hegel's critique. What Marx does not adopt from Hegel is the philosophy of identity, that is, the assumption that categories of thought subsume the material reality they purport to explain without, as Adorno puts it, leaving a remainder. But Marx failed to integrate in his "philosophical frame of reference" structures of communication, "symbolic interaction and the role of cultural tradition, which are the only basis on which power and ideology can be comprehended."<sup>48</sup>

Here, again, there is a degree of ambiguity in Habermas' application of his epistemological typology. Habermas contends Marx did not completely eliminate symbolic interaction, intersubjectivity, and cultural tradition from his analyses and in fact these aspects are evident in his practice of inquiry. In other words, although the concepts of labor and self-reflection are both employed in his empirical studies Marx nevertheless had, in Habermas' view, a restricted philosophical understanding of his "practice" in which self-reflection is reduced to instrumental activity. That is to say, Marx's, or the materialist, concept of synthesis is too

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<sup>48</sup> (1971), p. 42.

narrow to adequately comprehend the dimensions of symbolic interaction, tradition and the critique of ideology.

### Positivism in Marx

Marx's theory is thus unable to provide a theoretical basis for self-reflective knowledge and, Habermas, contends is therefore unable to prevent a positivist dissolution (or resolution) of a broad range of theoretical, but most specifically epistemological, issues. The "immanent" reason for this failure is the "reduction of the self-generative act of the species to labor."<sup>49</sup> Despite the fact that Marx's theory includes a systematic understanding of social relations, "symbolic interaction" and "cultural tradition", these insights are not systematically incorporated into his theoretical frame of reference. This leaves Marx with a gap between his "practice of inquiry" and theoretical self-understanding. That is to say Marx, in his work, accounted for labor, social interaction and symbolic interaction, yet he still misunderstands this practice and "interprets what he does

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<sup>49</sup> (1971), p. 42.

in the more restricted conception of the species self-reflection through work alone."<sup>50</sup>

Habermas states his central claim in the following ways. "Marx reduces the process of reflection to the level of instrumental action...Marx conceives of reflection according to the model of production..." and finally, "Marx deludes himself about the nature of reflection when he reduces it to labor."<sup>51</sup>

These characterizations indicate an implicit problem with Habermas' analysis: labor, instrumental action and production are each identified with the others. One way, I suggest, to approach the question of the accuracy of Habermas' interpretation of Marx is, therefore, to pose the question: did Marx conceive of labor, instrumental action and production as identical terms? The analysis of Marx in Chapter Two will investigate this question by focusing on the conceptual structure that Marx employs. By disentangling the meanings and levels of analysis of labor through a reconstruction of Marx, further light can be shed on this question.

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<sup>50</sup> (1971), p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> (1971), p.43,4.

One area in which Marx's failure to distinguish between labor and interaction that has important consequences is the question of the distinction between the natural and cultural sciences. While failing to address the logical status of critique and science, Habermas claims Marx did not eliminate the distinctions between the two. The ambiguity is reflected in Marx's clear intention of establishing a 'critique' of political economy versus his tendency to identify his theory with the natural sciences.

In Habermas' reading, Marx intends to uncover "the economic law of motion of modern society as a 'natural law'."<sup>52</sup> This interpretation is buttressed by references to the epilogue to the Second Edition of Capital, and by appeal to the German Ideology, which presumably shows that even the young Marx held to this positivist position. The relevant passage from the German Ideology is: "Natural science will eventually subsume the science of man just as the science of man will subsume natural science: there will be a single science."<sup>53</sup> This passage, seemingly ambiguous and utopian enough, is in Habermas' reading a

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<sup>52</sup> (1971), p. 45.

<sup>53</sup> (1971), p. 46.

clear call for a "natural science of man" with "astonishing" positivistic implications.

Through this interpretation of Marx's attitude toward the natural sciences and the relationship of science to industry, Habermas argues that the production process constitutes "the only framework in which the genesis and function of knowledge can be interpreted..."<sup>54</sup> Thus Marx subsumed the human sciences under the categories of instrumental knowledge for the purpose of control. Knowledge of persons, social interaction etc., becomes knowledge of the power of social control and manipulation.

This is further evidenced, Habermas maintains, in the controversial passage on science and industry in the Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Okonomie. As interpreted by Habermas, Marx here constructs a model of social evolution in which social consciousness is determined strictly by technological development. "According to this construction the history of transcendental consciousness would be no more than the residue of the history of technology."<sup>55</sup> The relevant passage, as interpreted by Habermas, again realizes the

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<sup>54</sup> (1971), p. 47.

<sup>55</sup> (1971), p. 48.

intention of the 'early Marx' to construct a natural science of man. Habermas terms the above reflections by Marx rather unorthodox. That is to say they are not taken up in Capital, for which the Grundrisse was a rough draft. In other writings, Habermas contends, Marx did not argue that the development of technology led to the liberation of social subjects from domination by capital. In other places "Marx very precisely distinguished the self-conscious control of the social life process by the combined producers from an automatic regulation of the process of production that has become independent of these individuals."<sup>56</sup>

This again points to Habermas' perception of a fundamental ambiguity in Marx's theoretical framework: he sometimes views social labor (instrumental activity) as the foundation of social consciousness, at other times he recognizes that technological development of the productive forces cannot lead to emancipation without self consciousness. Society may free itself from domination of external nature through social labor and the acquisition of technically useful knowledge but emancipation from the domination of social institutions can only be achieved through reconstructed social and communicative relations

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<sup>56</sup> (1971), p.51.

that are "free from domination." The latter can only be realized through class struggle and critical theoretical reflection. The attempt by Marx to capture these two dimensions in the concepts of forces and relations of production was unsuccessful because: "...the meaning of this 'dialectic' must remain unclarified as long as the materialist synthesis of man and nature is restricted to the categorical framework of production." In sum, Marx's materialist synthesis of Kant, Fichte and Hegel is inadequate for its failure to account for the dimension of "self-formation through critical revolutionary activity."<sup>57</sup>

Habermas contends that one must turn to the early writings of Hegel to find an analysis of the dialectic of moral life adequate to comprehend the dimension of social and symbolic interaction. On the basis of this moral dialectic Habermas suggests that Marx could have analyzed exploitation as a crime and revolution as morally justified retribution imposing the "causality of fate upon the rulers."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> (1971), p.55.

<sup>58</sup> (1971), p. 57.

It is not, however, a moral dialectic that is the center of Marx's critique of capitalism. Capitalism relies not on religion for legitimation, but on a secular ideology of equal exchange in the market. Capitalism justifies itself on the basis of this socially produced illusion that is manifested in the consciousness of all classes. The appropriation of the surplus by the dominant class in capitalist society is kept obscured by the commodification of all aspects of the reproduction of social life, including labor, and their exchange in the marketplace. The development of productive forces, i.e., the objectification of social labor as manifested in tangible wealth, makes at least theoretically possible the recognition of the disproportionate relation of the possibilities of social life to the actualities of existent social life. Reflection that can pierce the illusions of commodity fetishism and grasp the disparity of actuality and possibility takes the social form of a class conscious proletariat and class struggle. Habermas makes this point quite succinctly: "The development of the forces of production at any time augments the disproportion between institutionally demanded and objectively necessary repression, thereby making conscious



the existing untruth, the felt disruption of a moral totality."<sup>59</sup>

On this basis Habermas argues there are two implications for social theory. First, social theory is "continuous" with self-reflective class consciousness. Second, social theory must recognize that it is implicated in the process it seeks to understand. The epistemic subject "...must direct the critique of ideology at itself."<sup>60</sup> In other words, if the subject wishes to break the spell of objective illusion, commodity fetishism, and the weight of cultural tradition, it must reflect upon and understand its formation in the context of the history of social labor and consciousness.

Habermas summarizes his critique of Marx in the following way:

...if social practice does not only accumulate the successes of instrumental action but also, through class antagonism, produces and reflects an objective illusion, then, as a part of this process, the analysis of history is possible only in a phenomenologically mediated mode of thought. The science of man is critique and must remain so.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> (1971), p.61.

<sup>60</sup> (1971), p.61.

<sup>61</sup> (1971), p. 62.

### Emancipatory Interest in Marx

The epistemological status of Marxian theory, as previously noted, is not unambiguous. It is instrumental in its orientation as well as critical and self-reflective. While, for Habermas, the natural sciences are paradigmatic of an interest in technical control, Marx's and Freud's theories are paradigmatic of emancipatory interest. Marxism, as a form critical theory, should have critical self-reflection built into its very theoretical structure as well as specifying the historical conditions in which self-reflection is possible and how self-reflection is blocked. Thus the methodological status of Marxian theory is qualitatively different from the natural sciences and the Geistwissenschaften. It is neither science nor philosophy but somehow between science and philosophy.

The unique status of Marxian theory is described by Habermas in the following passage:

Historical materialism aims at achieving an explanation of social evolution which is so comprehensive that it embraces the interrelationships of the theory's own origins and application. The theory specifies the conditions under which reflection on the history of our species by members

of this species themselves has become objectively possible..."<sup>62</sup>

While it specifies its origins and applications, it goes further to specify the audience that it seeks to enlighten. This critical dimension separates it from the "objectivistic posture" of the sciences and from the "monologic" and contemplative forms of traditional philosophy.

As noted above, the 'elevation' of Marxian theory into dogma, and the historic confrontation of the two world systems has distorted and frequently paralyzed discussion and understanding of Marx. In the United States, the study of Marxism has flourished during the last decade prompted in part by the experience of the 1960's and the attempt to find a mode of analysis to replace a discredited positivism. This search has been largely carried out within the academic division of labor: Marxian economics, sociology, political science, history and philosophy have all developed and flourished. The work within these fields however is not cut of the same cloth. There are significant and persistent divisions between explicitly orthodox and heterodox theorists, the implicitly orthodox, the philosophically inclined and the

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<sup>62</sup> (1973), p. 1.

empirically inclined. Hence, an important underlying issue of academic debate is whether Marxian theory is science, philosophy or critique.

To clarify this situation the theoretical structure of Marxian theory and its status as critique must be brought to light. In a brief section Habermas examines the historical usages of critique and crisis.<sup>63</sup> In its earliest forms, crisis and critique referred to: 1) the necessity of deciding a "dispute over right..." (Greek), 2) "medical usage" (Roman), and 3) salvation (Gospel of St. John). Early bourgeois theory was comfortable with the concept of critique as it wished to demystify existing feudal relations. Feudal relations were dissolving on their own and there seemed to be no concurrent societal crisis to impel the process of critique. With the advent of Hegel's system, however, world history was conceived as a process of crisis ridden development. But Hegel failed to comprehend critique as part of that development. In Hegel, philosophy formed its own self- enclosed totality and saw itself as a synthetic process, superior to the crisis, not involved in it. Now, as Habermas notes, Marx rejected this contemplative attitude while he

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<sup>63</sup> (1973), p. 2.

was still a student.<sup>64</sup> His own approach deliberately restored the necessary relationship between social crisis and critique. The exploitation of labor and the crisis ridden development of capital provide the social basis for the critique of political economy.

If, in capitalist society, economic factors hold determinate power and act on society like a force of nature, subjects must adapt to them appropriately. Marx's theory, which understands this relationship as the domination of dead over living labor, or as I shall stress latter, being over becoming, strives to demistify the relationship by showing it to be a product of social labor under conditions of alienation and exploitation.

Herein lies the classic problem in the philosophy of history: man makes history and can in principle know it, but man is also made by history. Habermas expresses this as follows:

The historical subjects are...split up into their noumenal and phenomenal aspects: they are the authors of their history, but still they have not yet constituted themselves as its subject--they are at once a causally determined species of nature and morally free individuals.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> (1973), p. 212ff.

<sup>65</sup> (1973), p. 246. Here Habermas is restating Adorno's point that "Society is objective because it refers back to the human beings who create it, and its organizational principles too refer back to subjective consciousness and

What Marx discovered was that what reduces subjects to a "causally determined species" is ironically a product of those subjects. It is the domination of dead over living labor; capital over wage labor. Marx's theory is emancipatory in this centrally important way: social theory seeks enlightenment (in understanding the conditions of the domination of capital and in explaining why this domination is perceived as natural) and a practical transformation of the social relations that reproduce this domination.

### Conclusion

In the foregoing exposition of Habermas' critique of Marx I have indicated several of Habermas' most important and controversial points. In sum, they are: social labor is instrumental behavior. It is a 'transcendental-logical' error to construe it otherwise. Labor is not a general category signifying life activity. Marx's

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its most general form of abstraction - logic, something essentially subjective. Society is objective because, on account of its underlying structure, it cannot perceive its own subjectivity, because it does not possess a total subject and through its organization it thwarts that installation of such a subject." (1973), p.54-55.

understanding of labor is: instrumental and productive activity imposed by the necessity of transforming nature into useful objects.

The instrumental appropriation of nature necessarily entails an instrumental mode of apprehending the world. Marx's instrumental ontology and anthropology implies an instrumental epistemological theory. Instrumental knowledge is materialized in the forces of production and each generation must appropriate that apparatus, adapt themselves to its constraints, and alter it through new activity. This alienation of the collective social product is the material basis of the claim that historical subjects are both causally determined and morally free, self-reflective individuals.

Marx's theory cannot account for self-reflection since Marx conceives of self-reflection on the model of instrumental activity. Epistemological issues will tend to be resolved in a positivistic manner. This results in a behavioral explanation of consciousness and a theoretical subversion of the possibilities for self-reflection. Thus, Marx is inclined to misunderstand his theory as a kind of natural science.

Whether this account is correct or not, as noted earlier, requires a detailed and systematic study of Marx's usage of the term labor and its role in the structure of Marx's theory. The relevant questions raised above are: 1) Is Marx's understanding of labor restricted to instrumental activity narrowly defined; 2) did Marx hold that the genesis and constitution of knowledge are structured by instrumental activity); 3) did Marx understand his work to be a kind of natural science?

These questions, which will focus the analysis in Chapter Two, are subsumed by the more general problem concerning the nature of Marx's epistemological assumptions. Is Marx's epistemology instrumental and therefore positivist, or self-reflective and therefore emancipatory? If it is both, as Habermas seems to suggest, does this represent an inherent flaw of lack of coherence in Marx's theory, or does the problem lie in Habermas's analysis of Marx and his application of the theory of knowledge-constitutive interests? It is to these broader questions this work now seeks to address through a reconstruction of the structure of Marx's usage of the concept of labor. What meanings does labor have in the spheres of philosophical anthropology, ontology, epistemology, and economics and what, if any, structure can be found in the relationships between theoretical role



of labor in Marx and the structure of his analysis of capitalism.

## C H A P T E R   I I

### MARX'S CONCEPT OF LABOR

#### Introduction

In this chapter I will examine Marx's work to determine the cogency of Habermas' analysis. As we have seen, Habermas wishes to construe Marx's concept of labor in a highly restrictive way, i.e., instrumental activity. I will argue that this interpretation is not simply wrong, partial or inadequate, although to an extent it is all of these, but rather that it fails to account for the complex and diverse meanings and theoretical functions that Marx's writings evidence. The concept of labor in Marx cannot be subsumed by the concept of instrumental activity as Habermas argues.

Ultimately, Habermas' account entails a fundamental misunderstanding of Marx's critique of capitalism, and of the structure of Marx's thought. Indeed, it is Habermas' failure to understand the structure of Marx's theory that

makes his particular misinterpretation of the concept of labor possible.

Marx's theoretical structure is, I shall argue, doubly bisected. It is bisected first by the appearance/reality distinction and, second, by a distinction between the metatheoretical and historical levels of analysis.<sup>66</sup> Habermas' analysis is compromised by his failure to take these distinctions fully into account. Thus, he takes Marx's account of the form labor takes in capitalist society and projects that meaning into the metatheoretical level. By so doing, he obliterates the distinction between the two levels of analysis and thus fails to see that there is a normative basis other than capitalist, instrumental rationality underlying Marx's critique.

I begin by reconstructing Marx's assumptions about human nature, ontology, epistemology, and economics. The first concern is to elaborate the meaning of labor in each

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<sup>66</sup> Because the historical level terms in Marx's theory are themselves theory-laden, that is are not simply empirical, I have termed the more abstract level concepts metatheoretical rather than theoretical. This level of concepts will be discussed more fully in Chapter III. R. P. Wolff [(1984), p. 114] makes a similar point arguing that abstract homogeneous socially necessary labor is not a descriptive concept in the sense that one can find it in material available to the senses.

of these spheres. This is the necessary first step in evaluating Habermas' claim of a univocal meaning. I will be asking 1) how labor defines human nature, 2) how labor constitutes the complex of relations between the subject and self (internal nature), external nature, socially produced objectivity, and others, 3) how the structure of Marx's epistemological assumptions reflect the distinction between appearance and reality, and, 4) the meaning of labor in Marx's economic theory. The second concern is to elaborate the structure of Marx's theory vis-a-vis the above mentioned distinctions.

