

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I give an account of Marx's methodology in his critique of political economy. By methodology I mean methods of investigation and presentation (a distinction made by Marx himself), and ideas on method -- the methods of other writers, his own, and scientific method in general. I have tried to explain why Marx devoted so much of his time to this critique, what methods he employed in criticizing political economy, how he was able to make the Grundrisse a significant advance over his previous efforts, and where, in the 'final' version of this critique, some of his fundamental arguments can be refuted.

The ideal commentary on Marx's social and political thought (and here I part company with many commentators) presupposes a thorough understanding of the economic work on which, according to Marx, it rests. In these economic studies, the commentator is confronted with Marx at work on the theory of political economy, using methods drawn from the philosophy, logic, historical research, and political economy of his time. His methods and ideas on method are of paramount importance in grasping the nature and content of his critique, since the material to which he addressed himself, and the substance of his work, differ very greatly from what we recognize today as economics. The originality of my thesis lies in the distinction drawn between political economy and modern economics with reference to the elucidation of Marx's work, the detailed consideration of his use of terms from nineteenth-century logical science of both the Hegelian and traditional pre-Hegelian types, the claim that important methodological innovations were recorded in

the Introduction (1857) to the Grundrisse, and the specific criticisms offered of the fundamental arguments of Capital.

Since Marx's critique of political economy, begun in 1844, was never finished, and since its scope and form were altered many times, I discuss his numerous plans for this work in chronological order, in conjunction with an account of his economic studies, in so far as they have been preserved in published form. I also consider his methods and ideas on method in selected works written between 1842 and mid-1857. This material supports my contention that three methodological innovations are recorded in the Introduction (1857) to the Grundrisse -- innovations in his method of investigation, in his ideas on a scientific method for presenting his critique, and in his plan for the critique as a whole. The first innovation is that he undertook a thorough investigation of the meanings and logical interrelations of the fundamental concepts of political economy; the second, that he identified a version of logical synthesis as the 'scientifically correct method' to be followed in his presentation; the third, that he decided to open the substantial part of his critique with a discussion of the economic category 'capital'. These innovations are elucidated, in the central chapter of my thesis, by examining their place in Marx's arguments in this text.

In considering the remainder of the Grundrisse notebooks, I contend that in his methods and studies Marx did not reject the content of the Introduction, but developed his ideas further in the same direction. I also argue that his use of certain logical methods of investigation and his reasoning behind certain conclusions about the nature and future of capitalist society can

be seen with exceptional clarity in the Grundrisse. These methods include his efforts to formulate correct questions and clear distinctions, to analyse the conceptual counterparts of economic phenomena as they appear, to produce conceptual counterparts of economic phenomena as they really are, and to use 'idealist' expressions and 'ideal' formulations without introducing errors. I consider his work in the Grundrisse on value, capital, labour, and profit, and the relationship of these investigations to his critique of political economy -- the published volumes, and the finished product, in so far as its outlines can be discerned.

I discuss the plans and publications which followed the writing of the Introduction to the Grundrisse in August/September 1857, so as to establish the context of volume one of Capital, the only volume of the critique which Marx himself prepared for the publishers and corrected for further editions and translations. In my consideration of Marx's fundamental contentions in this work -- contentions about the commodity, labour, and value -- I criticize his version of an objective view of value, his claim that labour is the sole 'property' (apart from the property of being material things) common to the 'material bodies of commodities', and his acceptance of the view held by Adam Smith and David Ricardo (among others) that skilled labour is an arithmetic multiple of something called 'simple labour'. I consider a criticism previously made of Marx's work in Capital -- the criticism that his propositions are unfalsifiable -- and conclude that it is mistaken, since his claims can be refuted, though not with statistical data.

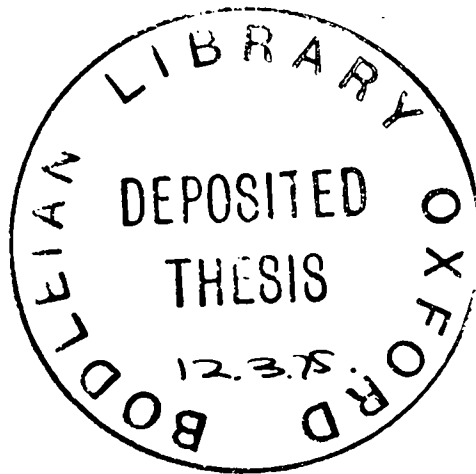
Marx's last recorded comments on methodology in connection with the critique of political economy appear in his Notes (1879-80) on

Adolph Wagner. My consideration of this little-used text reveals that there is a striking continuity in the problems considered and methods employed between the Notes of 1879-80 and the Manuscripts of 1844. In a final chapter I discuss the scientific status of some of Marx's claims about capitalist society, and the general relation of his economic critique to his political thought. I conclude that attempts to deduce a Marxian view of reality, from which his theories are thought logically to follow, are at best misleading, and that his methodology was a highly eclectic mixture of procedures, rather than something distinct and abstractable from his writings, as certain commentators have claimed.

A STUDY OF
MARX'S METHODOLOGY
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
THE GRUNDRISSE

- by -

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- CAP i Marx, Karl. Capital. i. Trans. S. Moore and E. Aveling. Ed. D. Torr. London, 1946, repr. 1957.
- CAP ii _____ . ii. Ed. F. Engels. Moscow, 1957.
- CAP iii _____ . iii. Ed. F. Engels. Moscow, 1959.
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- CCPE Marx, Karl. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Trans. S.W. Ryazanskaya. Ed. M. Dobb. London, 1971.
- CHPR _____ . Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Trans. and ed. Joseph O'Malley. Cambridge, 1970.
- CHR Karl Marx, Chronik seines Lebens in Einzeldaten. Moscow, 1934.
- CHRR _____ .
Repr. Frankfurt, 1971.
- ET Marx, Karl. Early Texts. Trans. and ed. David McLellan. Oxford, 1971.
- FBME Freiligraths Briefwechsel mit Marx und Engels. Ed. Manfred Häckel. 2 vols. [East] Berlin, 1968.
- GDW Deutsches Wörterbuch. Edd. J. and W. Grimm, et al. Leipzig, 1854 etc.
- GEL Greek-English Lexicon. Edd. H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, et al. Oxford, 1968.
- GI Marx, Karl, and Engels, Frederick. German Ideology. Ed. S. Ryazanskaya. London, 1956.

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- MEGA Marx, Karl, and Engels, Friedrich. Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe. Edd. D.B. Ryazanov, et al. Frankfurt and Berlin, 1927 etc.
- MEW _____ . Werke. Berlin, 1956 etc.
- OED New English Dictionary. Edd. J.A.H. Murray, et al. Oxford, 1884 etc.
- OLD Latin Dictionary. Edd. C.T. Lewis and C. Short, et al. Oxford, 1880.
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- PCEF Marx, Karl. Pre-capitalist Economic Formations. Trans. J. Cohen. Ed. E.J. Hobsbawm. London, 1964, repr. 1969.
- PGR _____ . Grundrisse. Trans. Martin Nicolaus. London, 1973.
- Phenom. Hegel, G.W.F. Phenomenology of Mind. Trans. J.B. Baillie. Rev. edn. London, 1931.
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NOTE TO THE READER

All translations from foreign-language texts are my own, unless otherwise acknowledged. The references for my translations are to original-language editions, with alternative references (where possible) to English-language versions for comparison, for example: (MEW xiii. 8 / SW i. 502.) My own insertions are enclosed in square brackets. I have made certain simple insertions (e.g. the verb 'to be', repetition of subjects or verbs within a sentence) without note. Similarly, I have incorporated minor emendations by the editors of MEGA, GR, and MEW into my translations without comment. Double square brackets denote an insertion by an editor other than myself. Emphasis is the author's own, unless otherwise noted.

Since the final versions of Marx and Engels's Holy Family, German Ideology, and Communist Manifesto were set down by Marx, I treat them on a par with works of which Marx was sole author. (See Avineri (1969), 3n.)

Terms and phrases from Hegel's works and the Hegelian philosophical tradition can never be reproduced in modern idiomatic English, since there are no precisely corresponding terms or phrases; such equivalents as exist are not familiar usage at present. I have found the Oxford dictionary helpful in selecting and defining English equivalents for terms and phrases current in nineteenth-century German philosophy and logic (such as determination, universal, moment, mediate, immediately, ideal), and I thought it only just to acknowledge this assistance, and similar help from other works of reference.

Dates in parentheses after the titles of books are the dates of first publication, unless otherwise indicated.

I have only found the key to the cipher of the Christian religion, only extricated its true meaning from the web of contradictions and delusions called theology; -- but in doing so I have certainly committed a sacrilege ... Therefore -- this is the moral of the fable -- we should not, as is the case in theology and speculative philosophy, make real beings and things into arbitrary signs, vehicles, symbols, or predicates of a distinct, transcendent, absolute, i.e. abstract being; but we should accept and understand them in the significance which they have in themselves, which is identical with their qualities, with those conditions which make them what they are: -- thus only do we obtain the key to a real theory and practice.

[Ludwig Feuerbach, Preface (1843) to the second edition of the Essence of Christianity, trans. Marian Evans (George Eliot) (London, 1854), pp. viii, xiii; cf. Das Wesen des Christenthums, 2nd edn. (Leipzig, 1843), pp. xii, xvii-xviii.]

CHAPTER I Introduction

1. The thesis

I shall argue that Marx, in his critique of political economy, aimed to analyse and explain a whole way of life by focusing on a particular sort of social theory -- the theory of the production, distribution, consumption, and exchange of material goods. I shall stress a number of points relevant to the consideration of his methodology that have been overlooked or neglected by previous commentators: the distinction between political economy and modern economics, the meaning of terms (particularly those used in the Grundrisse) derived from his study of classic texts of philosophical logic, the methodological innovations¹ recorded in the Grundrisse, and certain arguments in the first book of Capital said by Marx to be fundamental to the understanding of his critique.

I shall be tracing chronologically the course of Marx's studies and plans for his critical work on political economy. At appropriate points I shall treat in detail some of the texts most central to a critical analysis of methods, ideas on method, and arguments considered by Marx (and by many of his commentators) to be quintessential to his critique and, indeed, to his social and political thought in general.

In summary, I argue that the critique of political economy was never far from the centre of Marx's intellectual life after 1843; that in general his method in this project was to develop logical,

1. For these innovations see below, pp. 34-5. I take an innovation to be the alteration of given material by the introduction of new forms or elements. (OED s.v. Innovation 1.) An innovation, in my view, does not necessarily entail a rejection of previous views or practices.

philosophical, historical, political, and economic criticisms of political economy; that his methods of investigation (and crucial arguments in his published critique) display a hitherto unappreciated reliance on the logical science of his day; that certain important innovations in his plans, methods of investigation, and ideas on a scientific method of presentation were recorded in the Introduction (1857) to the Grundrisse.

Marx employed ideas and methods from philosophy and history in his critical analysis of political economy, on the assumption that it was (among other things) the expression of the defining presuppositions of capitalist society. As a result of substantial changes since his time in the study of logic and of economic phenomena, some of his methods, ideas on method, and arguments now seem obscure. When his enterprise is seen in context, however, he emerges as an unusually thorough social theorist and critic.

2. Methodology and Marx's critique

Marx's critique of political economy is very much his magnum opus, and any attempt at a thorough discussion of his social and political thought must come to terms with his critical study of the economic science of the time. He worked longer and harder on that critique than on any other single project, and it contains in epitome his most mature views on man, society, and the capitalist society of his day. His historical and political writings presupposed and used the views developed in his economic studies; moreover he thought that political life is to be explained, in the first place, with reference to the workings of -- and changes in -- economic life. That is why the critique of political economy is his chief work, why it is

fundamental to (rather than separable from) his political writings, and why it is the most substantial compendium of his social thought.

Understanding this critique necessitates a look at the science of political economy, Marx's reasons for writing a critique, and the ways in which he went about it: his methods, and ideas on method (the methods of others, his own, and scientific method in general), in short -- his methodology.¹ Only a fraction of the critique was published by Marx: that fraction developed out of a long series of plans and projects, and it was, according to his plans, to have been the opening of a larger work. Making plans, doing research, writing drafts, polemics, and topical works, then using all these in final drafts was the Marxian mode of procedure; hence studies, plans, and many diverse works (finished and unfinished) are of immediate relevance to my thesis.

Marx's drafts of 1857-8, published as the bulk of the Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie / Rohentwurf,² represent a unique source for a study of his methodology, because they contain material for parts of the critique of political economy which were planned, but never finished, and because they record investigations which were omitted or revised in later works for reasons discussed below. I shall devote considerable space to the examination of these drafts (as yet little analysed), especially the Introduction (Einleitung) of

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1. Rebarbative, but the best term at hand; I take it that methodology covers methods in Marx's manuscripts and works as well as his ideas on method.
 2. For the place of these manuscripts in Marx's career, see below, pp. 22-3; see also D. Ryazanov, 'Neueste Mitteilungen über den literarischen Nachlass von Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels', Archiv für die Geschichte des Sozialismus und der Arbeiterbewegung, xi (Leipzig, 1925), 385-400, where Ryazanov announced the discovery of the manuscript.

1857, which contains the most extended comments ever made by Marx on scientific method, as well as important examples of some of his methods of investigation. A discussion of this text forms the central chapter of my thesis.

It might be possible to give an account of the substance of Marx's unfinished critique of political economy, that is, to present, in some ordered fashion, his thoughts on the subject in a way that would combine criticism with elucidation of what he has left us. However, a more manageable and more fundamental study (one which I take to fall under 'methodology') concerns certain questions about Marx's work on political economy which are prior to an account of the full substance of his critique: What were his methods in investigating political economy and in presenting his critique? What were his ideas on method? What takes place in the crucial arguments of the critique of political economy? This seems at present a more useful and rewarding approach to his magnum opus than a headlong plunge into the 'thought' of Karl Marx.

3. The science of political economy

Nineteenth-century political economy (Nationalökonomie or politische Ökonomie in German) was usually defined as the science of the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth. It was different from much of modern economics, whether neo-classical, Keynesian, or post-Keynesian, since it posed different questions, developed different sorts of answers, and had a different methodological bias. The political economists attempted to give an account of production, distribution, consumption, and exchange, and their mutual interrelations. They also tried to determine how commodities acquired

their 'value in exchange', and how that value was determined and regulated. In his pioneering work, published in 1776, Adam Smith set the terms for a lengthy debate on 'exchangeable value':

What are the rules which men naturally observe in exchanging them [goods] either for money or for one another, I shall now proceed to examine. These rules determine what may be called the relative or exchangeable value of goods ... In order to investigate the principles which regulate the exchangeable value of commodities, I shall endeavour to shew,

First, what is the real measure of this exchangeable value; or, wherein consists the real price of all commodities.

Secondly, what are the different parts of which this real price is composed or made up.

And, lastly, what are the different circumstances which sometimes raise some or all of these different parts of price above, and sometimes sink them below their natural or ordinary rate; or, what are the causes which sometimes hinder the market price, that is, the actual price, of commodities, from coinciding exactly with what may be called their natural price. (Smith (1776), i. 33-4.)

Much of the effort of the political economists went into what appears today to be a very general inquiry, with statements and defences of their views on definitional questions (what is production? consumption? the relation between the two?), on some of the moral and political issues entailed, and on the best policies for the state. But with the rise of the neo-classical economists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many of the problems which had previously seemed important (such as the theory of value) were pushed aside or redefined in favour of new problems, and a more immediately mathematical approach.

The dividing line between political economy and neo-classical economics in England may be drawn at W.S. Jevons's Theory of Political Economy, first published in 1871, since his work presaged neo-classical economics in certain ways that Marx's did not. Jevons wrote that 'Economics, if it is to be a science at all, must be a mathematical science'. (Jevons (1888), 3.) Not surprisingly, he reformulated the

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problems characteristically set by political economists to suit his own conception of the new science of economics. The problems would now, according to Jevons, be 'purely mathematical in character', even though this might pose difficulties at first. (Jevons (1888), 7-8.)

Since the 1870s, economists have, like Jevons, rejected many of the questions which the political economists had tried to answer. Most modern economists would dismiss a theory of value (i.e. a theory of natural or real prices) as a metaphysical adventure. For example, this problem, put by Ricardo, would be regarded today as confused and senseless: 'Two commodities vary in relative value, and we wish to know in which the variation has really taken place.' (Ricardo (1821), 9.) And his theory of natural prices would be dismissed as unnecessary and unwarranted:

In speaking then of the exchangeable value of commodities, or the power of purchasing possessed by any one commodity, I mean always that power which it would possess, if not disturbed by any temporary or accidental cause, and which is its natural price. (Ricardo (1821), 85.)

But for Ricardo and other political economists concerned with material wealth ('necessaries, conveniences, and amusements', according to Adam Smith) and its increase, decrease, and distribution (as rent, wages, and profits), and with the worth of what has been produced and distributed (that is, the amount of one commodity which another will generally fetch), it seemed sensible to look for a source and regulator of 'exchangeable value'. (Smith (1776), i. 35.)

Something, they assumed, must account for the fact that at different times a given amount of one commodity is worth different amounts of another. Moreover, they assumed that in a given period the exchange-ratio between two commodities tends to be stable (or would be stable,

except for accidental and temporary deviations).¹ What seemed to require explanation was this: What gives commodities their value? What rule are we following when we trade one commodity for others of equal value? What accounts for significant changes in the relative values of different commodities?

Since the time of Adam Smith (and even earlier)² various versions of a labour theory of value had been put forward. Such a theory had the attraction of a single-factor explanation for the phenomenon 'value in exchange' (and for significant variations in it), and labour seemed a more precise and more nearly measureable factor than demand or scarcity. That it could not, in practice, be easily and precisely measured, did not seem a grave disadvantage at the time. The labour theory of value seems to have had, for the political economists, more of the character of a natural truth intuitively grasped than a hypothesis to be tested against statistical data. Smith did not seem discomfited by having to admit that the 'real measure of value' could not itself be accurately measured:

But though labour be the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities, it is not that by which their value is commonly estimated. It is often difficult to ascertain the proportion between two different quantities of labour ... it is not easy to find any accurate measure either of hardship or ingenuity. In exchanging indeed the different productions of different sorts of labour for one another, some allowance is commonly made for both. It is adjusted, however, not by any accurate measure, but by the higgling and bargaining of the market, according to that sort of rough equality which, though not exact, is sufficient for carrying on the business of common life. (Smith (1776), i. 36-7.)

Smith's theory of value was adopted (with modifications) and restated

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1. See Smith (1776), i. 70; Ricardo (1821), 85. See also the comments on exchange-value in J.S. Mill (1848), i. 516-17, 539.
 2. See Marx to Engels, 2 April 1858, where Marx mentions William Petty (1623-87) in connection with an early formulation of the labour theory of value.

in a somewhat clearer form by Ricardo:

It is necessary for me also to remark, that I have not said, because one commodity has so much labour bestowed upon it as will cost £1000 and another so much as will cost £2000 that therefore one would be of the value of £1000 and the other of the value of £2000 but I have said that their value will be to each other as two to one, and that in those proportions they will be exchanged. It is of no importance to the truth of this doctrine, whether one of these commodities sells for £1,100 and the other for £2,200, or one for £1,500 and the other for £3000; into that question I do not at present enquire; I affirm only, that their relative values will be governed by the relative quantities of labour bestowed on their production. (Ricardo (1821), 46, and 16-45.)

Though certain terms and interests are shared by political economists and modern economists, the definitions of the terms, and the presuppositions and intentions of the theorists, differ significantly, even in modern attempts to expand or correct economic studies using the work of political economists or Marx.¹ It does not follow, however, that Marx's work has been completely superseded, or that neo-classical economics and later schools were an unqualified improvement on political economy. But his work does make better sense if we see it as a critical study of political economy, not economics, from his own point of view. From that point of view, much of Jevons's work and most of modern economics, would not seem an advance over political economy at all -- rather the opposite. 'Marx's economics' is, I think, a misnomer.

Marx's critique of political economy does not resemble economics as generally understood and practised today, since he (in common with most political economists up to the time of Jevons) developed many of his distinctions and arguments for reasons other than the establishment

1. See for example the discussion of value in Paul A. Samuelson, Economics, 8th edn. (New York, 1970), 34, 416-17, and the chapters on 'Price Functioning' and 'Supply and Demand', pp. 37-76. For some recent essays in Marxist economics, see E.K. Hunt and Jesse G. Schwartz, eds., Critique of Economic Theory (Harmondsworth, 1972), passim.

of relationships expressible (and eventually testable) in quantitative terms. For example, it seemed important to him to present in Capital the presuppositions that characterize a capitalist, commodity-producing society -- in particular, how certain uncomplicated things and relations come to appear there in the 'enigmatical', 'mysterious' form 'the commodity' -- before he dealt with the aspects of money, capital, and profit which were susceptible to mathematical treatment. (See CAP i. 17, 26, 42.) Few modern economists would expend any effort on explaining in detail what a commodity is (and is not), how things have come to be commodities, how it is that we have come to deal with them in monetary terms, and what exactly is involved in the notions of value and exchange-value. Yet Marx thought that these were all extremely interesting and important problems. In his discussion of them he aimed to provide an insight into the special nature of capitalist society (and how it was different from earlier societies, and from contemporary societies which he thought were organized on a different basis); he also wanted to support his claim that the capitalist system was an alienated and visibly transitional form of social organization.

4. Marx's critique: A general view of the enterprise and methods

Marx's interest in political economy began early in his career and continued up to the very end. Although his projects and preoccupations were numerous, and, after about 1842 or 1843, closely related to his philosophical and political commitments, none the less his critical work on political economy occupied a special place in his plans for research and publication. His critique represented the definitive exposé of various influential political economists, and

commonplace theories and prejudices based on their work. Moreover, it was the format for the rigorous exposition of his own views on society and discoveries about it.

The critique of political economy was intended by Marx to be one of his contributions to the working-class movement, or as he put it, 'a scientific victory for our party'. (Marx to Weydemeyer, 1 February 1859, MEW xxix. 573.) His background and education, and his dedication to criticism (even highly technical criticism) as a practical activity, specially suited him to make an intellectual contribution of a very high standard to the proletarian cause, and, in addition, to write polemics based on his researches. He was, of course, involved in ventures into organized political activity as well.

For Marx, the contemporary science of political economy represented a scientifically useful and politically potent mixture of fact and falsehood, honest reporting and special pleading -- not simply because of errors or bias on the part of any given political economist, but because the basic concepts and presuppositions of the science bore a special relation to the capitalist form of social organization. He considered political economy to be the science of capitalist society (of which England was his 'chief illustration'), not merely in the sense that political economy described that society with a certain degree of precision and made more or less accurate predictions about it, but also in the sense that political economy was the science of social production which that particular society had produced. Moreover, that particular science had been elevated by that society (in Marx's view) to the status of a general science of human society. (See CAP i. p. xvii.)

Hence for Marx the concepts of political economy had a significance

independent of their use in describing the economic situation or in solving an economic problem: they expressed some of the peculiarities of capitalist society, though in an incomplete and misleading way. The 'laws' and the very 'categories',¹ 'forms', and 'formulas' of political economy (which Marx also called 'bourgeois economy') were, in his view, products of bourgeois society, not theoretical constructs with only a utilitarian significance in science. This is a specific instance of his 'general result', given in the Preface (Vorwort) to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, 1859): 'The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process generally.' (MEW xiii. 8-9 / SW i. 503-4.) And in the same text he stated that, as early as 1843 or 1844, he had drawn the conclusion that 'the anatomy of bourgeois society may be sought in political economy'.² Later, in his Preface (Vorwort) to Capital, I, he likened the first chapters of the first book of his critique of political economy to a study in 'microscopic anatomy', since they began the critical re-presentation of political economy with the 'economic cell-form' of capitalist society, the commodity. (See CAP i. p. xvi.)

Thus he accepted the concepts of political economy, in the first instance, as social data for analysis, since they were the special products of bourgeois society. The critical re-presentation of those

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1. Marx sometimes uses 'category' (Kategorie) to cover both the sense of 'concept' as the idea of a thing in general, and the sense of the more specific term 'category' as a class or division formed for the purpose of a particular inquiry.
 2. In the 1844 Manuscripts Marx referred to political economists as the 'scientific confession and existence' of businessmen. (MEW Ergänzungsband i. 548.)

concepts, which concerned the social production of life in capitalist society, necessarily involved re-stating, in a more precise form, some of his work on alienation. But he also accepted some of the problems set by the political economists as interesting and significant; in certain ways he followed their lines of reasoning; ultimately he saw the concepts of political economy, criticized and corrected by him, as part of a descriptive and predictive system. For example, Marx accepted (in Capital, i) an amended -- and logically more consistent -- version of the labour theory of value as the correct explanation for changes in the relative values of the general run of commodities over fairly long periods of time -- though he pointed out that the law itself was nothing to be very pleased about, since it asserted itself in periodical crises. But for Marx this was not the only significance of the principle. In the labour theory of value, or more precisely in the reality of commodity production and in the concept of the commodity accepted there, he saw an important manifestation of the alienation built into the very structure of capitalist society. Hence his work does not stand or fall in toto on whether or not his own labour theory of value gives a correct explanation for long-term shifts in the exchange ratios of most commodities, or a correct explanation of the 'rules' of exchange. The labour theory of value did exist in nineteenth-century England and elsewhere, and as such it was valid raw material for one aspect of his critical study.¹

1. Alasdair MacIntyre comments that 'the delineation of a society's concepts is therefore a, if not perhaps the, crucial step in the delineation of its life.' ('Mistake about Causality in Social Science', Politics and Society (Second Series), edd. Peter Laslett and W.G. Runciman (Oxford, 1969), 62-3.) Marx had reasonable grounds for taking the labour theory of value to be the orthodox view produced and held by 'bourgeois society', yet he can be faulted for underestimating the weight of contemporary criticism against it; see below, pp. 202-4. Hence I do not think that Marx's approach to the capitalist economy is 'arbitrary'; see Lichtheim (1967), 175.

Marx aimed to give an account of social production in capitalist society (since he assigned to the 'mode of production' a determining role in social development) by looking first at the contemporary science of social production. This, I think, is the force of his remark that he was seeking in political economy the anatomy of bourgeois society. In Capital, i, he attempted to unravel the mysteries contained in the concepts of political economy -- mysteries such as the fetishism of commodities -- and to improve the accuracy in all respects of economic studies. Marx did not set out to write a work of political economy but a critical re-presentation of the science, and in that way, to present a critique of the capitalist system itself.

One of the difficulties in reading this critique today lies in recognizing that much of it is a re-presentation of the concepts and theories of writers other than Marx, with Marx's own criticisms (of different kinds) built into the presentation. He assumed that his readers would be familiar with the science of political economy and able to distinguish its concepts (for which he did not always give a source) from his own critical contributions: a theory of the relationship between political economy and capitalist society (a specific instance of his general result of 1859); a critique, using the methods of the nineteenth-century historian, philosopher, and logician, of the fundamental concepts and presuppositions of political economy; additions and corrections to political economy, though on the basis of the preceding critique; and some unusual conclusions about economic trends in capitalist society.

By opting for an abstract opening to his multi-volume critique of political economy and capitalist society, Marx set himself a task

of enormous size and complexity: the re-presentation of the basic concepts of the science, beginning with the commodity.¹ His task in Capital was to investigate an entire body of theory -- the theory of political economy as found in the works of selected political economists -- and to re-present it critically, a process which necessarily involved knowing the subject thoroughly, breaking it down into basic concepts and propositions, and putting it back together again to reveal the essential character of the life-process in capitalist society and the economic laws demonstrating that a revolutionary situation would inevitably occur.

1. For a discussion of this aspect of Marx's plans, see below, pp. 17c-7.

CHAPTER II Marx's critical work on political economy:
Studies and Plans from 1842 to mid-1857

1. Preface

In this chapter I give an account of Marx's studies and plans preliminary (directly or indirectly) to his critique of political economy as it emerged in Capital, i, and the various drafts published as the Grundrisse, Theories of Surplus Value (Theorien über den Mehrwert), i-iii, and Capital, ii-iii. Sections 2 and 3 below cover Marx's studies and plans for a critique of political economy up to 1857.

Though the Grundrisse represents the first real draft for Capital, it is striking how much of his pre-Grundrisse studies were used by Marx in composing what became the published version of his critique of political economy.¹ It may be argued that the story of Capital begins in 1857, but the origin of the critique of political economy is much earlier. In the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 he began the analysis of economic categories such as labour, rent, private property, and wages. Only after an economic analysis did these concepts acquire their famous philosophical interpretation.

From the following narrative (which concentrates on studies and plans relevant to Marx's critique of political economy) I draw three conclusions: (1) Marx's plans for a critique developed alongside his studies, preliminary drafts, and critical works (sometimes containing material relevant to the economic critique) about various philosophers

1. Marx gave Capital the subtitle Kritik der politischen Ökonomie; see below, pp. 175-6.

and political theorists, and about contemporary politics, (2) the scope and organization of his critical work on political economy (and the structure of particular parts of it) were of great importance to Marx, and to us in understanding the methods and content of his critique, (3) in his studies he aimed to master political economy on its own terms, as well as to expose it (and the society which had produced it) as historically peculiar, fundamentally perverted, and visibly transitional.

2. Studies and Plans 1842-9

Marx's own summary of his interests and activities at the beginning of his career states concisely how he came to be concerned with 'economic questions':

It was in the years 1842-3, as editor of the Rheinische Zeitung [published in Cologne], that I first got into the embarrassing situation of having to put in a word on so-called material interests. The proceedings of the Rhenish Assembly on the theft of wood and the parcelling out of landed property, the official polemic which Herr von Schaper, then Oberpräsident of Rhenish Prussia, opened with the Rheinische Zeitung on the conditions of the Moselle peasantry, and finally, the debates on free trade and protection, were the first occasions for my pursuit of economic questions. (MEW xiii. 7-8 / SW i. 502.)

Descriptions of Marx's excerpt notebooks (Exzerptheft) for the years 1840-1, 1842, 1843, and 1844 have been published, and it is easy to trace the progression of his studies from works of philosophy to aesthetics, religion, politics, and history -- and then to political economy. His researches will be presented here in some detail, because it is important to see exactly what he read: a general sketch of the range of his interests would not be nearly so informative. A number of the writers which appeared in his early studies turn up again in later works, by name or by allusion. Indeed, the eclectic

character of his methods in criticizing political economy is directly linked with this early reading.

His studies in Berlin during 1840-1 were philosophical: Aristotle, Spinoza, and Leibniz (in Latin editions); Hume's Treatise of Human Nature (translated into German); and Karl Rosenkranz's History of Kantian Philosophy (in German). (MEGA I,i(2). 107-13.)

The Bonn notebooks for 1842, which dealt with religion and aesthetics, contain excerpts from C. Meiners's General Critical History of Religions (in German), Charles de Brosses's Cult of the Fetish-Gods (translated into German), C.A. Böttiger's Mythological Art (in German), and Johann Grund's Greek Painting (in German). The extracts from de Brosses and Böttiger, which deal with religious fetishism, are of particular interest because of their connection with Marx's later work, especially the section on the fetishism of commodities in Capital, i.¹ (MEGA I,i(2). 114-18.)