As noted, many Marx interpreters have claimed to have found some sort of split, rupture, dichotomy or contradiction. Rejecting formulations of this sort, I propose to demonstrate rather far reaching coherences among the various aspects of Marx's theory. Generally, it can be argued that a social theory is more plausible and persuasive when its assumptions made in one aspect cohere with parallel assumptions in other aspects. The greater the number of coherences established, the greater the power or explanatory force of a theory. Connolly has explained this criterion of coherence testing as follows:

In speculative theory, claims articulated on one domain can be checked for their consistency...with assumptions accepted in others. Judgements reached with confidence in one area can be brought to bear on issues posed in more problematic or mysterious areas of a theory...The more encompassing the theory, the

greater the variety of coherence tests each of the component parts must pass."<sup>67</sup>

The coherence of Marx's assumptions in the different spheres of his theory indicates the inadequacy of the various "two Marx(isms)" interpretations. The coherences established in the following pages transcend all formulations that bear a family resemblance to the young/old Marx controversy and/or postulate some philosophical turning point in the evolution of his thought.

Since Marx never wrote a philosophical work expounding on his method, interpreters are forced to reconstruct his method and assumptions employing a hermeneutic exercise that most nearly resembles an intellectual jig-saw puzzle. Because most interpreters have failed to recognize that Marx's theoretical structure is bisected by the appearance/reality distinction and by a historical and metatheoretical level of theory, the resulting picture is, not surprisingly, contradictory. As we shall see, Habermas makes this sort of error when he takes the historically specific observation that labor is a commodity and then projects the same meaning into the abstract, or metatheoretical, level.

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<sup>67</sup> (1979), p. 397,8.

Finally, in approaching the question of Marx's assumptions it is common to explicate them in relationship to Hegel, i.e., the infamous inversion of the Hegelian dialectic and rational kernel inside the mystical shell. Indeed, a substantial portion of scholarly disputation of Marx resolves itself into interpretations of Hegel and Marx's Hegelianism. Robert Paul Wolff<sup>68</sup> has suggested that a clearer understanding of Marx's Capital can be gained if we understand its structure as an inversion of the "Allegory of the Cave" in Plato's Republic.

Plato's allegory is the most profound statement of the appearance/reality distinction in Western philosophy, albeit from an idealist perspective. In Marx's reversal of the metaphor one does not achieve enlightenment by freeing oneself from the cave and escaping to the sunlight. Instead, the light of the marketplace is itself blinding. The marketplace itself creates illusions, namely, that there rule freedom, equality, property and Bentham.

This is the realm of appearances; a reality which seems so clear and straight forward that participants in it do not feel mystified and thus not in need of

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<sup>68</sup> (1980).

enlightenment. Marx's first job, like Plato's lover of wisdom who escapes into the sunlight, is to convince his audience that their marketplace creates illusions. Thus, Marx expounds at length on the intricacies of commodities and exchange.

Only then can Marx expose the reality concealed within those illusions. "Reality lies behind the factory door, within the dimly lighted workrooms, where men, women, and children are chained for endless hours to brutal machines. In the flickering light of that cave can be seen the truth of capitalism."<sup>69</sup>

I suggest this analysis can be specified further. I argue that the structure of Marx's metatheoretical assumptions (specifically the ontological and epistemological) also reveal a kind of inversion of Plato's assumptions vis-a-vis the realms of being and becoming, objectivity (fixity) and subjectivity (motion). Examining Marx's assumptions in this light will make clearer the central role of the concept labor on the metatheoretical level.

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<sup>69</sup> (1980), p. 763.

Labor in Marx's Anthropology

In a biting aside in Capital Marx pilloried Jeremy Bentham, "a genius in the way of bourgeois stupidity," for advancing an ahistorical, reified and one-dimensional theory of human nature. Like the "Robinsonades", Bentham erred in assuming that human nature as manifested in nineteenth century England is the norm, "the yardstick to be applied to the past, the present and the future." Marx caustically notes if one wishes to discover what has utility for a dog "one must investigate the nature of dogs," not deduce it from utilitarian principles. Marx goes on to say:

Applying this to man, he that would judge all human acts, movements, relations, etc. according to the principle of utility would first have to deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as historically modified in each epoch.<sup>70</sup>

Interestingly, most of the discussion of Marx's theory of human nature in the secondary literature focuses on the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. Struggling as he was at that point in his life with a critique of Hegel, Marx's language is difficult and at times rather tortured. While there are, of course,

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<sup>70</sup> (1977), p. 758,9.



important insights into the problems of philosophical anthropology to be gained from a close reading of the Manuscripts, perhaps Marx's clearest and most concise single statement on the subject is the quote cited above. Ironically, references to it in the secondary literature are virtually non-existent until recently. For example, Schlomo Avineri, in his classic work on Marx with its important contribution to the discussion of human nature, never cites it. John McMurty, on the other hand, centers his discussion of human nature precisely on the distinction between human nature in general and as historically modified.<sup>71</sup> Undoubtedly a large part of the reason for the focus on the early Marx to explain his anthropology has to do with the historical circumstances of the discovery and release of the Manuscripts. Published in the late 1920's, the immediately provided a challenge to Marxian orthodoxy's general view that human nature was little more than the sum total of existing social relations: that consciousness reflects being.<sup>72</sup> The Manuscripts provided Western Marxist with the needed

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<sup>71</sup> McMurty. (1978), pp.19-53.

<sup>72</sup> the tone, style and substance of Herbert Marcuse's essay "The Foundations of Historical Materialism," published in 1932, evidence the profound impact the publication of the Manuscripts had on theoretical debate and how they provided ammunition for the Neo-Marxist critique of the Marxism of the Second International. Marcuse (1972), p.1-48.

ammunition to challenge the orthodoxy and, in fact, spark a new intellectual movement: Marxist Humanism.

The critical point as regards this analysis is that Marx quite clearly distinguishes two levels of analysis of human nature: 'in general' and as 'historically modified' or as I designate them in this analysis: metatheoretical and historical. While the phenomenal record of human nature in history may seem to indicate that it is dynamic and seemingly infinitely variable, Marx argues that one can abstract certain valid general statements. What is constant, as Avineri puts it, "is historical creation as constant anthropogenesis..."<sup>73</sup> On the metatheoretical level certain characteristics may be ascribed to human beings: they are active, objective, natural, sensuous and social beings. And as the Marxist humanists would state it: alienation represents the historical fate of human nature under capitalism. Marx tried to capture the general determinants of human nature in five terms. Humans are active (labor), objective, natural, sensuous and social beings.

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<sup>73</sup> Avineri (1968), p. 85. This is probably Avineri's most important contribution to the interpretation of Marx's anthropological assumptions.

Marx characterizes labor as a central determinant of human nature and social relations. He notes in the Manuscripts that a virtue of Hegel's philosophy is that it sees the process of human self-creation, alienation, transcendence and the "dialectic of negativity" as the moving force in history. Hegel's dialectic is preeminently a dialectic of labor seeking to conceptualize the objectification of labor in objects, the loss or alienation and the transcendence of alienated states of being. In an oft quoted line Marx states: "Hegel's standpoint is that of modern political economy. He grasps labor as the essence of man..."<sup>74</sup> But in Hegel, objects never appear in their material aspect; they only appear as "consciousness or self-consciousness." Human labor appears only as the activity of self-consciousness and in an estranged form. Thus: "The only labor which Hegel knows and recognizes is abstractly mental labor."<sup>75</sup>

Human beings are capable, through their activity, of objectifying their activity to produce objects. Nature supplies the materials in which labor becomes objectified or realized. In this sense labor is a relational concept; it mediates between man and nature. As a specific quality

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<sup>74</sup> (1975), p.

<sup>75</sup> (1975), p.333.

of man's being labor allows man "to relate to the general aspects of objects and to the possibilities contained in them."<sup>76</sup> Every object can become the object of labor and labor is the ability to transform the given state of an object to realize its latent potential. Labor is thus 1) a characteristic of human nature, 2) a mediation of subject and object, 3) transformative in that the subject can make-over objects and 4) capable of objectification through its 'embodiment' in objects. Human labor is the material, sensuous presentation of the subject, i.e., the subject's self-creation.

The activity of human subjects, Marx argues, is not blind, random and chaotic but rather conscious, intentional and form-giving. The objects of labor represent a subject's conscious intentions or purposes. This ability of homo sapiens indicates qualities unknown in other animals. The products of labor represent "...natural material transformed into the organs of the human will over nature. They are organs of the human brain, created by the human hand, the power of knowledge objectified."<sup>77</sup> The labor process in general, the metabolism between man and nature is a process of mental

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<sup>76</sup> Marcuse (1972), p. 16.

<sup>77</sup> (1973), p.706.

and manual labor, of thought and thought (rule) governed activity. In the labor process, the result is conceived prior to the activity and the intended result "determines the mode of his activity."<sup>78</sup>

Several important points should be noted here. First, Marx's position on consciousness as a general characteristic of human nature is one that McMurty, for example, refers to as "projective consciousness"<sup>79</sup> and I refer to as rule and/or thought governed activity. Habermas wants to maintain that Marx misunderstood the concept of synthesis. Rather, Marx saw that synthesis is a part of the metatheoretical constitution of social labor. For Kant, "...synthesis is rule-directed mental activity,"<sup>80</sup> while for Marx, the synthetic process is labor with rule governed thought as an aspect of that process.

Consciousness, and the language that structures conscious understanding, is an integral element of the labor process. Therefore, the attribution to Marx of a theory of the dependency of consciousness on the labor

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<sup>78</sup> (1977), p. 284.

<sup>79</sup> (1978), p. 23-30.

<sup>80</sup> Wolff (1963), p. viii.

process, i.e., that it is solely a result of the labor process, is false. In capitalist society, however, conscious activity is not a characteristic of laboring individuals. In effect, consciousness, or mental labor, and work, brute activity shorn of any connection to projective consciousness, devolves on different individuals and social classes. Indeed this is the most significant form of the division of labor for Marx. In primitive society consciousness appears as a kind of "direct efflux" of social life and the division of labor takes a spontaneous, "natural" form.<sup>81</sup> However, "Division of labor only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labor appears."<sup>82</sup> The elevation of the division of mental and material labor to a principle of social organization in capitalist society has the profoundest consequences not only for the structure of the production process but also for the structure of social relations and ideology (alienated consciousness).

Second, consciousness, as Marx emphasizes constantly in the German Ideology, is as much a human product as a commodity. "Men are the producers of the conceptions,

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<sup>81</sup> (1975), p. 36.

<sup>82</sup> (1975), p. 44,5.

ideas, etc., and precisely men conditioned by the mode of production of their material life, by the material intercourse and its further development in the social and political structure."<sup>83</sup> It should be clear that consciousness, then, is not a simple result of the producer's economic, or productive, or instrumental activity, but rather it is conditioned by a totality of social relations. Specifically, Marx argues that social activity is comprised of three aspects "or, to make it clear to the Germans, three 'moments', which existed simultaneously since the dawn of history."<sup>84</sup> These aspects are: production and the production of new needs as the first historical act, familial relations, which in primitive society are a dominant relation but which later becomes a subordinate to other social relations, and finally consciousness.

Third, it must be noted that conscious understanding, the ideas and conceptions people hold may be both or either real or illusory and may be either "fetters and limitations" or enlightening. That is to say, they may be science or ideology. When, as noted above, a division of mental and material labor obtains for society, it can

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<sup>83</sup> (1976), p. 36.

<sup>84</sup> (1976), p. 43.

become the case that consciousness becomes both unmoored from social activity and the property and production of the ruling class. When this occurs one part of the dominant class becomes that class's thinkers, "...its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the formation of illusions of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood." The social reproduction of consciousness is then part of the reproduction of relations of domination and therefore productive of illusions and ideological justification "of the very empirical fetters and limitations...which move the mode of production of life, and the form of intercourse coupled with it."<sup>85</sup>

In addition to being active, objective and conscious, humans are sensuous beings. As Marcuse has argued, sensuousness is "an ontological concept within the definition of man's essence."<sup>86</sup> Marx's assumption is that all human activity and knowledge must have, as a starting point, sense perception and the orientation toward and appropriation of objects by subjects is determined by the historical character of the five senses.

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<sup>85</sup> (1976), p. 45.

<sup>86</sup> (1972), p. 19.



The textual indications are that Marx held a broader concept of sensuousness that included not only the sense awareness of external objects and nature, but also includes conscious awareness of the subject's body and the perceptible needs and desires that arise or originate from that body. Marx held that sense perception has a "two-fold form", external perception and internal perception or, as Marx phrased it, "sensuous consciousness and sensuous need". This additional meaning of sensuousness is evidenced by Marx's inclusion of such faculties as feeling, wanting and loving in a listing of sensuous relations.<sup>87</sup> Marx also refers to the fact that man's active "natural powers of life" manifest themselves "... as tendencies and abilities--as instincts" toward external objects and these take the form of passions or needs. Marx's concept of sensuousness can be summarized as including 1) perception of external nature and socially produced objects and 2) internal, subjective nature as it is socially formed. The conscious, sensuous activity of the subject, "each of his human relations to the world" is constituted in the "objective orientation" and "appropriation" of the object. The actual history of the subject's orientation and appropriation of self (as wage laborer), others and nature (as utilitarian objects)

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<sup>87</sup> (1975), p. 299-300.

represent, Marx argues, ontological relations in an estranged, or historical form. Here again Marx contrasts "needs and enjoyment" in their egotistical and utilitarian form with a human, social form of appropriation.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, Marx defines man as a social being who takes other individuals as objects of consciousness and activity. Human life is always "carried out in association with others."<sup>89</sup> That is to say that social life is carried out within specific historical conditions and the framework of a particular social formation.

Again, the textual evidence suggests Marx holds a more complex concept of social being. He is careful to note that human activity, even in an estranged form, is social and that the concept of estranged, or alienated, relations implies a concept of non-alienated relations. Non-alienated relations, Marx argues, manifest themselves as the need for a bond of unity between individuals and nature.

For example, Marx refers to the relationship between man and woman as a natural and essential species

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<sup>88</sup> (1975), p. 299-300.

<sup>89</sup> (1975), p. 299.

relationship. Further, from this relationship one can judge the nature of other relationships. Indeed,

"one can judge man's whole level of development. This relationship also reveals the extent to which mans need has become a human need; the extent to which...the other person as a person has become for him a need--the extent to which he in his individual existence is at the same time a social being.<sup>90</sup>

The above passage is found in the chapter of the Manuscripts entitled "Private Property and Communism." This context is important for understanding Marx's second or metatheoretical level of meaning of the concept social. The dominant theme and subject of analysis of the Manuscripts is alienation or estranged labor. The leitmotif of the chapter, "Private Property and Communism" is the supercession of alienation and private property through communism. The conception of man as a social being manifested as a bond or unity is elaborated as a counter-concept in contrast to alienated relations.

In sum, Marx clearly distinguished two levels of analysis in his discussion of human nature: in general and as historically modified. On the general, or metatheoretical level, Marx characterizes labor as that which links subject and object and creates social being.

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<sup>90</sup> (1975), p. 296.

He also points to a two leveled meaning to the concepts of sensuousness and social: each can be understood in their human form and in alienated historical forms. Indeed, in the early Marx, alienation represents the general state of historical being which sunders the set of general relations described above.

I will now turn to a discussion of Marx's ontology focusing first on these relations in general, or metatheoretically, and then on the historical forms they take in capitalism. As will become apparent in the final section of this chapter, Marx's economic categories are a systematic working out of a theory in which labor is understood metatheoretically and historically.

### Marx's Ontology

Traditionally, ontological questions have to do with what is real, i.e., questions of being (objectivity) and becoming (change). Thought must attempt to reflect being or articulate the relations between, and properties of, things. Thus it was generally held that ontology had priority over epistemology. Being was held to be prior to knowledge of being.

Marx clearly held certain assumptions about ontology in a philosophical sense, but was just as certainly unconcerned with exploring the classical philosophical questions such as the nature of being as such, or 'in itself,' or why there is being rather than nothing. His ontological assumptions are oriented toward answering questions about social and historical reality. Marx's concern was exploring the "practical relations of everyday life between man and man and man and nature."<sup>91</sup>

However, Marx's concerns were not completely divorced from the more classical concerns of philosophy. The classical metaphysical concerns, such as appearance and reality, being and becoming, and being and consciousness, take on a palpable social dimension. The problem of appearance and reality becomes the problem of the equal exchange and exploitation. The problem of becoming and being is transformed into understanding the active laboring subject and socially produced objectivity and, in capitalism, the alienated labor of the subject and alienated social product. The relation of being and consciousness and questions of the priority of either lose their abstractness to become the relation of alienated

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<sup>91</sup> (1977), p. 173.

social labor, socially produced objectivity and the social origins of fetishized consciousness.