In the Kreuznach notebooks for 1843, which cover political theory and history, Marx took excerpts from C.F.E. Ludwig's History of the French Revolution (in German), P. Daru's History of the Venetian Republic (in French), Rousseau's Social Contract (in French), Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws (in French), John (1st earl) Russell's History of the English Government and Constitution (translated into German), Leopold Ranke's History of the Reformation in Germany (in German), Thomas Hamilton's Men and Manners in America (translated into German), and Machiavelli's Discourses (translated into German). (MEGA I,i(2). 118-36.)

1. For a discussion of commodity fetishism, see below, pp. 107-15; see also the 1844 Manuscripts, MEW Ergänzungsband i. 552-3, where Marx uses the term 'fetishism' in a more general sense.

Marx wrote several indexes to his excerpts of 1843 and included such entries as the estates general, nobility, bureaucracy, constituent assembly, property, family, constitutional monarchy, nature and law, sovereignty of the people, taxes, slavery and freedom, different forms of government, constitution and administration, the press, rights of man, and political legitimacy. (MEGA I,i(2). 123, 129.) Writing excerpt notebooks and then indexes to them (usually just before writing a manuscript) became one of his characteristic ways of working -- gathering material, considering it, and then applying what he later called the 'method of condensation'. (Marx to Lassalle, 22 February 1858, MEW xxix. 551.)

Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right (Kritik des Hegelschen Staatsrechts) dates from the same period as the indexes -- March-August 1843. The entries listed above correspond, in general, to topics which occur in this unfinished critique of paragraphs 261-313 of the Philosophy of Right (Philosophie des Rechts, 1821). The Introduction (Einleitung) to the unfinished critique of Hegel, which Marx mentions in his autobiographical sketch in the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, was probably written between the autumn of 1843 and January 1844. It contained the first reference, in his published works, to the proletariat. (CHPR p. ix.)

The Paris notebooks date from the beginning of 1844, about the same time that Marx received Engels's Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy (Umriss zu einer Kritik der Nationalökonomie).¹ These notebooks, which continue to the beginning of 1845, deal mainly

1. For an English translation of Engels's sketch, see the Appendix to Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, ed. Dirk J. Struik (London, 1970), 197-226.

with works on political economy: Boisguillebert's Dissertation on the Nature of Wealth (in French), Eugène Buret's On the Poverty of the Working Classes in England and France (in French),¹ Destutt de Tracy's Elements of Ideology (in French), Lauderdale's Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Public Wealth (translated into French), J.R. MacCulloch's Discourse on ... Political Economy (translated into French), James Mill's Elements of Political Economy (translated into French), Ricardo's Principles of Political Economy (translated into French), J.-B. Say's Treatise on Political Economy (in French), and Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations (translated into French). (MEGA I,iii. 411-583.)

The manuscripts later termed 'economic and philosophical' were written in Paris between April and August 1844. Marx's Preface (Vorrede), one of the last to be written, contained an account of how he came to write the manuscripts and a plan for the publication of numerous critical works, the first of which was to be a critical study of political economy and the last, a special work, demonstrating the connection of the whole. This was to be his final refutation of Hegelian theories of such a connection.² Marx's 'long obsession' with the criticism of political economy seems to have begun with the expansion of his unfinished Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right into a vast treatise. (Rubel (1968), p. xvii.) In Marx's plan of 1844, outlined below, the critique of political economy was to have

1. For a discussion of Buret and Marx, see Rubel (1968), pp. lvii-lviii.

2. The 'general result' which Marx summarized in his Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy represents a 'connection of the whole' which also functioned as a critique of the Hegelian presentation of philosophy, history, law etc. (MEW xiii. 8-9 / SW i. 503-4.)

been the first of a series of 'self-contained brochures':

I have announced -- in the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher [the sole number of which appeared in February 1844] -- the critique of legal and political science [Rechts- und Staatswissenschaft] in the form of a critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right [Rechtsphilosophie]. Preparations for the press revealed that the mingling of the critique directed only against the work of Hegel and Hegelians [Spekulation] with the critique of the different materials themselves was completely unsuitable ... I will therefore produce in succession the critique of law, morals, politics etc. in diverse, self-contained brochures, and in conclusion I shall attempt in a special work to render the connection of the whole, the relation of the individual parts, by way of the final critique of the Hegelian [spekulativen] treatment of that material. For this reason in the present work [on political economy] the connection of political economy with the state,¹ law, morals, civic life etc. is touched on only so far as political economy itself touches ex professo on those subjects. (MEW Ergänzungsband i. 467 / ET 131.)

To this plan Marx appended a comment on his critical method; his analysis was to be in full accord with experiential evidence, but based primarily on a 'critical study' of the science of political economy:

I need hardly assure the reader familiar with political economy that my results have been attained through a wholly empirical analysis based on the scrupulously critical study of political economy. (MEW Ergänzungsband i. 467 / ET 131.)

On 1 February 1845 Marx signed a contract with the publisher Leske of Darmstadt for a critical work on 'politics' (now the first volume) and 'political economy':

Dr. Marx entrusts to the bookseller and publisher C.W. Leske his work entitled Critique of Politics and Political Economy [Kritik der Politik und Nationalökonomie], which will be two volumes in 8^o format, each over twenty printer's sheets [Druckbogen] in size. (MEW xxvii. 669.)

This proposed Critique of Politics and Political Economy ran into difficulties with its prospective publisher. The author drafted an

1. Rubel speculates that the 'major theme' of Marx's proposed work on the state would have been 'bureaucracy' or the 'bureaucratic phenomenon'. (Rubel (1968), p. xxv.)

angry letter to Leske on 1 August 1846, excusing his own delay in producing the work. In doing so, he explained the relation of the manuscript German Ideology (Die Deutsche Ideologie, written during 1845-6 in collaboration with Engels) to his 'positive development': a polemic against German philosophy and socialism was, in Marx's view, a necessary preamble to his critique of political economy. Because of his education and political interests, it was also an easier work to write than his Economy:

I had interrupted the preparation of the Economy, because of that publication [German Ideology] which had been arranged with the German capitalists. It seemed very important to me to preface my positive development with a polemical work against German philosophy and against German socialism up to the present. This is necessary to prepare the public for the standpoint of my Economy, which is diametrically opposed to the German science up to now. Anyway, this is the same polemical work about which I had already written to you, saying that it had to be finished before the publication of the Economy.¹ (MEW xxvii. 448-9.)

Marx's excerpt notebooks for 1845-6 (Brussels, Manchester, then Brussels again) represent a continuation of the Paris studies of 1844-5, but at the later date he was able to read and take notes in English, as well as French. These notebooks contain extracts from a great many works on political economy and economic and social conditions, such as J.A. Blanqui's History of Political Economy (in French), Thomas Cooper's Lectures of the Elements of Political Economy (in English), J.S. Mill's Essays on some unsettled Questions of Political Economy (in English), Richard Parkinson's On the present Conditions of the Labouring Poor in Manchester (in English), works of

1. This first reference by Marx to the German Ideology is overlooked in Rubel (1956), 56. Some of Marx's notes on politics from this period appear in MEW iii. 537, and in English in Karl Marx, Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, ed. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (Garden City, N.Y., 1967), 399-400.

Quesnay and Sismondi on political economy (in French), H. Storch's Political Economy (in French), and Thomas Tooke's History of Prices (in English). (MEGA I,vi. 597-618.) Since 1844, Marx's interests and abilities had broadened to include works on contemporary English political and economic questions, such as Chartism, free trade, and the population question. He also undertook a detailed study of the works of Robert Owen.

Although the contract with Leske was annulled in February 1847, Marx continued his work on political economy, but in direct connection with the German-speaking workers' movement in Brussels and elsewhere. Some of the material which he developed for lectures and classes appeared in April 1849 as Wage-labour and Capital (Lohnarbeit und Kapital) in the Neue Rheinische Zeitung -- Organ der Demokratie, edited by Marx (with Engels) and published in Cologne. Some of the rest of Marx's work from this period survives in manuscript.¹

3. Studies and Plans from 1850 to mid-1857

The revolutionary events of 1848-9 took Marx to Paris, Cologne, Berlin, and Vienna. As a result of his political and journalistic activities he was forced to leave Germany, and with his family he took up residence in London in 1849. The London continuation of the Neue Rheinische Zeitung, edited again by Marx (with Engels), appeared during 1850 and carried the words Politisch-ökonomische Revue, with

1. For the annulment of the contract by Leske, see MEW xxvii. 618. Wage-labour and Capital was published in book form in 1891 with 'corrections' by Engels. Marx's own German text is reproduced in MEW vi. 397-423, with Engels's 'corrections' in footnotes. Marx's manuscript Wages (Arbeitslohn), written in December 1847, appears in MEW vi. 535-56; see also the note in MEW vi. 658.

the explanation (summarizing a view about economic activity held by Marx since 1844-5) that a review, as opposed to a newspaper, 'permits detailed and scientific inquiry into the economic relations which form the basis of the whole political movement'. (MEW vii. 5.)

Marx's intensive researches at the British Museum began in the summer of 1850, and his twenty-four notebooks for the period September 1850 to August 1853 contain more material on specific topics in political economy: commodity, money, capital, wage-labour, landed property, international trade, history of technology and inventions, credit, population, economic history, world market, and colonization. Nearly all of those items appeared again in his later plans for publication.

His sources for these investigations included The Economist for 1843-50 and numerous writers on political economy and economic history, including Ricardo, Adam Smith, Nassau Senior, Hume, Locke, Torrens, Malthus, Owen, Proudhon, Ure, Carey, and others less well known. During this period Marx re-read in English a number of the classics of political economy which he had previously read in French translations; some of his comments on Ricardo for 1850-1 have been published in the Appendix to the Grundrisse.¹ He also produced a manuscript entitled The Money System Perfected (Das vollendete Geldsystem) in 1851, but according to the editors of the Grundrisse, only part of the text has survived, and it remains unpublished. (GR 766, 769-839, 986-7; see also Rubel (1957), 405 n, where the title is given as 'Das unvollendete Geldwesen'.)

The correspondence of the early 1850s contains numerous exchanges

1. For a discussion of this material, see below, pp. 54-8.

between Marx and Engels concerning Marx's corrections to various laws of political economy, such as Ricardo's law of rent and the currency theory of S.J. Loyd:

Dear Engels!

I am writing to you today [7 January 1851] to present a small theoretical question [questiuncula theoretica], naturally of a politico-economic nature [naturae politico-economicae].

You know, to begin at the beginning, that according to Ricardo's theory of rent, rent is nothing other than the difference between the cost of production and the price of the product of the land ... [Marx summarizes Ricardo's views into three propositions, and claims that they contradict historical evidence] ... It follows from this: ... The law of rent, as Ricardo puts it in his simplest thesis ... does not presuppose declining fertility of the land, but only the different fertilities of estates or different results of capital employed successively on the same land, in spite of the generally increasing fertility of the land as society develops ... I should like your views on the matter. (MEW xxvii. 157-62.)

Engels blamed his 'old witch' of a landlady for losing Marx's letter in a pile of books, saying:

[29 January 1851] Anyway, your new study of ground rent is completely correct ... There is no doubt that your solution is right, and you have won for yourself a new claim to the title of the economist of ground rent ... you will recall that I have already written in the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher [1844] against the theory of rising infertility and for the advance of scientific agriculture -- naturally very roughly and without all the connecting argument. You have now captured the matter in its pure form, and that is one more reason why you should hurry with the completion and publication of the Economy. If we could get an article from you on ground rent in general into an English review, that would make an enormous sensation. (MEW xxvii. 170-1.)

Marx replied cheerfully to Engels's flattering remarks with a new contribution to his critique of political economy:

[3 February 1851] ... Now I offer you a mere illustration of currency theory, my study of which would be characterized by Hegelians as the study of the 'other', of the 'alien', in short of the 'holy'.

The theory of Herr Loyd and tutti frutti from Ricardo on consists in the following:

Suppose we had a purely metallic currency (MEW xxvii. 173.)

After a time Engels gave brief consideration to Marx's work on currency theory:

[25 February 1851] Dear Marx ... In any case I have owed you an answer on your currency study for a long time. The thing itself is, in my view, wholly correct and will contribute very greatly to reducing the insane theory of circulation to simple and clear fundamental facts. I have only the following remarks on the discussion in your letter ... These glosses, as you see, are strictly limited to your modus illustrandi; the thing itself is completely in order. (MEW xxvii. 200-2.)

The following month Marx tried a different tack and was (after the usual delay) successful in drawing Engels out on economic questions of a less theoretical nature:

[31 March 1851] ... How do merchants, manufacturers etc., account for the part of their income which they consume themselves? Is this money also held by bankers, or what is done with it? I should like an answer on this. (MEW xxvii. 227.)

But Marx had to ask again. For him, as he indicates in this letter, Smith and Ricardo were still the giants of political economy, and their theories (with some modifications and additions) a basic source for his critical studies:

[2 April 1851] Dear Engels ... The worst is that I am suddenly held up in my studies at the library [of the British Museum]. I am so far advanced, that I will finish with all the economic crap in five weeks. If that happens, I will work on the Economy at home and throw myself into another subject [Wissenschaft] at the Museum. I am getting bored. Basically, this science has made no more progress since Adam Smith and David Ricardo; also, much has happened in individual investigations, often over-fine. (MEW xxvii. 228.)

During 1851 Marx worked very hard on political economy (both the theoretical and technological aspects of the science), but the course of his studies was not always smooth. The German socialist Ferdinand Lassalle wrote to him on 12 May with words of praise, but took the opportunity to outline his own views on Ricardo. Marx could hardly have agreed with Lassalle's claim for Ricardo's definition of

rent, since he was working on a critique of just that aspect of the Ricardian theory. But Rodbertus's book, to which Lassalle also referred, proved to be important:

I hear that your Political Economy will at last see the light of day. Three fat volumes at once! ... But I wish to see the three-volume wonder of the Ricardo turned socialist, the Hegel turned economist, on my desk -- for you will and must unite them both. Don't misunderstand me if I say Ricardo turned socialist. In fact, I take Ricardo for our direct ancestor. I consider his definition of ground rent an important communistic fact ... Anyway, [political] economy appears to have come into favour with aristocratic Germans. Rodbertus¹ has written 'socialist [sic] letters' in which he, so I hear, will have every interest-bearing power of capital banned etc. Have you read them?
(BZLM 28-9.)

Engels, who knew more about Marx's work on Ricardo, had also read the latest of the Social Letters by Rodbertus, and on 19 May he attempted to explode some of Marx's extravagant hopes in this extraordinary letter:

Dear Marx ... The latest is that you are completely sunk. You think that you have discovered the correct theory of ground rent. You think that you are the first to overthrow Ricardo's theory. Poor unfortunate that you are. You are surpassed, nullified, struck down, and overwhelmed. The whole basis of your 'monument more lasting than bronze'² has collapsed. Listen to this: Rodbertus has just published the third volume of his Social Letters to v. Kirchmann -- eighteen printer's sheets. This volume contains a 'complete refutation of Ricardo's doctrine of ground rent and the exposition of a new theory of rent'. Leipzig Illustrated News of last week. Now there's a treat for you.³
(MEW xxvii. 259.)

The reply (if there was one) is not preserved.

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1. Lassalle refers to Johann Karl Rodbertus (Jagetzow), Sociale Briefe an von Kirchmann, Dritter Brief (Berlin, 1851). Rodbertus was a landowner who advocated 'state socialism'. (MEW xxvii. 732.)
 2. Horace, Carmina, iii. 30.
 3. Engels was mistaken when he wrote in his Preface to Capital, ii (1885), and in his Preface to the first German edition of Marx's Poverty of Philosophy (1885), that Marx did not know of Rodbertus's Third Social Letter until 1858 or 1859. (KAP ii. pp. ix-x / CAP ii. 7; PP 8.)

Marx's plan for this period for his Economy has not survived, nor has his manuscript -- if it existed. (Ryazanov (1930), 4-5, 8-9.) But since he and his prospective publishers had quite different views on how the material should be arranged for publication, we have some idea what he had in mind:

[24 November 1851] Dear Frederic [Engels] ... Ebner¹ has written to me that Löwenthal [a prospective publisher] wants to experiment with one volume, but I never said that I was to begin with the 'History of [Political] Economy'. This would upset my whole plan. Furthermore, Ebner wrote that Löwenthal could only pay 'poorly'. That would be all right, if he published what I want first. But if he forces me to destroy my whole plan, then he must pay me as much as if I wrote directly on his commission. (MEW xxvii. 370.)

Engels's reply gave further information on Marx's plans, and an insight into the nature of their collaboration. Marx had apparently expected to give a critical account of socialist theory, as well as the 'history of economy', but the critique of political economy seems to have been the most crucial part of the project. Engels, as usual, urged Marx to work with immediate political and commercial considerations in mind:

[27 November 1851] Dear Marx ... I believe, as far as beginning with the history of economy is concerned ... that if Löwenthal really intends to do this, Ebner can at best make difficulties for him, [e.g.] it would not do to upset your whole plan, you have already begun to work out the critique etc. However, should it not work out, Löwenthal must engage himself for two volumes and you would also require this space, partly to anticipate the critical material, partly to make the history profitable to some extent for you, with the honorarium calculated in any case on the London cost price. Then the socialists would come as volume 3, and as volume 4 the critique -- what is left of it -- and the famous 'positive', what you 'really' want. In that form the thing has its difficulties, but it has the advantage that the long awaited secret is expressed in full

1. The editors of MEW identify Hermann Ebner as a 'journalist' and 'secret agent of the Austrian police' during the 1840s and 1850s. (MEW xxvii. 714.)

only at the end, and only after the curious bourgeois has held his breath through three volumes is it revealed to him that we are not making palliatives. For people of some intelligence the indications of the first volumes, [and] the 'Anti-Proudhon' [Poverty of Philosophy], and the [Communist Manifesto] will suffice to get them on the right track; the buying and reading mob will not be interested in the history anymore if the great mystery has been revealed in volume 1; the mob has, as Hegel says in the Phenomenology, read 'the preface', and there's where you get the general idea ... The main thing is that you will make your debut before the public with a fat book, and best of all with the least risky, the history ... There is the additional consideration that you can write the History only in London, while you can write the Socialists and the Critique wherever you go. Hence it would be good for you to make use of the opportunity now, before the philistines do something silly and put us back onto the international stage ... The more I think the matter over, the more practical it appears to me to begin with the historical. Show a little commercial sense! (MEW xxvii. 373-5.)

The plan for Marx's Economy, as it emerges from the correspondence of 1851, called for an initial volume (the critique of political economy), a second volume on the socialists,¹ and a third volume (on the history of political economy)² not mentioned in either of the earlier plans. The concluding volume of the plan of 1844, showing the 'connection of the whole' as the critique of the 'speculative presentation' of various subjects, was missing from both the plans of 1845-6 (the two-volume critique of politics and political economy) and of 1850-1 (the three-volume work described above). Marx evidently reckoned that he had settled (in book form) with Hegelian or 'speculative' philosophy after the publication (in 1845 in Frankfurt a.M.) of the Holy Family (Die Heilige Familie), the Poverty

1. This appears to be a development of the earlier plans of 1844 and 1845-6 for a critique of politics, and of volume ii of the German Ideology, and of section III of the Communist Manifesto (Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei), published in London in 1848.

2. See Marx's historical sketch in PP 138-41.

of Philosophy, and the Communist Manifesto, and the writing of the German Ideology, since he and Engels mentioned the last three of those works as prefatory to the critique of political economy. The idea of writing a history of political economy, separate from the critique of political economy, dates from 1847-51, but it is not clear precisely whose idea it was -- Marx's, or one of his correspondents or prospective publishers.

The wide scope of Marx's plan of 1850-1 was in keeping with the tradition of political economy. In particular, it resembled Adam Smith's plan for the Wealth of Nations, since each opened with the author's presentation of (or views on) political economy, each considered the history of economic development and of theories of political economy, and each developed an avowedly political section which was both critical and prescriptive: Smith on revenue and taxation, and Marx on the socialists and socialism. The tendency of political economists, especially Adam Smith, to connect their studies with 'larger considerations' was noted with approval by J.S. Mill in the Preface to his own survey of the subject, the Principles of Political Economy (1848). But Marx's conception of a critique of political economy was even larger in scope than any of the works written or planned by political economists.

Until August 1853 Marx continued to make occasional additions to the economic notebooks begun in 1850. From September 1853 to May 1854 he worked on the events leading to the Crimean War. During 1853-4 he also worked on the histories of India and Spain in connection with his articles for the New York Tribune.

Between November 1854 and January 1855 he began a work entitled Money, Credit, Crises (Geldwesen, Kreditwesen, Krisen, still

unpublished), but did not finish the manuscript. Most of his energies during this period were spent on the journalism required to support his family, but the subject-matter of the articles was often related to his studies in political economy, and he did not lose interest in writing a critique, especially during the 'crises' of capitalist production which, in his view, prepared the way for a proletarian revolution. (GR 766, 1044; Rubel (1956), 226.)

Marx had written to Weydemeyer on 19 December 1849 linking the possibility of a new revolutionary outbreak with a 'terrible industrial, agricultural, and commercial crisis'. The article 'May to October' by Marx and Engels, which appeared in the Neue Rheinische Zeitung (London) in 1850, gave a history of 'commercial depression' from 1837 to 1850 in connection with the European revolutionary movement, and in November 1852 Marx published articles in the New York Tribune titled 'Pauperism and Free Trade -- the impending Trade Crisis' and 'The political Consequences of the commercial Paroxysm'. (MEW xxvii. 516; vii. 421-63; viii. 367-78.) On 11 March 1853 Engels wrote to Marx, urging him once again to hurry his book along because a favourable political situation was developing:

As far as recruiting goes, I think that as soon as we are back in Germany we will find enough young men of talent who have, in the interim [since 1848-9], enjoyed the forbidden fruits [and] not without success. If we had the means for making sober and scientific propaganda for two to three years with books on no matter what, we would be so much the better for it. But that is not to be; the storm clouds are already on the horizon. You should get finished with your Economy; we could publish it in weekly numbers, as soon as we have a newspaper, and what the populace does not understand, [our] disciples would expound, correctly and badly, but not without effect. (MEW xxviii. 226.)

Marx's articles for the autumn of 1853 included 'Rise in the Price of Corn -- Cholera -- Strikes -- Sailors' Movement', 'Panic

on the London Exchange -- Strikes', and 'War -- Strikes -- Scarcity'. (MEW ix. 297-9, 341-6, 447-55.) On 15 September 1853 he wrote to the emigré Cluss, connecting the expected 'commercial collapse' with his desire to work on the Economy:

In any case the movement might come down on my head before I would wish it (I think that a commercial collapse will begin in the spring, as in 1847). I always hope before things go too far to take a couple of months in solitude and to be able to work out my Economy. It appears that I am not to do it. The continuous scribbling for newspapers bores me. It takes up much of my time, fritters it away, and finally comes to nothing. (MEW xxviii. 592.)

In January 1855 he published a series of articles in the Neue Oder-Zeitung (Breslau) on the current industrial and trade crisis. (MEW x. 602-9.) And in a letter to Lassalle of 23 January 1855 he traced the history of the 'present crisis' back to 1847, and drew his usual conclusion -- the ideal time for his critique to appear in print would be during an economic crisis, with its attendant industrial and political unrest:

I have tossed out the above history in order to answer your question in a completely general way. What I can dig up in the way of definite figures in my notebooks, I shall see. Books, as is said, will make a good appearance just now (MEW xxviii. 615.)

And on 13 February 1855 he wrote to Engels:

I have contracted an eye ailment from reading through my notebooks on [political] economy, if not to work the thing out, in any case to master the material and to have it ready for work. (MEW xxviii. 434.)

Much of Marx's time during 1855-6 was taken up with illness and journalism, but he greeted reports of a financial crisis in September 1856 with hopes of getting back to his books -- and with a series of articles for the New York Tribune on the economic and monetary crisis in Europe. (MEW xii. 49-70.)

[26 September 1856] Dear Frederick [Engels] ... This time

the thing has a general European dimension as never before, and I do not believe that we can look on from here for very long. The very fact that I am so far along with setting up house again¹ and getting down to my books, proves to me that the 'mobilization' of our people is at hand.
(MEW xxix. 74-6.)

Marx worked on various notebooks from September 1856 to July 1857, covering such items as silver, banking, money, and the latest volumes of Tooke's History of Prices. (CHR 160-5; Rubel (1957), 405 n.) Then in July he set to work on some of the material published posthumously as the Grundrisse (the sketches on the political economists Bastiat and Carey) and on numerous articles for the New York Tribune concerning the European financial and trade crisis. (GR 842-53 / PGR 883-93; MEW xii. 234-7, and passim.) The 'unfinished Introduction (1857) followed in late August and early September.

Another commercial crisis -- or in Marx's view, the same general crisis -- erupted in October. The remainder of the notes and drafts which appear in the Grundrisse were written between October 1857 and June 1858 (except for certain fragments published in the Appendix). At the same time he wrote a series of articles on the economic crisis for the New York Tribune, and his correspondence with Engels contained numerous exchanges on the subject -- the American crash, Marx commented (in English) on 20 October 1857, was 'beautiful'. (MEW xxix. 198.)

The Grundrisse has been called the 'centre-piece of Marx's thought', and in some ways, the best and 'completest' of all his works. (McLellan (1971a), 3, 15.) Why did Marx write this work in

1. Marx was in the process of moving from 28 Dean Street, Soho, to 9 Grafton Terrace, Maitland Park, Haverstock Hill, Hampstead.

1857-8? The trade crisis of October 1857 is usually cited in answer to this question, since he mentions in a letter to Lassalle of 21 December 1857 that it had 'spurred me to work seriously on my Principles of [Political] Economy, also to prepare something on the present crisis'. (MEW xxix. 548.)

But Marx had predicted or experienced trade crises in 1850, 1851, 1852, 1853, 1855, 1856, and the spring and summer of 1857. And he had managed to do some useful work on political economy during those years (at least twenty-four notebooks and two unfinished manuscripts) in spite of poverty and ill-health, which continued moreover throughout 1857 and 1858. In any case, the economic crisis of October 1857, however much it spurred Marx on, cannot account for the writing of the Introduction to the Grundrisse in August/September 1857. This text, I shall argue, is intimately linked with the seven succeeding notebooks of the Grundrisse in methods and content, and is by no means a 'false start'. (PGR 38.) Hence I see no direct connection between the October crisis and Marx's initial work on the Grundrisse, and I think that the question posed above cannot be answered satisfactorily at present.

But we may also ask: Why, in the seven notebooks, was Marx able to improve so dramatically on his pre-Grundrisse studies? The methodological innovations of the Introduction (1857), hitherto unremarked, provide us with an answer, because in them Marx was able to get a grip on three aspects of his sprawling critique of political economy: his pre-Grundrisse studies, the required investigations subsequently recorded in the seven Grundrisse notebooks, and the structure of the critique as an eventual published presentation. In the next chapter, I list these innovations and establish them as such in the context of Marx's work up to mid-1857.

CHAPTER III Methodological innovations recorded in the
Introduction (1857) to the Grundrisse

1. Three important innovations

In the Introduction (1857) Marx stated that he was considering 'material production', and went on to confirm the view, which had already been formulated in the 1844 Manuscripts, that productive activity was crucial to the nature of man and his social life and to the development of the modern individual and modern bourgeois society. Marx then restricted himself to 'modern bourgeois production'; the 1844 Manuscripts, the Communist Manifesto, and Wage-labour and Capital had dealt with various aspects of that subject, as had the Poverty of Philosophy, in which he criticized the views of Proudhon in particular. But the Introduction (1857) did not merely repeat Marx's earlier views and criticisms.

Three important innovations¹ in his methods and plans were recorded in the 1857 text. The first was that he dealt abstractly, and very self-consciously, with the meanings and logical inter-relations of economic concepts -- an innovation in his method of investigation. Using the methods of the nineteenth-century logician, he investigated the connections which those concepts have with one another and with other concepts used in the real world, in order to understand them fully and to avoid confusing 'ideas and things'. (See Marx to Annenkov, 28 December 1846, MEW xxvii. 453.)

The second innovation in the Introduction (1857) was Marx's endorsement -- as the 'scientifically correct method' for presenting an 'economic system' -- of a version of logical synthesis:

1. 'Innovation' is discussed in n. 1 on p. 1 above.

proceeding from abstract, simple forms, to concrete, complex entities. This proved to be an important stage in the development of a method of presentation for his critique.

In his earlier efforts at a critique of political economy he had begun with wages or wage-labour and the treatment of the labourer as a commodity.¹ The third innovation of the Introduction (1857) was that Marx decided to begin the substantial part of his critique with capital, since it represented the 'power ruling over everything' in bourgeois society. His train of thought led him from an analysis of the category labour, the starting point of previous discussions, to the society in which its abstract form was 'truly practical'. In that society, he claimed, capital was the dominant relation of production;² it was to form the starting point and terminal point of his analysis and presentation -- an innovation in his plans for a critique of political economy.³

In the Introduction (1857) Marx decided where to begin his critique, developed some thoughts on his method of presentation, and began a thorough logical investigation of the categories of political economy. The link between the 1857 text and his famous letter to Lassalle of 22 February 1858 is clear:

The first work in question is the Critique of the Economic Categories [Kritik der ökonomischen Kategorien], or, if you like, the system of bourgeois economy critically presented. It is the presentation [Darstellung] of the system and, at

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1. In his Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy Engels wrote: '... it [Malthusian theory] has shown us how in the last instance private property has made man into a commodity' (MEW i. 520.)
 2. For an analysis of this passage, see below, pp. 112-17.
 3. This innovation is established by the preceding chapter on Marx's studies and plans from 1842 to mid-1857.

the same time, through the presentation, its critique.¹
 (MEW xxix. 550.)

The remainder of this chapter surveys Marx's methods -- and ideas on method -- relevant to his critique of political economy up to mid-1857.² In considering the Marxian method of criticism (based on philosophy, logic, history, and a developing knowledge of political economy) I discuss the apparent transition of his critical work from philosophy to political economy, their continuing connection in his writings, the character of the 1844 Manuscripts as a first attempt at a critique of political economy, the economic content (often overlooked) of certain polemics of 1845-8, and (briefly) the economic works and manuscripts from 1847 to mid-1857. I aim to present Marx's critical views 1842-57 insofar as they are relevant to a study of his methods and ideas on method, and to establish the first two innovations of 1857 (in methods of investigation and presentation).

2. Methods and ideas on method from 1842 to mid-1857

From Philosophy to Political Economy

There was a rationale behind the progression of Marx's interests from philosophy and religion to history, jurisprudence, and politics, and then (in early 1844) to the serious study of political economy. Much of the critical, rationalist thought of his day was elaborated in writings on theology, religion, philosophy, and history; hence he turned his attention to those subjects, studying or re-studying

1. This letter is dated a year too early in McLellan (1971a), 10.

2. Sections 2 and 3 of chapter II surveyed studies and plans 1842-57; here I examine methods, and ideas on method.

various texts and views, criticizing the presuppositions and doctrines of religionists, philosophers, and other writers, and then attacking their liberal critics, who, in his view, had not gone far enough in their criticisms. He wrote this admonition on method in early 1842:

And to you, you speculative theologians and philosophers, I give this advice: make yourselves free from the concepts and prejudices of speculative philosophy up to now, if indeed you want to arrive at things as they are, i.e. at the truth. (MEW i. 27 / ET 25.)

Marx's articles for that year show an increasing involvement from a liberal point of view in the political issues of the time: freedom of the press, relations between church and state, property rights, poverty, and reform of the legal system. Criticism based on reason, experience, and thorough study was his avowed method; over and over his message was that men must free themselves from dogma and a woolly-minded idealism in which criticism (if there was any) of real circumstances took place only at a high level of abstraction. Reactionaries, conservatives, and liberals were not, however, his only targets. On 30 November 1842 he wrote to Arnold Ruge¹ that political talk not backed up by precise, detailed knowledge and careful research was worthless:

A few days ago I received a letter from little Meyen,² whose beloved category, with the best of reasons, is ought ... I answered right away and declared openly my view on the defects in their works, which find freedom more in a licentious, sans-culottish and hence comfortable form than in free, i.e. independent and profound content. I demanded that less vague reasoning, high-sounding phrases, complacent self-admiration, and more precision, more investigation

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1. Ruge (1802-80) was one of the Young Hegelians, and, in 1844, Marx's co-editor on the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher. (MEW i. 644.)
 2. Eduard Meyen (1812-70) was another of the Young Hegelian writers. (MEW i. 642.)

into concrete circumstances, more expert knowledge be brought to light. I explained that I considered the smuggling of communist and socialist dogmas, hence a new world-view, into incidental reviews on the theatre etc. to be misplaced, even immoral, and that I desired a quite different and more fundamental discussion of communism, if it is to be discussed at all. (MEW xxvii. 412.)

After the suppression of his newspaper, the Rheinische Zeitung, in March 1843, Marx occupied himself with a detailed critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, itself a study of political and economic affairs placed in a philosophical and historical context. In his work Hegel assigned great importance to the development of the institution of private property; Marx considered Hegel's explanation and justification uncritical, yet full of insight on the relation in the modern state between private property, morality, and the political constitution. He attacked (à la Feuerbach) Hegel's treatment of the state as mystical, speculative, and inverted.

The family and civil society, according to Marx, are part of the real life-process of society, whereas Hegel had made them appear to be functions of the state as an idea; Marx's view of the relation between civil society and the state was the reverse. His conclusion that 'the political state mirrors truthfully the different moments of the concrete state' led to the study of political economy in early 1844. (MEW i. 312 / CHPR 107.) The move from an interest in Hegel's civil (or bourgeois) society (as the basis of political life and the state) to a study of the science of the production, distribution, and exchange of wealth (as the systematic study of the basis of life in civil society) was, for someone who insisted on a thorough investigation of any subject, obvious and direct.

Marx's connection between the realization of a liberal, rationalist philosophy and human (that is, political and socio-

economic) emancipation by means of a proletarian revolution is more difficult to explain. In his Introduction, published in February 1844, to the manuscript critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right Marx wrote:

The head of this emancipation [of man] is philosophy, its heart the proletariat. Philosophy cannot make itself real without the abolition and transcendence [Aufhebung] of the proletariat; the proletariat cannot abolish and transcend itself without the realization of philosophy. (MEW i. 391 / ET 129.)

What lay behind this conclusion of late 1843 or early 1844 was his concern for the plight of the poor (particularly industrial workers), his study of the modern state and liberal politics (particularly ideas and events connected with the French Revolution and the French socialist movement), his exposure to Engels's Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy, and his conviction that freedom in society requires more than a political revolution. Marx looked forward to the end of injustice in general by means of the reorganization of practical, economic life (specifically, the activities pursued in modern civil or bourgeois society) carried out by the class which represents humanity in general -- the proletariat.¹

It is evident from Marx's education, and early studies and works, that he identified himself with a movement to make the world rational. For Marx philosophy (or political economy) for its own sake was a waste of time or worse, but knowing the rational and knowing the world necessarily involved, in his view, a careful, critical study of previous attempts to do so, rather than some across-the-board rejection of the work of philosophers and political

1. For a discussion of Marx's early views on the proletariat, see Avineri (1969), 52-64.

economists. Though Marx was not in general an appreciative critic, his work on Hegel, Feuerbach, and others stressed complex, sophisticated aspects of their thought. Though he opposed the ideas and practice of contemporary philosophy and political economy and looked to the proletariat for practical emancipation in society, his methods were hardly anti-intellectual. Reason and experience -- his critical weapons -- were, in his view, acquired as knowledge through both intellectual and practical activity. Indeed, for Marx, a necessary diremption between the two did not exist: some intellectual and practical activities could be equally useless, but intellectual activity was not in itself unpractical. He is said to have commented some years later: 'Ignorance never yet helped anybody!' (P. Annenkov, 'A wonderful Ten Years', Reminiscences of Marx and Engels (Moscow, [1958]), 272.)

The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts

The Paris manuscripts and notes of 1844 represent an attempt by Marx to get his views on political economy and philosophy, and some of the results of his recent investigations, down on paper.¹ Hence

1. Most commentators (see, for example, McLellan (1971a), 4) take the following extract from the draft (dated 1 August [1846]) of Marx's letter to the publisher Leske to refer to the 1844 Manuscripts, but I think that it is at least arguable that Marx was referring to the German Ideology, since its second volume (on the 'True Socialists') could be said to be 'more historical' than the first, and the reference to 'six months earlier' suggests early 1846 when Marx was writing the critical work on German philosophers and socialists: 'The manuscript of the first volume of my work, almost finished, has lain here such a long time that I will not have it printed without working it over for content and style. It is obvious that a writer who makes progress cannot publish word for word what he has written six months earlier ... The revision of the first volume will be ready for the press at the end of November. The second volume, which is more historical, can quickly follow.' (MEW xxvii. 449-50.)

these manuscripts are best regarded as studies towards a book -- identified in one of the last of the manuscripts as, at the outset, a critical work on political economy.¹ The studies of 1844 recorded Marx's initial confrontation with various political economists and their critics (such as Proudhon and Engels). It is also evident that his meeting with French workers had made a significant impression, as well as his reading of Hegel's Encyclopedia (Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften, 1817) and Phenomenology (Phänomenologie des Geistes, 1807).

Marx's manuscripts began, so far as we know, with the consideration of wages, profit on capital, and ground rent -- three economic categories. His method was to present these terms as they appeared in works of political economy, and to consider their implications for the working class of his day, by filling out their definitions with sociological detail, following the arguments of the political economists themselves, and citing the work of certain critical economists (e.g. Buret, Schulz, and Pecqueur)² and certain socialists (e.g. Proudhon and Owen).³ Some of what Marx wrote in these sections of the 1844 Manuscripts was frankly derivative; the Marxian touch emerged when he proposed to inquire into the 'meaning' or 'significance' of his results thus far, and to discuss the necessity of social revolution:

1. What is the meaning [Sinn] in the development of

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1. See the discussion of Marx's plan of 1844, above, pp. 19-20.
 2. For Buret, see above, p. 19; Constantin Pecqueur was the author of Théorie nouvelle d'économie sociale et politique, ou études sur l'organisation des sociétés (Paris, 1842); and C.W. Schulz the author of Die Bewegung der Produktion (Zürich, 1843).
 3. Engels used similar methods in his Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy.

mankind of this reduction of the greater part of humanity to abstract labour?

2. What error is committed by piecemeal reformists who either want to raise wages and in that way to improve the condition of the working class or those who (like Proudhon) consider the equality of wages to be the goal of the social revolution? (MEW Ergänzungsband i. 477.)

In the section on estranged labour, and in succeeding sections, Marx discussed the significance of a contemporary economic fact (the miserable situation of the industrial working class in England, France, and Germany) by demonstrating the opposition between it and essential human life-activities as he conceived them. This he called formulating and analysing the fact in (fresh) conceptual terms -- a description of one of his methods of dealing with 'politico-economic' facts:

We set forth from a politico-economic fact, the estrangement [Entfremdung] of the labourer and of his production. We have expressed the concept [Begriff] of this fact: estranged, alienated [entfremdete, entäusserte] labour. We have analysed this concept, hence we have merely analysed a politico-economic fact. (MEW Ergänzungsband i. 518 / ET 141.)

Marx's own sketch of the way in which the present situation would be resolved -- crude communism, then communism as humanism, the 'real appropriation of what is essentially human' -- involved him in some comments on Hegel's dialectical method. (MEW Ergänzungsband i. 536 / ET 148.) Evidently Marx thought Proudhon right (in one respect) in looking forward to the abolition of private property, but for Marx this was merely the 'negation of the negation'. In his critical treatment of Hegel he argued that for the idealist philosopher the external world was treated only as an entity in thought, and that insofar as the world was actually external, it was, for the idealists, defective. Marx thought this a gigantic misconception. Furthermore, he took another cue from Feuerbach by

denying that the negation of the negation was the 'absolute positive' and by substituting for it the 'positive derived from itself and positively founded on itself'. (MEW Ergänzungsband i. 570 / ET 159.) Marx's 'humanism' (the practical resolution of alienation) was, he argued, just such a 'positive'.

In the works of 1844 there was some mention of the separation of production, consumption, distribution, and exchange in political economy, particularly in Marx's comments on Adam Smith, J.-B. Say, and here, on James Mill: 'For the political economist production, consumption, and, as mediator between the two, exchange or distribution, are dissociated.' (MEW Ergänzungsband i. 455-6 / ET 198.)

But in the works of 1844, so far as they are preserved, Marx undertook no thorough investigation of the logical interrelations of these already existing economic categories, as he did in the Introduction (1857) to the Grundrisse. Moreover, capital was said by Marx (in the 1844 Manuscripts) to be a 'governing power over labour and its products', but he did not use or identify it as the 'starting point' and 'terminal point' of the opening part (or any other part) of his critique of political economy. (MEW Ergänzungsband i. 484.) The works of 1844 contain no mention of a specific plan or method of presentation for his critical study of political economy in particular; in the 1844 Manuscripts and notes he dealt with wages and wage-labour, value, price, profit, capital, ground rent, estranged labour, private property, need, production, and division of labour. The presentation in the Manuscripts seems to have been governed by his conviction that the explanation for political and economic phenomena will be derived from facts about

man and his productive activities (facts about production), and by the need to demonstrate that the apparent independence of certain other economic factors -- capital, ground rent, private property -- vis-à-vis the labourer is only temporary, and, in fact, subject to social strains leading to the supersession of the 'bourgeois' economic system.

Political Economy and the Polemics of 1845-8

Marx's major works for late 1844 to early 1848 present a different picture, since they appear (except for the Poverty of Philosophy) to interrupt his studies and drafts for a critique of 'political economy'.¹ The works in question -- Holy Family, German Ideology, Communist Manifesto -- were written in collaboration with Engels and were intended to be topical, clarificatory essays on the views of philosophers, political reformers and journalists, and various individuals and groups involved in politics. But in the midst of his criticisms Marx often took the opportunity to work out his own views on man and society, history, economic life, and specific points in political economy. Hence his critique of political economy was not so much interrupted as continued indirectly, and many years later he still felt able to take seriously the Poverty of Philosophy and the Communist Manifesto, and to say something favourable about the Holy Family,² which recorded a further

1. See the account of Marx's attempts during this period to write and publish a Critique of Politics and Political Economy, above, pp. 18-22.

2. See Marx to Engels, 24 April 1867, MEW xxxi. 290, and their correspondence for the 1860s and 1870s passim. Engels referred to his contribution to the Holy Family as 'comical' in its brevity, compared with Marx's 'heavy artillery'. (Engels to Marx, 17 March 1845, 27 November 1851, MEW xxvii. 26, 375.)

stage in the development of his work on the categories of political economy. In the 1844 Manuscripts and excerpt-notes value was not discussed at length,¹ but in the published work of 1845 he discussed the labour theory of value and theories of cost of production and natural price with more confidence, though with the proviso that the political economists (and, to a lesser extent, Proudhon) had translated immediate truths and relationships concerning man and his products into their estranged forms, e.g. value, wages, wage-labour -- or with the proviso that they had accepted such translations without criticism. His own critique, he announced, would build on the achievement of Proudhon, who had questioned private property, the 'premiss' of political economy. Proudhon, Marx commented, had made the question of the 'essentials of private property' (Wesen des Privateigentums) into the 'vital question' for political economy and jurisprudence'. (MEW ii. 34 / HF 48.)

Further along in the Holy Family he posed a problem which followed from his consideration of Proudhon and private property. This was to become the central question of Capital, i:

Among other things the exhaustive reasoning of Herr Edgar [Bauer] does not exhaust [the question] why the capitalist, who is himself nothing other than an individual man and a man paid by profit and interest, can not only buy back the product of labour, but can buy still more than this product. In order to clarify [this], Herr Edgar will have to dig up the essence [Wesen] of capital. (MEW ii. 54 / HF 71-2.)

1. Marx's rather disjointed criticisms of Ricardo and other political economists in the notes of 1844 do not support Mandel's claim that at that time he 'rejected' the labour theory of value. (See Mandel (1971), 40-51; McLellan (1973), 162n; and Walter Tuchscheerer, Bevor das Kapital Entstand (Berlin, 1968), 114-28; also MEGA I(3). 437-583.) Marx merely complained that the determination of value by labour, a theory which the Ricardians professed, was not linked with their views on cost of production and the determination of natural price in exactly the way that they claimed.

'To explain the relation of labour and capital, that is, to dig up the essence of capital' became the purpose of the first substantial section of Marx's critique of political economy, according to the plan at the close of the Introduction (1857) to the Grundrisse. The further away Marx moved from the impact of Proudhon's What is Property?, and from the need to criticize that work and to build on its 'achievements' (for example, the claim that private property must be abolished), the less he dealt with private property as such, and the more deeply he delved into its specific forms in capitalist society (e.g. capital, money, wages, profit), particularly as they were presented in the work of the political economists.

According to Marx, he and Engels wrote the German Ideology in order to prepare the German public for the novel standpoint of his forthcoming critique of political economy. In this unfinished work of 1845-6 he explained that his previous writings had been misunderstood by certain German philosophers and socialists, and he evidently believed that future works would continue to be misinterpreted unless the point of view of those writers was clearly and thoroughly exposed and criticized:

The empirical, material bearing [Verhalten] of those [ordinary] men can naturally not be understood at all with the theoretical equipment inherited from Hegel. Since Feuerbach showed the religious world to be an illusion of the earthly world -- a world appearing in his work merely as a phrase -- then for German theory there follows the question unanswered by him: How does it happen that men 'get into their heads' these illusions? This question itself prepared the way for German theorists to a materialistic view of the world -- a point of view which is not devoid of presuppositions but one which observes empirically the actual material presuppositions as such and hence is the only really critical point of view. This path was already indicated in the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher, the Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, and On the Jewish Question. Since this still took place in philosophical phraseology, the traditional philosophical expressions

occurring here, such as 'human essence' ['menschliches Wesen'], 'species' ['Gattung'] etc., gave the German theorists the desired pretext for misunderstanding the real development and for believing that here they were only dealing with a new use of their worn-out theoretical garments ... One must 'leave philosophy aside' ... one must jump out of it and give oneself as an ordinary man to the study of reality, for which there exists in book form a monstrous amount of material unknown, of course, to philosophers (MEW iii. 217-18 / GI 254-5.)

One reason, according to Marx, that German philosophers (even Feuerbach) had not left philosophy aside was that they had never worked out a comprehensive critique of the Hegelian philosophical system. (GI 29.) Since Hegel's system embraced the entire contemporary world, a comprehensive critique, in Marx's view, left one beyond the realm of philosophy and ready for the study of 'positive science' -- a study which by no means excluded questions and methods that today we associate with logic and philosophy. What Marx aimed to overthrow was idealist philosophy and philosophy for its own sake; the summary 'abstractions' mentioned in the passage below were to cause him immense difficulty when he came in 1857 to work seriously (using the methods of nineteenth-century philosophy and logic) on the categories of political economy:

Where speculative philosophy [Spekulation] breaks off -- in real life -- real, positive science begins, the presentation of practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. The phrases of consciousness leave off, [and] real knowledge must enter in their place. With the presentation of reality autonomous philosophy loses its medium of existence. At best a summary of general results can take its place, a summary which lets one abstract from the treatment of the historical development of men. In themselves these abstractions have no value apart from real history. They can only serve to facilitate the ordering of historical materials, to indicate the sequence of its individual strata. In no way do they offer, as does philosophy, a recipe or schema by which historical epochs can be trimmed aright. On the contrary, the difficulty only begins where one gives oneself to the consideration and ordering of materials, whether of a past epoch or of the present, [i.e.] to a real presentation. (MEW iii. 27 / GI 38.)

For the German Ideology the abstraction chosen was 'history'; in the later Introduction (1857) to the Grundrisse Marx set to work on 'production' and other economic categories to facilitate the 'ordering of materials' for the opening of his 'real presentation', the critique of political economy.

Besides attacking the premisses and methods of the Young Hegelians, Marx also attacked (in the German Ideology) their view of economic life, claiming that they were only superficially acquainted with political economy, and were ignorant of its methods and the proper methods of criticism. Max Stirner came in for lengthy criticism on this count:

Hence this whole great organizational plan [of Stirner's] amounts to a completely petit-bourgeois assimilation of the law of supply and demand which exists today and has been worked out by all [political] economists. Sancho [i.e. Stirner] can find the law, according to which the price of any kind of labour is determined ... already explained in Adam Smith and estimates made [taxiert] by the American [Thomas] Cooper. (MEW iii. 376-7 / GI 429.)

If Saint Max [Stirner] seriously sets about exploiting this double meaning [Marx claims that in modern languages terms referring to human relations as such and those referring to commercial relations often overlap] then he may easily come to make a brilliant series of new economic discoveries without knowing a word of [political] economy; as is noted later, his new economic facts remain wholly within this realm of synonymy. (MEW iii. 213 / GI 249.)

According to Marx, Stirner had not only failed to see the unhistorical and uncritical character of political economy, but had failed to grasp its 'positive content' -- a project to which Marx devoted a considerable part of his life:

While utilitarianism at least had the merit of pointing to the connection of all existing relations with the economic basis of society, with Sancho [i.e. Stirner] it has lost all positive content, [it] abstracts from all real relations, and limits itself to the mere illusion of the individual bourgeois about the 'cleverness' with which he believes the world to be exploited. (MEW iii. 399 / GI 454.)

Also, Marx saw in the work of the political economists certain views held by Hegel:

On p. 163 [of the Rheinische Jahrbücher, attacked by Marx and Engels as an organ of 'True Socialism'] singularity and generality follow, with the usual consequences, in the form of individual welfare and the welfare of the whole. One finds similar explanations of the relation of the two in any handbook of political economy under the topic competition, and among other [things] also, only better expressed, in Hegel. (MEW iii. 468 / GI 529.)

Hence for Marx, Hegel and the political economists were connected in the following ways: Hegel had applied his dialectic to political economy and politics in order to explain their relationship to one another and to philosophy; Hegel's political economy was derived from Adam Smith and other political economists; various Hegelians had attempted to deal with both Hegel and the political economists in their accounts of economic and political life; some of Hegel's insights into the logical relations of concepts, with certain corrective conditions in mind, were eventually applied by Marx to his work on the economic categories, particularly in the Introduction (1857) to the Grundrisse; and certain socialists, such as Proudhon, had attempted to apply Hegel's work to their own socio-economic systems:

The most important thing in Proudhon's book De la création de l'ordre dans l'humanité [1843] is his serial dialectic [dialectique sérielle], the attempt to establish a method of thought by which the thought-process takes the place of original [selbständigen] thought. Proudhon is searching from the French standpoint for a dialectic such as Hegel has actually established. Hence the relationship with Hegel is present here in reality, not through a fantastic analogy. Hence it would be easy here to give a critique of the Proudhonian dialectic, if one had finished with the critique of the Hegelian. (MEW iii. 519 / GI 584.)

In the second half of his next book, the Poverty of Philosophy, Marx undertook this critique of Proudhon's dialectic, or in his own

phrase, the 'metaphysics of political economy'. Though Proudhon was the main object of his criticisms, he warned the reader that dealing with Proudhon's Philosophy of Poverty entailed a critical look at German philosophy and at political economy (largely an English and French science) as well. Hence the work recorded a further stage in Marx's study of the political economists, both in mastering the methods and 'positive content' of their works and in criticizing their conclusions and overall points of view on logical and philosophical grounds. Proudhon's presentation of the economic categories use-value and exchange-value either led Marx to a detailed consideration of Ricardian theory (then a standard doctrine of value), or the critique of Proudhon offered a convenient pretext for criticizing this material. In general Marx did not emphasize his criticisms of Ricardo's work as the expression of actual economic relationships, though he explicitly rejected what he took to be Ricardo's general view of society, dismissing it as cynical: Ricardo had not drawn Marx's conclusion that relative value, measured by minimum necessary labour-time (the Ricardian theory of exchange-value), was a formula of enslavement. Neither had Proudhon:

Thus relative value, measured by labour time, is inevitably the formula of the present enslavement of the worker, instead of being, as M. Proudhon would have it, the 'revolutionary theory' of the emancipation of the proletariat. (PP 56-7.)

The Poverty of Philosophy marks the beginning of Marx's detailed work on some of the most difficult aspects of political economy, particularly theories of value, prices, wages, profit, money, and proposals for the reform of the contemporary system of exchange. The line of attack on the political economists (and Proudhon) was similar to the one in the Manuscripts of 1844: in the system of

capitalist production and exchange, labour is a commodity, and the labourer an alienated being. What is remarkable about the work of 1847 is the extent to which Marx was able to use political economists such as Ricardo, Bray, and Sismondi to ridicule Proudhon's economic theories; moreover Marx endorses Ricardo's 'scientific' method of using a general truth to explain complex economic phenomena:

Ricardo shows us the real movement of bourgeois production, which constitutes value ... Ricardo takes his starting point from present-day society to demonstrate to us how it constitutes value ... Ricardo's theory of value is the scientific interpretation of actual economic life; M. Proudhon's theory of value is the utopian interpretation of Ricardo's theory. Ricardo establishes the truth of his formula by deriving it from all economic relations, and by explaining in this way all phenomena, even those like ground rent, accumulation of capital and the relation of wages to profits, which at first sight seem to contradict it; it is precisely that which makes his doctrine a scientific system (PP 53-4; in TSV ii. 150, 164-9, Marx takes a more critical view of Ricardo's methods.)

In his criticism of Proudhon's dialectical method Marx claimed that the French socialist had managed to adopt erroneous ideas from both the political economists and Hegel. From the former Proudhon had accepted the assumption that the economic categories which express certain relations found in modern economic life also apply without much modification to the economic life of all epochs; from the latter, Proudhon had adopted a way of treating these categories as entities independent of human historical activity and of subjecting them to spurious manipulations. Marx characterized the former practice as unhistorical and the latter as mystifying. Furthermore, Marx charged Proudhon with being a failure as a socialist, since he had not advanced from a utopian system existing only in the mind to a socialism based on the actual experience of the proletariat:

But in the measure that history moves forward, and with it the struggle of the proletariat assumes clearer outlines, they [socialists and communists] no longer need to seek science in their minds; they have only to take note of what is happening before their eyes and to become its mouthpiece. So long as they look for science and merely make systems, so long as they are at the beginning of the struggle, they see in poverty nothing but poverty, without seeing in it the revolutionary, subversive side, which will overthrow the old society. From this moment, science, which is a product of the historical movement, has associated itself consciously with it, has ceased to be doctrinaire and has become revolutionary. (PP 140-1.)

Having rejected Proudhon's attempts to deal with the economic categories, Marx stated what he considered these abstractions to be: 'Economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions of the social relations of production.' (PP 122.) 'But apart from condemning the economists' treatment of these abstractions as unhistorical and Proudhon's as idealist and illogical, Marx undertook no independent investigations of them on his own. Evidently he thought Hegel's work less foolish than Proudhon's, but there is no explicit evidence that Marx had begun to apply (in the way that he did in August/September 1857) what 'positive content' there was for him in Hegel's logical studies to his own work on the categories of political economy.

The Communist Manifesto presents the immediately political side of Marx's general thesis on production, and registers little in the way of advances in his work on political economy. However, the events of 1847-9 directed his attention back towards the detailed study of the science as well as the short- and long-term political situation. Young Hegelians, True Socialists, and utopian socialists became, understandably, less important to his work, since the revolution was moving under its own power. The need to expound correct theory to the working class arose, as well as the opportunity

to do so; Marx's studies on political economy now proceeded more against the background of working-class politics than against the journals and books of Hegelian philosophers and theoretical socialists.

Economic Works 1847-57

The manuscript Wages (Arbeitslohn) of 1847 represents an attempt by Marx to examine an economic category (one of obvious importance to the workers with whom he was in contact) from a 'purely economic point of view'.¹ (MEW vi. 546.) In the light of his subsequent work, however, I think it wrong to infer a rejection of his previous critical essays on the theorizing of philosophers, socialists, and political economists; I take this limitation to represent an attempt by Marx to get to grips (using a broad range of methods) with the positive content of political economy -- that part of the science which dealt accurately, though not exhaustively, with real economic life -- in order to produce a devastating critique (however planned and presented) of the 'bourgeois' science of political economy.

Some of Marx's other works of this period contain lavish endorsements of Ricardo's political economy. The Speech of Dr. Marx on Protection, Free Trade, and the Working Classes, reported in English in the Northern Star (London) for 9 October 1847, outlined Marx's view of some of the methods of the political economists and revealed his enthusiastic use of Ricardian theory:

These laws [of political economy], which A. Smith,

1. Martin Nicolaus rightly notes that the 'downward ratchet' view of wages presented here was later changed by Marx in the Grundrisse. (PGR 48.)

[J.-B.] Say, and Ricardo, have developed, the laws under which wealth is produced and distributed -- these laws grow more true, more exact, then cease to be mere abstractions, in the same measure in which Free Trade is carried out. And the master of the science, when treating of any economical subject, tells us every moment that all their reasonings are founded upon the supposition that all fetters, yet existing, are to be removed from trade. They are quite right in following this method. For they make no arbitrary abstractions; they only remove from their reasoning a series of accidental circumstances. Thus it can justly be said, that the economists -- Ricardo and others -- know more about society as it will be, than about society as it is. They know more about the future than about the present. If you wish to read in the book of the future, open Smith, Say, Ricardo. (MEGA I(6). 429-30.)

The Discourse on the Question of Free Trade (Discours sur la question du libre échange) of January 1848 delivered much the same message, though praise for the political economists was less lavish.

Wage-labour and Capital, published in 1849, represents an attempt by Marx to summarize his work on political economy in a form accessible to working-class readers. He declared that he would be examining 'economic conditions' themselves, rather than (as in earlier published works) dealing primarily with political and theoretical conflicts and only secondarily with the economic conditions which, in his view, 'determine' social, political, and intellectual life. The work presents Ricardian doctrines of value, wages, and profit, but from Marx's own viewpoint; the economic material is presented within the framework of his views on the production process in general, and the alienation of the worker under the capitalist system of production. Marx's improved grasp of political economy by no means ruled out the methods and conclusions of the 1844 Manuscripts, used almost verbatim in the passage below:

And the labourer who weaves, spins, drills, rolls, builds, shovels, breaks stones, carries etc. for twelve hours -- does twelve hours' weaving, spinning, drilling, rolling, building, shoveling, stone-breaking serve him as an externalization of

his life, as life? On the contrary. Life begins for him where this activity leaves off, at table, at the tavern bench, in bed. The twelve hours' labour has no meaning for him as weaving, spinning, drilling etc., but [only] as earnings which bring him to the table, to the tavern bench, into bed. (MEW vi. 400-1; cf. ET 137.)

Marx described the determination of wages as merely a specific instance of commodity-pricing, which he linked (in the Ricardian manner) with the determination of the cost of production by labour-time:

The determination of price by the cost of production is equivalent to the determination of price by labour-time, which is necessary for the manufacture of a commodity; for the cost of production consists of 1. raw materials and instruments, i.e. of industrial products, whose manufacture has cost a certain sum of labour-days, which therefore represents a determinate sum of labour-time; and 2. of direct labour, whose measure is time. (MEW vi. 405.)

But the Ricardian theory of the wage-minimum (that wages must always fluctuate around subsistence level) was modified by Marx in two respects: (1) subsistence is always relative to socially determined needs; (2) though real wages may rise when capital is expanding, relative wages (the relation of wages to profit) will fall. Marx argued that the interests of wage-labourers and capitalists are always diametrically opposed, and that wages are not a 'share' in what the worker and the capitalist produce 'together', but an advance payment by the capitalist for the value-creating 'power' [Kraft] of the labourer during, for example, one day. (MEW vi. 409.)

Two of Marx's later distinctions -- labour and labour-power, value and surplus value -- are not explicitly formulated in Wage-labour and Capital, though the substance is there.¹ What is missing

1. The first explicit record of these distinctions is correctly ascribed to the Grundrisse period (1857-8), but the substance of

from Wage-labour and Capital is a thorough study of money (as a special sort of commodity and as capital), including the concepts of value and exchange-value, capital and the way in which it is formed and accumulated, prices, credit, and economic crisis. This was a highly specialized course of study, for which much research (and careful investigation of terms or 'categories') was required. In 1850-1 Marx turned again to Ricardo, a leading monetary authority, and the notes for those years published in the Appendix to the Grundrisse opened with the Ricardian 'Doctrine of Money'. For Marx's work in Wage-labour and Capital to be seen to be correct, he needed to refute any suggestion that the accumulation of capital might be the result of something other than the value-creating force which resides only in the labourer. If subsistence wages and capital accumulation were simply the result of exchanges unequal in value¹ or something else that could in principle be modified or corrected within the capitalist economy (e.g. by reforming the monetary system), then these Marxian claims would not be justified:

the distinction between labour and labour-power and the outline of the theory of surplus value occur in this passage published in 1849: 'The labourer obtains the means of existence in exchange for his labour, but the capitalist obtains, in exchange for the means of existence, labour -- the creative power [Kraft] by which the labourer not only replaces what he consumes, but gives to accumulated labour a greater value than it previously possessed. The labourer receives from the capitalist a part of the means of existence already to hand.' (MEW vi. 409; cf. CAP i. 175, and McLellan (1973), 296.) This point appears in Mandel (1971), 54, but he quotes from the text as 'corrected' by Engels.

1. Marx had expressed such a view in the notes of 1844: 'Ricardo explains how labour comprises the whole sum of price because capital is also labour. [J.-B.] Say ... points out that he has forgotten the profit on capital and on land, which are not proffered gratis. Proudhon concludes correctly that where private property exists, a thing costs more than it is worth -- certainly this [is] tribute to the property owner.' (MEGA I(3), 494.)

(1) within the system the relation of workers to capitalists is inevitably one of opposition, rather than co-operation; (2) only revolution and the overthrow of the system will bring a lasting improvement in the condition of the working class.

Most of Marx's notes consist of excerpts from Ricardo and summaries of his views on the value of gold and silver, the value of money, payment in foreign trade, rent, natural and market prices, profit, wages, and taxes, but certain criticisms of Ricardo emerge. Marx found him confused on variations in the quantity and value of gold, and deficient in his treatment of interest. Marx's method here is very much a process of arguing with Ricardo on the political economist's own terms, and referring only in passing to contrasting data or experiences of economic phenomena. (GR 776-7.)