In speaking of the labor process in general, abstracted from its specific historical form, one can identify three aspects: 1) human activity, or labor, 2) the material to be worked upon, and 3) the instruments of labor. In the labor process the laborer employs the instruments of labor, which are a complex of tools that "serve as the conductor of his activity,"<sup>92</sup> to the materials, which comprise the subject of the labor process. The labor process is therefore primarily a regulated interchange between man and nature. Man, collectively and socially, appropriates objects in nature to subject them to the labor process so that he may produce the use values necessary for continued social existence. Human beings, who are themselves part of nature, oppose themselves to nature and bring to bear upon it their own natural and historically developed capabilities in order to appropriate material from nature and alter to a "form adapted to (their) own wants."<sup>93</sup> The manner in which the stuff of nature, use values, enter the production process (whether as raw materials or

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<sup>92</sup> (1977), p. 179.

<sup>93</sup> (1977), p. 177.

instrument), is determined by the position it occupies, e.g., its function in the process. When a social product enters into a new production process it loses its social character to become an objective material factor "contributing to living labor."<sup>94</sup>

Human labor is not identifiable with the primitive, instinctual forms of activity manifested by animal. Rather, Marx "presuppose(s) labor in a form that stamps it as exclusively human." What differentiates the weaver from the spider or the architect from the bee is that weaver and architect produce an object that they had conceived of prior to the commencement of the labor process. "What distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality." The laborer must have a 'practical' knowledge of the material to be worked upon such that he can transform the object as it is given in nature to a state that is useful to him. The blacksmith, for example, does not simply appropriate crude iron ore and subject it blindly to a series of random processes in hopes of coming up with a horseshoe. Rather, he makes use of the natural mechanical, physical and chemical properties of the iron ore in rational,

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<sup>94</sup> (1977), p. 289.

purposive ways to effect a useful product. "He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi*..."<sup>95</sup>

The objective factors of production must be employed by living labor so that the use values of these elements can be maintained otherwise they would fall "prey to the destructive power of natural processes. Iron rusts: wood rots." But more importantly: "Living labor must seize on these things, awaken them from the dead, change them from merely possible into real and effective use values."<sup>96</sup>

Strictly speaking the labor process is an interchange of subjective and objective aspects in which subjectivity in the state of becoming is transformed into a state of being. As Marx states it, labor passes "from the form of unrest into that of being, from the form of motion into that of objectivity."<sup>97</sup> Material objectivity then is socially produced. By changing the form of a "piece of natural material" the subject creates a use value and labor has been objectified.

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<sup>95</sup> Here again is another restatement of the nature of rule governed, synthetic activity. (1977), p. 178.

<sup>96</sup> (1977), p. 289.

<sup>97</sup> (1977), p. 296.



"The product of the (labor) process is a use value, a piece of natural material adapted to human needs by means of a change in its form. Labor has become bound up in its object: labor has been objectified, the object has been worked on. What on the side of the worker appeared in the form of unrest now appears, on the side of the product, in the form of being, as a fixed, immobile characteristic."<sup>98</sup>

Alienation, as expressed in the Manuscripts, is a state of being which effects the totality of the subject's relations to objects, whether the objects are the individual's subjective nature, the products of the subject's labor, or others' labor, or other subjects or nature. Marx viewed this complex of relations as internally related and thus the alienation of the subject from any one particular aspect of being effects all other relations. Marx indicates this when he states: "What applies to man's relation to his work, to the product of his labor and to himself, also holds of man's relation to the other man, and to the other man's labor and object of labor."<sup>99</sup>

Whereas Hegel had identified objectification and alienation, Marx separated the terms. Objectification is

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<sup>98</sup> (1977), p. 287. note here the clear contrast MARx draws between labor as becoming and being, between labor as unrest and its fixed, immobile form as being.

<sup>99</sup> (1975), p.

an aspect of human nature and the result of activity applied to material or nature. Alienation is a historically determinate, distorted form of objectification; a form which does not affirm the subject's ontological essence. Alienation thus is a form of objectification which results in an object that "...becomes a power on its own confronting him."<sup>100</sup>

The alienation of the objects of labor result from the social relations of capitalist appropriation and in this form represent, for the subject, a loss of the object. The objectification of labor then "appears as loss of the object and bondage to it."<sup>101</sup> That the subject must alienate his activity, by its sale to the capitalist, indicates the subjects alienation from self. The workers activity becomes a means to his existence rather than an affirmation of the subjects anthropological capability for conscious, intentional, form-giving activity. Alienation is then a state of social being.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> (1975), p.

<sup>101</sup> (1975), p.

<sup>102</sup> As McMurty (1978), p.77) argues, alienation has an objective nature. "Alienation is not for him [Marx], as contemporary usage mystifies it, some psychological malaise peculiar to modern man, but a necessary material concomitant of all private ownership of productive forces."

In sum, alienation refers to the situation that what the laborer produces takes on an existence independent, over and against the producer's own existence and needs. The fixation of alienated labor as a social activity creates a force which dominates the producer. This domination has different aspects; historical, social, and epistemological.

With respect to the historical dimension, the "fixated social activity" of previous generations plays a determinant role in the present. The alienated social product, "thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now."<sup>103</sup> Each generation must appropriate the productive apparatus, both material and cultural, and must adapt itself to it and alter it through new activity. For Marx, this is the real constraint of history:

History is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which uses the materials, the capital funds, the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus, on the one hand, continues the traditional activity on completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> (1976), p. 47-8.

<sup>104</sup> (1976), p. 50.

Earlier I noted that Marx's insight into the classic problem of freedom and determinism in the philosophy of history lies in the recognition that what makes subjects into a "causally determined species" (Habermas' phrase) is, ironically, a product of those subjects. The alienated activity of past generations (of past production cycles), active labor that was transformed from unrest, motion or becoming into fixed material objectivity, or being, is manifested as the force of dead labor over living labor, or past labor over present labor.

With respect to the social dimension, Marx's analysis of alienated labor goes beyond economic relations simply understood to the social relations that constitute the economic. The relations between capital and labor, between capital, labor and commodities, and even relations between commodities are understood as social relations. The laborer, alienated from the means of production and the product, working under the control of the capitalist, finds himself in a society where social relations become thing-like and conversely, relations between things become like social relations.

This occurs because capitalism forces people to relate to one another through the mediation of money and commodities. All aspects of a person's existence are

determined by the value of the commodities possessed and offered for exchange in the market. This includes their class position, social status, standard of living, education, ability to satisfy needs, power and freedom. The laborer participates in society as the owner of a commodity, labor power, which means simply that he has property in himself and can 'choose' to sell his ability to labor. The capitalist participates as the owner of the objective factors of production.

Lacking only the subjective aspect of the labor process, the capitalist buys the appropriate commodity, labor-power, in the market. For the capitalist, the consumption of the commodity labor-power is no different than the consumption of any other thing (raw material, instrument) acquired in the market. As Marx states it:

From his (the capitalist) point of view, the labor process is nothing more than the consumption of the commodity purchased, i.e., of labor power; but he can consume this labor power only by adding the means of production to it. The labor process is a process between things the capitalist has purchased, things which belong to him.<sup>105</sup>

On the metatheoretical level the process is, as noted above, a dynamic of subject and object. In speaking of the labor process in general it was necessary only to

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<sup>105</sup> (1977), p. 292.

delineate those factors "common to all forms of society. We did not, therefore, have to present the worker in his relationship to other workers; it was enough to present man and his labor on one side, nature and its materials on the other."<sup>106</sup> The historically specific conditions of capitalist production stamps the labor process with its own alienated forms i.e., separation from the means of production and the necessity of selling ones labor power.

The second distinction between the historical and metatheoretical levels in that in the former, the capitalist labor process, the intention is to produce surplus value, whereas on the metatheoretical level the objective is simply to produce a use-value. Therefore, in the capitalist labor process, labor is of concern "only in so far as it creates value... Here we are no longer concerned with the quality, the character and the content of the labor, but merely with its quantity."<sup>107</sup>

Finally, alienation has epistemic consequences. Alienated objectivity, that is being that has taken on an existence over and against its producers, constitutes the ontological aspect of the epistemological phenomenon of

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<sup>106</sup> (1977), p. 290.

<sup>107</sup> (1977), p. 296.

fetishism. This, as I shall argue in the following section, evidences a significant coherence in the structure of Marx's theory that may be stated as follows: the primary epistemological consequence of alienated labor is fetishism and Marx's conceptual structure not only points to this but also explains it. As Marx states it: "The objective conditions essential to the realization of labor are alienated from the worker and become manifest as fetishes endowed with a will and soul of their own. Commodities, in short, appear as the purchasers of persons".<sup>108</sup> I explore this issue along with the issues of appearance and reality, science and ideology in the next section.

### Labor in Marx's Epistemology

Some theorists hold that Marx's mode of thought changed from philosophic to scientific. Indeed Althusser once argued that there was an epistemological rupture in Marx's work. And, as noted in Chapter I, Habermas has argued that Marx conceived of his theory as a form of natural science and therefore tends to resolve

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<sup>108</sup> (1977), p. 1003, emphasis in original.

epistemological issues in a positivistic manner.

Habermas, like Althusser, maintains that there is a significant break in Marx's theoretical development.

Habermas argues that:

Marx himself immediately abandoned the anthropological model of labor as externalization, which still furnished the standard for the critique of alienated labor in the 'Paris Manuscripts', and shifted the burden of normative grounding to the labor theory of value.<sup>109</sup>

A result of this shift is the categorization of the human sciences as a natural science, the point upon which much of Habermas' interpretation rests. Marx's social theory becomes an instrumental theory with the 'telos' of power, manipulation and control associated with the natural sciences.

Therefore the debate centers over what Marx meant by science. Both orthodox Marxists and Habermas seem to have taken the dominant cultural meaning of science and attributed that meaning to Marx. As is common in the debates over Marx's theory, a battle of citations has failed to clarify the issue although those references which tend to equate Marx's theory with the natural sciences seem to have had greater currency than those citations which express a more skeptical view of science.

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<sup>109</sup> Thompson, Held (1982), p. 255-6.



Regrettably, in the discourse on this question, citations are used like philosophical clubs. Orthodox Marxists wield the club both to legitimize their theory and to bludgeon "petty bourgeois" Marxists and assorted idealists for failing the test of science.

For Habermas and Charles Taylor, and anti-positivist theorists generally, Marx's claim to be scientific is sufficient to undermine his philosophic credibility or to demonstrate that his theory is rent by an irreducible conflict between romantic and scientific tendencies. Marx's comments in the Postface to the Second Edition of *Capital* are ritually trotted out to demonstrate Marx's 'scientism'. The following quote from Capital, while directed against Proudhon, may serve as a useful comment on this debate: "No school of thought has thrown around the word 'science' more haphazardly than that of Proudhon, for where thoughts are absent, words are brought in as convenient replacements."<sup>110</sup>

The controversy over science and Marx's epistemological assumptions cannot be settled, or, if that is impossible, our understanding advanced, without a more general reconstruction of Marx's assumptions. A

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<sup>110</sup> (1977), p. 161.

determination of a position consistent with that reconstruction can then be made.

Paralleling the structure of his ontology, Marx's epistemology is bisected by the appearance/reality distinction. He thus necessarily distinguishes between science, knowledge of reality, and ideology, knowledge of appearances. Marx is rather blunt in his description of those he characterizes as vulgar economists or ideologists. These economists "flounder around within the apparent framework" of economic relations. They do not advance the science of political economy but rather take on the roles of popularizer and apologist. Hopelessly caught in the realm of appearances, these economists

...seek there plausible explanations of the crudest phenomena for the domestic purposes of the bourgeoisie. Apart from this, the vulgar economists confine themselves to systematizing in a pedantic way, and proclaiming for everlasting truths, the banal and complacent notions held by the bourgeois agents of production about their own world, which is to them the best possible one.<sup>111</sup>

In opposition, Marx defines classical political economy as the analysis of the "...real internal framework of bourgeois relations of production..."<sup>112</sup> Marx is essentially making a distinction between ideology and

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<sup>111</sup> (1977), p. 174-5, ftn. 34.

<sup>112</sup> (1977), p.174-5, ftn. 34.

science. Ideologists have as their exclusive focus a reified objectivity. Like the unfortunates chained to the bottom of Plato's cave, they see only the "semblance of objectivity" and "ruminate" on the relationships between the various "social hieroglyphs" that parade before them. Marx's epistemology is connected to his ontology in this important sense: alienated products of labor in exchange relations come to take on a life of their own and this ontological situation has epistemological consequences: fetishism. Marx points to this in the Grundrisse where he states:

"The bourgeois economists are so much cooped up within notions belonging to a specific stage of historical development that the necessity of the objectification of the powers of social labor appears to them as inseparable from the necessity of their alienation vis-a-vis living labor."<sup>113</sup>

Goods become commodities with all the mysterious characteristics that come with the designation because they are made by private individual producers who must exchange them in the market. "It is only by being exchanged that the products of labor acquire a socially uniform objectivity as values, which is distinct from their sensuously varied objectivity as articles of

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<sup>113</sup> (1973), p. 832. Bourgeois thought, in other words, cannot distinguish between objectification and alienation.

utility."<sup>114</sup> The market functions to establish social relations between things. The ever-changing value relations between things in the market move "independently of the will, fore-knowledge and actions of the exchangers." The movement of commodities then controls the producers rather than being controlled by them. The form that commodities take in this context is the value form and this form has no relation to the "physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relations between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things."<sup>115</sup> Vulgar political economy fails to penetrate this necessary illusion of objectivity but instead remains bounded by it.

Fetishism is a "necessary" illusion, as opposed to a mistake, a simple error in thought or a delusion motivated by subjective desire, in that it results from the material relations of production of commodities for exchange in the market by private independent producers. Seeing through this realm of false objectivity does not make it vanish like a mistaken understanding when the truth is brought out or a delusion when the impulse behind it is altered

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<sup>114</sup> (1977), p. 166.

<sup>115</sup> (1977), p. 165.

through therapy. The recognition of fetishism and the discovery that what underlies this realm of appearances is the "determination of the magnitude of value by labor time" does not make this realm disappear. Rather,

Its discovery destroys the semblance of the merely accidental determination of the magnitude of the value of the products of labor, but by no means abolishes that determination's material form."<sup>116</sup>

The recognition of the law of value, Marx states, "marks an epoch in the history of mankind's development, but by no means banishes the semblance of objectivity possessed by the social characteristics of labor."<sup>117</sup>

In contrast to vulgar political economy, e.g., ideology, science is the investigation of the actual social relations behind, or concealed within this objectivity. Having produced this objectivity men must then "...try to decipher the hieroglyph...for the characteristic which objects of utility have of being values is as much men's social product as is their language."<sup>118</sup>

Several important points should be noted here. First, science, as Marx employed the term, is defined in

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<sup>116</sup> (1977), p. 168.

<sup>117</sup> (1977), p. 167.

<sup>118</sup> (1977), p. 167.

opposition to ideology and within the fundamental distinction between appearance and reality. Second, science is not employed in a way that suggests an identity with the natural sciences whether of a Comtist, Vienna Circle or Popperian variety. Third, it is important to realize that the term 'science' was employed in scientific socialism to distinguish it from 'utopian' socialism.<sup>119</sup> It was not employed by Marx to identify his theory with the natural sciences. Finally, when Marx employed the term science, its meaning was perhaps more akin to the Hegelian nuanced term of 'wissenschaft'. As Russel Jacoby points out, the meaning of 'wissenschaft' is inseparable from history, and association most all advocates of science in its dominant meanings would have considerable problems.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> "...scientific socialism...was used in opposition to utopian socialism, which wants to attach people to new delusions, instead of limiting its science to the knowledge of the social movement made by the people itself." (emphasis added) Marx (1974), p. 337.

<sup>120</sup> "The Hegelian wissenschaft is not wider or larger than the positivist science; rather it is impregnated with history. The natural reality and natural sciences do not know the fundamental historical categories: consciousness and self-consciousness, subjectivity and objectivity, appearance and essence...As object and method, Hegel's Wissenschaft is saturated with history; this finally constitutes Hegel's protest against the positive and empirical sciences." Jacoby (1981), p. 22,23.

Second, science involves the dissolving of fixed, objective forms of being and analyzing the social practices that constitute those forms. Knowledge is the understanding of the process by which labor in the form of motion produces a fixed state of being. Knowledge of the fixed forms of objectivity, in contrast to Plato, is ideological and knowledge of flux, motion and activity, that is human activity or labor, is science.

Third, there is no clear delineation between science (the science of classical political economy) and ideology. The practitioners of classical political economy were not immune from the influences of fetishism. This is most clear, Marx argues, in the failure of Smith and Ricardo to adequately explain the value form. The value form is the "most abstract" and "most universal form of the bourgeois mode of production" and reveals the "historical and transitory character" of capitalism. By beginning its investigations "post festum" political economy mistakes that universality as an "external natural form of social production." Exchange value seems to be an immutable form rather than a specific, historically conditioned result.<sup>121</sup> Put simply, political economy begins with socially produced forms as given and natural and thus proceeds to

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<sup>121</sup> (1977), pp.168-74.

read these forms back into history and project them into the future. Fetishism flattens out the historical dimension making it into a projection of the present.