In the notes for 1851 Marx suggested that Ricardo's treatment of simple labour as the basis of value is insufficient, and he began again to rework some of Ricardo's examples, but none of his criticisms called the fundamental tenets of the Ricardian system into question. However, a correction to Ricardo was suggested by Marx; it involved a re-interpretation on logical and philosophical grounds of material presented by the political economist. According to Ricardo, the market prices of commodities fluctuate about their natural price, and it is the latter which he considers fundamental, and the former 'accidental'; economic laws for Ricardo are the laws of natural prices, natural wages, and natural profits. Marx thought this presentation one-sided; his own method was not to eschew abstraction, but arbitrary abstraction:

Ricardo abstracts from that which he considers accidental. An alternative is to present the real process in which the two -- that which he calls accidental movement, but which

is continuous and real, and his law, the average relation -- the two appear essentially equivalent. (GR 802-3; Marx's emphasis.)¹

The two long economic manuscripts of the early 1850s, both on money, are inaccessible;² the notes on Bastiat and Carey of July 1857 (published in the Appendix to the Grundrisse) are the last recorded economic studies before the Introduction of August/September. Marx opened his comments on the two political economists with a survey of the state of political economy, and with a re-endorsement of Ricardo as the leading authority in the science. Since the time of Ricardo and Sismondi, he argued, political economy had made no significant theoretical advances, though there were two apparent exceptions -- Frédéric Bastiat and H.C. Carey, the former French and the latter American:

The history of modern political economy ends with Ricardo and Sismondi ... just as it begins at the end of the 17th-century with Petty and Boisguillebert. The later literature of political economy exhausts itself either in eclectic, syncretistic compendia, as for example the work of J.S. Mill, or in the deeper working out of individual branches, as for example Tooke's History of Prices and in general the new English writings on circulation ... The only apparent exceptions are the writings of Carey, the Yankee, and Bastiat, the Frenchman, of whom the latter admits that he depends on the former. The two have grasped that the antithesis of political economy -- socialism and communism -- finds its theoretical presuppositions in the works of classical [political] economy, especially in Ricardo, who must be regarded as its last and completest expression. (GR 843-4 / PGR 883-4; see also the later comments in GR 917-18.)

But both writers, Marx concluded, are unhistorical and anti-historical: Carey, because his 'bonafide research' is a mass of

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1. The editors of the Grundrisse put the whole passage into italic, omitted here. Marx made the same point about Ricardian theory in his notes of 1844 on James Mill; see ET 188.
 2. For the place of these manuscripts in Marx's career, see above, pp. 32-3.

unorganized detail; Bastiat, because his generalizations are platitudinous, tautologous, or false. (GR 848 / PGR 888.) Some of Marx's views of 1843-57 on the workings of the capitalist economy, on the defects of specific theories in political economy, and on erroneous or misleading arguments employed by the political economists reappear in his next essay into the criticism of political economy -- the Introduction of August/September 1857 to the Grundrisse. But only there does he undertake a thorough logical investigation of the categories of political economy, and only there does the definitive method of presentation for his critique begin to take shape, as well as the definitive plan. This text is discussed in detail in the next chapter below.

CHAPTER IV The Introduction (1857) to the Grundrisse:
Marx's methods and ideas on method

1. A difficult text

According to the editors of the Grundrisse, the Introduction was begun on 23 August 1857 and laid aside about the middle of September. Marx's correspondence with Engels seems to have stopped between 27 August and 14 September 1857; on the 15th Marx commented, 'much work'. (MEW xxix. 168-9, 174-5.)

The Introduction of August/September 1857 is the richest of all short Marxian texts in examples of different aspects of his 'method of investigation' (Forschungsweise)¹ for his critical work on political economy: the use of earlier views and arguments; of arguments and evidence from studies in philosophy, logic, history, and political economy; of the methods of the philosopher and logician to advance (in a new way) his criticisms of the political economists. Moreover, in this Introduction Marx arrived at some innovatory conclusions concerning his 'method of presentation' (Darstellungsweise)² in -- and organizational plans for -- his critique of political economy.

The 1857 text is manifestly unfinished and unpolished for the press, since numerous points are made only in an abbreviated, even fragmentary way (and some quite simple points are investigated at length), and the work ends with a series of notes and reminders,

1. In his Afterword (dated 1873) to the second German edition of Capital, i, Marx wrote: 'Investigation has to appropriate the material in detail, analyse its different forms of development, and trace their inner link.' (KAP i. p. xviii / CAP i. p. xxix.)

2. In Marx's method of presentation 'the life of the material' was to be 'mirrored in ideas'. (KAP i. pp. xviii-xix / CAP i. pp. xxix-xxx.)

including a coda on a question in aesthetics. That the work was left unfinished and unpublished does not, I think, count against its relevance to the examination of Marx's methods and ideas on method; that his later published works do not reproduce these investigations and comments in full seems entirely natural.

In this chapter my aim will be to explicate Marx's criticisms, investigations, and conclusions in the Introduction to the Grundrisse. The 1857 text reveals an unusual and now unfamiliar type of logical, investigative thought underlying his critique; the text merits detailed treatment on that account alone. Moreover, some of the most complex and (in recent times) influential passages in Marx's writings, notably the comments on his own method and on social scientific method in general, appear in the Introduction (1857). Hence my reason for treating the text in detail is that an account of a particular logical method of investigation (an innovation in this text) and of Marx's innovatory comments on his methods and plans, must include a serious study of their context.

In my discussion I have attempted to explain Marx's use of terms current in nineteenth-century philosophy and logic (and to explicate other obscurities and allusions) and to trace his use of material from Hegel's writings, particularly the Logic, so that the nature of his relationship to these works (at least in this text) becomes evident. Marx divided the Introduction into four sections, which I treat in sequence below. In my concluding remarks I summarize his thesis on production, developed at length in the 1857 text, and the substance of his methodological borrowings from Hegel.

2. The attack on political economy

In his Introduction (1857) Marx undertook a critique of various political economists and philosophers, and other writers who were, in his view, their predecessors. His work is difficult to follow, since he is apt to attack, in quick succession, several different writers and their various critics in order to make quite different points, without quoting the passages to which he objects. Also, he does not limit himself to criticism, but investigates the questions which interest him, and then develops his own point of view -- a characteristically Marxian procedure.

A further difficulty with the text is that his critique shows a rapid shift away from simple factual disagreements with the political economists (and their critics and predecessors) towards an attack on their presuppositions, purposes, and procedures. Indeed, the method of political economy emerges as a subject on its own in the course of the Introduction (1857), in which Marx is not simply concerned with what the political economists have said that is, in his view, incorrect, incomplete, or misleading, but with why they wrote as they did, and how a critical account of their subject ought to be presented.

The first long paragraph of the text -- the paragraph which follows his declaration that the subject, 'to begin with', is material production -- is an excellent example of the compressed, critical character of his thought in this work, and it demonstrates his concern to start his own critical discussion in the right place, and in the right way. Like a good post-Hegelian logician he immediately states his starting point: Hegel's Science of Logic opens with a famous essay 'With what must the beginning of the

science be made?'

Marx proceeds directly to a critique of the starting points of Adam Smith and David Ricardo; here 'starting point' is Marx's shorthand for the opening assumptions (stated and unstated) of an argument. This line of reasoning is not perhaps the obvious way to approach the study of 'material production' (a long-standing Marxian preoccupation), but it is comprehensible in the light of his training in philosophy and his interest in the critical analysis of philosophy, political theory, and political economy. I quote Marx's presentation at length, noting the philosophical senses of 'determine' and 'subject' which he employs:

Individuals producing in society -- hence the starting point is naturally the socially determined¹ production [carried on] by individuals. The individual -- and individuated -- hunter and fisher,² with which [Adam] Smith and Ricardo begin, belongs to the unimaginative conceits of 18th-century stories à la Robinson Crusoe, which in no way express, as cultural historians³ imagine, a simple reaction against over-refinement and a regression to a misconstrued natural life. [Those stories] no more rest on such naturalism than does Rousseau's social contract, which brings naturally independent subjects [Subjekte]⁴ into

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1. Marx makes frequent use of the verb bestimmen (to determine or define) and its derivatives. I have translated bestimmten as 'definite', 'determinate', or 'determined', meaning 'limited' or 'conditioned'.
 2. This seems a better reading of Marx's Der einzelne und vereinzelte Jäger und Fischer than the more usual rendering of vereinzelte as 'isolated'; see below, pp. 64-5.
 3. There is a suggestion in Engels's review (published on 6 August 1859) that Marx might have been thinking of W.H. Riehl (1823-97), author of Die Naturgeschichte des Volkes als Grundlage einer deutschen Social-Politik (Stuttgart, 1851 etc.). (See MEW xiii. 469, 755 / SW i. 508.)
 4. Here and elsewhere by Subjekt Marx means a thinking, acting agent, rather than a subject of study. Objekt in this text is usually that on which the subject acts or of which it takes cognizance; Gegenstand (in one of its senses) is a natural object, something concrete; see n. 4 on p. 120 below.

relation and association by means of a contract.
(GR 5 / PGR 83.)

The announcement by Marx of his own starting point, 'the socially determined production [carried on] by individuals', is an abbreviated version of another famous statement of his premisses which appears in the German Ideology:

The presuppositions, with which we begin, are not arbitrary, nor are they dogmas; they are real presuppositions, from which one can abstract only in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and their material conditions of life, the conditions which they find, as well as those produced through their own activity. (MEW iii. 20 / GI 31.)

In the Introduction (1857) he contrasts his 'real premisses' with the fantasies à la Robinson Crusoe which he says are the starting points of Smith and Ricardo, viz. 'the individual -- and individuated -- hunter and fisher'. Marx has in mind passages such as these, in which Smith and Ricardo give their views on life in primitive societies; I quote the economists to show that Marx's reading of their works, though seldom generous, is not unreliable:

As it is by treaty, by barter, and by purchase, that we obtain from one another the greater part of those mutual good offices which we stand in need of, so it is this same trucking disposition which originally gives occasion to the division of labour. In a tribe of hunters or shepherds a particular person makes bows and arrows, for example, with more readiness and dexterity than any other. (Smith (1776), i. 18.)

Even in that early state to which Adam Smith refers, some capital, though possibly made and accumulated by the hunter himself, would be necessary to enable him to kill his game ... If we suppose the occupations of the society extended, that some provide canoes and tackle necessary for fishing, others the seed and rude machinery first used in agriculture, still the same principle would hold true, that the exchangeable value of the commodities produced would be in proportion to the labour bestowed on their production (Ricardo (1821), 16-18.)

By stories à la Robinson Crusoe Marx seems to mean the

projection of the 'individuated individual' (a person who sees himself as an independent, self-interested agent) back into some tribal past which is said to be natural. Since Smith and Ricardo discuss a society, Marx's complaint cannot be that they begin with an 'isolated individual', as the term vereinzelter Einzelne is sometimes translated. By 'individuated individual' Marx seems to mean a person made into an autonomous, private individual of the modern bourgeois type, not, in this case, the physical separation or isolation of a single person. Later in this section Marx refers to 'production by an individuated individual outside society'-- an isolated individual.¹

Marx claims that the starting point of Smith and Ricardo is 'absurd and derivative, but nevertheless representative of a particular state of affairs in a particular society -- the emerging bourgeois society of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the German Ideology he had discussed the concept bourgeois society, distinguishing modern bourgeois society from his more general conception of the social organization which 'is developed directly from production and commerce':

The term bourgeois or civil [bürgerliche] society came into use in the 18th century, when property relations had already been extricated from ancient and medieval community life. Bourgeois society as such is developed only with the bourgeoisie; the social organization which is developed directly from production and commerce, the organization which at all times forms the basis of the state and the rest of the idealist superstructure [Superstruktur], has nevertheless been continually designated by the same name. (MEW iii. 36 / GI 48; cf. GR 983.)

At the same time (in the 1857 text) he attacks the 'cultural historians' for missing the point when they ascribe to the stories

1. An individual might be 'isolated' in some non-physical sense, but then the term becomes ambiguous.

à la Robinson Crusoe (and to Rousseau's social contract) only a literary significance. For Marx the 'individuated individual', as seen in Robinson Crusoe and in actual human behaviour, is the product of specific socio-economic changes: 'the dissolution of feudal forms of society' and 'the powers of production newly developed since the 16th century'. He charges that the 'prophets' of the eighteenth century (presumably Rousseau and others, such as Locke), the predecessors of Smith and Ricardo, did not conceive of the individual as originating and developing historically, but as posited once and for all by nature. In Marx's view, the 'prophets' merely projected a modern, unchanging 'individuated individual' into the past, and Smith and Ricardo and others (up to Marx's own time) have repeated that mistake, confusing history with nature.

Marx outlines his own view of the actual history of the development of the 'individuated individual'; then he returns for a final riposte against 'Bastiat, Carey, Proudhon etc.' for introducing what he takes to be characteristically eighteenth-century conceptions into nineteenth-century political economy. He comments: 'Nothing is more tediously arid than the fantasizing common place.'¹ (GR 6 /PGR 85.)

Marx's own account of the modern individual in the Introduction (1857) is indebted to his critical reading of Hegel, especially the Philosophy of Right, in which Hegel gave an account of the family and then the transition into civil or bourgeois (bürgerliche) society,

1. Der phantasierende locus communis. Marx uses the Latin philosophical term meaning 'a general theme or argument applicable to many particular cases'. (OED s.v. Commonplace.) The reference is to the use of 'Adam or Prometheus' to explain the origin of something.

where social life takes on these characteristics:

In civil or bourgeois society each is himself an end; all the others are nothing to him. But without a relationship to others he cannot reach the [full] range of his ends; hence the others are a means to the end of the particular person. (Hegel (1821), 263, para. 182.)

Marx's view of man as producer, which he restates in the Introduction (1857) as the basis of his historical account of the development of the modern individual, is traceable to his critical reading of Hegel's Phenomenology, as Marx himself made plain in the 1844 Manuscripts. In those writings he developed the view that the human individual is in essence the producing individual:

The practical production of a world of objects, the working-up of inorganic nature, is the confirmation of man as a conscious species-being, i.e. a being which relates to the species as his own being, or to himself as a species-being ... Hence only in the working-up of the world of objects is man actually confirmed as a species-being. This production is his species-life in action. (MEW Ergänzungsband i. 516-17 / ET 139-40.)

Hegel, Marx wrote, recognized the importance of the 'self-production of man', but his account in the Phenomenology was one-sided and limited:

The important thing in Hegel's Phenomenology ... is that Hegel understands the self-production of man as a process ... [but] the only labour which Hegel knows and recognizes is abstractly intellectual. (MEW Ergänzungsband i. 574 / ET 164.)

In the Introduction (1857) Marx also argues that the epoch which produces a particular point of view, that of the individuated individual, is the 'epoch of the most developed social relations up to now', and that from the point of view of that epoch (that is, from the bourgeois point of view) the most developed social relations are general relations -- relations found in all societies. (Marx is probably thinking here of theses like Bastiat's and Carey's,¹ that

1. See the passage quoted below, pp. 71-2.

economic laws are universal.)

But how can an epoch produce a point of view? By point of view Marx seems to mean a general presupposition about man, used as the basis for more detailed arguments and claims. In this passage he is applying one of his own theses concerning the relation between ideas, beliefs, points of view, and the social organization of production. The thesis appears in the German Ideology: 'We begin with actual active men, and from their actual life-process we present the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of that life-process.' (MEW iii. 26 / GI 37.) And again in the 'general result' formulated in the Preface (1859) to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy:

The totality of the relations of production forms the economic structure [Struktur] of society, the real basis, on which a legal and political superstructure [Überbau] arises, and to which correspond definite social forms of consciousness. (MEW xiii. 8 / SW i. 503.)

In the Introduction (1857) Marx begins his discussion of material production with an attack on various political economists. They have not, in his view, presented the situation -- 'individuals producing in society' -- in a way that is historically accurate and philosophically sound. Then, using the methods of the philosopher, logician, historian, and political economist, he investigates the concept or category of production, and criticizes the ways in which certain political economists have treated production and distribution.

Marx sets himself a problem which is practical and constructive, yet philosophical: How does one talk about production correctly? How does one talk about production without contradicting general truths or matters of historical or contemporary fact? His first point is that the discussion must not be about a mythical or

inaccurately conceived time in the past, nor must it be about individuals who are alleged to be non-social in some sense. Then he proposes two ways in which the discussion of production might proceed correctly. One is a genetic account (tracing the 'historical process of development in its various phases'); the other is an account limited to one particular period, such as 'modern bourgeois production', which, he notes, is 'our proper subject'. There is however a third possibility noted by Marx: a discussion of production in general -- the abstraction, or logical universal, which represents what is common to all forms of production, or those features which are necessary in order to conceive of production at all (he does not seem to distinguish between the two views):

However, all epochs of production have certain features in common, common determinations.¹ Production in general is an abstraction, but a sensible abstraction, insofar as it actually picks out what is common, fixes it, and consequently spares us repetition. (GR 7 / PGR 85.)

It soon becomes apparent that his work on the correct formulation of the concept 'production in general' is not simply an attempt to solve a problem in logic, but an effort to distinguish (using the methods of logic) what is common to all epochs of production from what is different, and more particularly, from what constitutes their development:

Nevertheless this universal,² or that which is common,

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1. Bestimmungen. A 'determination' is 'a determining attribute', essential constituent, or limiting factor. Also in this text, 'determination' (Bestimmung) as 'the rendering of a notion more determinate or definite by the addition of characters or determining attributes'; the opposite of generalization. (OED s.v. Determination 5b(b).5b(a).)
 2. Dies Allgemeine. I have translated allgemein as 'general', im Allgemeinen as 'in general', Allgemeinheit as 'generality', überhaupt as 'generally', except in passages, such as this

separated out by [a process of] comparison, is [something which is] itself many times divided, [something which] splits into different determinations. A few [of those determinations] belong to all epochs; others are common to a few epochs. The most modern epoch will have [[a few]] determinations in common with the oldest. One cannot conceive of production without them; however, if the most developed languages have laws and determinations in common with the least developed, then that which constitutes their development must have the difference¹ from that which is universal and common, [hence] the determinations which are applicable to production generally must be precisely separated [from that which constitutes its development], so that beyond the unity [of those determinations] -- a unity which arises from the fact that the subject [Subjekt], mankind, and the object [Objekt], nature, are the same [in all epochs] -- the essential divergence [of those determinations] is not forgotten. (GR 7 / PGR 85.)

According to Marx, political economists generally fail to make those distinctions because of their careless or insufficient consideration of historical fact, and because they do not always distinguish logical universals from universal truths about all epochs of production. Marx later contends that the truths which they cite are, in any case, uninteresting, inane, or platitudinous. Furthermore, he charges the political economists with ignoring historical and contemporary evidence which reveals, in his view, that social forms and relations of production have changed and developed in the

one, in which Marx uses the technical vocabulary of logic. A 'universal' is 'that which is predicated or asserted of all the individuals or species of a class or genus', a common factor. (OED s.v. Universal Bl.)

1. den Unterschied. Marx uses a sense of 'difference' related to the philosophical term differentia, meaning 'a quality, mark, or characteristic, that distinguishes a thing from all others in the same class'. (OED s.v. Difference 4c.) He argues that determinations relating to development (in production) are different from those common to all forms of production. For Marx's use of das Spezifische and differentia specifica, see below, pp. 71.45-6. In this passage Marx follows an Aristotelian logical method as outlined in Robert Adamson, Short History of Logic, ed. W.R. Sorby (Edinburgh, 1911), 75-6; see further pp. 82-3 for his comment on the scholastic tradition, and p. 121 for traditional logic and the Kantian philosophy familiar to Marx. (See Marx's reading for 1842, above, p. 17.)

course of human social history. He parodies the reasoning of political economists who have made that sort of mistake and have therefore come to the conclusion (convenient, he says, for the bourgeoisie and their apologists) that capital is 'a general, eternal, natural relation'.

Marx does not dispute that capital is an 'instrument of production' and also 'past, objectified labour', both of which are features common to all forms of production and therefore determinations or concepts necessary in order to conceive of production at all; both are determinations of the complex logical universal 'production in general'. For Marx, however, the significance of capital is that it is not entirely the same as those two 'common determinations'; the conditions (the 'specifics') which make 'instrument of production' and 'accumulated labour' into capital are the very conditions which interest him, the conditions of 'modern bourgeois production'. Those conditions, he claims, are not 'eternal' conditions, but the product of various processes of social change which have been under way since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He singles out Carey as an example of an economist who postulates eternal laws and consequently puts economic change down to government interference.

Carey does argue that there are universal laws of nature, but he attributes only certain sorts of change (increasing poverty and misery, as opposed to increasing wealth) to 'interference'; Marx had somewhat simplified Carey's position:

We think there is abundant evidence that the prosperity of nations and the happiness of the individuals composing them, are in the ratio in which the laws of nature have been allowed to govern their operations, and that the poverty, misery, and distress, that exist are invariably to be traced

to the interference of man with those laws, and that they exist in the ratio of that interference ... [W]henver the laws of nature shall be accurately traced by the political economist it will be found that they are universally true, and universally applicable (Carey (1837), i. p. xvi.)

At the beginning of this discussion Marx lists three correct ways of 'talking about production'. He closes with his conclusions on what sorts of production do not exist ('production in general', since it is an abstraction), and what sorts actually do. Production, he explains, may be said to exist in two ways: as 'a particular branch of production' or as 'the totality of production', not as 'general production'. Nevertheless he does not confine himself to a discussion of the concrete aspects of production which he has identified ('political economy', he writes, 'is not technology'), but declares his interest in investigating ('elsewhere') the relation between the 'general determinations of production' (the 'common features' represented by the complex logical universal 'production in general') and the 'particular forms of production' at a given stage of social development. He puts forward -- to the section on method -- the problem of the 'relation of scientific presentation to real movement', but reiterates the distinction between his presentation of production and any idealist notion that production is (or may be said to be) in some way independent of man. For Marx, 'production in general' (the 'general determinations' of production), 'particular branches of production', and 'totality of production' are three meaningful senses of the term, so long as the place of production in the human social world is kept clearly in focus, that is, so long as it is remembered that there is always a 'social subject' doing the producing.

Having distinguished production as a logical universal from the

'so-called general conditions of production', and what production is (a 'particular branch of production', or the 'totality of production') from what it is not (some activity called 'general production'), Marx returns to the work of particular political economists in order to put them right when they generalize about production. His thesis is that their generalizations are tautological, false, or irrelevant, and that the political economists are often (consciously or unconsciously) apologetic for 'bourgeois relations'. His method of reducing such 'trivialities' to their 'real content', and his conclusion that 'they express more than their preachers realize', echo a passage from Hegel's Logic:

What emerges from this consideration is, therefore, first, that the law of identity or of contradiction which purports to express merely abstract identity in contrast to difference as a truth, is not a law of thought, but rather the opposite of it; secondly, that these laws contain more than is meant by them (Hegel (1812), 416.)

Marx also directs a methodological criticism at the economists, implying that one of the reasons why their views are so limited, biased, and superficial (for example, on the nature and functioning of the modern legal system and police) is that they do not develop their concepts and presuppositions thoroughly and correctly; he says that their thinking displays a crude, mechanical quality (Begriffslosigkeit), and the use of the 'simple connection based on reflection'.¹ These are terms from Hegel's Logic; Marx's criticism of the political economists resembles some of Hegel's criticisms of

1. ein blosser Reflexionszusammenhang. Marx uses a similar expression (Reflexionsverhältnis) in his unfinished Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: 'A relation of reflection is the highest identity between things which are essentially different.' (MEW i. 277 / CHPR 74.) He alludes to the discussion of 'reflection' in Hegel (1812), 394-431. The English sense of 'reflection' or 'reflex' here is that of an image which reproduces certain features of something else.

other (unnamed) philosophers. Hegel complains that some logicians, by attempting to reduce logic to mathematics, and to state universal truths as propositions, have failed to see the limitations of their results:

[In conventional logic] ... determinations are accepted in their unmoved fixity and are brought only into an external relation with each other. In judgements and syllogisms the operations are in the main reduced to and founded on the quantitative aspect of the determinations; consequently everything rests on an external difference, on mere comparison and becomes a completely analytical procedure and mechanical [begriffloses] calculation. (Hegel (1812), 52.)

In the first place, reflection is the movement of nothing to nothing and is the negation that coincides with itself. This coincidence with itself is, in general, simple equality-with-self, immediacy ... The categories of reflection used to be taken up in the form of propositions, in which they were asserted to be valid for everything. These propositions ranked as the universal laws of thought that lie at the base of all thinking ... [A]lthough the determinations of reflection have the form of equality-with-self and therefore of being unrelated to an other and without opposition, yet they are determinate against one another ... their form of reflection, therefore, does not exempt them from transition and contradiction. (Hegel (1812), 400, 409-11.)

Marx concludes very briefly by stating that he admits the existence of common determinations or complex logical universals, such as the features which all forms of production have in common; but, in his view, those 'abstract moments'¹ do not give a full account of any particular form of production which has actually existed. (GR 10 / PGR 88.) Having argued that the political economists are confused about the logic of some of the basic concepts of their subject, as well as about the pertinent historical and contemporary facts, he moves on in the Introduction (1857) to clarify the meanings and logical interrelations of the economic categories

1. A 'moment' in this context is 'one of the elements of a complex conceptual entity'. (OED s.v. Moment 9.)

for himself. This highly self-conscious and very abstract method of investigation is one of the innovations recorded in this text.

3. Investigation of the economic categories

Marx pursues his investigation of 'modern bourgeois production' by considering 'the different rubrics which the economists set alongside it'. More specifically, he investigates the interrelations of four economic categories -- production, distribution, consumption, and exchange -- the classical subject-matter of political economy.¹ He summarizes the conventional wisdom of political economists about the economic process, and undertakes his own analysis of this conception in terms related to Hegel's work in the Phenomenology and the Logic, terms such as 'objectified', 'subjectified', 'mediation', 'contingent determinateness':

Thus production appears as the starting point, consumption as the end-point, distribution and exchange as the middle term, a term which is itself twofold, since distribution is determined as the moment deriving from society, exchange as the moment deriving from individuals. In production, the person is objectified [objektiviert sich], [and] in consumption² the thing is subjectified [subjektiviert sich]; in distribution, society in the form of general, dominating determinations takes over the mediation³ between production

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1. See, for example, James Mill (1826), 4.
 2. The editors of MEW xiii suggest emending 'the person' (in the GR text) to read 'consumption'. (MEW xiii. 621.) Marx's argument seems to be that in economic life, as the political economists conceive it, the person engaged in production becomes an 'object' and in his consumption the product becomes a 'subject', so the production and consumption processes themselves rule economic life.
 3. I have translated vermitteln as 'to mediate' in this sense: 'To be the intermediary or medium concerned in bringing about (a result) [e.g.] ... 1861 Goschen ... A country which, like England, mediates the transactions of many others'; similarly, Vermittlung as 'mediation', vermittelt as 'mediated', and vermittelnd as 'mediating'. (OED s.v. Mediate 5.) For a related sense of 'immediate', see n. 1 on p. 78 below.

and consumption; in exchange, production and consumption are mediated through the contingent determinateness¹ of individuals. (GR 10-11 / PGR 89.)

Marx's comments that in production the person is objectified and materialized, and that in consumption the thing is subjectified in the person, recall Hegel's discussion of the development of individuality through action and work, and the changed significance of the object on which the work is performed:

Hence the individual does not know what he is, until he is brought to actuality through action ... Whether taken in one way or another there is, just the same, an action and work, a presentation and expression of an individuality ... To begin with, the work which has come into existence is to be considered for itself. It has received the whole nature of individuality ... The thing ... now has its meaning through self-consciousness and for it alone; on this rests the distinction between a thing and a fact. (Hegel (1807), 306, 308, 310, 315 / Phenom. 422-31; cf. GR 983.)

In the course of his investigations Marx places the economic categories (as understood by the political economists) into an Hegelian syllogism:

Production, distribution, exchange, [and] consumption thus form a regular syllogism; production, the universality; distribution and exchange the particularity; consumption, the individuality in which the whole is contained. (GR 11 / PGR 89.)

'This is indeed a connection', he comments, 'but a superficial one!'; in using material from Hegel's Logic (such as the passage below) to further his criticisms of the political economists, Marx was never uncritical of the philosopher:

The first syllogism is, therefore, strictly the formal syllogism ... The Notion, differentiated into its abstract moments, has individuality and universality for its extremes,

1. That is, through the activities of particular individuals, rather than through a more general social framework of rules and distinctions independent (to some extent) of individual choice or action.

and appears itself, as the particularity standing between them. (Hegel (1812), 666.)

Marx's account of consumption, as conceived by the political economists, is also presented in Hegelian terms; he writes that consumption is understood as 'ultimate goal' and as 'ultimate purpose' so that it is technically outside political economy, but is still one of its presuppositions. Hegel gives a similar presentation -- a circle of presuppositions -- when he describes a conscious action:

But it appears from this that the purpose of the action cannot be determined until it has been done; at the same time, however, the individual must, in that he is consciousness, have the matter at hand as wholly his own, i.e. as purpose. The individual who is embarking on an action appears to be situated in a circle, in which each moment presupposes the other (Hegel (1807), 306-7 / Phenom. 422-3.)

Having made his own criticisms of the way in which the economic categories are understood by the political economists, Marx considers their 'opponents', and finds their work no better. The trouble with their points of view is that they either treat the economic categories as a unity (without differentiating them correctly), or they treat them as separate and autonomous (without explaining the extent to which they are interrelated). Besides being philosophically inept, the opponents of the political economists are at the same time, in his view, too philosophical in the idealist sense, since they seem to look for a 'dialectical equation of concepts' rather than the 'apprehension of real relations'.

This critical presentation of the general interrelations of the four economic categories¹ leads Marx to the consideration of the

1. I think that Marx's investigations into the logical interrelations of various concepts can be followed without the introduction of a 'philosophy of internal relations'. (Ollman (1971), 28-42, and passim.)

relationships of three of them -- consumption, distribution, and exchange -- to production.

Consumption and Production

He presents the notion, detected in the work of the political economists, that production is 'immediately'¹ also consumption and that production and consumption are identical; the economists, according to Marx, admit this, and introduce the concept productive consumption. That identity, he comments, is 'tantamount to Spinoza's proposition: determination is negation' ('determinatio est negatio'), since assigning a determination (identity with something else) to production happens to result in its negation (productive consumption). The reference is probably to a letter of 2 June 1674 where Spinoza writes:

As to the doctrine that figure is negation and not anything positive, it is plain that the whole of matter considered indefinitely can have no figure ... For he who says, that he perceives a figure, merely indicates thereby, that he conceives a determinate thing ... This determination, therefore, does not appertain to the thing according to its being, but, on the contrary, is its non-being. As then figure is nothing else than determination, and determination is negation, figure, as has been said, can be nothing but negation.² (Benedict de Spinoza, Chief Works, ii, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (London, 1884), 369-70.)

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1. unmittelbar. Since Marx uses direkt elsewhere, I use this non-temporal sense of 'immediately': 'Without intermediary, intervening agency, or medium ... directly'; similarly, unmittelbar as an adjective is 'immediate', and Unmittelbarkeit 'immediacy'. (OED s.v. Immediately 1.)
 2. Hegel discusses the same passage in his Logic: 'Determinateness is negation posited as affirmative and is the proposition of Spinoza: omnis determinatio est negatio. This proposition is infinitely important; only, negation as such is formless abstraction. However, speculative philosophy must not be charged with making negation or nothing an ultimate: negation is as little an ultimate for philosophy as reality is for it truth.' (Hegel (1812), 113.) Hegel (like Marx) is probably quoting from memory, since the Latin text reads: 'Quia ergo figura non aliud quam determinatio, et

Marx's comment should be interpreted with heavy emphasis on the word 'tantamount', since the particular case of 'productive consumption' merely reminds him of a 'tag' version of Spinoza's phrase.

Marx continues by charging that the economists only introduce the term productive consumption in order to separate two supposedly different kinds of consumption: 'productive consumption' and 'consumption proper' (the latter is the 'nullifying antithesis of production'). The economists, in his view, have postulated the identity of production and consumption in the concepts productive consumption and consumptive production, and the non-identity of the two in the concepts production proper and consumption proper. The last two, he claims, are supposed to cancel each other. But this conception of the relation between production and consumption is unsatisfactory because, he says, it posits their identity or immediate unity (productive consumption) and their essential difference or duality (unproductive consumption, or 'consumption proper') at the same time. He then investigates the logical relations between the two categories for himself, drawing on concepts and distinctions remembered from Aristotle and Hegel -- an instance of the strictly logical aspect of his method of investigation. In doing so, he concludes that production and consumption, as categories, are related in a way that requires a complex description: (1) each is immediately the other, (2) each is immediately the opposite of the other, (3) each mediates the other, (4) one (production) attains its 'last finish' (? final stage in its creation) in the other, (5) each

determinatio negatio est' (Benedict de Spinoza, Opera, ed. C.H. Bruder (Leipzig, 1843), ii. 299; cf. GR 984 which misprints Bender for Bruder.)

is a necessary condition for the other:

Therefore production is immediately consumption, [and] consumption is immediately production. Each is immediately its opposite. At the same time, however, a mediating movement takes place between the two. Production mediates consumption, whose material it creates; without production, consumption lacks an object. However, consumption also mediates production, since it creates first the subject for the products, the subject for which they are products. The product only receives its last finish¹ in consumption. A railway on which no one rides, which is therefore not worn out, which is not consumed, is only a railway virtually,² not a railway in actuality. Without production there is no consumption; however, without consumption there is no production, since production [without consumption] would be purposeless. (GR 12-13 / PGR 91.)

Furthermore, he claims that consumption produces production in two ways, and that production produces consumption in three ways. In the first way in which consumption is said to produce production Marx offers a view on when certain objects count as products, and when they do not: 'a house which is not lived in, is in fact not a real house'. The second way contains a thesis on the reasons, purposes, motives, and needs which he infers that people develop when they engage in productive activities: 'consumption creates the need for new production'. In both arguments he contends that products cannot be identified simply as objects of this or that material kind, but must be defined in the human social context as objects with a purpose and, correspondingly, objects which are purposefully made. His view is that products only become products in

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1. Marx uses the English phrase 'last finish'; possibly a reference to tailoring or cloth manufacture.
 2. *δυναμικ.* (GEL s.v. *δύναμις* IV.) In this case 'virtually' is understood as 'in respect of essence or effect ... as far as essential qualities or facts are concerned'. (OED s.v. *Virtually* 1.) The German *dynamisch* ('dynamically'), which Marx also uses in this text, is etymologically related to *δυναμικ.*, but quite different in meaning.

consumption, and that consumption, in a sense, creates the object, since it figures in production as a 'purpose-defining object'.

He also claims that production may be said to produce consumption, the opposite of the previous proposition, because, firstly, 'production supplies the material, the object for consumption', and secondly, 'not only the object of consumption but also the mode of consumption is produced by production'.

In his remark that civilized hunger is, in a sense, different from primitive hunger, he seems to recall part of a passage from Hegel's Logic, in which Hegel takes the 'instruments of eating, the teeth and claws' (Marx mentions 'hand, nail, and tooth') to be 'vital points of animal individuality'. (Hegel (1812), 805-6.) Marx has assimilated the animal characteristics to the human situation, contrasting an animal-like with a civilized mode of life, and the correspondingly different modes of production. He has not simply borrowed from Hegel, nor is he simply under Hegel's influence; rather Hegel's work has been thought over critically by Marx and used in putting across certain views and distinctions.

The third way in which production produces consumption, in Marx's account, is that 'production produces the products ... as a need in the consumer'. He also adds the corresponding third point to the two ways, previously noted, in which consumption produces production: '... consumption produces the disposition of the producer, since consumption requires him to determine a need purposefully'. (GR 14 / PGR 92.)

Marx summarizes his investigations of the ways in which production and consumption may be said to be identical: immediate identity; each appears as a means to the other; each of the two

creates the other. But the point of the discussion, in his view, is not that production and consumption are identical, as some writers ('socialist belletristes' and 'prosaic economists') had stated. Thus far he has treated the categories production and consumption as equals; neither is, as yet, said to be in any way prior to the other and to be the 'transcending moment'.¹ However, he concludes his critical investigation of production and consumption by stating that production is 'the real starting point' and that 'consumption appears as a moment of production', whether production and consumption are considered as 'activities of one subject' or of many individuals. According to Marx, 'productive activity is the starting point of realization', since the individual produces an object and through its consumption 'returns again as himself', but as a productive and 'self-reproducing' individual. (GR 15 / PGR 94.)

This is a restatement of the view of man developed in the 1844 Manuscripts and the German Ideology. In the Introduction (1857) Marx recalls his conception of man as homo laborans in his arguments from logic and experience for the priority of one economic category over another: production over consumption. Production, he claims, is the 'real starting point' of a dynamic process fundamental to human life and its development. He recognizes, however, that his

1. Übergreifende. The German term, meaning to overlap, encroach, glide, shift, or spread, is related to the Latin excedens ('to go beyond a certain boundary or a certain measure'). (GDW s.v. Übergreifen passim. OLD s.v. Excedo IB2.) The OED gives a sense of 'to exceed' as 'to transcend the limits of'. (s.v. Exceed 1.) The argument seems to be that production and consumption are both moments (elements) of a process which is essentially a process of production, ergo production 'transcends' all other aspects; see below, pp. 86-7.

conclusion is a statement about human life in general, not a report on the actual workings of society, nor even a conception which, as yet, takes society explicitly into account. Hence he moves on to a logical investigation of the relation of production to two other categories, distribution and exchange, which entail the consideration of the relationship of the human subject to 'other individuals'.

Distribution and Production

Marx makes the transition from a discussion of production and consumption to one of production and distribution by bringing up the relations of the producer to the product in society: Is the product immediately obtainable by the producer? Is the product produced for his immediate appropriation? If the product is produced in society, his answer to both questions is 'no'. He concludes that distribution 'steps between' production and consumption, and then he poses a question about the logical independence of distribution from production: Is distribution 'an autonomous sphere alongside and outside production'? The answer will obviously be negative, since he has already condemned the view taken by some of the political economists and their 'opponents' that 'distribution dwells next to production as an autonomous, independent sphere'.

He compares the 'rubrics' or sub-categories of distribution, as presented by various political economists (Ricardo, J.S. Mill, and J.-B. Say), with the rubrics of production, and concludes that those of distribution (interest, profit, wages, and ground rent) are not applicable to all societies, but are functions peculiar to a system in which capital, wage-labour (rather than slaves), and large-scale landed property (rather than 'simple earth') are agents of production.

He claims that the political economists have committed the same fallacy with the economic rubrics of distribution that they have with the rubrics of production and with the 'individuated individual'. They have, according to Marx's argument, attempted to 'pass off' present conditions as general conditions, and to expand these into general truths about the past, present, and future. He also draws the stronger conclusion consistent with his thesis that production is the 'real starting point': 'the arrangement¹ of distribution is completely determined by the arrangement of production'.

He then considers a number of ways in which distribution appears 'to precede production and to determine it'. Ricardo, Marx says, was taken in by the appearance and so declared distribution to be the 'exclusive subject of [political] economy'. (In his Preface to the third (1821) edition of the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation, Ricardo identified the laws of distribution as his 'principal problem'.)

Marx claims that the reality in each of his examples (social distribution of labour, distribution of the instruments of production, certain kinds of changes in the mode of production) belies the appearance, and that production in each case precedes and determines (or conditions) distribution. In considering these apparent

1. I have chosen 'arrangement', rather than 'structure', as a translation of Gliederung, in order to avoid begging any question of how distinct or developed an entity Marx had in mind. In a letter to Lassalle of 31 May 1858 (MEW xxix. 561) he uses the phrase der ... innere Bau ('inner structure'), and in the Preface (1859) to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (MEW xiii. 8) he writes of die ökonomische Struktur ('economic structure'), so he may have drawn a distinction between Gliederung and Bau or Struktur. 'Articulation' is another possible translation of Gliederung.

counter-examples to his thesis that the mode of production conditions or determines other aspects of social life (such as various kinds of distribution), he takes certain historical cases (conquest, revolution, caste-system, legislation) into account, and offers arguments that his view is correct. The evidence briefly adduced in the Introduction (1857) -- or in the longer versions of these case-studies found in the German Ideology¹ -- can hardly be said to substantiate his point, but the text does demonstrate that he at least considered situations in which production does not appear to be the determining factor for other aspects of social life (and even cases where production itself appears to be determined by other factors), and that he was aware that particular cases might not support his theory. He seems to draw a distinction between truths which are general, yet take historical and contemporary developments into account (such as his thesis that production determines various other phenomena), and contrary effects which might turn up in individual examples.²

Exchange, Circulation, and Production

Marx quickly disposes of the rubric circulation as only 'a determinate moment of exchange'. In considering the relation of exchange to production, and to distribution as well, he concludes that exchange, in its various forms, is a 'mediating moment' between production and distribution, or a 'moment of consumption',

1. See for example GI 34-5, 91-2, where Marx discusses conquest.

2. See Professor Plamenatz's suggestion that the particular cases overthrow the alleged general truth. (John Plamenatz, Man and Society (London, 1963, repr. 1968), ii. 282-3; also 301-3, 349 n.) For a contrasting view, see Lichtheim (1967), 141-5.

or a direct and essential part of production, or an act 'comprised in production', or an activity 'determined by production'. Only the 'last stage' of exchange -- 'the stage where the product is immediately exchanged for consumption' -- seems to present any difficulty for Marx, since exchange appears at that point to be 'independent alongside, indifferent towards production'. It takes him only a few sentences (in which he draws on classic distinctions in logic) to refute this appearance to his own satisfaction and to draw the same conclusion for exchange that he had drawn for consumption and distribution -- exchange is 'either directly comprised in production or determined by it':

Only in its last stage does exchange appear independent alongside, indifferent towards production, the stage where the product is immediately exchanged for consumption. However, 1) there is no exchange without division of labour, whether the division of labour is spontaneous or is itself already an historical result; 2) private exchange presupposes private production; 3) the intensiveness of exchange, like its extension, like its type,¹ is determined by the development and arrangement of production. For example, exchange between town and country, exchange in the country, in the town etc. Thus exchange appears in all its moments either directly comprised in production or determined by it. (GR 20 / PGR 99.)

The result of his inquiry into the meanings and logical interrelations of the economic categories production, distribution, consumption, and exchange is given in two stages: firstly, that they are not simply identical, but are 'members of a totality,

1. Intensivität ... Extension ... Art. The OED relates 'intensiveness' to 'intensive' and the latter to 'intension' in its philosophical sense as 'the number of qualities connoted by a term'. (s.v. Intensive 3; Intension 5.) 'Extension' is defined as 'of a term or concept: Its range as measured by the number of objects which it denotes or contains under it'. (OED s.v. Extension 8b.) Marx argues that exchange, however conceived or practised, is determined by production.

differences within a unity'; and secondly, that one category, production clearly 'transcends' all the others. Consumption and exchange, he claims, were never serious rivals to production, as the 'transcending' moment, since 'the process always begins anew from production'. By 'transcending moment' Marx seems to mean that one moment or aspect of economic life is logically prior to the others as part of a dynamic process and determines them as a general rule.

The one category at which he takes a closer look is distribution 'as distribution of the agents of production' (this would obviously include class relationships), but his final word is that production not only determines the specific forms of the other processes (consumption, distribution, and exchange) but also determines their relationships to one another.¹ For Marx this is a general truth about production, albeit one which does not 'extinguish or confound' historical differences. In the consideration of particular cases, where production and the other categories take a 'one-sided'² form, he expects the results to be more varied. These one-sided forms are immediately recognizable as formulations of the economic categories which relate more

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1. In their discussions McLellan and Ollman seem to miss this concluding point. (McLellan (1971b), 68; Ollman (1971), 16-18.) Here Marx is arguing that the processes of distribution and exchange -- usually treated by the political economists as their principal areas of study -- are secondary phenomena; the truth about capitalist society does not lie in an analysis of the market, according to Marx, but in an understanding of the process of production. This view is restated in PGR 758-9.
 2. einseitig. 'Relating to, considering, or dealing with only one side of a question or subject; partial'. (OED s.v. one-sided 1.) In his Logic Hegel gives this definition: 'The commonest injustice done to a speculative content is to make it one-sided, that is, to give prominence only to one of the propositions into which it can be resolved.' (Hegel (1812), 91.)

immediately to measurable economic phenomena than the four general rubrics: 'extent' of production (for production), 'the market' (for exchange), 'distribution of population' and 'concentration of capital' (for distribution), 'needs of consumption' (for consumption). Where phenomena are considered in a limited, one-sided way, his general truth about production determining consumption, distribution, exchange, and their interrelations presumably stands, despite a 'reciprocal' effect between the different one-sided forms. By 'determining' Marx seems to mean 'limiting, restricting, or conditioning', rather than a stronger sense closer to causation.

Why should Marx have been so interested in general truths about production, distribution, exchange, and consumption, taken in their most abstract, general senses? The one-sided forms, by contrast, receive only a brief mention.

The exercise illustrates an innovatory part of his method of investigation -- a thorough, abstract analysis of the meanings and logical interrelations of basic economic concepts, taking into account relevant historical facts. The political economists seem to him to be (among other things) logically muddled, and their generalizations about the basic categories of their subject are, consequently, incorrect, misleading, or biased, or some combination of these. He investigates the logical relations that obtain among those categories in order to see the theoretical, factual, and methodological 'errors' of the political economists more clearly, and to get a thorough grasp on his own terms of the most basic concepts of the science, rather than -- at the outset -- the results of measurable economic phenomena.

After investigating the most general categories of political economy, he turns to the methods used by political economists in presenting the content of their works. In the section of the Introduction (1857) just considered he has investigated what economic categories are -- they are abstractions which pick out what is common to different forms of -- for example -- production. And he has looked into what can be derived from them: he thinks that they are mostly used to express tautologies or superficial truths and do not demonstrate very much in themselves. In the next section (on method) he develops his arguments in more detail, using further distinctions from his studies in philosophy and logic, in order to criticize the methods and content of political economy and to determine for himself the way to re-present this material informatively. His ideas on where to begin and how to proceed are innovations recorded in the Introduction (1857).

4. On method

Marx begins by commenting on method in political economy: how to consider 'a given country in the manner of political economy' and where to start, for example, with 'population'. To start with population ('the real and concrete', the presupposition which actually exists), he argues, is only apparently correct, though it is true that a population is 'the basis and subject [Subjekt] of the whole social act of production'. Moreover, he notes that population is a complex concept, and that it is merely an 'abstraction' unless we introduce numerous simpler concepts, such as class, wage-labour, capital, and value, in order to grasp the actually existing population of a given country. To obtain the

simpler concepts, he writes, one proceeds 'analytically'. (GR 21 / PGR 100.)

The process of breaking down a complex, concrete conception like population into simpler, more abstract concepts (or determinations) corresponds to the philosophical method of analysis, in which something complex is resolved or broken up into simple elements. (OED s.v. Analysis 1.) Marx used the standard terminology of nineteenth-century logic (derived, in both English and German, from concepts and procedures of ancient and medieval philosophy) with reasonable precision and consistency. Synthesis proceeds in the opposite direction in order to reproduce the concrete in a conception which is, as he says, 'a rich totality of many determinations and relationships'. (GR 21 / PGR 100.)

A contradiction seems to arise when he identifies population as real and concrete, and then suggests that it is an abstraction. His point seems to be that it is an abstraction, i.e. a conception removed from a particular, concrete example, unless the conception has been built up along the synthetic lines which he indicates. Once the correct synthesis is performed, the conception would represent the 'reproduction of the concrete by means of thinking'. It would be the 'conceptualized concrete', and hence an abstraction only in the sense that as a conception it exists as an idea. But at the same time it would not be abstract, in the sense that it would not be at a remove from a concrete example (either by being too simple, or by being a 'chaotic' combination of related concepts), but would be its correct, synthetic, conceptual representation. Perhaps a simpler way of putting this point is to say that population is an abstraction (a conception which is too

simple) unless other contextual elements (such as classes) are included in it. In general, he regards population as the 'actual presupposition', a presupposition which actually exists, rather than the starting or finishing point for his critical presentation; population or society, he explains, is the real 'subject'.¹

(GR 21 / PGR 101-2.)

The distinction between logical analysis and synthesis is derived from classical philosophy; in his Logic Hegel presents it, in his own interpretation:

The relation contained in something concrete, in a synthetic unity, is necessary only in so far as it is not just given but is produced by the spontaneous return of the moments back into this unity -- a movement which is the opposite of the analytical procedure, which is an activity belonging to the subject-thinker and external to the subject matter itself. (Hegel (1812), 75.)

Later Hegel develops a distinction between analytic and synthetic cognition for which there is no parallel in Marx's text, but it is not difficult to imagine his views on certain metaphysical aspects of the Hegelian philosophical consciousness and its aim of 'comprehension'. Nevertheless Marx obviously admired and used some of the methodological details of Hegel's work, for example:

... analytic cognition is merely the apprehension of what is. Synthetic cognition aims at the comprehension of what is, that is, at grasping the multiplicity of determinations in their unity. (Hegel (1812), 794.)

Much of Marx's lengthy discussion of the economic categories production, distribution, consumption, and exchange in the Introduction (1857) was devoted to 'grasping the multiplicity of determinations in their unity', though he sought to do this independently of Hegel's metaphysics. At the end of that section

1. For a further discussion of this point, see below, pp. 93-4.

Marx had, of course, moved beyond this 'grasping' of determinations as a unity to the conclusion that one (production) was prior to the others and their 'transcending moment'. This process of 'grasping' determinations I take to be a part of Marx's method of investigation and the arguments themselves to constitute for Marx an informal, unpolished demonstration of certain general truths.

In this section of the Introduction (1857) he divides up the history of political economy according to whether the analytic or synthetic method was employed, citing as his first example 'the economists of the 17th century'. He may have been thinking of works like William Petty's Political Arithmetic (1690), or Boisguillebert's Détail de France (1695). Marx contrasts the analytic character of seventeenth-century works with the synthetic character of later ones which 'ascend from the simple [moment], such as labour, division of labour, need, [and] exchange-value, up to the state' Here he may have been thinking of standard works by James and John Stuart Mill (for their treatment of labour), Adam Smith (for his treatment of the division of labour), J.-B. Say (for need), and Ricardo (for exchange-value). (GR 21 / PGR 100-101.)

The Introduction (1857) records an innovation in Marx's ideas on method: he comes down on the side of synthesis as the 'scientifically [wissenschaftlich] correct method' for presenting an 'economic system'; synthesis, in his view, is the way to reproduce 'the concrete' (complex, real-world phenomena) 'by means of thinking'. When he writes that '[t]he concrete is concrete, because it is the sum of many determinations, [and] therefore a unity of diversity', he very nearly quotes Hegel's Logic, though

he clearly rejects a view of the 'subject' as 'self-related universality':

The concrete totality which makes the beginning contains as such within itself the beginning of the advance and development. As concrete, it is differentiated within itself; but by reason of its first immediacy the first differentiated determinations are in the first instance merely a diversity. The immediate, however, as self-related universality, as subject, is also the unity of these diverse determinations. (Hegel (1812), 830.)

Marx develops the view that his concrete result, achieved by a process of synthesis, is also the 'actual starting point', the starting point which actually exists. In other words, to perform the synthesis properly, he must, at the beginning, presuppose actuality, in order to arrive (using analysis, then synthesis) at the summarized, conceptualized concrete. (GR 21-2 / PGR 101.) Similarly, Hegel begins his Logic with the 'universal' (the 'concrete totality' which is not yet 'for itself'), and proceeds from 'simple determinations' to those which are 'ever richer and more concrete'. The concrete universal is, as a result which contains its beginning, both beginning and end:

First of all, this advance [in cognition] is determined as beginning from simple determinateness, the succeeding ones becoming ever richer and more concrete. For the result contains its beginning and its course has enriched it by a fresh determinateness. The universal constitutes the foundation (Hegel (1812), 840.)

It is likely that these notions -- proceeding from the abstract to the concrete, from the simple to the complex, and the appearance of the concrete as a result, while it is at the same time a beginning or presupposition -- were developed by Marx with Hegel's Logic (and probably other Hegelian works, such as the Encyclopaedia) in mind. He evidently thought that Hegel had had an insight into the 'reproduction of the concrete' through logical

thinking, even though Marx was at pains in the Holy Family (and elsewhere) to point out that Hegel had, in his philosophy, stood the world on its head. (See HF 253-5.) Hence in the Introduction (1857) Marx charges Hegel with confusing logical synthesis, which is carried out by the human mind, with a conception of reality such that 'thinking' somehow produces 'the real'. (GR 22 / PGR 101.)

According to Marx, Hegel is guilty of hypostatization; in the Hegelian world, as Marx sees it, concepts have a life of their own, or rather 'Being', 'Spirit', or some other Hegelian 'demiurgos' (the 'self-delivering [sich selbst gebärenden] concept') is the active subject in his account of reality, not men producing in society ('population'). In Marx's work, concepts may be said to exist only in man's thoughts, speech, written language etc.; concepts are very much man's products, and any development or change in them is traceable to man, not to 'Spirit', the 'Idea', or the 'concept thinking outside or above [human] perception and conceptualization'. Marx concludes that 'the method of ascending from the abstract to the concrete is merely the way for thinking to appropriate the concrete, to reproduce it as a mental concrete'; and thinking (i.e. scientific practice), as he goes on to explain, is merely one way of 'appropriating' the world -- other ways are the artistic, religious, and practical-mental modes of appropriation. The distinction between 'thinking' and 'practical-mental' appropriation suggests a contrast between thought unaccompanied by action (e.g. working out logical relations) and practical activities involving forethought, such as 'taking in' the facts of a situation. (GR 22 / PGR 101.)

But in the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of

Political Economy Marx did not speak of 'ascending from the abstract to the concrete' but of 'ascending from the individual to the general' (von dem einzelnen zum allgemeinen aufzusteigen). (MEW xiii. 7 / SW i. 502.) What was behind this change in his ideas on a scientific method of presentation?

The 1859 formulation may be a result of an alteration in his plans which occurred between April and November 1858; he had altered the organization of his presentation of the category capital from 1. Value, 2. Money, 3. Capital (as outlined in the letter to Engels of 2 April) to 1. The Commodity, 2. Money or Simple Circulation, 3. Capital in General. This change probably took place in November, since Marx wrote to Lassalle on 12 November 1858, 'I shall be finished in about four weeks, since I have really just begun to write' (MEW xxix. 567), and to Engels on 29 November, 'the first part has grown much larger, since the first two chapters, of which the first: The Commodity, has not been written at all in rough draft' (MEW xxix. 372.) In the Contribution and Capital, i, Marx stated that the individual commodity (die einzelne Ware) represents the elementary form or unit of capitalist wealth; the series no longer began with value, which he had described in the Introduction (1857) as an 'abstract, general relationship' in political economy.¹ (MEW xiii. 15 / CCPE 27; KAP i. 1 / CAP i. 1.)

He seems to have chosen the distinction individual/general to cover the new series commodity/money/capital, but he did not explain why he made either of the changes. Probably neither is of

1. Elsewhere Marx distinguishes between the initial treatment of the commodity as the 'simplest element of capitalist production', and its actual occurrence in capitalist society as the 'general form of the product'. (MEW xxvi(3). 108 / TSV iii. 112.)

great significance, since his presentation of the commodity included his critical material on value.

But it is possible to speculate on his reasons for the alteration. Commodity/money/capital are more nearly the same sort of thing than value/money/capital, since value cannot be a tangible thing in quite the same way as a commodity, money, or capital. 'From the abstract to the concrete' does not describe the progression of the new series especially well, since all three may be abstractions or concrete objects. Hence he may have shifted to a distinction between the individual or unit and the general or conglomerate, resolving what may have been some confusion between relative theoretical abstraction or simplicity, and the relatively simple elements of the process of production in capitalist society. But the formula 'from the simple to the complex' was probably rejected (if it were even considered) because he went to great lengths in his published works to explicate the notions of the commodity and value, which; he claimed, were not at all simple.

Marx's method of presentation, as it emerged in A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy and Capital, i, resembles philosophical synthesis more than analysis, as discussed in the Introduction (1857). But his published presentation, which opens with the complexities of the individual commodity, does not conform throughout to the 'scientifically correct method' (ascending from the abstract to the concrete, from the simple to the complex) as formulated for the first time in the 1857 text, though his overall progression in Capital from the commodity, to money, capital, accumulation and circulation of capital, and the 'process as a

whole' corresponds to this intention.¹ Similarly, his method of investigation (tracing the 'inner link' of his material) is more like analysis, as discussed in the Introduction (1857), than synthesis; but again, the two are not exactly comparable, nor are the two methods (investigation and presentation) absolutely distinct in his work, since his presentation undoubtedly reproduces some of the investigation.

In this section of the 1857 text he makes two further points about 'the concrete', after his remark that it is 'the sum of many determinations' and 'a unity of diversity'. 'The concrete', he writes, is 'the actual starting point of perception and conceptualization' -- that with which perception and conceptualization begin. A correct account of perception does not open, in his view, with 'mind' or 'consciousness' on its own. (GR 21-2 / PGR 101.)

He also states that the mental reproduction of the concrete through logical synthesis is to be distinguished from the actual genesis of the concrete. In logical synthesis he says that he proceeds from an abstract relationship like exchange-value towards a complex, concrete phenomenon like population or world market. But something like exchange-value, in his view, could never be said to exist outside a 'given, concrete, living whole'; this point is presumably directed against political economists who spoke of exchange-value without taking 'certain sorts of familial or

1. Marx gives a brief recapitulation of the structure of Capital in the second volume, where he argues that in order to understand 'commodity-capital' and the 'capitalist process of production', one must analyse the 'circulation of commodities', and before that, the commodity itself. (KAP ii. 383 / CAP ii. 389.)

communal or political existence' into account. (GR 22 / PGR 101.)

Marx does say that exchange-value 'as a category' (presumably an idealist category) exists in the 'antediluvian' past; this is probably a derogatory reference to Proudhon's work on the economic categories, where he uses, according to Marx, pseudo-Hegelian methods and expressions. Marx again takes up his attack on philosophical idealism and traces the root of that view to what he sees as a strange conception of man and the world: for idealists, 'conceptual thinking is the actual man and hence the conceived world as such is the only actuality'. With that view, he argues, the 'movement of categories' in logic seems more real than actual activities, such as production. (GR 22 / PGR 101.)

Marx's own view, expressed in the 1844 Manuscripts and Capital, i, that man distinguishes himself in practice from the animals by being a conscious, and self-consciously imaginative producer,¹ was developed in opposition to Hegel's dictum that 'it is thinking which distinguishes man from beasts', though Marx does not deny this obvious point -- he puts it into a different philosophical framework, and expands it. (Hegel (1812), 31.) Hence in the Introduction (1857) he takes 'socially determined production' as his starting point, and puts the real world 'outside the head', not in the 'thought-world' as conceived by idealists. For Marx the real world is the everyday world of experience, and the only 'thought-world' is the world of thoughts (a man-made world) inside the head. The 'concrete totality' as a 'thought-totally' is not, in Marx's view, the product of 'the concept thinking outside or

1. See ET 139-40, and CAP i. 156-7.

above perception', but of actual thinking ('the working up of perception and conceptualization into concepts'), something done every day by actual men.¹ (GR 22 / PGR 101.)

The idealists, according to Marx, regard man as really 'the head', and the 'thought-world' as the real world; hence Hegel sees the real subject, something which accounts for activity and development and change, as the 'movement of categories'. Marx, on the other hand, says that he is concerned with the 'actual man' and the 'actual act of production'; hence he concludes that 'with the theoretical method' we must stand on our feet in the real world where the real subject (agent) is society as it exists 'outside the head' -- not as it is in the head (where it is a concept), but as it is in actuality. For Marx, the real subject (agent) is not a concept or category as such or 'self-motivating thinking' (but actual society -- men), and what the head does (it acts theoretically, or speculatively) is not the actual act of material production. (GR 22 / PGR 101-2.)

He seems to have considered Hegel's contribution to logic and the 'theoretical method' a valuable one, so long as the idealist presuppositions of 'subject' and 'dialectic' were thoroughly exposed and corrected. The Introduction (1857) represents, in part, one of his attempts to sort out the rational element in Hegel's method, and put it to use. Marx mentions this project in a letter

1. Stanley Moore cites passages from this section of the Introduction (1857) out of context to support his claim (with which I do not agree) that Marx rejected the epistemological position outlined in his early works. ('Marx and the Origin of Dialectical Materialism', Inquiry, xiv (Oslo, 1971). 422.) Similarly, the 1857 text does not support the dualism ascribed to Marx in K.R. Popper, Open Society and its Enemies, ii, 5th edn. (London, 1966, repr. 1969), 102-3.

to Engels of 16 January 1858, when he was working on the remainder of the Grundrisse:

If there is ever again time for such work, I would very much like to make accessible, in two or three printer's sheets ... what is rational in the method which Hegel discovered but has mystified. (MEW xxix. 260.)

And on 31 May 1858 he wrote to Lassalle in the same vein, saying that the dialectic must be freed from the 'mystical appearance' that it has in Hegel's works. (MEW xxix. 561.)

Later, in his Afterword (dated 1873) to the second edition of Capital, i, Marx returned to the subject in one of his most puzzling and frequently quoted assessments of the relation of his own work to Hegel's:

With him [Hegel] it [the dialectic] is standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel in the mystical shell. (KAP i. p. xix / CAP i. p. xxx.)

By 'rational kernel' he might be referring to Hegel's insights into logic and conceptual analysis; the 'mystical shell' might be Hegel's confusion between 'the conceived world' (or 'the movement of categories') and actuality (or in the 1857 text, 'the actual act of [material] production'). (GR 22 / PGR 101.)

The following passage, in which Hegel distinguishes between his dialectical method and 'formal thinking' (which deals with propositions, not dialectical accounts), must have impressed Marx. His attack on J.S. Mill for the 'crude sundering of production and distribution and their actual relation', his criticism of the political economists generally for the 'crudeness and the mechanical character of their thought ... in haphazardly relating to one another things which belong together organically', and his investigation, for example, of the relations which obtain between

the categories production and distribution, all recall Hegel's account of the dialectical method:

... this unity can be expressed as a proposition ... for example, the finite is infinite, one is many, the individual is the universal. However, the inadequate form of such propositions is at once obvious ... the positive judgement, is incapable of holding within its grasp speculative determinations and truth. The direct supplement to it, the negative judgement, would at least have to be added as well ... It may be taken in the first instance as a simple determination, but in its truth it is a relation or relationship; for it is a negative, but the negative of the positive, and includes the positive within itself ... [T]herefore it includes its own other within it and is consequently as contradiction, the posited dialectic of itself ... But formal thinking makes identity its law, and allows the contradictory content before it to sink into the sphere of ordinary conception ... in which the contradictories are held asunder in juxtaposition and temporal succession and so come before consciousness without reciprocal contact. (Hegel (1812), 834-5.)