That such profound and insightful thinkers as Smith and Ricardo failed to penetrate the nature of value form yet were not ideologists poses an interesting paradox: they were seemingly both ideologists and not ideologists, scientists and not scientists. They were not ideologists in that their work and insight were not confined to and in the realm of appearances, i.e., they were more than simple apologists for the existing order. But their thought was regulated by some principles that resulted in work that was not completely free of ideological consequences; of fetishism.

Scientific knowledge necessitates the resolution of material objectivity back into the ontological relation of subjectivity and objectivity. The realm of being and objectivity in capitalism, the alienated social product must be understood as constituted by the realm of becoming, that is by labor in the form of motion.

Reflection upon that objectivity begins, as noted earlier, post festum. The results of that history are a given and the starting point for reflection. Knowledge is



historically contingent in that it is knowledge by a historical subject of a history that presents itself as a set of given, fixed congealed forms the result of past social labor. Further, the active subject, as a thinking conscious being, theoretically reconstructs that history. It is clear from the above analysis that Marx's concept of labor is designed to get at the classic philosophical problem of the constitution of society by the subject and the fundamental intent of Marx's theory is to abolish the domination of capital. The realization of that intent requires a subject that can actively investigate and de-fetishize the 'natural' laws that apparently govern capitalist social relations seeing through to their underlying social constitution. Social theoretic knowledge cannot then be acquired by subordinating thought to objectivity.

The knowing subject does not view the historically given conditions of his existence as brute data, "a collection of dead facts." Rather, theory and speculation are required both to see through false positivity and "to facilitate the arrangement of historical material."<sup>122</sup> To phrase it differently, the ontologically active subject produces a material objectivity through thought governed labor, whereas the epistemologically active subject

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<sup>122</sup> (1976), p. 37.

reflects on that objectivity, producing a scientific understanding through mental labor. Marx does not assume an epistemologically passive subject whose thought is simply the reflection of being. Simple reflection of the sphere of being, i.e., socially produced objectivity would necessarily remain confined to the ideological, to appearances. Marx not only assumes an active knowing subject but also, as Schmidt notes, assumes the "relative autonomy" of the cognitive subject "in [the] face of its object and, hence, does not simply reproduce the historical process of this object."<sup>123</sup>

One further and important consequence of this analysis of Marx's epistemological assumptions is that if the subject is active in an epistemological sense and is relatively autonomous, then the future development of society is contingent on the forms of action taken, and understanding reconstructed, by the subject. History is not, therefore, the working out of any purely objective tendencies or imminent ideal and is not teleological in the broad sense of the word.

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<sup>123</sup> (1981), p. 32.

Labor in Marx's Economics

Marx's economic categories clearly exhibit the meta-theoretical/historical distinction.<sup>124</sup> On the meta-theoretical level he elaborates the concepts of labor, use value, concrete labor. On the historical level, which is to say from the perspective of the capitalist production process, he elaborates the concepts of labor power, exchange value, abstract labor and variable and constant capital.

Marx starts Capital with an analysis of commodities which are the form in which wealth appears in capitalist economies. The commodity can be viewed from two aspects: quantity and quality. Viewed qualitatively, a commodity is a use value. Its usefulness is part of the object's natural existence, its "physical body. They constitute the material content of wealth whatever its social form may be."<sup>125</sup> In a sense, the analysis of commodities as use values is an analysis from an ontological standpoint: its reference is the object as a piece of nature containing

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<sup>124</sup> In this section the discussion is focused on the metatheoretical/historical distinction because it is there that Habermas' problems arise. While Marx's application of the appearance/reality distinction in his economic categories is brilliant, it will not be examined here.

<sup>125</sup> (1977), p. 126.

natural qualities. First, the creation of use values is "an external natural necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature and therefore human life itself."<sup>126</sup> Second, use values combine two elements, material and labor, and third, use values are created by different forms of concrete labor. The results of the labor process in general in all historical epochs "is an object of utility."<sup>127</sup> Marx's intent, however, is to analyze capitalist relations and to dissect the forms of appearance that capitalist production brings to these general relations: that form being exchange value.

Exchange value appears first as a quantitative relation that Marx describes as relative and accidental. If two qualitatively different use values are to be put in relationship with the other, then clearly there must be something contained in the articles that allows an expression of equality. Obviously that something cannot be a physical or natural property of the article. Exchange value implies an abstraction from these useful qualities and natural properties in which "all its sensuous characteristics are extinguished"<sup>128</sup> In addition,

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<sup>126</sup> (1977), p.133.

<sup>127</sup> (1977), p. 153-4.

<sup>128</sup> (1977), p. 128.

the forms of useful labor, concrete labor, are extinguished. Setting aside consideration of use value and concrete labor, the thing underlying the exchange relation is that they are products of labor, "human labor in the abstract." All social and natural qualities disregarded, commodities have left only a "phantom-like objectivity", a result of their being "congealed quantities of homogeneous labor", i.e., value. "The common factor in the exchange relation...is therefore its value." Furthermore, exchange value "is the necessary mode of expression, or form of appearance, of value."<sup>129</sup>

Value, therefore, arises out of the objectification (or materialization) of abstract labor and the quantity of labor is measured by time. The magnitude of value equals socially necessary labor time which Marx defines as "...the labor time required to produce any use value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with average degree of skill and intensity of labor prevalent in that society."<sup>130</sup> The "substance" of value is labor and the form of appearance of value in capitalism is exchange value.

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<sup>129</sup> (1977), p. 128.

<sup>130</sup> (1977), p. 129.

Use values acquire, or become bearers of, value through exchange by private, independent producers. The nexus of exchange establishes the social relationship between producers and products within the social division of labor, and it is in this sense that exchange value is constituted by underlying social relations. As Marx states it, again clearly contrasting the two levels of analysis: "It is only by being exchanged that the products of labor acquire a socially uniform objectivity as values, which is distinct from their sensuously varied objectivity as articles of utility."<sup>131</sup> Once exchange is generalized (such that producers produce for the market) labor acquires a two-fold social character. First, it must be useful concrete labor, satisfy some social need and on that basis reproduce itself as part of the social division of labor. Second, it must become commensurate with other forms of labor in other parts of the social division of labor, i.e., it must become abstract labor. Fundamentally, the equation of products through exchange brings about the real equation of different forms of labor. "The production of commodities must be fully developed before the scientific conviction emerges...that all the different kinds of private labor...are continually

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<sup>131</sup> (1977), p. 166.

being reduced to the quantitative proportions of which society requires them."<sup>132</sup>

Commodities do not go to market under their own power, rather they go along with someone as his or her property. For commodities and their owners to enter into relationships with each other their owners must enter into a juridical relation. Commodities, as things, are in principle alienable. For exchange to occur it is necessary that each person treat others as 1) "the private owners of those alienable things" and 2) as persons who are independent of each other." Marx characterizes this relation as "reciprocal isolation and foreignness"<sup>133</sup> and as "atomistic"<sup>134</sup> and fixes this form of relation as historically specific to the capitalist mode of production. The people who enter into these relations play particular social roles which are conditioned by economic relations, i.e. they are not simply free, equal, legal owners but they are also capitalists or workers.

Furthermore, for goods to appear in the market they must not be use values for their owner and they must be

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<sup>132</sup> (1977), P. 168.

<sup>133</sup> (1977), P. 182.

<sup>134</sup> (1977), P. 187.

use values for their purchaser. They must be exchanged to be realized as use values and must be effective use values before they are exchanged. Exchange will determine whether the concrete labor expended was indeed useful labor.

Money, Marx argues, is a necessary precipitate of the regular exchange process: it "crystallizes out of exchange because of the necessity of a universal equivalent." Utopian visions of commodity exchange without the 'evil' of money are, Marx argues, foolish but understandable. They are foolish because to get rid of money while leaving commodity production untouched is like abolishing "the pope while leaving Catholicism in existence."<sup>135</sup> Catholics and capitalists would have to reinvent the pope and money respectively.

Marx explained the riddle of the commodity and money fetishes as objectively necessary illusions. To the participants in the marketplace, the exchange process appears as natural and inevitable, i.e., as a fetish. In that money grows out of the exchange process and acquires the appearance of having an intrinsic value, it acquires an almost super natural appearance to the participants.

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<sup>135</sup> (1977), P. 181.



In fact the money fetish is a fetish built upon a prior fetish: a sort of fetish squared. Ultimately the supernatural qualities of money, whether viewed as good by the capitalists or evil by the social reformers, are part of a socially produced illusion that arises necessarily out of the regularized exchange process.<sup>136</sup> Out of the universal exchange process, or the circulation of money and commodities,

...there develops a whole network of social connections of natural origin, entirely beyond the control of human agents. Only because the farmer has sold his wheat is the weaver able to sell his linen, only because the weaver has sold his linen is our rash and intemperate friend able to sell his Bible, and only because the latter already has the water of everlasting life is the distiller able to sell his eau-de-vie. And so it goes on.<sup>137</sup>

On the face of it, the capitalist goes to market, spends money on those items needed for production, leaves the market, goods in hand, returns to his factory and produces a commodity which he then brings back to the market and, with luck, sells for a value greater than that spent in his original purchase. "M-C-M<sup>1</sup> is in fact therefore the general formula for capital, in the form in which it appears directly in the sphere of circulation."<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> (1977), p. 187.

<sup>137</sup> (1977), p. 207-8.

<sup>138</sup> (1977), p. 257.

The problem as summarized in Chapter V of Capital is: how can a surplus ( $M^1$ ) arise from the exchange of equivalents. "Circulation... creates no value"<sup>139</sup> and certainly no surplus value.

Marx argues that this incipient capitalist must have found something in the first exchange (M-C) that subsequently allows him to realize a surplus. Since equivalents are exchanged for equivalents in the market, the surplus cannot arise out of exchange. The capitalist is fortunate enough to acquire in the market a commodity whose use value is greater than its exchange value: labor power. Marx defines labor power as follows:

We mean by labor power, or labor capacity, the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing on the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use value of any kind.<sup>140</sup>

As was pointed out above, labor or activity is a central term in Marx's definition of human nature and his explanation on the metatheoretical level of the constitution of the social and historical world. It is also indubitably a perpetual necessity for the production of the wealth (use values) necessary for continued social

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<sup>139</sup> (1977), p. 266.

<sup>140</sup> (1977), p. 270.

existence. Labor power is introduced to distinguish the form labor takes in capitalist production from its metatheoretical determinants. Put simply there has always been labor. But special historical conditions must obtain for there to appear in the market labor for sale and thus labor with an exchange value. The aforementioned juridical relations must be in effect so that a person has an inalienable right to property in his person, i.e., he must have a legal self that is continuous with but separate from his physical identity. The worker must be free to sell or alienate his physical and mental capacities for a contractually delineated period of time. Further, the worker must be free to continuously enter into such contracts in the market. Most importantly, the worker must have no other commodities to bring to market and must lack the materials and instruments necessary for production.

...this worker must be free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labor power as his own commodity, and... he has no other commodity for sale, i.e., he is rid of them, he is free of all the objects needed for the realization of his labor power.<sup>141</sup>

In case it was not sufficiently clear that labor power is a historically specific concept Marx states:

...nature does not produce on the one hand owners of money and commodities, and on the other hand men possessing nothing but their labor power. This

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<sup>141</sup> (1977), p. 272-3.

relation has no basis in natural history, nor does it have a social basis common to all periods of human history."<sup>142</sup>

The capitalist historical epoch is distinguished by the appearance (out of the dissolution of feudal ties) of labor power and that "in the eyes of the worker himself (labor power) takes on the form of a commodity which is his property..."<sup>143</sup> When this point has been reached (labor having an exchange value) the commodity form has become universal.

The capitalist, Marx argues, is fortunate to have found the one commodity, which, as noted above, has an exchange value which is less than the value it can produce. "Therefore the value of labor power, and the value which that labor power valorizes, are two entirely different magnitudes; and this difference was what the capitalist had in mind when he was purchasing the labor power."<sup>144</sup>

Things look, and are, very different in the capitalist production process. What, from the perspective of the labor process in general, is a dynamic of subject

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<sup>142</sup> (1977), p. 273.

<sup>143</sup> (1977), p. 274.

<sup>144</sup> (1977), p.300.

and object becomes, from the perspective of the valorization process, a functional relation of things. From the latter perspective, labor power, means of production, and raw material become forms of existence that are taken on by capital advanced in its monetary form. Marx introduces two terms to refer to these social forms of existence in the valorization process: constant and variable capital. Constant capital is defined by the condition that its value is not increased or decreased in the production process and is "turned into means of production; the raw material, the auxiliary material and the instruments of labor..."<sup>145</sup> Variable capital is that part of capital advanced that undergoes an alteration in value during production. "It both reproduces the equivalent of its own value and produces an excess, surplus-value, which may itself vary, and be more or less according to circumstances."<sup>146</sup>

On the metatheoretical level, the objective factors of production take the form of constant capital and the subjective factors take the form of variable capital. Marx is quite clear that constant and variable capital are particular historical forms of appearance of the

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<sup>145</sup> (1977), p. 317.

<sup>146</sup> (1977), p.317.

metatheoretical concepts of objective and subjective factors of production.

The same elements of capital which, from the point of view of the labor process, can be distinguished respectively as the objective and subjective factors, as means of production and labor power, can be distinguished, from the point of view of the valorization process, as constant and variable capital.<sup>147</sup>

If what counts, from the perspective of producing use values, is concrete labor and the qualities of the object, then from the perspective of producing surplus value what counts is abstract labor and quantity. Abstract labor is pre-eminently a social and historical category. More accurately, it has as a referent the form labor takes when subsumed by capital. The reality of capitalist production manifests itself as a tendency towards the reproduction of labor as abstract labor.

What counts for the capitalist is quantity, specifically a quantity of labor power measured by time. "...Labor does not count as productive activity with a specific utility, but simply as value-creating substance, as social labor in general which is in the act of objectifying itself and whose sole feature of interest is its quantities."<sup>148</sup> Marx continually stresses that time

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<sup>147</sup> (1977), p. 317.

<sup>148</sup> (1977), p. 1012.

(duration) is the crucial factor. In order to produce surplus value, the capitalist is compelled to use labor power for a period of time in excess of the time necessary to produce value equal to the variable capital advanced. The capitalist advances variable capital with the intent of extracting surplus labor time. On average it matters not who is employed, i.e., that a particular laborer can perform specific kinds of skilled, concrete, heterogeneous labor, only that the laborer work the full day. As Marx puts it in the Poverty of Philosophy: "we should not say that one man's hour is worth another man's hour, but that one man during an hour is worth just as much as another man during an hour. Time is everything, man is nothing: he is at most time's carcass."<sup>149</sup>

Since abstract labor has been so widely misconstrued some clarifications are in order. First, it is not, as Colletti correctly notes, a simple theoretical abstraction.<sup>150</sup> Rather, as a concept it refers to an actual process of equating of different labors through exchange and a form of labor that comes into being through

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<sup>149</sup> (1976b), p. 127.

<sup>150</sup> (1972), p. 84. "...'abstract labor' is...far from being a mere mental abstraction of the investigator's", but rather "...is one which takes place daily in the reality of exchange itself."

the particularly capitalist mode of producing relative surplus value.

A second, and related issue, is that abstract labor is not an ontological or metatheoretical category. It is not, in other words, the type of abstraction which is valid for an analysis of production in all historical epochs. Most recently, for example, Diane Elson has argued that abstract labor applies to all historical epochs and is a "valid abstraction" (of the type Marx employs) that fixes a common element in all modes of production. It is incumbent on those advancing such a position to demonstrate the existence of abstract labor in, for instance, the feudal mode of production. The peasant, while producing on his own time for his immediate needs, is clearly engaged in concrete labor, i.e., the production of use values, without any involvement in an exchange network. His labor is concrete, heterogeneous, and structured by the needs of the family and the specific obligations to provide specific quantities of use values to the lord, or surplus labor. Surplus labor can, of course, be measured by time, but that would be insufficient to justify the inclusion of compulsory labor in the category of abstract labor. More to the point is whether one serf's labor time could be treated as the equivalent of another serf's labor time from the



perspective of the lord. That is, would it make any difference if serf A's labor were replaced by serf B's labor? On one level the answer is it makes no difference because one serf can probably repair as many yards of road as another. But it makes all the difference whether the serf prescriptively obligated to perform the labor actually performs it.

The feudal system is structured by relations of personal dependence based on prescriptive rights, duties, and obligations that are particular to not simply the occupant of a social role but to specific individuals. Ultimately, a lord's failure to enforce specific obligations due could result in those obligations being voided. To allow the interchangeability of labor would threaten the core of the feudal mode of domination.<sup>151</sup>

In the final analysis, the difference between feudalism and capitalism lies in essentially incomparable modes of domination, or to use Marx's terms, supremacy and subordination. The difference lies in the manner by which

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<sup>151</sup> More related objections can be raised. The serf's obligated labor time does not result in the production of commodities, i.e., the lord is not a capitalist. He may sell some of his surplus to acquire money to purchase luxury goods and contribute thereby to the development of capitalism but he does not exploit the different magnitudes of the exchange and use-value of labor power.

surplus labor is appropriated: "...the method by which surplus labor is extorted." Marx notes two relationships that formally distinguish the subsumption of labor under capital. The first is: "The pure money relationship between the man who appropriates the surplus labor and the man who yields it up..."<sup>152</sup> Buyer and seller are formal (legal) equals and both are free and unencumbered by any prior or underlying constraints whether social, political or religious. As against the feudal mode of production, what brings the seller of labor power into a position of dependency "is solely the fact that the buyer is the owner of conditions of labor"<sup>153</sup> What is decisive here, Marx repeatedly emphasizes, is that the mode of domination changes its form. "If supremacy and subordination come to take the place of slavery, serfdom, vassallage and other patriarchal forms of subjection, the change is purely one of form. The form becomes freer, because it is objective in nature, voluntary in appearance, purely economic."<sup>154</sup>

The second distinction is that the objective factors of production and the means of subsistence confront the

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<sup>152</sup> (1973), p. 1025.

<sup>153</sup> (1973), p. 1025.

<sup>154</sup> (1973), p. 1028.

worker as capital, or as "alien property."<sup>155</sup> These essentially legal conditions formally establish the relations of capitalist to worker, i.e., capital to wage labor.

Again, labor, when subsumed under capital, becomes an "instrument of the valorization process."<sup>156</sup> In the labor process in general the subjective conditions of production, labor, utilizes the objective conditions. Capitalism inverts the metatheoretical relation between person and thing, person and nature, subject and object. Thus: "Capital utilizes the worker, the worker does not utilize capital, and only articles which utilize the worker and hence possess independence, a consciousness and a will of their own in the capitalist, are capital."<sup>157</sup> In keeping with the discussion of fetishism above Marx further notes that this inversion "has become an inseparable part of the physical character of the elements of production both in capitalist production itself and in the imagination of the economists." So much so, in fact, that when Ricardo "...deems it necessary to give an analysis of the physical elements of capital, he naturally

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<sup>155</sup> (1973), p. 1026.

<sup>156</sup> (1973), p. 1019.

<sup>157</sup> (1973), p. 1008.

without scruples or reflection of any kind makes use of the correct economic expressions."<sup>158</sup> Marx continues by noting that Ricardo understands that capital is something that employs labor, not the opposite.

This is indeed the central point with regard to Habermas' analysis of Marx's concept of labor. The issue may be stated as follows: Habermas' claim is that Marx holds that labor is instrumental, by its nature, a thing to be utilized in a rational, efficient way. I have sought to demonstrate by the above exegesis that Marx's analysis shows how labor becomes an instrument when subsumed by capital.

We have been discussing the "formal" subsumption of labor under capital. That is to say the two conditions elaborated above represent the necessary pre-conditions of capitalist production. When these conditions obtain, the specifically economic relations of domination of the capitalist mode of production, capital over wage labor, are effective. These conditions may obtain regardless of the technology of the production process. In other words, a guild master may become a capitalist without altering the traditional technical production process

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<sup>158</sup> (1973), p.1008, ftn. 18.

although certainly the social relations of production will be altered. All things remaining the same, the guild master turned capitalist will generate surplus value through the mechanism of absolute surplus value, i.e., the lengthening of the working day beyond the time necessary to produce a quantity of commodities of value equal to the variable capital advanced. However, when this new capitalist revolutionizes the mode of production through the application of the social forces of production (science and technology) to the labor process, he initiates what Marx refers to as the "real" subsumption of labor under capital. "The real subsumption of labor under capital is developed in all the forms evolved by relative, as opposed to absolute surplus value."<sup>159</sup>

The capitalist now increases surplus value by shortening the period of necessary labor time rather than by lengthening the period of surplus labor time. With this development "...capitalist production now establishes itself as a mode of production sui generis and brings into being a new mode of material production." It is crucial to note here that this new form of large scale manufacture presupposes the direct application of science and technology. The penetration or transformation of old

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<sup>159</sup> (1973), p. 1035.

production process occurs on a scale that "beggar(s) comparison" with precapitalist and early capitalist production. Individual capital becomes social capital, and this tendency manifests itself in a drive to take over all spheres of industry "where only formal subsumption obtains."<sup>160</sup>

Marx's view of the relation of science to industry is important given the logic of Habermas' analysis. The development of the process of relative surplus value necessarily entails revolutionizing the means of production. The impetus for this is inherent in the nature of the constraints on the capitalist. The desire to increase surplus value through absolute surplus value reaches certain natural limits in the length of the working day: the laborer must have some time to reproduce his labor power. The capitalist, unless he is also an inventor, scientist, and engineer and thereby capable of revolutionizing the means of production through his own efforts, must rely on the general socialized knowledge of the sciences and bring that knowledge to bear on the problems of increasing the scale of production thereby reducing necessary labor time. The capitalist's desire to do so will be greatly enhanced when he realizes that such

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<sup>160</sup> (1973), p. 1035-6.

techniques could lead to super profits vis-a-vis other producers using older techniques.

Although they are lengthy, Marx's comments on this topic are worth quoting in their entirety.

The social productive forces of labor, or the productive forces of directly social, socialized (i.e. collective) labor come into being through cooperation, division of labor within the workshop, the use of machinery, and in general the transformation of production by the conscious use of the sciences, or mechanics, chemistry, etc. for specific ends, technology, etc. and similarly, through the enormous increase of scale corresponding to such developments (for it is only socialized labor that is capable of applying the general products of human development, such as mathematics, or the immediate processes of production; and conversely, progress in these sciences presupposes a certain level of material production). This entire development of productive forces of socialized labor (in contrast to the more or less isolated labor of individuals), and together with it the use of science (the general product of social development), in the immediate process of production, takes the form of the productive power of capital. It does not appear as the productive power of labor, or even of that part of it that is identical with capital. And least of all does it appear as the productive power either of the individual worker or of the workers joined together in the process of production. The mystification implicit in the relations of capital as a whole is greatly intensified here, far beyond the point it had reached or could have reached in the merely formal subsumption of labor under capital. On the other hand, we here find a striking illustration of the historic significance of capitalist production in its specific form--the transmutation of the immediate process of production itself and the development of social forces of production of labor.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> (1977), p. 1024.

In early capitalist production, the relation of science to industry was sporadic, un-coordinated, nonsystematic. With the real subsumption of labor through relative surplus value, Marx emphasizes that science is consciously used, and brought into systematic relation with industry. Further the mystification that inheres in capital acquires an additional dimension: science then participates in fetishism inasmuch as its application to production and ultimately its further development appears as (and indeed is) a function of the needs of capital.

Marx elaborates further on the relation of science and industry in the Grundrisse and carries the logic of the analysis one step further.<sup>162</sup> There he notes that an automatic system of machinery represents the most adequate form of capitalist development. At this stage there are some interesting implications. First, workers serve as "conscious linkages" and function primarily as superintendents. The machine, which possesses accumulated social knowledge and skill, is no longer the means that labor employs i.e. it does not transmit the laborers' activity to the raw material. Second, the machine then appears to act purposively, not labor, and the machine is thus the producer of use values. Labor becomes "a mere

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<sup>162</sup> (1973), p. 690-712.



abstraction of activity," that activity being governed by the requirements of the automatic system. And, as Marx notes in the paragraph reproduced above, science becomes an alien force due to the separation of mental and manual labor. "The science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by the construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power." Third, when capital reaches this stage of development, Marx presciently notes that science itself becomes an industry.<sup>163</sup> Ultimately "living labor (is) subsumed under self-activating objectified labor."<sup>164</sup> Being, in other words, subsumes becoming.

Marx goes on to note that the reduction of necessary labor time through the mechanism of relative surplus value "...will redound to the benefit of emancipated labor, and is the condition of its emancipation."<sup>165</sup> He also argues that through this process capitalism, and value theory, is undermined. Surplus value derives from the appropriation of labor time. "But," in Marx's words,

to the degree that large industry develops, the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labor time and on the amount of labor employed than on the

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<sup>163</sup> (1973), p. 704.

<sup>164</sup> (1973), p. 695

<sup>165</sup> (1973, p. 701.

power of the agencies set in motion during labor time, whose 'powerful effectiveness' is itself in turn out of proportion to the direct labor time spent on their production, but depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology,<sup>166</sup> or the application of this science to production.

Marx then draws out the logical implication: labor time "must cease to be" the measure of wealth and exchange value of use value. The whole system of production for exchange value is undermined by the very processes which it brought into existence. Capital, which turned both subject and object into "mere means" for the production of surplus value, makes the production of wealth, quite unintentionally, "independent (relatively) of the labor-time employed on it."<sup>167</sup> Here again value theory has historical limits. Here, the logic of Marx's argument, in a sort of closure, suggestively speculates on the dissolution of the social relations that, through their own historical dynamic, brought the logic of the domination of value into being.

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<sup>166</sup> (1973), p. 705.

<sup>167</sup> (1973), p. 706.

### Conclusion

In the foregoing I have first stressed the fundamental importance of the appearance/reality distinction and metatheoretical and historical levels of analysis in structuring Marx's theoretical assumptions. Second, I have suggested that Marx's ontological, anthropological, epistemological, and economic assumptions and analysis are fundamentally coherent. Third, I have argued that the concept of labor has differing 'functions' and levels of meaning in the various spheres of analysis. Fourth, I have argued that the concept of labor is theoretically central in the philosophic sense that a materialist social theory must proceed on the basic insight that labor in the form of motion (becoming) creates the fixed forms of objectivity (being).

On this basis I will argue, in the concluding chapter, that Habermas' understanding of Marx's concept of labor is severely restricted and fundamentally inadequate. This has consequences for Habermas' subsequent claim that Marx lacked a normative basis sufficient to sustain his critique of capitalism.

While sympathetic to Habermas' desire to link epistemological and anthropological issues and place them

on a new footing and, while agreeing substantially with the claim that "Marxism" (as a legitimating ideology) resolves these issues in a positivistic manner, I will argue that Marx does not so resolve these issues and in fact holds certain counter-factual normative assumptions arguably sufficient to his critique and, importantly and ironically, virtually identical to those derived by Habermas from the ideal speech situation.

## C H A P T E R   I I I

### HABERMAS AND MARX

#### Introduction

Habermas' analysis of Marx, linked as it is with a broad range of issues, is extraordinarily complex and ambitious. As we have seen, his central claim is that Marx understood labor to be exclusively instrumental activity. And again, as I have noted above, the consequences for Marx's theory are manifold. Marxian theory 1) is a form of positivism as it models itself after the natural sciences; 2) reduces all spheres of human activity to instrumental activity specifically reducing communication and interaction to labor; 3) is at best ambiguous with regard to epistemology, that is while it claims to contain an interest in emancipation it reduces knowledge to the instrumental.

After a brief summary of the analysis of Marx in Chapter II, I will discuss the possible justification of the metatheoretical level of analysis. The question is:

just what constitutes a rational abstraction, and conversely, what constitutes a bad abstraction? I will then turn to the central question of this work: can Habermas' analysis of Marx's concept of labor be sustained on the basis of the evidence brought to bear through the reconstruction of Marx above.

The final two parts of this chapter will examine the implications for the question of the normative foundations of critical theory. The most important implication of Habermas' line of analysis, and the implication which animates both Habermas' theoretical project and considerable controversy in contemporary political theory, is the related claim that Marx lacked a normative foundation adequate to his critique of capitalism. I will examine the implications of this critique of Habermas for this issue of normative foundations and discuss the norms Marx employed to ground his critique.

Marx clearly makes metatheoretical assumptions about human nature and justifies these as necessary and rational abstractions. Most important for the evaluation of Habermas' position is the notion of the subject as an active (laboring) being. Marx defines humans as active, natural, objective, social, sensuous and conscious beings. Activity, or labor, is 1) capable of objectification, 2)

mediates subject and object, 3) transformative (in that it "makes over" its object), 4) social, 5) rule governed, and 6) is of both mind and body. Regarding the last point, activity, on this level, is not simply the brute expenditure of energy. Activity also refers to mental activity.

On the ontological level, Marx places the active subject in a complex of relations that connect the subject to nature (both internal and external), socially produced objectivity and others. Labor serves to mediate these relations. Put philosophically, becoming (labor in the form of motion), through the rule governed appropriation of nature (internal and external) produces being (the objectivity and fixity of objects and social relations).

On the epistemological level, Marx makes one assumption that is crucial for our purposes: the subject is epistemologically active. This again is consistent with Marx's descriptions of consciousness (as in the Manuscripts when talking of human nature) and labor as thought governed, conscious, intentional and form giving activity (as in Capital when talking of the labor process in general). Furthermore, it is consistent with the position that it must be an active thinking subject that demystifies social reality by working through

theoretically the objectively necessary form of appearance, or illusions, created by capitalist production. For this is the only basis on which the domination of labor by capital can be overcome.

Marx's economic theory, on the metatheoretical level, points up the relations between the subjective factor (labor) and the objective factors (tools and material) of production abstracted from any particular social formation. Labor is here concrete, heterogeneous, rule governed, lacks any separation of design and execution or mental and manual labor, is connected to subjective needs and constitutes social relations for that purpose and for social reproduction, and transforms its own nature in the process. This continuous process of making and re-making the objectivity of things and social relations throughout time is history and thus the dynamic of history is the activity of the subject. History is labor in the form of motion or becoming as it is constrained by the material objectivity of past labor.

If the concept of labor is to be adequate to the theoretical task of linking anthropology, ontology, epistemology, history and economics, then it must necessarily be construed broadly enough 1) to cover the range of modes of human social expression from economics



(work), art, religion, science, the family, politics, love, and language and 2) be capable of definition on both the metatheoretical and historical levels of analysis. A metatheoretical level of analysis requires a broad concept of labor while the historical level requires a concept that specifies concrete social relations. Marx claimed that social activity is made up of three aspects, production, family, and consciousness, all of which are the result of the constituting activity of subjects. Hence it is that Habermas' claim that Marx's concept of labor applies only to the economic level and is exclusively instrumental is not adequate to either Marx's writings or the logical structure of Marx's theory, at least, thus far in our analysis on the metatheoretical level.

Let us now turn to Marx's historical level analysis. With the rise of capitalist social relations, the structured relations described above still obtain but assume alienated and fetishized forms. The subject's activity becomes something that must be sold on the market: thus, alienation from one's self through the sale of labor-power. The subject becomes alienated from the social product through the imposition of capitalist property relations. External nature and the social product become a material objectivity that confronts the

subject as an uncontrollable force. The subject's potential sociality becomes restricted by a legal system of individual rights, private property, and economic competition leaving only the impoverished, atomistic and utilitarian social world of Bentham. Finally, the subject must come to embody a mind/body duality, for not only is mental and manual labor split into different spheres of the division of labor, but the subject must hold to a conscious identity as a free being while not having the freedom to not sell his activity, or labor-power, to the capitalist. The subject necessarily comes to see the body as a thing to be utilized by capital. Capitalist relations demand that the subject maintain the mental identity of a free subject and a physical identity that is instrumental.

The set of ontological relations are similarly structured in a contradictory manner in capitalism. The subject produces an objectivity that controls rather than being controlled by the subject. The social relations that arise out of the social organization of labor become subsumed under capital and take the commodity form. This reacts back upon the subject's consciousness in the form of fetishes that arise out of alienated and rigidified social and productive relations.

Epistemologically, while the active subject constitutes the universe of objects and relations and the forms (language etc.) through which these are known, these forms are objectively necessary illusions: appearances. The domination of capital over labor (being over becoming) creates rigidified forms of conscious understandings that are ideological and hence that functionally obscure the subject's knowledge of history and the real process of the constitution of society by labor.

With the labor process subsumed by capital, concrete labor becomes abstract labor, heterogeneous labor becomes homogeneous, labor becomes a commodity and the subject's attributes become the capitalist's, production is for exchange and the production of wealth becomes the extraction of a surplus through exploitation. Marx's theory is a historical explanation of the appearance of labor as a commodity and all the implications that this appearance has for social theory. He attempted to capture these implication in the economic concepts he elaborates as the labor theory of value. Because Marx's theory operates on both the historical and metatheoretical level and with an appearance/reality distinction it can hardly be correct to claim that he treated labor as purely instrumental activity.

Rational Abstraction and Theory in General

Marx never systematically and explicitly discussed the justification of the metatheoretical conceptual structure. There are, however, enough textual clues to make a theoretical reconstruction possible. Thus we can reconstruct arguments for the validity of metatheoretical concepts; arguments that are consistent with those Marx used.