In his Logic Hegel explains that his dialectic grasps 'the positive in the negative', and that opposite determinations belong to the same subject matter 'with equal necessity':

It is in this dialectic as it is here understood, that is, in the grasping of opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative, that speculative thought consists. (Hegel (1812), 56.)

... it [dialectic] usually takes the following more precise form. It is shown that there belongs to some subject matter or other ... presence in this place, absolute negation of space; but further, that with equal necessity the opposite determination also belongs to the subject matter (Hegel (1812), 831.)

Marx's dialectic, like Hegel's, grasps the 'affirmative' and the 'negative' of things, but on a different basis: Marx uses the language of Hegel's Logic, but as a rule he does not allow it to give the impression that reality results from the 'movement of categories'.¹ He writes:

1. Marx refers to his 'critical mode' of applying Hegel's method, in a letter to Kugelmann of 27 June 1870. (MEW xxxii. 686.) See also the discussion of 'idealist' expressions in Marx's work, below, pp. 141-5.

In its mystified form the dialectic became a German fashion because it appeared to transfigure the existing state of affairs. In its rational form it is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in the positive understanding of the existing state of affairs the understanding of its negation, its necessary downfall (KAP i. p. xix / CAP i. pp. xxx-xxxii.)

In his Afterword to Capital, i, Marx distinguishes between his 'coquetting' with 'modes of expression' peculiar to Hegel (for example, terms such as 'assemblage of many properties', 'germ' of the money form, the two 'poles' of the expression of value) and the 'rational form of the dialectic'. The latter is a substantial adaptation by Marx of a method (not simply a mode of expression); according to Marx, Hegel was the first to present it, though in a mystified form. Some of Marx's closest preliminary work with that method takes place in the Introduction (1857), where -- in the preceding section, for example -- he criticizes various political economists for taking certain economic categories to be simply identical or simply antithetical, rather than interrelated in a complex but specifiable way. His view of the relations between the economic categories does include their 'reciprocal contact' (though in their 'one-sided forms'). But in his conclusion about their logical relations, which is not a thesis in 'simple determination' (a conception which Hegel found inadequate), he nevertheless supersedes the Hegelian view of 'reciprocal contact' by assigning to production a determining role.

When Marx was writing the remainder of the Grundrisse he stated that he had found Hegel's Logic helpful in dealing with a particular economic category -- profit; he had been offered Bakunin's old copy of Hegel's work in October 1857. (See Marx to Engels,

16 January 1858, MEW xxix. 260; FBME i. 96.) But the text of the Introduction (1857) suggests that Marx already had the Logic well in mind in August/September.

Having refuted, to his own satisfaction, the idealist standpoint, and having developed a distinction between categories (some are simple and abstract, others are complex and concrete), Marx was in a position in the 1857 text to take up specific questions about the 'mental concrete' and the actual origin of 'the concrete itself', for example: Do simple categories have an 'independent historical or natural existence' before the categories which are more concrete?

He argues that possession is indeed, as Hegel claimed in the Philosophy of Right (1821), 'the subject's simplest relationship to do with rights':

Right is, at first, the immediate existence which freedom is given in an immediate way,
 a) possession, which is property ownership
 (Hegel (1821), 92, para. 40.)

Marx notes that 'possession does not exist before the family', a point with which Hegel agrees in part: 'It cannot be said, for example, that property existed before the family' (Hegel (1821), 83, para. 32.) What Marx objects to is Hegel's equation of possession with property ownership, a relation of right or legal relationship which, according to Marx, only appears in developed societies. Hegel, in Marx's view, does not distinguish correctly between simple, primitive societies, and those which are more complex and developed. (GR 22-3 / PGR 102.)

When Marx writes that possession is not 'developed historically towards the family', he does not necessarily contradict Hegel:

But it is to be noted that the moments ... precede it [the result] as conceptual determinations in the scientific development of the idea, but do not go before it in temporal development as forms [of experience]. (Hegel (1821), 82, para. 32.)

And when Marx writes that 'possession always implies that "more concrete category of right" [i.e. the family]', he does not disagree with Hegel's view: 'Thus the idea, determined as the family, presupposes the conceptual determinations whose result will be the family' (Hegel (1821), 82, para. 32.) Marx's quarrel with Hegel is that the latter does not seem to take seriously forms of possession which do not imply a development towards modern property rights. (GR 23 / PGR 102.) Hegel gives this impression when he explains:

But that these inner presuppositions [of, e.g. the family] are seen present as forms [of experience], as property rights ... etc. -- this is the other side of development which is brought to the properly formed existence of its moments only in a higher, more complete [social] formation. (Hegel (1821), 82, para. 32.)

Marx had strong convictions concerning the direction of the (allegedly) necessary development of capitalist society, but his view of historical situations in relation to his own capitalist society was not that of a consistent historicist, since he seems to chide Hegel for seeing in possession a relation of right (a legal relation) and for implying that there is some inevitable or necessary historical development from primitive to 'higher' forms of social organization. But what is perhaps surprising here is the extent to which Marx follows Hegel's account without disagreeing; the fact that Marx studied Hegel's work in great detail is characteristic of his method of investigation.

In the Introduction (1857) Marx draws a complex conclusion

about the existence of simple categories as expressions of social relationships or practices in more or less developed societies: simple categories, such as possession, may be merely expressions of a less developed (familial or tribal) form of society where more complex categories, such as property, have not come into existence; possession continues to exist, however, in more developed societies (such as modern bourgeois society) as a 'subordinate relation'. (GR 23 / PGR 102-3.)

Money, he argues, is another example of a simple category existing in practice as the expression of certain social relations before more complex categories, such as wage-labour and capital. The simple category money expresses a 'subordinate' relation in modern times, much as in the previous example, but a 'dominating' relation in a pre-modern society, so simple categories are, in his view, not necessarily the expression of unimportant or subsidiary relations.

He concludes that his two examples (possession/property and money/capital) demonstrate a historical development from simple forms to combined forms, and that 'thus far the path of abstract thinking ... corresponds to the actual historical process', where abstract thinking follows the synthetic method. (GR 23 / PGR 102.) This represents the first, affirmative part of his answer to the question whether the simple categories have an 'independent historical or natural existence' before the more concrete categories. But he also chooses an example to support a negative answer. Complex economic forms (such as co-operation, developed division of labour) have existed before the simpler ones (such as money), according to Marx, in the Inca civilization. (See

W.H. Prescott, History of the Conquest of Peru (London, 1847), i. 57, 141-2; Marx read this work in 1851; CHR 110.)

His argument is that economic forms of life corresponding to the simpler economic categories do not necessarily exist before the more complex ones, nor are the simpler ones (such as the type of exchange associated with money) necessarily part of the constituent elements of pre-modern societies. The example for the latter point is the Slavic commune, where commodity exchange and money first appeared, according to Marx, in contacts with other peoples, but not within the commune itself. Furthermore, he argues, the simple form may achieve its 'complete development' (a system of exchange based on money, rather than payment in kind) during the dissolution of a particular type of society (e.g. ancient Greece and Rome), or it may be one of the presuppositions of a society (e.g. modern capitalist society). (GR 23-4 / PGR 102-3.)

There are further refinements in his discussion of how simple economic forms may be said to exist before those which are more complex. Simple forms may exist in the pre-modern world in what appears to be the modern form (for example, in 'trading nations'), but there is still a difference between the existence of a simpler form in pre-modern times and its existence in modern bourgeois society: the simple form does not exist multi-nationally, or as the presupposition of a society, or in the complete array of forms which it takes in modern society (it 'does not appear historically in its intensiveness'), or it does not permeate so many other economic relations, e.g. taxation, or all forms of labour. (GR 24 / PGR 103.)

Marx's conclusion is that simple and complex economic forms

(money and co-operation, respectively) may exist more or less intensively and extensively in more or less developed societies; however, simple categories (such as money) only obtain their 'complete intensive and extensive development' in a complex, modern society. He notes that a more complex, concrete category (co-operation) has existed in a more completely developed form in pre-modern societies than in some later societies, but he does not commit himself overtly to the view that co-operation will attain its 'complete intensive and extensive development' in an even more complex future society. (GR 24 / PGR 103.)

The ensuing discussion of the category labour introduces additional complexities into his consideration of the ways in which economic categories may be said to exist as expressions of social relations. He begins by granting that labour appears to be a simple category, and that it has been understood as a simple category for a very long time; yet, he argues, labour is a modern category 'in the same way as the [social] relations which produce that simple abstraction'. The conclusion which he draws is typically complex: it might appear as if an abstract expression for an old and simple relationship had been discovered, 'the relationship in which men -- in whatever form of society -- emerge as producing'. He argues that this is correct (since men have in fact developed a conscious awareness of the simple category labour), but he claims that this apparent conclusion omits several important points. (GR 24 / PGR 103-4.)

This discovery, or formulation of a simple category, was not, in Marx's view, a purely intellectual process, but rather the result of certain changes in the social organization of labour. The

development of the concept labour, in its most abstract and general form, presupposes, according to Marx, a society in which the division of labour is highly developed and in which one particular form of labour is not dominant over the others, a society in which men do not conceive of labour as essentially one sort of labour rather than another. His development of the simple category labour or 'labour in general' resembles his work in the first section of the Introduction (1857) on the category 'production in general': both are sensible abstractions insofar as they 'actually pick out what is common'. But he notes that general production does not actually exist as an activity; 'labour in general', however, exists 'in the category' and 'in actuality', as in the United States, where he sees an 'indifference'¹ towards the determinate form of labour', a situation in which labour 'has ceased being attached to individuals as a determination in a particular situation' (as opposed to the situation in feudal society). (GR 25 / PGR 104-5.)

Marx is careful to clarify the epistemological implications of his claim that the conception of labour in the abstract only emerges in a particular sort of society. It is not, in his view, the simple fact that labour has become diversified that causes a new conception of labour to arise (the category 'labour in general'), but the way in which people conduct their activities -- what might be called the practical existence of the category. This

1. Gleichgültigkeit. The term has a philosophical sense, which might apply here, as 'want of difference in nature or character; substantial equality or equivalence'. (OED s.v. Indifference 5.) It also figures in Hegel's Logic: 'Being is the abstract equivalence [Gleichgültigkeit] -- for which ... the expression indifference [Indifferenz] has been employed.' (Hegel (1812), 375.) Thus this passage might read, 'The abstract equivalence of determinate forms of labour presupposes'

represents a specification of his general thesis on the social determination of ideas as expressed in the German Ideology.¹

Marx has come to a conclusion about labour similar to his conclusion about money: simple categories only come to their 'complete intensive and extensive development' as expressions of practical social relations in modern, complex societies.² But in the case of labour he has explained why he thinks that this occurs, and he has traced the history of the category as it appears in political economy together with its development as the expression of a social relationship in practice. The example of labour seems to show more clearly than that of money that the 'most general abstractions generally develop only with the richest concrete development'. He seems concerned to refute the notion that the members of simple societies have simple, abstract conceptions; such conceptions, in his view, only develop in complex, advanced societies. (GR 25 / PGR 105.)

However, he does consider an apparent counter-example to his thesis: Russian 'barbarians' seem just as indifferent to particular forms of labour as American workers. But he draws a distinction between a 'disposition to be assigned to everything', and the more consciously active way in which 'civilized men assign themselves to everything'. (GR 25 / PGR 105.)

In summary, Marx declares that the most abstract categories, though valid (in the sense that they are logical universals) for

1. See above, pp. 67-8, and Marx's further application of this thesis to the category labour in CAP i. 44-5.

2. Since Marx was interested in the labour theory of value and the accumulation of capital, it is not surprising that money and labour figure as examples in these general investigations of the economic categories.

all forms of society, are nevertheless very much the products of a long historical process of development. They can only be formulated at a late historical stage when social life has become diverse and complex, and only in a developed society do they possess their 'full validity', their full range of connotations and denotations. This inquiry into 'mental concretes' and the actual origins of 'the concrete itself' continues the innovatory investigations of the preceding section of the Introduction (1857); Marx uses methods of the logician and historian to get absolutely clear about certain economic categories (such as possession, property, co-operation, money, and labour) -- what they are as categories, when and how they appeared as the expression of certain forms of life -- and he discusses their application to different sorts of societies at different times in history.

Having developed the view that the most abstract categories are only formulated and only possess their full validity in modern societies, Marx claims that in consequence the present provides a key to the past -- if it is used carefully. Fragments and elements of less developed, extinct forms of society and of animal life persist, in his view, in the more developed forms which exist at present; hence the categories which express 'an insight' into the arrangement of the higher forms also express an insight into the lower, and the categories of the higher forms are therefore applicable, in a sense, to the lower forms ('in the anatomy of man there is a key to the anatomy of the ape'). Marx explains this point further by claiming that the intimations of the higher types of animal life can be seen in the lower only if the higher types are already understood. We can comprehend the significance of past

epochs, according to Marx, only from the viewpoint of the present, though there is no suggestion of a strictly linear view of historical development. (GR 25-6 / PGR 105-6.)

Marx sees a process of development, and some developmental links and relations between epochs, and he claims that we can only comprehend the past in the light of the present. Perhaps his point is that 'simple' societies are not simple to understand on their own terms. He seems to have subscribed, though with the usual anti-idealist, anti-Hegelian reservations, to the view (expressed in the Preface to the Philosophy of Right) that the owl of Minerva flies only at dusk, but there is little of the Hegelian sense of strict historical necessity -- the view that specific epochs must have succeeded each other in order to produce the present. (Hegel sometimes gives this impression.) Such a view is queried in the concluding section of the Introduction (1857).

Marx applies his conclusion that the present provides a key to the past by suggesting that we can understand the developmental significance of economic forms in pre-modern societies (he takes tribute and tithes as examples) if we are acquainted with the modern economic form ground rent. 'However', he warns, 'one must not identify them [with each other]'; and furthermore, the differences between modern and pre-modern economic forms may be of great significance. In his view, not only are pre-modern forms not identical with the bourgeois forms, but some of the forms which occur in bourgeois society are themselves pre-modern (though distorted or travestied), for example, communal property. Marx might be thinking here of Russia or India, where capitalist relations had made an impact on older forms. (GR 26 / PGR 105-6.)

He goes on to draw a methodological distinction: 'one-sided' criticism obliterates historical differences and 'demonstrates' that past economic forms are 'really' those of the present, but in an undeveloped way (this was also his complaint in the first section about the political economists); but 'objective' understanding only develops when writers see their own societies critically. Historical development, in his view, does not mean the linear progress of history to its culmination in present-day society, but development out of the past through the present; hence only after criticism of the present (seeing its positive aspects, and those leading to its negation) do we understand the past -- and Marx's critique of political economy was for him nothing if not the beginning of his critique of the present.

He then outlines some of his views on a 'historical social science'. In doing so, he introduces a distinction between the understanding of categories (they 'express forms of being ... single sides of that determinate society') and their scientific understanding and presentation. The scientific understanding begins from his anti-idealist standpoint: 'as in actuality, so in the head [i.e. in theoretical constructs], the subject [agent], which is here modern bourgeois society, is given' Furthermore, his scientific account presents the categories in a particular order, so that their interrelations are presented in a particular light. (GR 26 / PGR 106.)

The first step is their proper disposition. He begins with a particular category (capital-- an innovation in his plans) selected according to a theory which he illustrates with analogies from the physical sciences and with historical examples. His view

that 'in all forms of society there is a determinate [form of] production which directs all the others, and ... all the other relations' expands his conclusion on the relation of production to other economic relationships. Production determines all these relationships, and one form of production determines all the other forms and relations within the totality:

... there is something decisive [Entscheidendes] over the disposition [of categories] ... In all forms of society there is a determinate [form of] production which directs all the others, and whose relations therefore direct all the other relations, [and their] position and influence. There is a general illumination in which all other colours are submerged and [[which]] modifies them in their particularity. There is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of everything in it.¹
(GR 27 / PGR 106-7.)

Marx dismisses the idea of beginning with what is thought to be 'in accord with nature', with ground rent and landed property. Instead, he cites three sorts of society, in which three different forms of production are, in turn, the determining factor for the other economic forms and relations; these are the examples cited to support his thesis on production.

Firstly, he takes a society of herdsmen, in which 'a certain form of cultivation of the earth comes to the fore, a sporadic form ... Landed property is thereby determined'. (My emphasis.) The determination of this form, according to Marx, depends on the mode

1. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries experiments and calculations were undertaken to determine the properties of the 'ether': 'a substance of great elasticity and subtilty, believed to permeate the whole of planetary and stellar space, not only filling the interplanetary spaces, but also the interstices between the particles of air and other matter on earth ... [e.g.] Perrault represents it as 7200 times more rare than air; and Hook makes it more dense than gold itself.' Specific gravity is the ratio between the density of a substance and the density of some other substance (air, water, or, in principle, ether) taken as a standard. (OED s.v. Ether 5; Gravity 4c.)

of production (tending animals), but whether or not the corresponding form of property will last depends on whether those people 'cling to their tradition, e.g. the communal property of the Slavs'. Marx was no advocate of a strict technological determinism.

Secondly, he claims that with peoples who have developed a settled form of agriculture, as in Roman times, industry and property have the character (more or less) of landed property; and similarly in the middle ages, urban industry imitates the country, and capital (so far as it is not pure money-capital) has certain characteristics of landed property.

Thirdly, bourgeois society, in Marx's view, represents an age in which the 'historically-created' (as opposed to the 'natural') element is predominant. Capital dominates agriculture and ground rent, in fact, the whole of society. When Marx wrote in the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy of 'results still to be proved', this may have been one of the things he had in mind, since in the Introduction (1857) this result -- to be demonstrated by Capital -- was merely asserted. (MEW xiii. 7 / SW i. 502.)

He does not propose to treat these categories of political economy 'in the sequence in which they were the determining categories historically' (though this does not commit him to an unhistorical presentation), but in an 'order of succession ... determined by the relationship which they have to one another in modern bourgeois society', 'their arrangement within modern bourgeois society'. He tells us that this means capital first (since it is 'the economic power of bourgeois society, the power ruling over everything'), then landed property, then their

'reciprocal relationship'. Capital was to 'form the starting point as [well as] the terminal point', an idea compatible with his earlier thoughts on presupposing the concrete in order to proceed from the abstract to the concrete by means of analysis, then synthesis. (GR 27 / PGR 107.)

Marx's work in the Introduction (1857) bears comparison with the 'general result' formulated in the Preface to the Contribution of 1859. The thesis on the 'determining' relation of production to consumption, distribution, and exchange, and the 'dominating' role of capital within the relations of production of bourgeois society, represents a preliminary demonstration of half of his general result of 1859 (the half to do with the 'economic structure'). The other half of the general result (concerning 'definite social forms of consciousness' corresponding to the economic structure) is presupposed and used in the 1857 text.¹ (MEW xiii. 8 / SW i. 503.) His arguments for production as the determining factor seem to rely on the special ontological status assigned to production in the 1844 Manuscripts² and the special role it plays in his theory of history, as outlined in the German Ideology³ and other works. The theory that capital is the 'dominating' (or 'ruling') factor in bourgeois society is something of an innovation in the 1857 text, but a development of earlier views (such as the role of the bourgeoisie as ruling class), rather than a departure.

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1. The 'general result' is also formulated in Capital, iii, where Marx discusses the 'capitalist process of production' as an 'historically determinate' instance of the 'social process of production generally'. (KAP iii(2). 353 / CAP iii. 798.) I disagree with the account of production, labour, value, and capital in Marx's critique given in Lichtheim (1967), 176-8.
 2. See above, pp. 47-8, 82-3,
 3. See above, pp. 84-5.

In the Introduction (1857) Marx uses his conclusion that capital is the dominating factor or ruling element in bourgeois society to elucidate some of his views on pre-modern social organizations and how they differ from commodity-producing societies. Capital in its modern, dominating form is not to be confused with the appearance of capital in its pure, abstract form (trading or money-capital), as with the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Lombards, and Jews. The activities of those peoples, and even the early appearance of joint-stock companies, demonstrate, for Marx, that capital existed before modern society, but that it occupied a different, less dominant place in pre-modern times, so it did not exist in quite the same way: the same categories take different places 'in different stages of society'. Earlier in this section he had argued that money had put in an appearance, so to speak, in pre-modern times as a 'dominating relation' of certain societies, but that in modern bourgeois society it was a subordinate relation -- subordinate, we learn, to capital. In this discussion he distinguishes between the existence of an economic category (capital) in an abstract form (as with the ancient trading nations, who appear exceptional against the predominance of agricultural peoples) and its existence as a 'ruling element' in bourgeois society. (GR 27 / PGR 107-8.)

At the end of this section on method Marx gives his five-part plan for a critique of political economy, which was to deal not only with the economic categories in their abstract forms (as they apply to all societies), but also with the particular categories, beginning with capital, which 'constitute the inner arrangement of bourgeois society and on which the three fundamental classes are

based'. (GR 28 / PGR 108.) The further sections of his plan indicate that the critique of political economy was a way of approaching the critique of bourgeois society and the state, and indeed a way to begin the analysis of international capitalist relations and the consequent crises, which he linked with a working-class revolutionary movement.¹

5. Problems

The final section of the 1857 text includes some brief notes by Marx to the effect that certain fundamental problems raised by his investigations must eventually be dealt with: definition of production, means of production, relations of production, relations of commerce; accounts of imported relations of production, and forms of consciousness (such as various forms of historiography and philosophical materialism) with respect to the relations of production and other social relations. Marx at least recognized that certain questions (particularly the definitions of terms) presented a challenge to his views on the role of production in history and human life in general, even though he never actually dealt with all the difficulties, or satisfied all his critics:

N.B. In regard to points which are to be mentioned here and must not be forgotten:

1) War is specialized in the past, like peace; [that is the] way, as through war and in the army etc., [that] certain economic relations, like wage-labour, machinery etc., are developed earlier than in the interior of bourgeois society. Also the relation of productive power and the relations of commerce are particularly clear in the army.

2) Relation of historiography, hitherto ideal, to

1. For a discussion of this plan and immediate developments from it, see below, pp. 161-74.

real historiography. Namely [the relation] of so-called cultural history, which [includes] all history of religion and political history [to real historiography]. (On this occasion something can also be said about the different types of historiography up to now. The so-called objective [type]. The subjective [type]. (The moral [type], among others). The philosophical [type].)

3) Secondary and tertiary [relation], generally derivative, transmitted, relations of production, which are not original. Here relations play a role internationally.

4) Objections concerning the materialism of that view. Relation to naturalistic materialism.

5) Dialectic of the concept productive power (means of production) and relations of production, a dialectic whose limits are to be determined and which does not abolish¹ the real difference. (GR 29 / PGR 109.)

In point 1) above Marx comments that certain economic relations developed earlier (and more clearly) in the army than in the remainder of bourgeois society, an example, previously used in Wage-labour and Capital, of the influence of what he called 'material relations' on a social organization:

With the invention of a new instrument of war, the fire-arm, the whole internal organization of the army was necessarily altered, the relations within which individuals form an army and can work as an army were transformed, and the relation of different armies to each other was also altered. (MEW vi. 407-8; cf. GR 984; see also Marx to Engels, 25 September 1857, MEW xxix. 192-3.)

For Marx the foremost 'material relation' is that of production. Hence the theme which occupies his attention in the bulk of this section is the exact relation between material production (and its development) and some of the phenomena (and their development) which he takes to be determined by it, such as education. He considers 'artistic production' at length, and briefly mentions the 'really difficult point', legal relations, a subject to which he

1. aufhebt. Aufheben may mean to preserve, abolish, or raise, or a number of those connotations simultaneously. In this case, the context suggests that only 'abolish' is intended.

returned in detail some months later. (See GR 915-16.) The difficulty, as formulated in the Introduction (1857), is to explain 'how the relations of production enter as legal relations into unequal development ... for example, the relation of Roman civil law ... to modern production.' (GR 30 / PGR 109.)

But the chief problem in this section of the 1857 text turns out to be a different case of disproportionate or unequal development. Marx seems quite certain that he has established a general truth about production and other phenomena or activities in social life, but feels obliged to investigate its validity (using arguments and examples from his studies in history and aesthetics) as an explanation for specific cases of historical development -- a more complex concept, he notes, than simple progress. Not surprisingly, his view is that the general truth does hold as a thesis about historical development, but he is also concerned to avoid a simplistic determinism, since he asks how to reconcile his view, which appears to be a view of necessary development, with contingent phenomena and counter-examples:

... This view appears as [a view of] necessary development. However, justification of the contingent [as opposed to the necessary]. How [to do this?] (Freedom, among other [subjects], also.) (GR 30 / PGR 109.)

The instance of unequal development which he takes up is the problem of the achievement of an 'unreachable' artistic standard by a society, such as ancient Greece, whose mode of production was much less developed than the mode of production of modern society. He states with confidence that any contradictions with his thesis are only apparent contradictions, and that they will disappear '[a]s soon as they have been specified':

Let us take, for example, the relation of Greek art and then Shakespeare's art to the present. It is known that Greek mythology is not only the arsenal of Greek art but [also] its ground. Is the perception of nature and of social relations which lies at the basis of the Greek imagination, and hence of Greek [[mythology]], possible with self-actors¹ and trains and locomotives and electrical telegraphs? What has become of Vulcan against Roberts and Co.,² Jupiter against the lightning conductor, and Hermes against the Crédit mobilier?³ All mythology controls and rules and forms the powers of nature in the imagination and through the imagination; therefore mythology disappears with actual domination over natural powers. What has become of Fama beside Printing House Square? Greek art presupposes Greek mythology, that is, nature and social forms themselves are already worked up in an unconsciously artistic mode by the folk imagination. That is its material. Not just any mythology, that is, not just any unconsciously artistic working-up of nature (here under nature everything has the character of a subject [for mythology], hence society is included [among the subjects for mythology]).⁴ Egyptian mythology could never be the seed bed or the womb of Greek art. However, in any case there must be a mythology. Therefore in no case is there

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1. 'A self-acting mule in a spinning-machine.' A 'mule' was 'a kind of spinning machine invented by S. Crompton (died 1827)'. (OED s.v. Self-actor; Mule 4a.) For an account of Crompton's life and his invention, see Evan Leigh, Science of modern Cotton Spinning, 2nd edn. (Manchester, 1873), ii. 236-8.
 2. Richard Roberts was the inventor of the self-acting mule with 'quadrant winding motion', patented in 1830. Evan Leigh writes that 'he carried on business at the Globe Works [Manchester, under the title of Richard Roberts and Co.' (Leigh, ii. 242-4.)
 3. A finance institution, giving (in theory) loans on movable estate, which had its origin 'in the joint-stock speculation and sanguine promotion of public works which marked many years of the second empire in France ... the system of business pursued had the result of mixing the credit banks very closely with the various companies and undertakings they were promoting ... The rates of dividend and the value of the shares consequently fell as rapidly as they had risen.' (Encyclopaedia Britannica, vi (Edinburgh, 1877), 557-8.) Between May and September 1857 Marx wrote several articles on the Crédit mobilier and the French financial crisis. (MEW xii. 202-9, 222-5, 234-7, 289-92.)
 4. hier darunter alles Gegenständliche. This passage might be read as 'everything objective (or concrete) is under nature, therefore society is included'. However elsewhere in this text, Marx uses Gegenstand to mean a subject or object of study, but subjektiv and objektiv for 'subjective' and 'objective' and konkret and abstrakt for 'concrete' and 'abstract'. See n. 4 on p. 43 above.

a development of society which excludes all mythological relation to nature, all mythologizing relation to nature, all mythologizing relation to social development; therefore in no case is there a development of society which demands of the artist an imagination independent of mythology.

From another side: Is Achilles possible with powder and shot? Or, generally, the Iliad with the printing press, and, specifically, with the printing machine? Do not singing and recitation and the muse cease being necessary with the press-bar,¹ therefore do not the necessary conditions of epic poetry disappear? (GR 30-1 / PGR 110-11; there is also a brief comment on some of these problems in TSV i. 285.)

Marx's account of the Greeks' 'mythologizing relation to nature ... [and] to social development' is probably derived, in part, from Hegel's discussion of the Greek world in the Philosophy of History (Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte, 1837), especially the notion that both the human and natural worlds were treated by the Greeks as subjects for mythology:

The interpretation and explanation of nature and of natural changes ... is the act of subjective spirit, to which the Greeks assigned the name $\mu\alpha\nu\tau\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$. We can grasp this generally as the way in which man relates to nature ... It is also to be observed that the stirrings of the spirit are at first external, natural events, but that inner changes which take place in man himself ... are also interpreted intelligibly only through the $\mu\alpha\nu\tau\acute{\iota}\varsigma$. (Hegel (1837), 310-11 / Phil. Hist. 235-6.)

Marx concludes that 'Greek art and epic poetry are tied up with a certain social form of development' -- a reassertion of his thesis that a particular mode of production establishes the conditions for particular kinds of artistic production such as epic poetry. But for him the difficult problem is not to establish the relation between Greek art and the Greek mode of production, but to

1. Marx may be referring to the Earl of Stanhope's introduction (in 1800) of a lever-and-screw mechanism to mechanical printing. See Colin Clair, History of Printing in Britain (London, 1965), 210.

account for the relation of Greek art to his own society. His explanation of this phenomenon (that modern society takes Greek art as a norm) is couched in historical and aesthetic terms: the 'charm' of Greek art, according to Marx, 'is inseparably connected with the fact that the immature social conditions under which it originated, and alone could originate, can never recur'. (GR 31 / PGR 111.) Evidently Marx did not limit explanations in aesthetics to the economic aspects of social life.

6. Conclusions

After writing the Introduction (1857) Marx went on to the detailed studies recorded in the Grundrisse. He does not seem to have revised the 1857 text at a later date, though there is evidence to suggest that he re-read it or looked it over. In the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy he comments, 'I am suppressing a general introduction which I had dashed off', but 'the Introduction (1857) is best regarded as a rough study towards such an introduction, or even as a compendium of preliminary investigations. (MEW xiii. 7 / SW i. 502.)

In the 1857 text Marx criticizes various political economists and philosophers on both philosophical and historical grounds. But when he argues that their work is unhistorical, his objection is not, as a rule, that they have missed particular points of fact or that they have not even looked for them (though he does make this sort of criticism occasionally), but that they do not grasp that human nature and social life have changed and developed in the past, and that this is still happening in the present. Moreover, he argues that if various practices in human life have changed

(particularly practices related to material production), then so have some of the concepts used to pursue and explain those activities and relevant social relationships: new concepts have arisen, and old ones have been given new content. These views were derived, in part, from his critical reading of Hegel (and Hegel's critics), but he also takes Hegel to task for overlooking certain historical changes and for his philosophical orientation (as Marx construes it).