For example, Marx argues that it is proper to abstract from specific historical forms of production and to speak of production in general.<sup>168</sup> He deems this a "rational abstraction" because it delineates those relations common to all forms of production. Because Marx said so little on this subject, I will quote him at length.

Production in general is an abstraction, but a rational abstraction in so far as it really brings out and fixes the common element and saves us repetition. Still, this general category, this common element sifted out by comparison, is itself segmented many times over and splits into different determinations. Some determinations belong to all epochs, others to only a few. [Some] determinations will be shared by the most modern epoch and the most ancient...There are characteristics which all stages of production have in common, and which are established as general ones of the mind: but so-called general preconditions of

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<sup>168</sup> (1973), p. 85.

all production are nothing more than these abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped"<sup>169</sup>

In Capital, Marx again discusses the abstract elements of the labor process.

It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence, and it is therefore independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live.<sup>170</sup>

Marx always notes in these passages that, as abstractions, these concepts do not provide knowledge of particular things or relationships, in fact remain empty until brought to bear on historical material. Marx goes on to note:

The taste of porridge does not tell us who grew the oats, and the process we have presented does not reveal the conditions under which it takes place, whether it is happening under the slave-owner's brutal lash or the anxious eye of the capitalist, whether Cincinnatus undertakes it in tilling his couple of acres, or a savage, when he lays low a wild beast with a stone"<sup>171</sup>

If what characterizes a rational abstraction is that it fixes certain determinations of labor or the subjects that are common, universal and necessary (in the sense of indispensable to the practice of social theory), the

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<sup>169</sup> (1973), p.85,88.

<sup>170</sup> (1977), p. 290.

<sup>171</sup> (1977), p. 290.

question arises: what characterizes a "bad" abstraction? Marx offers two examples of bad abstractions.

The first Marx calls a process of forgetting. He argues that one must take care not to confuse those particular determinations which have developmental significance with those that are common and universal. This can lead, as we shall see, to fundamentally ideological conclusions. Capital, which obviously has had the profoundest developmental impact on society, is not, Marx argues, a valid abstraction. Marx criticizes political economy precisely for the error of seeing capital as a valid abstraction. His argument is as follows: all will agree no production can take place without an instrument, which is nothing but stored up labor. Capital, which is an instrument of production, is also objectified labor. "Therefore capital is a general, eternal relation of nature; that is, if I leave out just the specific quality which alone makes 'instrument of production' and 'stored-up labor' into capital."<sup>172</sup> In such a view the stone flung by the savage at a wild beast is capital.<sup>173</sup> The forgetting Marx refers to is blindness

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<sup>172</sup> (1973), p. 86.

<sup>173</sup> "By a wonderful feat of logical acumen, Colonel Torrens has discovered, in this stone of the savage, the origin of capital." (1977), p.291.

that results from using the process of abstracting as a filter. This type of bad abstraction is essentially a form of reification involving historical amnesia and has the ideological result of concealing the historical and social relations that determine what form the instrument takes. As Marx puts it, "The whole profundity of those modern economists who demonstrate the eternity and harmoniousness of the existing social relations lies in this forgetting."<sup>174</sup>

The second type of bad abstraction Marx notes are those abstractions which are chaotic or too indeterminant. It may seem scientifically correct to begin investigation "with the real and concrete...with eg the population, which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production." Upon reflection, however, population proves to be an empty concept of the whole. "The population is an abstraction if I leave out...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 labor, capital, etc."<sup>175</sup> The journey would have to continue until we discover the determinants of wage labor and capital, such as exchange

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<sup>174</sup> (1973), p. 85.

<sup>175</sup> (1973), p. 100.

value, labor power, division of labor and property for example. Population proves to be only an apparently concrete point of departure.

Furthermore, we should note that Marx considers the abstraction 'labor' as an historical result. While he notes that the conception of "labor as such" is of ancient origins, as an economic conception its origins are in modern, capitalist productive relations. If one examines the history of economic thought one finds wealth variously attributed to, in different historical periods, money and land. With Smith, and modern political economy the source of wealth is seen as labor, in "subjective activity." As Marx puts it: "As a rule, the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete development, where one thing appears as common to many, to all. Then it ceases to be thinkable in a particular form alone."<sup>176</sup> The abstraction "labor" is thus not simply the result of thought, but also of the concrete relations of labor and production in capitalism which are in fact the practical basis for the validity of this abstraction. "Not only the category, labor, but labor in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and

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<sup>176</sup> (1973), p. 104.



has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form."

There is one further type of abstraction, or more properly, process of abstraction, that Marx criticizes: that is the method of speculative idealism that he critiques in The Holy Family. In a brief section on the "absolute fruit" Marx parodies the method of German Idealism, which appears profound and mystifying when the subject is Geist, by bringing the method to bear on a more mundane subject. One apparent contradiction should be kept in mind at this point. Though Marx does not recommend this procedure as a mode of philosophic reasoning, and indeed finds it absurd when it is brought down to earth. Yet, Marx seems to reproduce this mode of speculative abstraction in the opening sections of Capital.

In order to clarify this point, let us look at the specifics of these arguments. The following, Marx argues, is the method of speculative idealism. First the philosopher contemplates a collection of objects, in this case, particular fruits. From this he concludes that the abstraction "fruit" is valid. He then comes to think of the abstraction "fruit" as something that exists independently of himself and the particular fruits. He then thinks that the abstraction "fruit", real and

independent as it is, forms the "substance" of real particular fruits which are only semblances of the substance. Next, he begins to wonder how it is that the "absolute fruit" manifests itself in the forms of particular fruits, i.e., how apples are the instantiation of the "absolute fruit." The speculative philosopher sees in every particular fruit

"the incarnation of the Substance, of the Absolute Fruit...Hence what is delightful in this speculation is to discover all the real fruits there, but as fruits which have a higher mystical significance, which have grown out of the ether of your brain and not out of the material earth...when you return from the abstraction, the supernatural creation of the mind, "the Fruit", to real natural fruits, you give on the contrary the natural fruits a supernatural significance and transform them into sheera abstractions."<sup>177</sup>

The parallel between this critique of speculative idealism and the logic of Marx's argument in the beginning of Capital is interesting. Marx seems to employ the same logic that he ridiculed in The Holy Family. To draw out this parallel let us imagine, instead of a philosopher, a political economist. Instead of fruit, let us imagine the economist in contemplating different labor processes such as spinning, weaving, tailoring, smithing, etc. We know these to be different forms of concrete labor but our political economist sees the possibility of making the

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<sup>177</sup> (1975b), p. 59.

abstraction 'labor'. Let us suppose that he begins taking the same logical steps as the philosopher, i.e., he concludes that 'labor' exists independently of the actual subjects performing the concrete labor and that what is important is not labor in its concrete form but the abstraction labor. The concrete labor he began with now becomes the particular manifestation of abstract labor. Spinning, weaving, tailoring, and smithing become instantiations of abstract labor which becomes the substance of value. Actual labor becomes abstract and acquires supernatural significance in the labor theory of value. Now if this mode of thinking is silly when employed by the Left Hegelians what makes it valid for the political economist?

Part of the answer to this question has already been provided above in Chapter II. That is, the social relations of capitalist production make labor abstract. Exchange relations make different, particular forms of human activity equivalent by bringing them into relation in the market and constituting their value. What is involved here are actual social practices of production and exchange--real social relations. While an orange can never become the instantiation of the absolute fruit, labor in its concrete form labor can, when subsumed by capital, become the instantiation of abstract labor.

Marx makes this point in an oft overlooked passage in Capital.

If I state that coats or boots stand in relation to linen because the latter is the universal incarnation of abstract human labor, the absurdity of the statement is self-evident. Nevertheless, when the producers of coats and linen bring these commodities into a relation to linen, or with gold and silver (and this makes no difference here), as the universal equivalent, the relation between their own private labor and the collective labor of society appears to them in exactly this absurd form.<sup>178</sup>

Coats, boots, and linen, as real objects, are no more equivalent than oranges and apples, but real social relations can make all of these objects stand in relationship to each other and give them an exchange value.

This line of reasoning can provide a clue to what Marx meant when referring to the rational element of the Hegelian dialectic. In this respect, the hidden validity of Hegel's logic is that it accurately captures the objective insanity of capitalist relations. The insanity of capitalist relations became the hidden core of Hegel's philosophical method. As philosophical method it is problematic, but as philosophic insight into the human condition in the modern world it is insightful. Hegel's mistake, as Marx viewed it, was to elevate and transform the logic of capitalist social reality into the logic of

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<sup>178</sup> (1977), p. 169.

method. Quite simply, the method of Hegel's speculative idealism mirrors the actual social processes of capitalism.

### A Critique of Habermas

Let us now turn to an evaluation of Habermas' claims regarding Marx's concept of labor. His central claim is that social labor is instrumental behavior imposed by the necessity of transforming nature into use values. In light of the foregoing analysis and reconstruction of Marx's concept of labor Habermas' claim must be qualified by making it historically contingent. On the theoretical level, Marx's concept of labor has diverse meanings and theoretical 'functions.' On the broadest level labor refers to the constituting activity of subjects: labor creates social and cultural life in all its forms be they economic, familial, language and consciousness or cultural forms of expression. On this level it is a broad concept with numerous diverse meanings and is best understood as that which constitutes or creates the whole diverse range of human forms of expression.

That Habermas' claim must be made historically contingent means simply that the forms of expression of

labor are social and historical. Specifically, when labor is subsumed by capital there is a tendency for all of its forms of expression to become instrumental.

While Marx is not completely clear on the following point one may extrapolate from his speculative comments on the system of automated machinery and its implications for labor that labor need not inevitably be instrumental. Labor expended for the production of wealth in a socialized mode of automated production would not be defined by the technical requirements of the production process or by the economic imperatives of capital. Labor, rather than being defined by the production process, would instead define production. While there may always be a realm of necessary labor, that labor need not always be the burdensome brute activity of subjects strictly determined by profit and technique (division of labor). In other words, even necessary labor need not always be abstract, instrumental labor. But whether this admittedly speculative interpretation can be sustained is of little consequence. Marx clearly places human labor as instrumental activity in the historical dimension, not in the metatheoretical dimension.

I suggest that one possible explanation of Habermas' analysis is that he has confused or conflated the

theoretical and historical levels of analysis in Marx. In Habermas' analysis labor always is solely instrumental: the realm instrumental activity has the force of ontology behind it. In Marx, however, instrumental activity has the force of history behind it: the history of capitalist social relations.

Habermas claims that Marx's understanding of labor as instrumental necessarily entails an instrumental epistemology is thus also open to question. Habermas' observation that Marx held instrumental knowledge to be materialized in the instruments of production is a valid though partial statement of Marx's theory of knowledge. Marx was certainly concerned with explaining the relationship between objectifying, instrumental knowledge and economic production. Clearly capital, concerned with extracting surplus value and, formally and "really" subsumes labor and establishes a systematic instrumental and pragmatic relation between natural science and production, i.e., between subject and object and social consciousness and social being. But, as I have argued above, capital is a social and historical relation. The fundamental point of Marx's analysis of the fetishism of commodities is that the objects of labor cease being under the control of the producer and become an independent force that dominates the producer. In the language of

Habermas' mentor, Adorno, "The self-made thing becomes a thing-in-itself, from which the self cannot escape anymore..."<sup>179</sup> In the language of Capital, the commodity form is a 'mysterious thing' because exchange value, which is really the expression of a system of social relations, appears to be a natural property of the commodity.

"Exchange value is not caused by a system of social relationships, or traceable to a system of social relationships, or explainable in terms of a system of social relationships; exchange value is a system of social relationships."<sup>180</sup>

The same problem may be posed as follows: Habermas claims what is Kantian about Marx's epistemology is "...the invariant relation of the species to its natural environment..." Whether Kantian or not, this claim is on one level trivially true. Human beings are natural beings, evolved within natural processes (i.e., have a natural history) and exist in a metabolic relationship

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<sup>179</sup> (1973), p.346.

<sup>180</sup> Wolff ( ), How to read Das Kapital. Adorno makes the exact same point when he states: "The fetish chapter's 'theological quirks of merchandise' mock the false consciousness in which the social relation of the exchange value is reflected to contracting parties as a quality of things-in-themselves; but those quirks are also as true as the practice of bloody idolatry was once a fact. For the constitutive forms of socialization, of which mystification is one, maintain their absolute supremacy over mankind as if they were divine Providence." (1973), p.356.



with nature. Marx indeed tried to capture the dimensions of this complex of relations that link the subject and nature in his ontology and economics. However, for Habermas, this ontological complex of relations is necessarily characterized (in all historical epochs and arising out of the contingencies of the natural evolution of the species) by a behavioral system of instrumental action. Human beings must interact with nature and have acquired technical, instrumental knowledge about nature. But the critical point is that these rules "take on sensuous existence and belong to the historically alterable inventory of societies."<sup>181</sup> It is precisely the historical dimension that Habermas' formulation slights and conversely, that Marx's captures. It is a question of whether, and how, objectified technical rules (science) have come to dominate the labor process to the exclusion of other rules and transformed labor into instrumental action. Marx assumes that undistorted, that is scientific, knowledge of social relations is possible and that the conscious subject can transcend both the instrumental social relations and ideological fetters imposed on consciousness by an alienated mode of production. Knowledge, then, is not restricted to purely instrumental modes of apprehending the world.

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<sup>181</sup> (1971), p. 35.

In Chapter I, I noted that Habermas appears to identify the terms labor, production and work, and that this identification raised some interesting question and problems. While many commentators have discussed problems with Habermas' use of the categories of labor and interaction, few have done so with the clarity of Giddens.<sup>182</sup> As he argues, Habermas presents the two categories as referring to different types of actions. Labor refers to instrumental action, or purposeful-rational, and interaction refers to communicative interaction. But Giddens contends that neither is a 'type' of action. Rather they are analytical, "or idealized features of action, like Weber's categories from which in some part they draw their inspiration."<sup>183</sup>

The problem, as Giddens see it, and I believe he sees it correctly, is that it is problematic to use an analytical element or category as equivalent to, as

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<sup>182</sup> For a somewhat more sympathetic discussion of this issue, see McCarthy (1981), p.24-27. See also, Held (1980), p.389-92, who raises the objection that since labor is always in and through society it is more adequately seen as a subcategory of social interaction. As Held states it: "While Marx does understand the unfolding of human powers and needs in history in relation to labour, this does not entail the collapse of interaction into a narrow instrumentalist framework. The referent of labour is always a form of social activity."

<sup>183</sup> Thompson and Held (1982), p.156.

Giddens states it, a "substantive type" of action.<sup>184</sup> Marx did not employ labor as a type, ideal or otherwise, while Weber clearly intended his categories to be just that: types. There is, in effect, a conceptual sloppiness here that Giddens believes "leads to quite serious conceptual consequences for Habermas' work as a whole." The identification by Habermas of labor, production, work and instrumental action do not serve his project well.

Giddens suggests that this terminological confusion could be eliminated by defining labor as "the socially productive activities whereby human beings interact creatively with material nature."<sup>185</sup> Praxis should be reserved for a broader meaning associated with the philosophical tradition of Vico, for example, as the constituting activity of social life. This is a useful suggestion, and one I am sympathetic towards although I think it unnecessary. If one accepts the bi-level theory of the structure of Marx's thought elaborated in this work, this particular conceptual problem would be solved by clearly keeping in mind on what level, metatheoretical or historical, the discussion of labor is taking place, i.e., is one discussing labor as socially constitutive

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p.157.

action in general, or as subsumed by the capitalist production process.

Habermas has responded in part to the criticisms that labor, or praxis, must be retained by social theory as a 'philosophic' concept. He argues that the problem lies in trying to expand the economic concept a in philosophically meaningful way. Habermas argues that "...we need an analytic clarification of the question as to whether the economic concept of labour can really be expanded into the concept of a simultaneously creative and self-formative productivity."<sup>186</sup>

Marx certainly did not see himself as expanding a narrow instrumental concept of labor into a philosophical concept capable of supporting the theoretical edifice of a dialectic of labor and critical-revolutionary action. Rather, he came from a philosophic tradition, of which he was very well aware, that put the philosophic concept at its center. For example: Marx viewed Hegel's advance as in seeing the movement of history as the dialectic of labor, his failure was in seeing only mental labor. He also saw himself in the tradition of Vico. Avineri correctly notes that: "Marx does not consider himself the

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<sup>186</sup> "A Reply to my Critics" Thompson and Held, (1982) p.225.

first to have suggested that man creates himself by his own work. Some of his remarks attest to his indebtedness to Giambattista Vico, and in one case he refers to Vico in connection with the development of technology..."<sup>187</sup> From letters to Lassalle and Engels we know that Marx had been reading Vico in 1862 while preparing the final draft of Capital. In this light, it may be more appropriate to ask if the 'philosophical' concept of labor can be specified more precisely so as to account for specific social and historical forms of labor. As I see it, this was Marx's approach: to analytically clarify the philosophical, or metatheoretical, meanings of labor and develop a historical and social theory of the forms of expression of actual human labor.