Marx also taxes the political economists with a number of other methodological errors: taking society as analogous to a single person, presenting the economic categories with insufficient historical sensitivity and logical rigour, failing to grasp human nature in the correct way. But what is perhaps surprising in this text is the detail into which he goes in his criticisms; some of the points in logic and history are complex and subtle, particularly the discussion of the historical development of certain economic concepts, and the senses in which they correspond to actual phenomena of the past and present. Doubtless some of the political economists were not as historically inaccurate and insensitive as Marx claims, and much of his own historical work consists, in any case, of assertions, rather than fully argued and documented accounts. Furthermore, he has a view of human nature (albeit a view of it as largely self-creating) which he never seriously questions. Nonetheless his historical and philosophical work distinguishes him from the writers whom he criticizes: he is deeply suspicious of 'eternal' laws and 'universal' truths, scorning them as trivial, misleading, or false. Change and development (and the ways in which they take place) are what interest him; he

generalizes about these processes, and draws general conclusions. These are confidently stated, but do not seem, for Marx, to constitute 'general human laws' in the sense that they represent some reality which can, of necessity, only be discovered, not changed; rather, they seem to be generalizations about human social development, past and present, which may conflict with particular phenomena at particular times. The theses on the determination of various phenomena by production in general and in one particular form (though none of these terms is thoroughly defined in the 1857 text) seem to be generalizations of this type -- generalizations that are true and useful, according to Marx.

His work on production seems to include two very general claims: (1) That certain general aspects of economic life (distribution, consumption, exchange) are determined or conditioned by production (taken in its most general sense), as a general rule. In the Introduction (1857) he uses arguments from logic and human experience in general (or alludes to arguments previously made) to support this generalization. (2) That various aspects (both 'universal' and historically specific) of social life (e.g. certain conceptions, 'social forms of consciousness', 'legal and political superstructure', 'forms of commerce', 'forms of property', 'relations of individuals to one another with respect to the material instrument and production of labour') are determined or conditioned by production in some particular 'form' or 'mode', as a general rule. There is also the even weaker claim that these elements of the superstructure correspond to certain forms of production. These views are developed at length in the German Ideology and elsewhere, and are presupposed and used intelligently

(though there is no serious attempt at proof) in the Introduction (1857), notably in the aesthetic question which concludes the work. Such a sustained concern with generalities is unusual today, but Marx evidently considered truths of the utmost generality a necessary basis for his investigation of the past, present, and future of industrial society.

In the 1857 text Marx has employed, in an innovatory way, specifically Hegelian methods of conceptual analysis, though on his own terms and for his own purposes: Hegel's version of logical synthesis ('grasping the multiplicity of determinations in their unity') and his dialectic ('grasping of opposites in their unity', or of the positive in the negative and vice versa). Some commentators on Marx conflate 'dialectic' with the various senses of Aufhebung and the presuppositions of philosophical idealism generally. (See, for example, Sidney Hook, From Hegel to Marx (Ann Arbor, 1950, repr. 1962), 61.) Hegel and Marx themselves do not always make clear distinctions between these terms, but it is possible and useful to do so. When Marx refers to the rational form of the dialectic I take him to mean a technique in logical analysis: discovering and specifying the contradictory aspects of something. And when he speaks of the mystified, speculative, or divine dialectic I take him to be referring to Hegel's (alleged) confusion as an idealist between the abolishing and transcending 'movement' of contradictory categories in logic and the real historical 'movement' of actual events 'outside the head'.

Evidently Marx found these methods helpful in separating what is universally the case with human life and material production (and other economic activities) from what is historically specific and

subject to alteration. But it is the logical thoroughness, abstraction, and generality of this investigation of the concepts of political economy that distinguish it methodologically from his previous comments. Two of the implications of his work in the Introduction (1857) to the Grundrisse are that political economy must be rewritten from a more philosophically, logically, and historically informed point of view, and that much of the 'arrangement' of capitalist production and the 'corresponding' social relations might, at some stage, be considerably altered.

CHAPTER V The seven notebooks of the Grundrisse:
Marx as logician

1. Preface

There is a striking continuity in both method and content between the Introduction (1857) and the subsequent Grundrisse notebooks (numbered I-VII and dated October 1857 to June 1858). Marx took up many of the same questions and examples in the same investigative way, even though the structure of the Introduction is very different from that of the notebooks: in the former he pursues a narrow range of questions intensively; the latter are full of digressions and lengthy excerpts from the political economists. The opening of notebook I and the overall outline of the discussion from there to the end of notebook VII are consonant with the innovations in the plan -- and ideas on a method of presentation -- recorded in the Introduction of August/September 1857, and with the requirements set out by his previous critical work on political economy:¹ to substantiate his account of the accumulation of capital from surplus value created and measured solely by the power of labour, a thorough investigation of money was required, that is, an investigation of the interrelations of the economic categories money, value, and capital. Marx asked: What is capital, and where does it come from? For someone who suspected that capital was appropriated as a surplus from the value created by wage-labour, money -- that is, what happens in a system of production and exchange based on money -- was an obvious place to begin his investigations.²

1. Nicolaus's account is in error here; see PGR 37. For Marx's previous work, see above, pp. 55-7.

2. See Marx's own confirmation of this in PGR 259-60.

The presentation of results in the published critique would not necessarily have to follow the order of the Grundrisse investigations: in the Introduction (1857) Marx planned to begin the substantial part of his critique with capital. He developed plans in 1858 for the following order within that section (termed 'capital' or 'capital in general'): value (later commodity), money, capital.¹ In notebooks I-VII his investigations follow this general outline: money, value, capital, complexities of capital, complexities of the money system -- value (new beginning). Hence the outline of the investigations pursued by Marx in notebooks I-VII of the Grundrisse is directly related to the intent and content of his previous work and in no way at variance with his plans of 1857-8 for the organization of his critique of political economy.

The Grundrisse notebooks reveal that Marx continued with the logical methods of investigation used in the Introduction (1857). In notebooks I-VII he worked out in detail the logical foundations of his theory of surplus value (which had appeared only in outline in the published pamphlet Wage-labour and Capital), and he clarified certain terms (such as 'production costs') and distinctions (such as fixed and circulating capital) in the course of his investigations. But it is to the deepest levels of his methods of investigation that I shall turn in this chapter, to the unique record of the analysis of economic concepts behind his conclusions about capitalist society. I shall argue that these most philosophical of passages in his critical work on political economy were not an aberration from his previous writings and from the

1. For a discussion of these plans see below, pp. 170-3.

published and unpublished works which followed the Grundrisse, but were, for Marx, an important part of the evidence that the rest of his critical work on political economy-- and his critical presentation of the system as a 'critique of the economic categories' -- was correctly founded. Marx probably omitted these passages (or passages like them) from his published presentation to avoid a repetition of an earlier misinterpretation: in the German Ideology he commented that 'philosophical phraseology' in certain articles of 1844 'gave the German theorists the desired pretext for misunderstanding the real development'.¹ As a result, one sometimes wonders why in Capital, i, he was so certain that the contradictions of capitalist society foretold its inevitable collapse and its supersession by a socialist system. Notebooks I-VII of the Grundrisse contain the answer, and an analysis of Marx's use of some of the methods of the nineteenth-century logician will enable us to evaluate these conclusions. In section 2 of this chapter, I examine Marx's methods of conceptual analysis in the seven Grundrisse notebooks, and in section 3 I discuss certain conclusions about capitalist society derived by Marx from his Grundrisse studies.

2. The analysis of economic concepts

This section of chapter V surveys methods of conceptual analysis employed by Marx in the Grundrisse. I consider his insistence on clear distinctions in his critical work on political economy; in particular, I examine methods used in his investigation of the

1. This passage is quoted in full, above, pp. 46-7.

category 'money'. After that, I discuss his analysis of economic appearances and his use of an 'idealist manner of presentation'. In conclusion I speculate on the purpose of these conceptual investigations.

Clear Distinctions

Near the beginning of the Grundrisse notebooks Marx complains that the political economists frequently do not formulate their questions properly, and that in consequence their results cannot possibly be correct. His own method, he says, is to criticize the questions themselves, to raise proper questions 'in their pure form', and 'to join together nothing incongruous'. In his attack on the 'theoretical abstractions' formulated by certain political economists, e.g. Alfred Darimon,¹ he notes that economic facts are taken from their 'necessary context' and that the economists 'play' with these facts: their abstractions are not correctly formulated, and facts (for example, on bullion and discounted commercial paper held by the Banque de France) therefore cannot test their theories:

We have dwelt on this fact [fait] in order to clear up the entire worth of the statistical and positive illustrations of the Proudhonistes in a single example. It is not that economic facts [Tatsachen] provide the test [Probe] for their theories -- they provide proof of their non-mastery of the facts in order to be able to play with them. Their way of playing with the facts shows, rather, the genesis of their theoretical abstractions. (GR 39 / PGR 119; also GR 43, 619 / PGR 123, 732.)

Moreover, Marx again charges the political economists with an 'apologetic wisdom' acquired by 'forgetting their own definitions [Bestimmungen] at all decisive moments'. What is really wrong with

1. Alfred Darimon was the author of De la réforme des banques (Paris, 1856).

the work of most political economists, in Marx's view, is their 'crude incapacity for understanding the real distinctions' necessary for a truthful study and presentation of economic life. This includes failure to apply their own principles correctly, misunderstandings, 'motley' relations instead of clear distinctions, failure to put arguments into general terms, and layer upon layer of confusion. Marx makes points of this kind in his consideration of Ricardo and other economists on value:

The difficulty of grasping the formation of value is exhibited (1) in the modern English economists who accuse Ricardo of not having grasped the surplus [Surplus], the surplus value [Mehrwert] (see Malthus on value, he at least tries to proceed scientifically), although Ricardo alone of all economists has grasped it, as is proved by his polemic against A. Smith's mix-up of the determination of value by wages and by the labour-time objectified in the commodity. The newcomers are just plain fools. Of course, Ricardo himself falls into confusion (GR 232 / PGR 326; also GR 68, 161, 449, 456, 577 / PGR 150, 249-50, 551, 561-2, 685.)

The political economists miss these distinctions for a great many reasons, one of which Marx claimed was a 'crude materialism'; they took human social relations to be the natural properties of material things:

The crude materialism of the [political] economists in considering human social relations of production and the determinations which things [Sachen] receive [there] ... as natural properties of things [Dinge] is just as crude an idealism, even fetishism, which ascribes social relations to things as their immanent determinations and thus mystifies them. (GR 579 / PGR 687.)

What Marx meant by a clear understanding of necessary distinctions and how he set about achieving this in the Grundrisse notebooks are clearly seen in an examination of his work on money -- his opening problem, and the one preliminary to his study of value and capital. I do not intend to develop a complete account of his views, but rather I shall examine his techniques in

dealing with the subject, and then draw attention to the wide range of what were, for Marx, interesting results. The application of nineteenth-century logical science to political economy is, I shall argue, fundamental to his method of investigating this concept, and others like it.

The Concept of Money

Some of the problems about money that concern Marx are these: In what sense can it be said to be a commodity? Is it productive? How is exchange in a money system different from barter? How is money related to (and distinguished from) exchange-value, price, capital, and wealth? In his view, one cannot make sense of the economic system -- or even do what the political economists set out to do at all accurately -- without a thorough mastery of these terms and their interrelations. In his logical method displays a conviction (like Hegel's) that such truth about anything as can be determined must be a complex account (rather than a 'true' proposition); but he combines this with a clarity of expression and specificity of interest more akin to pre-Hegelian logic. Traditional logic appears, of course, in Hegel's work as material for his critique; Hegel accepted, rejected, and modified various aspects of the logical science of his day. Marx's relationship to logical science -- and to Hegel's work on it -- was similarly complex.

In his investigation of money Marx writes that it has three 'contradictory functions': measure, means of exchange or circulation, and realization of prices. (GR 126-7 / PGR 212-13.) In considering its role as simple means of exchange on the

discusses in the manner of Hegel -- not whether it is a commodity or not, but -- in what sense it is not a commodity, and in what sense it is:

As simple means of circulation it can be said of money that it ceases to be a commodity (a particular commodity), since its material is a matter of indifference and it still only satisfies the need of exchange itself, [and] no other immediate need: gold and silver cease to be commodities as soon as they circulate as money. On the other hand, it can be said of money that it is still only a commodity (a general commodity), the commodity in its pure form, indifferent to its natural particularity and hence indifferent to all immediate needs, without [any] natural relation to a determinate need as such. (GR 127-8 / PGR 213-14.)

Some political economists ('adherents of the Monetary System') insist on the first aspect of this analysis, and others ('modern [political] economists ... e.g. [Louis-Auguste] Say')¹ on the second; Marx aims for a complex account, with the possibility of using one aspect or the other in later discussions. Similarly, he decides that money may be said to be unproductive in one sense, and productive in another:

The question whether money as a means of circulation is productive or not productive is resolved just as simply. According to Adam Smith, money [is] unproductive. But Ferrier² says, for example: 'It creates values [valeurs] because they would not exist without it.' One must not only 'consider its value as metal, but equally its property as money'. A. Smith is right insofar as it is not the instrument of any particular branch of production; Ferrier is right, because [it] is a moment of the general production resting on exchange-value for product and agent of production to be posited in the [conceptual] determination 'money', and [because] this determination presupposes a money distinct from product; because the

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1. Louis-Auguste Say was the author of Principales Causes de la richesse ou de la misère des peuples et des particuliers (Paris, 1818).
 2. François-Louis-Auguste Ferrier was the author of Du gouvernement considéré dans ses rapports avec le commerce (Paris, 1805).

money-relation is itself a relation of production, if production is considered in its totality. (GR 128 / PGR 214.)

And he takes a similar position on whether or not exchange in a money system is a 'complicated kind of barter' -- it is, and it is not:

When C-M-M-C [a diagrammatic exchange: commodity for money, and the money for another commodity] is broken down into its two moments -- although the prices of commodities are presupposed (and this makes the significant difference) -- exchange divides into two acts of direct barter. C-M: the exchange-value of the commodity is expressed in another particular commodity, the material of money, like that of money in the commodity; the same in M-C. Thus far A. Smith is right when he says that money as means of exchange [is] only a more complicated kind of barter.¹ But so far as the whole of the process is considered -- not the two [parts] as indifferent acts: that the commodity is realized in money, and money in the commodity -- A. Smith's opponents are right; they say that he has misconstrued the nature of money and that monetary circulation displaces barter; since money only serves to settle the 'arithmetical division'² which arises out of the division of labour. These 'arithmetical figures' have as little need to be of gold and silver as the measures of length. (GR 128-9 / PGR 214-15.)

The relations between money, exchange-value, and price are expounded by Marx using a different distinction: exchange-value is 'expressed as' a quantity of money; but exchange-value is also 'compared with' money in a given quantity. Hence he draws attention to an ideal/real distinction between 'the quantitatively defined exchange-value [of a commodity]' and a 'determinate quantity of money'. The point of these difficult passages in GR 104-5 / PGR 189-90 is preliminary clarification, so that other problems (such as problems to do with prices) can be solved without confusion:

This much follows from the foregoing [discussion].

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1. Marx's text reads: von barter (Tauschhandel).
 2. Edward Solly, Present Distress in relation to the Theory of Money (London, 1830), 5; also 'arithmetical figures' in the following sentence.

Commodities are only exchanged for money in reality [reell], transformed into actual money, after they have been previously transformed into money as an idea [ideell] -- i.e. [after they] have received the [conceptual] determination 'price', as prices. Hence prices are the presupposition of the circulation of money, however much their realization appears as the result of it. The circumstances which cause the prices of commodities, because of their exchange-values, to rise over or fall under their average value, are to be developed in the section on exchange-value and to precede the process of their actual realization in money; hence they appear at first [to be] completely independent of that [process of actual realization]. (GR 108 / PGR 193-4.)

Money as the realization of prices, Marx writes, is its 'complete development' and presupposes its other two aspects. This 'independent existence' of money 'outside circulation' includes 'its determination as capital'. Capital, then, includes all aspects of money displayed in circulation and new aspects related to production -- the 'creation of exchange-values'.¹ Moreover, money is also said by Marx to be the negation of its three aspects previously identified:

Firstly. Money is the negation of the means of circulation as such, coin. But at the same time money contains coin as its determination, negatively, since it can be continuously turned back into coin; positively as world coin, but as such it is indifferent to this formal determination, and [is] essentially commodity as such, omnipresent commodity, not determined by location ...
Secondly: Money is the negation of it as simple realization of the price of the commodity, where the particular commodity always remains the essential [thing]. Rather it becomes the price realized in itself and as such the material representative of wealth as well as the general form of wealth opposed to all commodities as only particular substances of it; however,

Thirdly: Money is also negated in the determination where it is simply the measure of exchange-value. As general form of wealth and as its material representative it is no longer the ideal measure of another [thing], of exchange-values. For it is itself the adequate² actuality

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1. Marx's view that capitalist production results in the 'creation of exchange-values' is discussed below, pp. 202-4.
 2. adäquate. 'Fully answering to, or representing.' (OED s.v. Adequate 3. Logic.)

of exchange-value, and it is this in its metallic existence. (GR 139-40 / PGR 228-9; also GR 129-31 / PGR 216-17.)

Some of the complicated ways in which money and wealth can be said to be related to one another are delineated in the closing comments of this discussion:

As general form of wealth the whole world of actual riches opposes money. It is the pure abstraction of this world -- hence such a solid simple representation. Where wealth as such appears to exist in a wholly material, tangible form, money has its existence merely in the head; [it] is purely a phantom. (GR 144 / PGR 233.)

Wealth and money, in Marx's view, appear to be more or less the same, but in reality they are profoundly different; he pursues antinomies (like the ones in the passage quoted above) at length.

What the methods of logical investigation have accomplished for Marx is this: he has, to his apparent satisfaction, defined the aspects of money related to simple exchange of equivalents and to monetary circulation, and he has distinguished them from its roles in the capitalist production of values -- its roles as an instrument of production and as something which reproduces itself. Thus at the beginning of his work on money (with particular reference to money in the capitalist system of production and exchange) he analyses concepts and distinctions drawn from political economy and from economic activities, with a view to exploring all their aspects and relationships, not simply those that might be useful in formulating theories that can be tested against 'economic facts'. (GR 39 / PGR 119.) The aim of his theory -- if his preliminary conclusions about money can be considered as such -- is to inform himself about economic life by marshalling all significant distinctions. Hence his theory reflects life in

capitalist, commodity-producing society -- not simply capitalist economic life as seen and expressed by other theorists (and by participants in the economic process), but -- capitalist economic life as investigated by Marx. Social theory usually seeks to inform us about social life in a more or less critical way, as well as to formulate relationships testable against data, often quantitative. Marx's work (so far as it survives) is strongly biased towards the former approach, but it is not non-empirical¹ for that reason; his work on economic concepts cannot be successfully dismissed in that way, though it is certainly open to other objections.²

The Analysis of Appearances

In his critical study of political economy -- that is, a study of real economic activities primarily through an analysis of theories already developed -- Marx presupposes that capitalist economic life is a world of appearances. These appearances are conceptualized, in his view, in the language of economic practice and (more accessibly for the scholar) in published works of economic theory. Economic appearances and their conceptual counterparts are said by Marx to be illusions and misunderstandings which vanish under analysis -- conceptual analysis based on distinctions and arguments from philosophy, logic, history, and political economy itself. This passage from his work on capital

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1. Current usage equates 'empirical' with 'testability against quantitative data'. I take it to mean simply 'pertaining to, or derived from, experience'. (OED s.v. Empirical 4.)
 2. For some of my own objections, see below, pp. 196-202. For Marx's comments on theories that merely describe social phenomena as they appear to participants and non-scientists, see TSV ii. 165-6.

in the Grundrisse notebooks illustrates his characteristic procedure of analysing the conceptual counterparts of economic appearances in order to develop a conceptual counterpart of economic practice as it really is, not simply as it appears:

The relation of the different constituent parts of capital to one another, as [[they]] appear in its process of becoming [capital], where it obtains raw material and instrument, the conditions of the product, from circulation, [where capital] is related to these conditions as [its] given presuppositions -- [this apparent relation] disappears, to be sure, on closer consideration, since all moments appear equally [to be] produced by capital, else it would not have subjugated the total conditions of its production (GR 661; my emphasis / PGR 775; see also TSV ii. 106, 164-6, where Marx contrasts his method with that of Ricardo, and 217-19, 235, where he criticizes Adam Smith.)

Moreover, the point of Marx's analysis is not only to indicate, for example, that profit (an appearance) is really surplus value produced by the labourer, but also to establish that there are important antitheses, contradictions, and tendencies inherent in the economic relationships of capitalist society by definition:

Hence if it looks very simple that labour-time ... could serve directly as ... money ... then this appearance of simplicity is deceptive. Rather the relation of exchange-value -- commodities as mutually equivalent and equalizable objectifications of labour-time -- contains contradictions [Widersprüche] which receive their material expression in a money different from labour-time.¹ (GR 85-6 / PGR 168-9.)

Finally, it is overlooked [in political economy] that the antithesis [Gegensatz] of wage-labour and capital etc. is latently [latent] contained in the simple definition of exchange-value and of money. Hence all this wisdom amounts to dwelling on the simplest economic relationships which are understood purely as self-sufficient abstractions; but in actuality, rather, they are mediated by the deepest antitheses, and [they] only present [in political economy] an aspect in which the expression of the antithesis is obliterated. (GR 159-60 / PGR 248.)

1. I discuss Marx's presentation of these fundamental contradictions, below, pp. 146-55.

These antitheses and contradictions are not, as Marx indicates above, merely conceptual phenomena; that antitheses or contradictions exist in definitions is taken by him as part of the process of establishing that corresponding oppositions (irreconcilable within the capitalist system) actually exist in practice. (See also PGR 403, 413, 415, 419, 443-4, 650, 653.) The eventual development of these logical or 'latent' antitheses and contradictions in economic life is said to lead to a definitive crisis, from which arises the possibility of abolishing and transcending certain economic contradictions in practice (and, perforce, certain conceptual contradictions as well):

In the lists of prices current wherein all values are measured in money, there appears at the same time the independence of the social character of things from persons, like the activity of trade on this basis of alienness [Fremdartigkeit] wherein the total relations of production and commerce appear opposed to the individual, to all individuals; these relations [are] to be subject to individuals again. Since the self-sufficiency of the world market ... grows with the development of money-relations (exchange-value) and vice versa, the general [inter]connection and the all-sided dependence in production and consumption [grow] together with the independence and indifference of consumers and producers to one another; since that contradiction leads to crises etc. it is attempted to abolish [aufzuheben] them on their own terms simultaneously with the development of that alienation; lists of prices current, rates of exchange ... etc. ... Although all these [attempts] on the [basis of the] given standpoint do not abolish the alienness, yet there arise relations and associations which encompass the possibility of abolishing and transcending the old standpoint. (GR 78-9 / PGR 160-1.)

In the Grundrisse notebooks Marx occasionally indicates that he does not always see a social practice corresponding to a certain conceptual contradiction immediately:

In its determination as measure, money is indifferent to its quantity, or the quantity of money existing is [an] indifferent [matter]. In its determinateness as means of exchange, as instrument of circulation, its quantity is

measured. Whether these two determinations of money can come into contradiction with one another -- to be looked into later. (GR 110 / PGR 196.)

Marx is aiming above all at the 'exact development' of the 'concept of capital',¹ by analysing, in the manner indicated above, its presuppositions: money, exchange-value, commodity, wage-labour. His analysis proceeds from the conceptual counterparts of economic appearances to a 'rigorous understanding' of these concepts, from which the contradictions involved in 'bourgeois production' follow logically. Marx's view is that these contradictions are inherent in the conceptual structure of capitalist economic practices; his aim in these investigations is to formulate this contradictory conceptual structure precisely and completely:

The exact development of the concept of capital [is] necessary, since it [is] the basic concept of modern [political] economy, as capital itself, whose abstract counterpart [is] its concept; [it is] the basis of bourgeois society. All the contradictions of bourgeois production must follow of themselves from the rigorous understanding of the basic presupposition of the relations [of bourgeois production] (GR 237 / PGR 331.)

Some of the most important contradictions inherent in the conceptual structure of capital are summarized by Marx in his theory of surplus value:

Hence [it is] just as much the tendency of capital to increase the working population as to reduce continuously the necessary part of it (to establish again and again a part as a reserve). And the increase of population itself [is] the chief means for the reduction of the necessary part of the working population. At bottom this is only an application of proportionality to the single working day. Here lie all the contradictions which are expressed as such in modern theories of population, although the contradictions have not been [properly] grasped. Capital as the establishing of surplus labour is equally and in the same moment the establishing and

1. We might call this a theory of capital.

not-establishing [i.e. reduction] of necessary labour; it is [what it is] -- in as much as it is and at the same time is not. (GR 304 / PGR 400-1; see also PGR 706.)

The inevitable economic crises, in his view, will result in revolution; here he refers to an appropriation by 'the mass of workers' of their 'surplus labour' for themselves:¹

It [capital] is thus, despite itself, instrumental in creating the means of social disposable time, in order to reduce the labour-time for the whole society to a decreasing minimum, and thus to make everyone's time free for his own development. But its tendency is always to create on the one hand disposable time, [and] on the other hand to convert it into surplus labour. If it succeeds too well at the first, then it suffers from surplus production and then necessary labour is disrupted, because no surplus labour can be turned into value by capital. The more this contradiction is developed, the more is it revealed that the growth of productive powers can no longer be tied to the appropriation of alien surplus labour, but the mass of workers must appropriate their surplus labour for themselves. When they have done this -- and with that, disposable time ceases to have an antithetical existence -- then on the one hand necessary labour-time will have its measure in the needs of the social individual, [and] on the other hand the development of the social productive force will grow so rapidly that, although production is directed towards the wealth of all, everyone's disposable time increases. For real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. (GR 595-6 / PGR 708.)

An Idealist Manner

In the course of his investigations Marx uses what he himself termed an 'idealist manner of presentation'. This is one of the passages that troubled him:

Hence we have seen how it is immanent in money to fulfil its purposes by negating them at the same time; to make itself independent of commodities; to be changed

1. McLellan's claim that in the Grundrisse 'there is no allusion to ... the revolutionary activity of the proletariat' is surely incorrect. (See also PGR 750, 805.) However, Marx does not discuss proletarian revolution in this text in any great detail. (See McLellan (1973), 300.) The theory of surplus value is discussed below, pp. 150-5, 187-90.

from a means into an end; to realize the exchange-value of commodities by separating them from it [itself]; to make exchange easier by splitting it up; to overcome the difficulties of the direct exchange of commodities by generalizing these difficulties; to make exchange independent of the producers in the same degree as the producers become dependent on exchange. (GR 69 / PGR 151; see also PGR 145, 165.)

But he remarks immediately that this 'presentation' will have to be corrected:

(It will be necessary later, before this question is dispensed with, to correct the idealist manner of presentation, which gives the appearance of dealing only with conceptual determinations and the dialectic of those concepts. Above all the phrase: the product (or activity) becomes commodity; the commodity [becomes] exchange-value; exchange-value [becomes] money.)' (GR 69 / PGR 151.)

There are other striking examples of an idealist manner in the Grundrisse notebooks. For example, money is said to arise 'from the essence of exchange-value itself' (GR 84 / PGR 167), and money as capital is said to preserve itself 'only by continuously driving beyond its quantitative limitations'.² The latter is said (in non-idealist terms) to take place because money is 'a representative of general wealth' but exists only as 'a quantitatively determinate sum'; hence it 'does not by any means have the capacity which according to its general concept it ought to have, [the capacity] of buying ... the totality of the material substances of wealth'. (GR 181 / PGR 270.) Marx comments parenthetically:

It is damned difficult for Messrs the [political] economists to progress theoretically from the self-preservation of value in capital to its multiplication; that is to say, this multiplication in its fundamental

1. See Marx's corrected version of this material in the first book of Capital, discussed below, pp. 179-83,

2. Marx's reasoning here is perhaps an adaptation of this passage from Hegel's Logic: 'The limitation of the finite is not something external to it; on the contrary, its own determination is also its limitation; and this latter is both itself and also the ought-to-be ... But now further, the finite as ought transcends its limitation ... its limit is also not its limit.' (Hegel (1812), 133.)

definition, not just as accident¹ nor merely as result.
(GR 182 / PGR 270-1; see also GR 936.)

This elucidation of the concept of capital -- that is, of money (the material existence of value) as capital -- avoided, according to Marx, the absurdity and banality of already existing accounts:

Chit-chat that no one would employ his capital without drawing a profit on it either amounts to the absurdity that upstanding capitalists will remain capitalists even without employing their capital; or to saying in a very homely way that profit-yielding employment lies in the concept of capital. Well then. That would just have to be demonstrated.
(GR 182 / PGR 271.)

His own demonstration of this 'contradictory' character of money as capital² enabled him to locate certain sorts of human motivation and behaviour within the historically specific (and, in principle, alterable) concepts and conventions of a particular society, rather than in human nature itself, either as an inherent drive, or as some moral corruption. If the self-aggrandizing behaviour which Marx thought characteristic of capitalist society were inherent in human nature, then there would seem to be little that one could do about it; similarly, if it were the result of some moral perversion of man's nature, then the exhortations of socialist co-operation and mutual self-help might be in order. In Marx's view, the behaviour that characterizes capitalist society is something less than the full rational use of human capacities and the world's resources, and the critical area for change -- change in the direction of the full realization of the human potential -- is the field of productive activities, the way they are organized

1. Akzidens. 'A property or quality not essential to our conception of a substance; an attribute.' (OED s.v. Accident II.6. Logic.)

2. See, for example, PGR 270, 524-5.

and understood. The 'contradictory' character of money as quantitatively limitless but qualitatively unitary and general is presented again in Capital, i, Marx's 'final'¹ version of this discussion, and it is assumed there that the bourgeois strives to use his accumulated exchange-values to accumulate more, but the idealist manner of presentation is not reproduced. The use of an idealist manner in his investigation of the concept of capital was evidently a short-cut in formulating in 'ideal' terms the assumptions and behaviour patterns which define capitalist society and which, Marx stated, contain its 'secret'. (GR 662 / PGR 776.) In the passage below he distinguishes between his formulation of the concept in ideal (but not idealist) terms and the actual history of the development of capital. The point of the ideal, 'dialectical' formulation is to grasp -- in a way that does violence neither to logic nor history -- the meaning, historical character, and probable future of a social phenomenon:

Capital, so far as it is considered here, as a relation to be distinguished from value and money, is capital in general, i.e. the class [Inbegriff]² of determinations which distinguish value as capital from [value] itself as value pure and simple or money. Value, money, circulation etc., prices etc., are presupposed, just as labour etc. [is presupposed]. But we are dealing neither with a particular form of capital, nor with the individual capital as distinguished from other individual capitals etc. We are present at the process of its formation. This dialectical process of formation is but the ideal expression of the actual movement in which capital becomes [capital]. The later relations are to be considered as developing from this

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1. In the sense that this is his last recorded opinion; see CAP i. 109-10; also CCPE 131-2.
 2. A class is 'a number of individuals (persons or things) possessing common attributes, and grouped together under a general or "class" name' (OED s.v. Class sb. 6.) For Inbegriff GDW gives 'that which grasps, inside of it, something else ... summa ... compendium' I think that the connotations of scholastic logic are more in order here than those suggested by 'incarnation' in PGR 310.

embryo. (GR 217 / PGR 310.)

It is quite clear from the Grundrisse that Marx's idealist manner -- sentences in which concepts 'arise' from one another, or 'become' some other concept, or 'strive' towards other forms -- does not indicate a departure from his profoundly anti-idealist presuppositions, viz. that it is men who, in the course of their activities, produce concepts, and not the reverse. What is idealist about a presentation, in Marx's view, is that concepts seem to 'do' things independent of human agency: abstractions become the subjects of actions in contexts where the human agent drops out of sight. Elsewhere in the Grundrisse he states, for example, that 'labour alone produces', but the active human agent appears in the course of that discussion, and the 'presentation' there does not appear to deal 'only with conceptual determinations'. (GR 506' / PGR 612.)