Habermas' criticism that Marx fails to adequately account for self-reflection is substantially correct. A systematic theory of knowledge is not systematically elaborated and nowhere does Marx explain or elaborate a process through which subjects can come to transcend the ideological distortions imposed by the material relations of capitalist production. In other words, what brings about the conditions sufficient for subjects to critically question existing social relations and their

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<sup>187</sup> (1968), p.77.

understandings of the same? In this author's view it seems likely that Marx assumed that the disjuncture or non-identity between reality and consciousness (self-understandings) provided the "leverage" for critique and self-reflection.

Whether one examines Marx's early critique of Hegel's Rechtphilosophie or his later critique of bourgeois political economy, one will find that it is a two-pronged attack. First, criticism is directed against the existing state of affairs (whether state or economy) and second, against the most sophisticated self-understandings and theoretical presentations (whether it be Hegel or Ricardo). The actual working of a capitalist economy can provide the needed leverage against the theory as well as the theory providing leverage against the reality. To the extent that theory and reality are not identical, that there are non-identities and contradictions, the possibilities for critique exist. Furthermore one may assume, as Marx apparently did, that the privations exacted by capitalist production will impel the subject to question a previously unquestioned, natural understanding of society. In other words, the cunning of history, materialistically understood as the unintended consequences of an uncontrolled system of

production, will somehow engender the conditions for enlightenment. While these arguments are insightful and suggestive, they are not sufficient to account for critical self-reflection. They rely too much on hopeful assumptions. It is for this reason that neo-Marxists from Lukacs to Habermas have wrestled with the problem of the subjective basis for revolution.

Habermas' additional claim that Marx's epistemology lapses into positivism on account of this failure to account for self-reflection is specious and anachronistic. As I have argued above, Marx does not misunderstand his theoretical efforts and see his critique of political economy as a branch of the natural sciences. First, what Marx meant by science is something altogether different from the meanings attributed to him by subsequent interpreters. Science meant, as I have argued, the investigation of the social practices (the realm of becoming) that constitute the fixed forms of objectivity. Second, Marx's critique of political economy is in large part a critique of its positivist orientation. In sum, one of the fundamental mystifications of political economy is the perception of historically transient productive and social relations as being timeless, eternal and supra-historical. The "laws" discovered by political economy were revealed by Marx to be (to use terminology

Marx did not) scientific misunderstandings in as much as the laws of political economy are a social product misconceived as natural. This is precisely Marx's point in criticizing a leading positivist of his day: "Hence Auguste Comte and his school might just as well have shown that feudal lords are an eternal necessity, in the same way as they have done in the case of the lords of capital."<sup>188</sup>

Let us note here that Habermas's attribution to Marx of an intention to uncover the laws of motion of capitalist society as natural laws is an interpretation emphatically rejected by his mentor, Adorno. Citing the same quote as Habermas but to prove the opposite point, Adorno argues that:

The youthful Marx expressed the unending entwinement of the two elements [nature and history] with an extremist vigor bound to irritate dogmatic materialists. "We know only a single science, the science of history. History can be considered from two sides...Yet there is no separating the two sides;

as long as men exist, natural and human history will qualify each other."<sup>189</sup>

Adorno understood the irony in the construct 'natural history.' It is the uncontrolled social product that brings to history the force of nature. The 'natural laws'

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<sup>188</sup> (1977), p. 451.

<sup>189</sup> Adorno (1973), p. 358.



operative in a historical epoch acquire the status of a dominating force "because of its [their] inevitable character under the prevailing conditions of production."<sup>190</sup> History appears natural to subjects because it is "neither seated in their consciousness nor subsumed under them as a whole." There is no mistaking Adorno's position when he states:

...the assumption of natural laws is not to be taken a la lettre--that least of all is it to be ontologized in the sense of a design, whatever its kind, of so-called "man"--this is confirmed by the strongest motive behind all Marxist theory: that those laws can be abolished. The realm of freedom would no sooner begin than they would cease to apply.<sup>191</sup>

Habermas seems to take Marx 'a la lettre.' What for Adorno is an unending entwinement of nature and history is for Habermas the reduction of the latter to the former. Perhaps the cure for those who read Marx's use of the phrase 'laws of nature' is to put quotes around it so as to emphasize the ironic nature of the construction when applied to society. This may serve as a reminder that the 'laws' of social development appear as natural and act as if they were natural (from the perspective of the subject) but are the creation of a subject who is not the conscious author of his own history.

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 354.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

If Habermas had wanted to conclusively argue the case for Marx's positivism he could have employed the criteria derived from his analysis of Comte's positivism. In other words, he could have argued that Marx's categorical structure could be subsumed by a definition of positivism. In this analysis, Habermas distills the concept 'positive' into five possible meanings: sense certainty, methodological certainty, the deduction of law-like hypotheses, technical utilization of knowledge, and the relativity and unfinished state of knowledge.<sup>192</sup>

But again, Marx's approach simply cannot be fit into the mold. For example, the methodological requirement of the deduction of law-like hypotheses necessitates that specific cases be subsumed under general laws. If Marx had been a positivist in this sense, he would not have needed the historical level of concepts. Rather, the metatheoretical level would have been justified as a statement of the laws of nature and historical specifics would fall under the general laws.

Finally, it is inappropriate to attribute to Marx the crimes of his adherents. Habermas is wrong in seeing existing socialist societies as the logical working out of

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<sup>192</sup> see (1971), p. 74-77.

tendencies in Marx's theory. This is a peculiarly idealist construction of history given Habermas' self-understanding as a materialist. If Habermas' object of analysis is Marxism, in the sense of a legitimating ideology as developed and understood in specific Socialist societies, then his assertion of its positivistic and instrumental qualities can scarcely be questioned. If it is Marx, then I believe he is wrong. A technological civilization, a society of "social engineers and inmates", a danger faced by any bureaucratized society whether socialist or not, is no more compatible with the logical workings out of Marx's theory than is the continued existence of a society of capitalists and workers whose value lies in their status as brute objects and instruments in the production process. The idea of human beings as instruments of either social engineers or capitalists is flatly incompatible with the moral vision in Marx. The Stalinist purges are no more the working out of Marx's theory than psychological torture and brainwashing are the working out of the theory of defense mechanisms in Freud's ego-psychology.

The object of Habermas' critique is both Marx and Marxism and his analysis is weakened by a failure to adequately distinguish between them. Agnes Heller has raised a similar question and asserts that Habermas'

"...Marx is the institutionalized one: Marxism, historical materialism." The Marx that Habermas critiques is the Marx of Marxist ideology. Or as Heller nicely puts it, "He reinterprets the Marx who was already interpreted by Marxism..."<sup>193</sup> If this is, as I believe, the case, then Habermas' critique is not properly speaking a critique of Marx. Rather it is a critique of Marxism with recourse to Marx. While the apparent object of critique is Marx, the real object is many times removed in space, time, culture and theoretical intention. The intent of Habermas' construction of the ideal speech situation is oddly betrayed by his failure to distinguish between Marx and Marxism. Rather than freeing scholarly debate from ideological distortion, ideology is smuggled into his analysis of Marx and epistemological issues.

In order to conceptually link Marx and Marxism one must assume an identity, both theoretical and practical, between, for example, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. There is, indeed, a tendency among a broad spectrum of political and social theorists to do precisely that. Individual writers, depending on their particular focus and specific axes to grind, may eliminate or add one or another terms to the equation. In general, orthodox

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<sup>193</sup> Thompson and Held (1982), p. 22.

Marxists wish to affirm the equation in order to point to a continuous theoretical heritage which can sustain legitimations of the existing state of affairs in socialist countries. Liberals and conservatives point to the same equation as proof that Marxism leads to Stalinism. Both positions are fundamentally ideological and rigorous analysis of Marx's own texts will not sustain the equation. For example, take the first pair of terms: Marx/Engels. While close friends and collaborators, Marx and Engels held to significantly different views on the following three topics: human nature, value theory, and the dialectic.

Terrance Bell, for instance, has argued that Marx held to what he calls a radical humanist view of human nature while Engels held a naturalistic, positivistic view.<sup>194</sup> Marx held that the theory of value is historically specific to the capitalist mode of production. Engels held that it is trans-historical in its explanatory power. A powerful and compelling analysis by John Weeks demonstrates the range of issues that this difference bears upon, including the question of the transition from feudalism to capitalism.<sup>195</sup> The question of

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<sup>194</sup> (1979), p. 2.

<sup>195</sup> (1981), p. 3-62.

a dialectic of nature has a long history beginning with Lukacs and Korsch's work in the 1920's and more recently with Alfred Schmidt.<sup>196</sup> The compelling evidence is that Marx's dialectic is socio-natural, subject-object, while Engels' dialectic is an ontological verity.

### The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory

The major implication of Habermas' critique is that Marx's work does not provide an adequate normative basis for critique. Habermas argues that: "From the beginning there was a lack of clarity concerning the normative foundation of Marxian social theory."<sup>197</sup> Marx could carry out his critique on the basis of an immanent critique of political economy, i.e., through and within the understandings of his time. In other words, in the mid-nineteenth century, bourgeois theory was far from having lost all normative content. Rather justifications of capitalism (in political economy) and the state (natural law theories) depended on the explicit claim that one or the other, or both, were the only forms of social

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<sup>196</sup> see appendix to Schmidt (1981).

<sup>197</sup> (1979), p. 96.

organization capable of fostering the realization of the norms of freedom, equality, liberty, and individuality. Since this was the case, there was a cultural context to which Marx need only implicitly appeal.

But that this is no longer the case follows from the fact that "bourgeois consciousness has become cynical..."<sup>198</sup> In this century, social theory "...has been thoroughly emptied of binding normative contents."<sup>199</sup> Bourgeois ideals no longer rest on a widely held intersubjective consensus but rather tend to be ritually and cynically used to legitimate political action and have been virtually completely excluded from the social sciences in the name of positivism. This produces the dilemma that one can not any longer employ the method of immanent critique with any effect if the theory one wishes to critique appears to restrict itself to the purely descriptive and empirical.

The resolution of this dilemma lies at the heart of Habermas' theoretical project. The question becomes: given the dissolution of the background consensus that once was supportive of bourgeois norms, how is it possible

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<sup>198</sup> (1979), p. 96.

<sup>199</sup> (1979), p. 97.

to "reconstruct (the) general presuppositions of communication and procedures for justifying norms and values?"<sup>200</sup> This is the problem the construct of the ideal speech situation seeks to address and to which I shall turn shortly.

As noted above, one argument Habermas employs is to say that the problem of a normative basis for Marxian theory is essentially a historical result of the dissolution of bourgeois norms. But Habermas advances another argument: the problem is inherent in Marx's theory. If, as Habermas claims, Marx reduces knowledge to the technical and instrumental, then instrumental reason is the only normative basis available to Marx and Marxist criticism. But, as I have shown, this claim is true only in the restricted sense that Marx values objectified instrumental knowledge in that it allows for, or may be useful in enabling, a reduction in necessary labor time. While in capitalist relations this results in greater surplus value for the capitalist, under socialized production it has the potential benefit of freeing the subject from necessary labor. That capitalism fosters this development is of considerable benefit to emancipated labor since the other side of this development is the real

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<sup>200</sup> (1979), p. 97.



potential of greater free time for all-sided human development. Through the mediation of social relations, instrumental knowledge can have a normative dimension: a normative imperative and a potential for liberation that may or may not be realized in historical practice. Specifically, therefor, the distinction between necessary and surplus labor is not simply a technical and economic term. It has profound critical and normative implications.

As noted earlier the implications of the argument that Marx either lacks a normative grounding of critique or that grounding is restricted to capitalist norms of productivity and calculable efficiency are quite serious. For if Marxian theory is morally and ethically bankrupt it inevitable leads to treating persons as things and issues in a social theory of control, manipulation and policy of social engineering. Clearly, also, this problem is not the exclusive domain of varieties of Marxism. To be accurate, it is a function of all social and political theories positivistically and scientistically oriented in their methods and perspectives. To the extent that historical Marxism has taken on a positivist orientation - and this is especially relevant in countries where Marxism is a legitimating ideology - it is susceptible to this line of criticism.

Habermas argues that the critical theory of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse had not yet adequately formulated the normative and ethical foundations adequate to sustain their critique. To phrase it as a question: to what concepts of truth, freedom, justice can critical theory appeal in its critique of capitalism and its justification of a more just and rational society that are not ideological and particularistic in their scope? Or to put it another way, can a critical theory and its normative foundations be secure from the very charge of ideology it brings against other theories. As McCarthy states it: "How does the conception of freedom on which it relies insure that critical theory too is not just another time-bound (say post-Enlightenment), culture based (say secularized bourgeois) and perhaps even "class"-bound (say alienated intellectual) standpoint?"<sup>201</sup> The perceived failure of Marx, as well as Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, to settle this question is perhaps the central motivation in Habermas' work. His critique of Marx, analysis of Hegel's 'Jena system,' and productive journey into linguistics have issued in his theory of systematically distorted communication, knowledge constitutive interests and ideal speech situation.

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<sup>201</sup> see McCarthy's introduction to Legitimation Crisis (1975), p.xi-xii.

Habermas stated the core claim of this theoretical project in his 1965 Frankfurt University inaugural lecture:

The human interest in autonomy and responsibility is not mere fancy, for it can be apprehended a priori. What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: language. Through its structure, autonomy, and responsibility are posited for us. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus. Taken together, autonomy and responsibility constitute the only Idea that we possess a priori in the sense of the philosophical tradition. Perhaps that is why the language of German Idealism, according to which "reason" contains both will and consciousness as its elements is not quite obsolete."<sup>202</sup>

Hence, Habermas' theory of communicative competence is designed to meet the need for a normative foundation for social theory. Drawing on Wittgenstein, Habermas argues that the concept of language implies the concept of reaching an understanding. This can be stated even more strongly: reaching an understanding is internal to the concept of language. The process of communication through language would indeed be meaningless if the intention of reaching an understanding, or consensus, were absent. But just as clearly not all communication results in a true consensus: all sorts of 'empirical' factors may intervene to prevent it, i.e., relations of force, conscious deception, and unconscious self-deception. Yet, reaching an understanding or a true consensus, is a concept which

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<sup>202</sup> (1973), p. 314.

all speakers of a "natural language intuitively know, therefore it is a priori or innate."<sup>203</sup>

A functioning language game presupposes four claims that all speakers implicitly understand: "the comprehensibility of the utterance, the truth of its propositional content, the appropriateness of its performatory component, and the authenticity of the speaking subject."<sup>204</sup> In normal social praxis these claims are "naively" accepted and discourse proceeds on the basis of a tacitly held intersubjective background consensus. In such a situation, the above claims are taken for granted. If, however, this intersubjective background consensus is broken or challenged, the presumed rationality, truth, morality, and authenticity of a statement becomes an object of discourse. If this does happen, then these questions can be rendered subject to resolution only if the persons engaged in discourse suspend all "motives except that of a willingness to come to an understanding..." This involves, as McCarthy elaborates, a willingness to suspend judgement as to the "existence of certain states of affairs (that may or may

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<sup>203</sup> (1973), p. 17.

<sup>204</sup> (1973), p. 18.

not exist) and as to the rightness of certain norms (that may or may not be correct.)"<sup>205</sup>

The centrality of language lies in its relating of three domains: external nature, the social world and the subjective world of the speaker. Additionally it is through language that a subject comes to demarcate these domains. In other words, through language the subject differentiates himself from an external nature "that he objectifies on the third-person attitude of an observer," from a social environment "that he conforms to or deviates from", and from his own subjective consciousness and experiences to which the subject has privileged access.<sup>206</sup>

For our purposes what is important in this analysis are the norms or validity claims that are embedded in communication and made explicit in the ideal speech situation. In ordinary communication, statements about external nature carry the implicit claim to be true, statements pertaining to interaction presuppose a claim to "rightness", and the claim to authenticity inheres in statements regarding the subject's inner nature. Further, in discourse there must be a just distribution of chances

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<sup>205</sup> introduction to Habermas (1975), p. xiv.

<sup>206</sup> (1979), p. 66.

to speak and the freedom to advance propositions and to challenge and critique claims regarding the above domains.

As Habermas puts it:

We can examine every utterance to see whether it is true or untrue, justified or unjustified, truthful or untruthful, because in speech, grammatical sentences are embedded in relations to reality in such a way that in an acceptable speech action segments of external nature, society, and internal nature always come into appearance together."<sup>207</sup>

These, in sum, are norms derived from, or embedded in, ordinary language, made explicit in the ideal speech situation construct and with which Habermas hopes to provide the foundation for critical theory.

My analysis of Marx's concept of labor and the critique of Habermas presented above suggests that the question of whether or not Marx holds to norms other than instrumental rationality is an open question. I have demonstrated that for Marx labor is not solely instrumental behavior. If it were then all aspects of human activity could be judged only by criteria of technical efficiency and questions of social freedom and the form of a just society would be susceptible only to technical answers. Justice and human freedom would then be nothing but a technical, bureaucratic problem and the

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<sup>207</sup> (1979), p. 67-8.

construction of a socialist society would become the domain of social engineers.

While a full scale analysis of the normative aspect of Marx's work is beyond the scope of this work, I will argue, in conclusion, that strong evidence exists for the claim that Marx indeed held to norms that provide leverage for his critique of capitalism. These norms are: freedom, equality, consciousness, sociality and individuality. I shall further demonstrate that Marx was conscious of the fact that his method distinguished his work from the other political economists (particularly Proudhon).

### The Normative Dimension in Marx

In the period of 1843-1844, Marx's work reveals certain clear intentions: a critique of the state and money. Marx viewed the critique of religion as being, in the main, complete. His critique of capitalism and political economy is, I shall argue, informed by and grows

logically out of his critique of religion. As Marx states it:

The critique of religion ends in the doctrine that man is the supreme being for man; thus it ends with the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a debased, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being...<sup>208</sup>

In this context it is clear why Marx turned from philosophy to social theory. The compelling question for Marx became the analysis of those conditions other than religion that oppress humanity e.g. the state and the economy. If the Enlightenment project of demystification was to be completed, critical analysis of these forms of social domination would have to be developed.

Most important from the standpoint of a critique of Habermas is the normative dimension of Marx's early works, which is indeed the dominant dimension. Works such as "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law" are an internal critique of the existing German state and Hegel's philosophical legitimation of that state. But Marx is, at the same time, turning the critical method he had developed out of his confrontation with Hegel and the Young Hegelians to a critique of political economy, specifically James Mill. Marx had not yet developed an internal critique of political economy. Thus, to critique

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<sup>208</sup> (1975), p. 182.



Mill, Marx's weapons are philosophy, moralistic polemic and outrage expressed in a tone very similar to Engel's contemporaneous work Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy.<sup>209</sup> The central question for understanding Marx, and evaluating Habermas' interpretation, is to determine whether this philosophical-ethical dimension of Marx's critique (and the norms underlying it) remain a part of Marx's later works which differ otherwise in the respect that they are a fully developed internal critique of political economy.

Marx's "Comments on James Mill, 'Elemens d'economie politique'" exemplify his strategy of employing a philosophical-ethical critique against political economy. For example, in discussing Mill on money as a medium of exchange, Marx has nothing to say about money that we would normally construe as an economic statement or critique. Instead Marx employs the Hegelian terminology of mediation and alienation to demonstrate that human social activity becomes "A material thing outside man".<sup>210</sup> In these passages Marx is concerned to point out that in a system of exchange things no longer have significance

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<sup>209</sup> Marx, Engels (1975), p. 418-443. see also Rubel (1981)

<sup>210</sup> (1975), p. 212.

because of a relationship to a subject but instead gain significance as expressions of monetary value.<sup>211</sup>

Money represents an alien force which appears as a "product and yet as the non-product" of man finally debasing and dehumanizing man by commodifying his social, moral and psychological existence.<sup>212</sup> In a system of credit, the moral quality that makes a person "good" is nothing more than the ability to repay. As Marx puts it:

Credit is the economic judgment on the morality of man...Within the credit relationship, it is not the case that money is transcended in man, but that man himself is turned into money...Human individuality, human morality itself, has become both an object of commerce and the material in which money exists."<sup>213</sup>

Marx argues that such a result demonstrates "the extent to which all progress and all inconsistencies in a false system are extreme retrogression and the extreme consequence of vileness."<sup>214</sup>

Marx goes on to look closely at the exchange system. For exchange to occur, one must produce a surplus beyond

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<sup>211</sup> by comparison see Capital (1977), p. 47-167. There money is analyzed as a medium of exchange, store of value, means of payment, measure of value and relative prices, and unit of account, or general equivalent.

<sup>212</sup> (1975), p. 214.

<sup>213</sup> (1975), p. 215.

<sup>214</sup> (1975), p. 215.

one's immediate need. But this does not mean one rises "above selfish need." This production for exchange is not "social" production for it does not go beyond every producer producing for himself. "Each of us sees in his product only the objectification of his own selfish need, and therefore in the product of the other the objectification of a different selfish need, independent of him and alien to him."<sup>215</sup> The purchaser of a product has a need or desire for the object which Marx argues, puts the purchaser in a position of dependence on the product.

Of course, the producer of a surplus for exchange calculates production on the basis of the purchaser's need. In fact, the production of a surplus is only an "appearance," a "semblance." The reality is that the producer produces for an exchange which he has conceptualized prior to production. Producers do not stand in any human or social relation to these objects or other producers, since their "respective products...are the means, the mediator, the instrument, the acknowledged power of our mutual needs."<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> (1975), p.225.

<sup>216</sup> (1975), p. 226.

Produced objects have value, significance and meaning because they are "instruments" or "means" to the satisfaction of the desires of both the producers and purchasers. From the viewpoint of selfish, egoistic need everything and everyone becomes instrumental. "For me, you are rather the means and instrument of producing this object that is my aim, just as conversely you stand in the same relationship to my object."<sup>217</sup> In sum, Marx characterizes the social relationship of production for exchange as a relationship of master and slave, and one in which persons become the instruments or servants of their desire. While in Capital the language changes, the point is still the same: exchange is unfree and unequal and does not conform to the discourse which characterizes the market ideology of classical political economy.

At the conclusion of the 'Comments on James Mill,' and more completely in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, Marx elaborates the normative basis of his critique. The counter-factual assumption is "that we had carried out production as human beings."<sup>218</sup> The distinctions are as follows: a) the object would be an objectification of the producers "specific character" and

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<sup>217</sup> (1975), p. 227.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

"individuality", b) an enjoyable "manifestation of (my) life" during production, c) would be known to the producer as an objectification of his personality and powers, d) the producer would be conscious of having satisfied a human need by his work, e) by creating an object that is an expression of the producer's life and the satisfaction of a social need the producer would realize his human "social" or communal nature.

Whereas in political economy labor is a "means to life," Marx presupposes that it can be a "free manifestation of life, hence an enjoyment of life." In political economy labor and life are no longer related terms. If the intrinsic connection between these terms is sundered, i.e., if labor is alienated, then it becomes "hateful...a torment, the semblance of an activity...a forced activity" necessitated by an "external fortuitous need..."<sup>219</sup> By contrast Marx grounds his critique explicitly upon a "real, conscious and true mode of existence...which is social activity and social enjoyment."<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> (1975), p. 228.

<sup>220</sup> (1975), p. 217.

Marx's positing of a normative basis for his critique of Mill, a basis outside the conceptual limits of classical political economy but counter-factually derived from it, is the factor that he argued distinguishes his work from Proudhon's. Marx argued that Proudhon is, despite his critical pretensions, constrained by political economy's presuppositions: private property and equality. With respect to property, Marx remarks:

Proudhon's wish to abolish not having and the old way of having is quite identical with his wish to abolish the practically estranged relation of man to his objective essence and the economic expression of human self-estrangement. But since his criticism of political economy is still captive to the premises of political economy, the reappropriation of the objective world itself is still conceived in the economic form of possession.<sup>221</sup>

Proudhon wishes to abolish the inequality of wealth through the idea of "equal possession." But his analysis remains riddled with contradictions in ways similar to the political economists. Smith, Ricardo, and Sismondi all attacked particular forms of private property. Occasionally, when conscious of a contradiction in political economy, these authors would discuss what Marx referred to as the appearance of humanity in economic relationships. It is crucial to note that the economists, "as a rule...take these relations precisely in their clearly pronounced difference from the human, in their

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<sup>221</sup> (1975b), p. 43.

strictly economic sense." The political economists remain committed to an economic, or abstract, instrumental, view of persons and society while Marx clearly maintains that there is a distinction between the economic relations understood in their estranged, inhuman form in capitalist society and a potential "human form." Proudhon goes as far as one can, while still trapped in the assumptions of political economy, in exposing the disparity between the "human semblance" of economic relations and "their inhuman reality."<sup>222</sup>

The above analysis indicates that the ethical/normative assumptions Marx held and briefly elaborated in the "Comments..." are central to his own understanding of what distinguished his work from that of the political economists of his time. In the first chapter of the Manuscripts, "Wages of Labor", Marx is concerned to show how the dynamics of capitalist production operate consistently to the detriment of the worker. The advantages that accrue to the capitalist and landlord due to separation of capital rent and labor are "fatal for the workers."<sup>223</sup> As capitalist production expands it reduces the worker "spiritually and physically to the condition of

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<sup>222</sup> (1975b), p.33.

<sup>223</sup> (1975), p. 235.

a machine and from being a man [he] becomes an abstract activity and a belly..."<sup>224</sup> The workers "abstract activity" Marx refers to here is what he will later term "labor power," a conceptual advance Marx viewed as one of his major contributions to political economy.

No matter what socio-economic conditions prevail workers suffer, despite the fact that all political economists point out that without labor there is no wealth, no capital. When socio-economic conditions decline workers suffer "increasing misery," in expanding conditions "--misery with complications, and in a fully developed state of society--static misery."<sup>225</sup> This, according to the logic of political economy, is the fate of labor. It raises, for Marx, two questions:

- 1) What in the evolution of mankind is the meaning of this reduction of the greater part of mankind to abstract labor?
- 2) What are the mistakes committed by the piecemeal reformers, who either want to raise wages...or regard equality of wages (as Proudhon does) as the goal of social revolution.<sup>226</sup>

Our attention throughout this work has focused on the first question and Marx's answer to it. The meaning of

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<sup>224</sup> (1975), p. 236.???

<sup>225</sup> (1975), p. 239.

<sup>226</sup> (1975), p. 241.



labor in classical political economy is clear to Marx: "Labor occurs only in the form of activity as a source of livelihood." Labor is simply a means to life, an instrument to be employed in order to live. Political economy fails to consider human activity outside the realm of production. Failing to consider other aspects of the worker as human being, political economy "leaves such consideration to criminal law, to doctors, to religion, to the statistical tables, to politics and to the poor-house overseer."<sup>227</sup> In an ironic sense, political economy's understanding of labor as a commodity, as a thing, is adequate to its object of study, the capitalist economy which produces labor in this form. The crux of Marx's critique of political economy at this stage is that it sees labor, and the existing system reproducing labor, as an oppressive system that produces people fit only for restrictive, instrumental activity.

Thus far the analysis of Marx's normative dimension reveals that in his early works the ethical question of the reduction of labor to a means to life was the basis of his critique of capitalism at that time he lacked a critique of political economy that was internal to that

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<sup>227</sup> (1975), p. 241.

subject. Similarly, in his critique of Proudhon, Marx shows he was conscious of the fact that his theory had a dimension transcending the limits of political economy, and the limits constraining Proudhon's analysis. In what follows I seek to demonstrate that this normative dimension is carried through in Marx's later works and is grounded in the metatheoretical level of analysis.

Marx has a normative dimension in his later works and it is contained in his vision of labor emancipated from the domination of capital (or the same formulation in terms of the early Marx: non-alienated labor). Textual clues to these norms can be found in all of Marx's major writings. The norms which infuse his vision of emancipated labor I contend are "The free development of individualities,"<sup>228</sup> consciousness (in terms of conscious control of the social product), freedom (in a substantive rather than formal sense) and sociality.

In Capital, Marx characterizes the world of Robinson Crusoe, Medieval Europe, and an "association of free men."<sup>229</sup> The first two exhibit different types of modes of domination (supremacy and subordination). Dependency in

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<sup>228</sup> (1973), p. 706.

<sup>229</sup> (1977), p. 169-72.

the feudal mode of production (and of feudal society generally) is based on personal subordination. In capitalism, personal dependence gives way to formal freedom. Now free from political and religious constraints, labor is formally and "really" subsumed under capital (the objective factors of production become alien property and the subject becomes an instrument). Perhaps nowhere else is Marx so bitterly ironic as in the famous passage where he lays bare the norms that justify commodity exchange, the "very Eden of the innate rights of man." Marx continues:

It is the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, let us say of labor-power, are determined only by their own free will. They contract as free persons, who are equal before the law. Their contract is the final result in which their joint will finds a common legal expression. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each disposes only of what is his own. And Bentham, because each looks only to his own advantage. The only force bringing them together and putting them into relation with each other, is the selfishness, the gain and the private interest of each. Each pays heed to himself only, and no one worries about the others. And precisely for that reason, either in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of an omniscient providence, they all work together to their mutual advantage, for the commonweal, and in the common interest."<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> (1977), p. 280.

Marx's vision of emancipated labor is presented as a free association of producers commonly owning the means of production. They exercise their labor under conditions "transparent" to their consciousness.<sup>231</sup> Under their conscious control, the social product no longer assumes its fantastic forms.

If the normative dimension of Marx's critique is expressed in his vision of emancipated labor, it is grounded in the metatheoretical level of analysis. It is for that reason that Habermas fails to recognize it. Marx's analysis of man in capitalism is that he is alienated 1) from self through the sale of labor power, 2) from the product through capitalist property relations, 3) from nature which becomes brute objectivity that is treated instrumentally, 4) from others through the impoverished social relations of utilitarian self interest, and 5) from consciousness which must become separate from the body and sensuousness to maintain the fiction of freedom and allow the sale of labor power. However, the metatheoretical level provides a realm abstracted from these specific historical relations, a realm in which the subject can be conceptualized in a manner not constrained by existing social relations. That

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<sup>231</sup> (1977), p. 172.

man is an active being can be seen to imply that this activity can be a pleasure rather than a burden, a manifestation of life rather than merely a means. That man is an objective being implies the counter-factual possibility that the product can truly be the manifestation of the subject's powers and under the control of the subject. That the subject is a natural being implies that the subject can relate to both internal and external nature in ways other than instrumentally. That man is a social being implies relations that can be characterized as a bond or community rather than atomistically. Marx's anthropology is fundamentally one which stresses the potential development and realization of man's powers. This is, as McPherson<sup>232</sup> notes, a fundamentally ethical concept of man.

Seen from the vantage point of Marx's ontological assumptions, being or socially produced objectivity can take forms other than those characterized by alienation and the commodity forms. That man must appropriate nature

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<sup>232</sup> In discussing power, McPherson distinguishes between an ethical and descriptive concept. The ethical concept of power is defined as the subject's ability "to use and develop his essentially human capacities...and his power must include access to the means of using his capacities, and that his power is diminished by lack of such access." He develops the concept of "extractive power" to cover the ability of one person to use another's power. (1973), p. 39-76.

in the form of useful objects, carry on this activity with others, does not necessitate that the social relations and material objectivity thereby produced be a hostile and uncontrollable power that requires the commodification of these essential relations.

From an epistemological perspective a mentally and physically active subject constitutes the world of objects and social relations and the forms through which these are known. If we may imagine that this world could be the conscious product of the social individual then the illusions created by an objectivity out of the subject's control would vanish. The fetishism of the commodity, money, the trinity formula, etc., could be seen as what they are: a social product. By abstracting from the specific forms of historical social relations and by focusing on the common, universal and necessary conditions of social existence, Marx creates a conceptual space suitable to the grounding of normative assumptions.

Habermas asks us to conceive of communicative relations free of all the distortions inherent in ordinary life: power, deception and self-deception. Marx asks us to conceive of the relations of human activity (labor) in a way free from historical conditions of domination:

exploitation, property relations, alienation. Each, though starting from different paradigms and with different theoretical projects, wants to abstract from real conditions that distort those paradigms and to construct a vision of an alternative. For Habermas, speech acts implicitly carry with them claims to be true or untrue, authentic or inauthentic, normative or ethical, rightness and equality of participation and freedom from constraints. These claims, while they inhere in ordinary communication, are made explicit in the ideal speech situation construct. Similarly, Marx claims that human labor abstracted from historical distortions can be carried out freely and in control by conscious social individuals. Habermas claims the centrality of language lies in its relating the domains of external nature, internal nature and the social world. Speech necessarily brings these domains together. So also does labor.

Finally, Habermas' theory is animated by an overriding interest in human autonomy and the realization of such through a theory with a practical intent--that of realizing a just and free society. This, too, is Marx's interest. His analysis of capitalism reveals the extent to which freedom and autonomy are fictions in capitalist society.

These powerful similarities suggest, in this writer's opinion, that Habermas has not so much transcended the limitations of Marx but rather tends to provide a powerful confirmation of the intent of Marx's theoretical project. Marx's analyses penetrate the secret language of commodities while Habermas penetrates the presuppositions of language. These analyses complement each other.

Both theorists try to base hope for human emancipation on assumptions derived from aspects of human existence. They argue that underlying labor and language is a dimension of general, abstract, universal and necessary assumptions: apriori assumptions. Given the intent of their respective projects, that their thought is animated by 'emancipatory interest' and part of a historical tradition of critical theory, it should not be surprising to find that the normative assumptions upon which each theory relies are similar, if not virtually identical.



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