Conceptual Analysis

Marx himself discusses his method -- which incorporates distinctions and methods from nineteenth-century logic -- and the various results he expected from it. He was 'to state the differentia specifica'; this, he said, 'is the logical development as well as the key to an understanding of the historical [development]'. Moreover, from such an analysis one could also read the future:

... our method indicates the points where historical consideration must enter, or where bourgeois [political] economy as a simple historical representation of the process of production points beyond itself to earlier historical modes of production. Hence it is not necessary in order to develop the laws of bourgeois economy, to write the actual history of the relations of production. But the correct

view of them, and their derivation as relations formed in history, always leads to simple equations -- like the empirical figures in natural science¹ -- which point to a past lying behind that system. These indications, together with the correct grasp of the present, offer the key for the understanding of the past -- a work in itself to which, hopefully, we shall still come. On the other hand this correct consideration leads, in the same way, to points indicated by the abolition [Aufhebung] of the present form of the relations of production -- and so foreshadowing the future, an ongoing movement. On the one hand, if the pre-bourgeois phases appear as merely historical, i.e. presuppositions which have been abolished and transcended [aufgehobne], then the present conditions of production [appear] as abolishing [aufhebende] themselves and hence as establishing historical presuppositions for a new state of society. (GR 364-5 / PGR 460-1; also GR 565, 945-6 / PGR 672.)

For Marx, the point of his conceptual explorations seems to have been something like this: If I am not aware of all the distinctions in the terminology of political economy, then I will not obtain an accurate picture of all relevant economic phenomena (past, present and possible future phenomena), nor will I be able to understand what happens (has happened, and might happen) in economic life; moreover, if I do not have a complete understanding of this terminology (and knowledge of a great deal of economic history and contemporary economic fact), I shall fall into the sort of confusion to be found in works of political economy.² Marx paid an extraordinary amount of attention to the meanings and logical interrelations of terms current in the science he chose to criticize. In doing so, he attempted to sort out in what sense or senses particular terms may be applied to social phenomena of the

1. Probably a reference to 'the empirical' in nineteenth-century chemistry: 'a formula which merely enumerates the ultimate constituents of a compound in any convenient order, without implying any theory of the mode in which they are grouped.' (OED s.v. Empirical 4.) Marx's point is that the 'simple equations' or 'empirical figures' are indications (not unambiguous representations) of the past.

2. See, for example, his comments on the deficiencies of Ricardo's method of investigation in TSV ii. 167-9.

past and present; he also guessed at what the fully developed social phenomena corresponding to certain terms (in their fully developed senses) might be. This last process was very much a matter of drawing extreme conclusions from the implications of certain definitions found in political economy. He seems to have been convinced that actual developments in society supported the conclusions he drew from his investigations -- investigations which were in large part (for the early writings, the Grundrisse, and Capital) into works of economic theory.

In his criticism of political economy Marx was by no means lost in a welter of totalities, nor was his analysis of the concepts used in the capitalist society of his day (both in theory and in practice) impenetrably Hegelian. The methods of logic, as criticized by Hegel and then adapted by Marx, were put to use to establish relationships that are specifiable, though in a necessarily lengthy, complex way. Whether these results could have been stated in terms that would be more immediately intelligible to the English reader, and whether the economic material selected by Marx was as significant as he thought it was, are questions to which I shall return in chapters VI and VII below.

3. Critique of the economic categories

In this section I take up a detailed study of methods used by Marx in his critical discussions of certain economic categories in the seven Grundrisse notebooks. His work on value, capital, labour, and profit contains some of the investigations crucial to his critique and some of his most sweeping conclusions about capitalist society. Though these passages are clearly related to the earlier

and later writings on political economy, I shall treat these four categories as self-contained studies, since it is Marx's methods that are under observation here, rather than the exact evolutionary development of his views.

Value

His work on value in the first of these notebooks is particularly interesting, because his application of certain methods -- the methods of a nineteenth-century political economist (primarily definition, inference, and elementary mathematics), and the methods of a nineteenth-century logician familiar with Hegel's work -- to an analysis of value is clearer in this text than elsewhere. Moreover, the analysis of value in notebook I is fully compatible with the more polished account given in the first book of Capital,¹ even though the Grundrisse investigations are not reproduced in full.

In notebook I of the Grundrisse Marx considers whether changes in the money system could revolutionize existing economic relations, and whether socialist schemes for a 'labour-money' would accomplish this. Labour-money was to abolish any discrepancy between monetary price and actual value, determined (according to a commonplace reading of Ricardian theory) by labour-time or cost of production. From Marx's point of view, the issue was this: If we accept that commodities are produced and exchanged as described by the labour theory of value, can we abolish money? The general nature of value was clearly the place to begin: If the labour theory of value requires the existence of a special sort of commodity -- a

1. This account is discussed below, pp. 180-6.

value-symbol (money) convertible into gold, or something like gold -- then the real value (exchange-value, average value) of commodities cannot be equated with their nominal value (price, market value, money-value), and the absurdity and practical impossibility of labour-money is proved. His demonstration rests on the assumption that an average (such as average value or average labour)¹ is a different sort of thing from the quantities which, in their fluctuations, create an average.

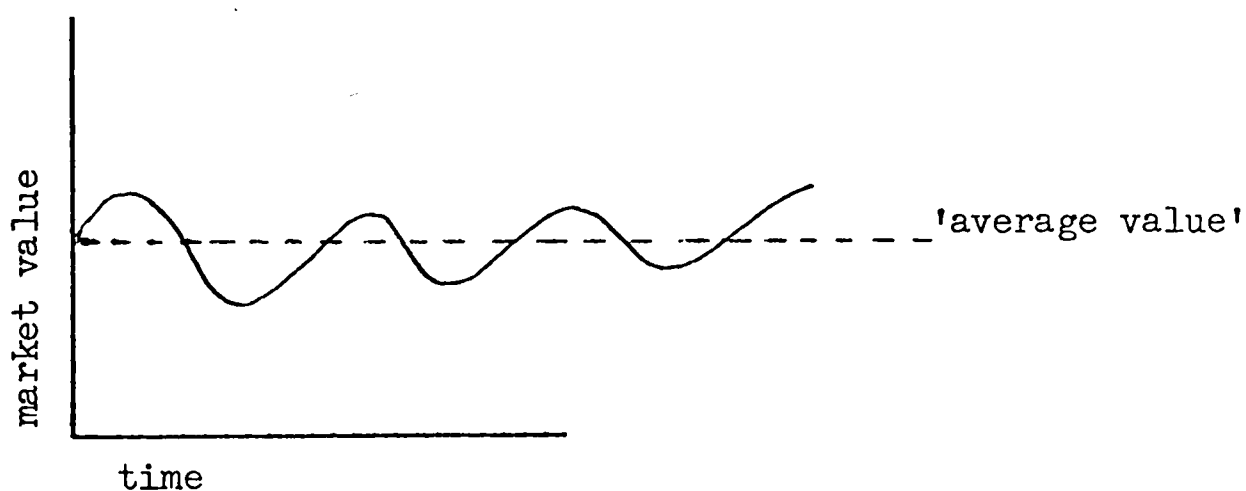
Market values, he writes, are always different from the average value (or real exchange-value) of a commodity. This extraordinary claim requires lengthy justification, since an average quantity could, on the usual understanding of these terms, be equal to some of the quantities from which it is derived. If the average value is calculated from market values, then it is, according to Marx, an 'external abstraction' -- the 'average figure of an epoch'. But at the same time average value is also said by Marx to be the 'driving force' and 'moving principle' behind the fluctuations in market value that produce the average. One of the mistakes behind the labour-money theorists, in Marx's view, is that they see only the first aspect of average value -- its character as 'external abstraction' -- and not the second. He writes:

The value of commodities determined by their labour-time is only their average value. [This is] an average which appears as external abstraction so far as it is calculated as the average figure of an epoch. e.g. 1 pound of coffee [has a value of] 1 shilling, if the average, say, of coffee prices is reckoned over twenty-five years; but that [average] is very real if, at the same time, it is recognized as the driving force and moving principle of the oscillations through which commodity prices run during

1. In Capital, i, average labour appears as simple abstract labour.

a particular epoch. This reality is not of merely theoretical importance: it forms the basis of mercantile speculation, whose reckoning of possibilities is as much a matter of median average prices, which serve them as a centre of oscillation, as of average heights and average depths of oscillation over or under this centre.
(GR 56 / PGR 137.)

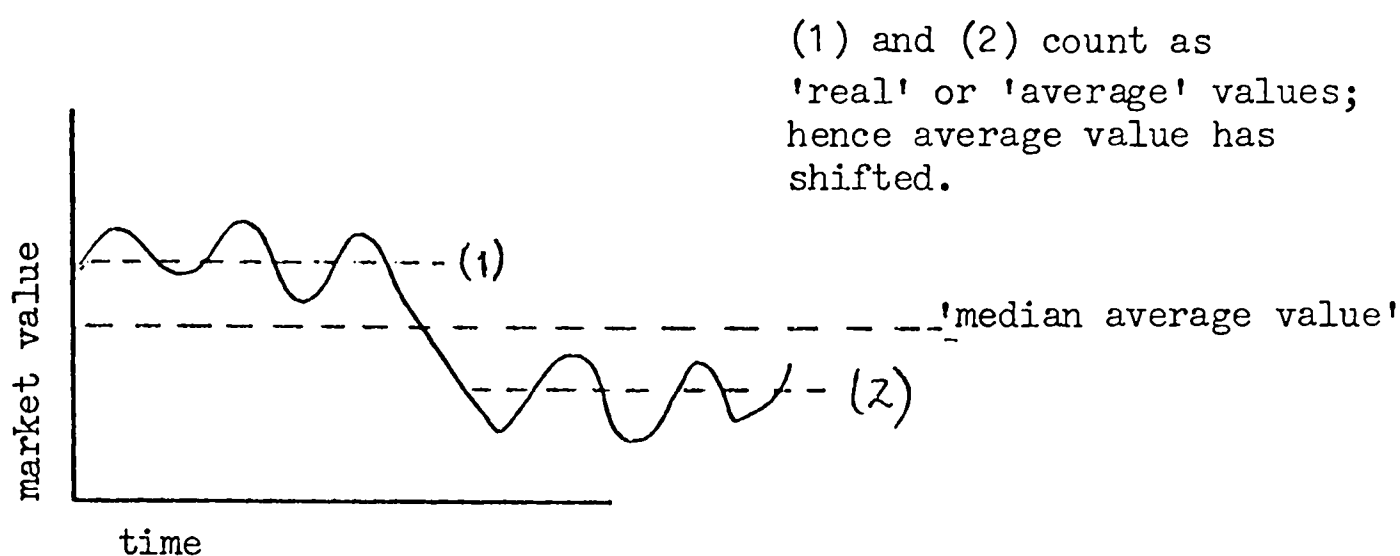
What Marx had in mind here can be more easily grasped from two different, but compatible graphs. The first represents fluctuations in market values over time, and their average value. This is average value merely as 'external abstraction':



The graph below represents average value as 'external abstraction' and as 'moving principle' behind the fluctuations of market values or commodity prices. Here the labour theory of value (as interpreted by Marx) not only reflects the fluctuation of market values within a certain range about an average (the 'median average') but also accounts for the marked shifts of average value (the 'average heights and average depths of oscillation over or under' the 'median average') which take place within the given range of market values.¹ This graph is a special case of the first

1. This reading of Marx's views on value explains why he could state that value is equivalent over 'longer periods' or

graph above:



According to Marx, average (or real) value as external abstraction is equal only coincidentally or exceptionally with market values -- but he has a special sort of equality in mind: 'Market value equalizes itself with real value through its continuous oscillations, never through an equation with real value as a third[party]' (GR 56 / PGR 137.) He claims that since market value creates average value, the two cannot be equated as if they were two separate things of the same sort with a common measure; rather, average value (an abstraction formulated outside the exchange process itself) only exists because there are fluctuations in market value (the exchange-ratios of commodities). Market value, according to Marx, is the negation of average (or

'ultimately' to the 'average' or 'natural' price around which market prices fluctuate, and deny that average prices conform to values 'directly'. (See VPP 52-3, 82-3; this text was written by Marx in English in 1865; also, CAP i. 144 n.) In Capital, iii, Marx uses a different definition of average price when he moves from the assumption -- for purposes of explication and analysis -- that commodities exchange at their values to his theory that average prices reflect a uniform rate of profit on competing capitals of different composition.

real) value: market value is not-average value by definition. Hence market value only 'coincides with' average value when, 'exceptionally', it happens in the course of its fluctuations to negate itself as the negation of average (or real) value.¹ The point of this application of Hegelian logic to political economy is that no absolute equation of market value and average (or real) value is possible (and no abolition of the distinction between them), but only occasional coincidence in magnitude.

Moreover, Marx detects a contradiction in average (or real) value as 'moving principle': it establishes the initial real value of a commodity -- the (minimum) necessary labour-time materialized in it. But it also causes the appreciation or depreciation of the real value of commodities already produced, because of changes in the productivity of labour:

The value-determining [element] is not the labour-time incorporated in the product, but the labour-time necessary at present ... I have shown in my pamphlet against Proudhon [Poverty of Philosophy] ... that real value itself -- independent of its domination of the oscillation of market prices (quite apart from it as the law of those oscillations) -- continuously establishes the real value of commodities in contradiction with its own definition; [it] appreciates or depreciates the real value of commodities already at hand (GR 54, 56 / PGR 135, 137.)

There are two conclusions to these arguments. The first is

1. That is, only by means of the non-equality of market value with average value (else there would be no average value) are the two ever equal -- only by the negation of the negation: negating the non-equality of market value with average value. In the Logic Hegel writes: 'In the form of the proposition, therefore, in which identity is expressed, there is more than simple, abstract identity ... The other expression of the law of identity: A cannot at the same time be A and not-A ... is called the law of contradiction ... this form is implied in the fact that identity ... is simple negativity ... In this proposition, therefore, identity is expressed -- as negation of the negation. (Hegel (1812), 415-16.)

that average labour-time -- or its representation in a 'note' (Zettel) or unit of labour-money -- can 'never correspond to or be convertible into actual labour-time'. Marx's view is that average labour-time is an ideal (something existing only as an idea) behind the successive approximations to equality in value that make up the exchange-relations of commodities. But this average labour cannot be measured directly in individual commodities; it occurs only in their relations to one another as values, and -- since it is an ideal -- it cannot (even if it could be directly measured) serve as the 'matter' of price comparisons. Only another commodity (such as gold or silver) will do:

Commodity a = 1 shilling (i.e. = 1/x silver); commodity b = 2 shillings (i.e. 2/x silver). Hence commodity b = double the value of commodity a. The value-relation between a and b is expressed through the proportion in which both are exchanged against some quantity [Quantum] of a third commodity, against silver; not against a value-relation. (GR 59 / PGR 140; also GR 58 / PGR 139-40.)

His other conclusion is that the 'law of the increasing productivity of labour-time' is another indication of the real distinction between average labour-time (an ideal) and actual labour-time: one sort of labour-time (the actual sort) will depreciate against the other. Labour-money -- far from abolishing the money-system -- would merely perpetuate it. (GR 58 / PGR 139-40.)

Marx summarizes his case against labour-money in the form of a logical contradiction. If we have a system of value-comparisons (on the basis of the amount of labour actually materialized in commodities), fluctuating necessarily about the average, and shifting necessarily within those fluctuations, then labour-time cannot simultaneously appear in the necessarily inexact value-comparisons on the market and in the resulting average value:

Because price is not equal to value, the value-determining element -- labour-time -- cannot be the element in which prices are expressed, because labour-time would have expressed itself as the determining and the non-determining [element] at the same time, as the equality and inequality of itself. (GR 58, where the entire passage is spaced for emphasis / PGR 140.)

Marx's 'contradiction' is something of a quibble, since he is objecting to the 'confusion' engendered by talking in terms of two sorts of labour-time -- 'actual' and ideal or 'average':

But the confusion would reach a new height altogether, that the medium in which commodities, these objectified quantities of labour-time, are equalized, would not [be] a third commodity, but their own value-measure, labour-time. Commodity a, the objectification of 3 hours of labour-time, is = 2 labour-hour-notes; commodity b, the objectification of 3 labour-hours is = 4 labour-hour-notes. (GR 58 / PGR 139.)

And he maintains that this real distinction -- between actual and ideal average labour-time -- lies behind the necessary existence in a system of commodity production and exchange of a money convertible into some 'third' commodity like gold or silver. Actual labour-time appears in individual commodities on the market; average labour-time (an ideal measure) appears necessarily in a commodity of general equivalence:

The distinction between price and value, between the commodity measured by the labour-time whose product it is, and the product of the labour-time against which it is exchanged, that distinction requires a third commodity as measure in which the real exchange-value of the commodity is expressed. (GR 58 / PGR 139-40.)

In Marx's view, a careful examination of the principles of the capitalist system (as revealed in the works of selected political economists) shows that there is a contradiction in the basic premiss of labour-money: the premiss that there is no real distinction between market value and average value. Marx says that there is a real distinction. Moreover, there is, according to Marx, a

contradiction in the practical aspect of the scheme: the plan to measure average labour-time as such and represent it by a symbol. Marx claims that average labour-time (unlike actual labour-time) can only be expressed in a commodity functioning as measure. His expanded version of the labour theory of value (average value as 'median average', and, characteristically, average value as the 'moving principle' behind sharp fluctuations and crises) shows a thorough grasp of the methods of the nineteenth-century science he took as the object of his critique. The adaptation of Hegel's arguments to dispose of a theory of labour-money is, however, distinctively Marxian.

Capital

In the Grundrisse the major problem considered by Marx is the formulation of a general account of capital -- what it is in all its aspects, and how it functions: as capital in general, as an individual capital, as a system of many individual capitals. From Marx's point of view the work on capital was probably his finest achievement in this text. Crucial to the development of this economic category is the transition (supported by an adaptation of Hegelian logic) 'from the self-preservation of the value in capital to its multiplication'. (GR 182 / PGR 270-1.)

His opening move is to discredit the view that capital is merely a sum of exchange-values or an accumulation of money, and to give a general account of the real relationship between money and capital: capital is a further aspect of money ('money as capital'), and money also functions within a system of capitalist production and exchange. Hence an account of 'capital in general' must

precede the consideration of the development of money up to the capitalist 'money market', since 'capital in general' (for purposes of this analysis) is a presupposition of 'money-market'. In this passage he also suggests that his account of the presuppositions of the capitalist money market does not imply a teleological conception of money:

Money as capital is a determination of money which goes beyond its simple determination as money. It can be considered as [a] higher realization; as it can be said that the ape developed into man.¹ But then the lower form is posited as the transcending subject [übergreifende Subjekt] over the higher. In any case money as capital is distinguished from money as money. The new determination is to be developed. On the other hand, capital as money appears [to be] the regression of capital into a lower form. But it is only its establishment in a particularity which already exists as not-capital, and makes up one of its presuppositions. Money occurs again in all later relations; but then it does not function simply as money. If, as here, it is at first a matter of following [it] up to its totality as money market, then the eventual development is presupposed, and must be included opportunely. Hence here [we are dealing with] the general determination 'capital', before we proceed to its particularity as money. (GR 162 / PGR 250-1.)

Though the 'gradual victory and formation' of capital can be traced in the transition of landed property from feudal to modern capitalist forms (here Marx pays tribute to Ricardo, 'the economist of the modern age'), it is not the historical events leading to the capitalist system that are the main issue under investigation, but the presuppositions of the developed system. (GR 162-4 / PGR 250-3.)

The first three forms of capital considered by Marx as presuppositions of capitalism are circulating capital (as in exchange for money: M-C-C-M), money-capital (using money to make money: $M \rightarrow M'$, where $M' = M + \Delta M$), and commodity-capital (as in exchange

1. Here and elsewhere in this quotation Marx alludes to passages in the Introduction (1857), discussed above, pp. 110-111,

for consumption: C-M-M-C). Yet none of these processes accounts for the 'self-renewal' of capital within a functioning system -- even $M \rightarrow M'$, which Marx dismisses as a withdrawal or stockpiling of money that eventually 'dissolves' in the simple exchange of commodities for other commodities equivalent in value. The self-renewal of exchange-values (which Marx calls 'capitalizing') cannot be accounted for by the circulation of exchange-values, but must be a phenomenon of the production process:

For circulation, what is presupposed are commodities (whether in their particular form or in the general form of money) which are the actualization of a determinate labour-time, and as such are values; hence its presupposition is just as much the production of commodities by labour as [it is] their production as exchange-values. This is its starting point, and it returns through its own movement, back into production -- the production which creates exchange-values -- as its result. Hence we have reached the starting point again with production establishing, creating exchange-values, but this time in such a way that this [production] presupposes circulation as [a] developed moment, and appears as [a] continuous process which establishes circulation and continuously returns from it into itself in order to establish it anew. (GR 166-7 / PGR 255; also GR 163 / PGR 251.)

If capital is not simply a sum of values, is it then, as Adam Smith said, "accumulated ... labour ..., which serves as the means for new labour"? (GR 168 / PGR 257; see Smith (1776), i. 401.) According to Marx, Smith's view is either tautological or false, since anything material, on this definition, could function as capital (tautology), or capital could appear at any time in history (falsehood):

... thus the simple material of capital [is] considered [by Adam Smith], quite apart from the determination of form without which it is not capital. This [definition by Smith] means nothing but that capital is --- instrument of production, for, in the broadest sense, any object, even one furnished purely by nature, like a stone, for example, must be appropriated in the first instance by some kind of activity, before it can serve as instrument, as means of

production. According to this [definition], capital would have existed in all forms of society, [and] is something thoroughly unhistorical ... Capital is understood [by the political economists] as [a] thing, not as [a] relation. (GR 168-9 / PGR 257-8.)

Moreover, for Marx, capital is not a simple relation but a process, in the various moments of which it is always capital. He concludes that this process is not one of simple production and circulation of exchange-values (objectified labour), since such a process would be a 'simple designation of equivalents, [a] preservation of its [exchange-value's] identity'. Rather the process is this: 'the labour objectified in the exchange-value¹ establishes living labour as a means of reproducing it'. This 'reproduction, he adds, is not a simple circle:

Exchange-value established as the unity of commodity and money is capital, and this establishment itself appears as the circulation of capital. (But this [is] a spiral, a self-expanding curve, not a simple circle). (GR 177 / PGR 266; also GR 169-70, 174-5 / PGR 257-8, 262-4; see also PGR 746.)

The theory of capital as inherently and necessarily self-aggrandizing,² the relationship between capital and labour,³ and the theory of surplus value⁴ (the real nature of the exchange between capital and labour) follow logically from Marx's development of 'capital in general'. Moreover, the history of the accumulation of capital, and its future modifications, form further sections of his

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1. This would include capital as accumulated exchange-value (commodities or money) and as instrument of production.
 2. This 'transition' from 'preservation' to 'multiplication' is discussed with reference to Hegel's Logic, above, pp. 142-5; see also Marx's comments on capital in PGR 334-5. By contrast, David Beetham remarks that in Max Weber's work, 'the motivating force of profit remains unexamined'. (Max Weber and the Theory of modern Politics (London, 1974), 275.)
 3. Discussed above, pp. 140-1.
 4. Discussed below, pp. 160-5, 187-90.

projected complete account of capital:

We have already seen that capital presupposes: 1) the production process generally as it is common to all historical conditions, hence without historical character, human, if you please;¹ 2) circulation which is itself, in every one of its moments, and still more in its totality, [a] determinate historical product; 3) capital as the determinate unity of the two. Howsoever the general process of production itself is modified historically, as soon as it appears simply as an element of capital, [this] must be revealed in its development; just as its historical presuppositions generally must arise from the simple understanding of the specific distinctions of [the concept] capital. (GR 226 / PGR 320.)

This combined historical and conceptual development of the concept capital completely undermines, according to Marx, any contractual or co-operative theory about the origin or essential nature of the relations of capitalist and wage-labourer:

Neither does history know anything of the agreeable fantasies according to which capitalist and labourer contract etc. [an] association, nor is there a trace of this in the conceptual development of capital. (GR 405 / PGR 505.)

This account of capital in general is also used by Marx to correct definitions formulated by various political economists, for example, distinctions between fixed and circulating capital:

Capital -- as the subject [Subjekt] proceeding through all of the phases, as the unity in motion, the unity-in-process of circulation and production -- is circulating capital; capital -- as tied down in any of those phases, as established in its distinctions -- is fixed capital, engaged capital ... This has led to much confusion in political economy -- that the definition of circulating and fixed [capital] is nothing more, to begin with, than capital itself under two determinations ... [we are to understand these definitions] not as two particular forms of capital ... but as determinations -- different in form -- of the same capital. (GR 515 / PGR 621.)

1. 'If you please' is Marx's own English; 'if you like' would fit the context better.

Labour

Marx's investigation of labour in the Grundrisse notebooks is fuller and more revealing than his published presentation of this economic category. His views on labour are of considerable importance to an understanding of his work in Capital, i, since he develops his proof that the capitalist system is inherently and inescapably self-destructive from the premiss that in this system of commodity production and exchange, value is created and measured solely by labour. Marx's work on labour draws heavily on distinctions that are more specifically Aristotelian (as modified by the scholastic tradition) than characteristically Hegelian.

In the Grundrisse Marx explains exactly how 'labour creates surplus value. To do this he distinguishes between labour expressed in motion and labour expressed 'statically': in the former case labour¹ is said to be measurable solely by time; in the latter case this labour-time appears as a quantity in space (Raumquantum). Hence labour (measurable as labour-time) may also be expressed as objectified labour; consequently the labour done by the worker (which appears in his products), and the products which he buys with his money-wages, are commensurable. According to Marx, the only way that capital can preserve and multiply itself as exchange-value is to appropriate the surplus value created by the 'living' labour of the worker and by that factor alone. The labour already objectified in raw material and instrument of labour produces, in his view, no new value, though this value is preserved in the product:

1. In the stricter terminology of Capital, i, this refers to a unit of abstract labour-power expended over time.

The surplus value which capital has at the end of the production process ... means that the labour-time objectified in the product -- or a quantity of labour (expressed statically [ruhend] the amount of labour appears as a spatial quantity [Raumquantum], but expressed in motion it is only measurable by time) -- is greater than that to hand in the original constituents of capital. This is only possible if the objectified labour in the price of labour is less than the living labour-time which is bought with it. The labour-time objectified in capital appears, as we have seen, as a sum consisting of three parts: a) the labour-time objectified in raw materials; b) the labour-time objectified in the instrument; c) the labour-time objectified in the price of labour. Parts a) and b) remain unaltered as constituents of capital; if they alter their character [Gestalt] in the process [of capitalist production], their material mode of existence, they remain unaltered as values. It is only c) which capital exchanges against something qualitatively different; a given quantity of objectified labour against a quantity of living labour. (GR 227 / PGR 321; see also GR 942.)

Marx goes on to demonstrate that this exchange of things which are qualitatively different¹ (though still commensurable) is fully consonant with the rule that one quantity of value exchanges for an equal quantity of the same. The value of labour (i.e. of the capacity to labour) is equal to the objectified labour contained in it, which may be less than the labour of which a worker is capable:

What the worker exchanges against capital is his labour itself (in exchange, the capacity for disposing of it); he alienates [entäussert] it. What he receives as [the] price [for it] is the value of this alienation. He exchanges the activity which establishes value for a predetermined value, quite apart from the result of his activity. But how is his value determined? By the objectified labour which is contained in his commodity. This commodity exists in his existence as a living being. In order to retain it from day to day ... he must consume a determinate amount of the means of life, replace used-up blood etc. He obtains only an equivalent. (GR 228-9 / PGR 322-3.)

Moreover, skilled labour is said to require more objectified labour for its production than 'general, simple labour'. Hence

1. Elsewhere in the Grundrisse Marx makes a qualitative distinction between labour as 'acting cause' (wirkende Ursache) and labour-products as 'produced effect' (produzierter Effekt); see GR 469-70 / PGR 575.

skilled labour counts as a multiple of this simple labour, and the two are commensurable in terms of labour-time:

That besides the labour-time objectified in his [the worker's] existence as a living being -- i.e. the labour-time which was necessary in order to pay for the products necessary for the maintenance of his existence as a living being -- still more labour is objectified in his immediate existence, namely the values which he has consumed to produce a specific labour capacity, a particular skillfulness -- and the value of this is indicated by the cost of production at which a similar skill can be produced -- [this fact] does not concern us here, where it is not a matter of a particular qualified labour, but of labour in itself, simple labour. (GR 229-30 / PGR 323-4.)

When Marx comes to a specific consideration of labour-time as the measure of value, the scholastic distinctions multiply. We learn that labour is the only substance of products as values, that products are labour by nature, that two things of the same nature are commensurable, that the labour-substance of products is a unitary feature, that this feature (as activity) is measurable by time, that products as use-values have natural measures as natural objects, that products can be considered as effects of the force that created them, and that they can be measured by the measure of that force:

Labour alone produces; it is the sole substance of products as values. Their measure, labour-time -- equal intensiveness is presupposed -- is therefore, the measure of values ... Labour-time, or the quantity of labour, is the measure of values -- [this] means nothing but that the measure of labour is the measure of values. Two things are only commensurable with the same measure¹ if they are of the same nature ... They are objectified labour ... They [products as values] exist as the same thing as long as

1. See the quotation from Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, below, pp. 183-4). Marx's analysis in this passage of the relation of labour to 'products as values' uses distinctions from nineteenth-century logic in a way that is not characteristically Hegelian (though some of these distinctions and arguments occur in Hegel's Logic) -- but scholastic. For the analysis of the relation of labour to capital (in the form of commodities) Marx uses characteristically Hegelian distinctions, probably because he treats capital as a dynamic process, whereas the labour/commodity relationship, considered on its own, is treated as something much more static in character. (See PGR 271-2.)

they exist as activity. This is measured by time, which is also turned, therefore, into the measure of objectified labour ... Use-value is not related to human activity as the source of the product, to its being established by human activity -- but to its being for mankind. So far as the product has a measure in itself, this is a natural measure of it as natural object -- weight, mass, length, measure of space etc. Measure of usefulness etc. But as effect or as static existence [ruhndes Dasein] of [the] force which [has] created it, it is only measured by the measure of that force itself. The measure of labour is time. Simply because products ARE labour, they can be measured by the measure of labour, by labour-time, or by the quantity of labour consumed in them. (GR 506-7 / PGR 612-13.)

When Marx writes of the contradictions of the capitalist system in Capital, i, he refers (at least in part) to the social expression of certain logical contradictions developed from this scholastic account of the nature of labour and the definition of value. The views expressed in the Grundrisse are compatible with those of the critique as published by Marx, though some of the underlying distinctions and presuppositions are omitted or greatly compressed in the later text. My own criticisms of these views on labour and value appear in my discussion of the first book of Capital. (See below, pp. 196-202.)

The 'contradictions' which follow from the Marxian account of surplus value (including its distribution among the 'many capitals' as profit) are formulated with particular clarity in the Grundrisse notebooks. Using the methods of logic and mathematics Marx draws general conclusions about the functioning of the capitalist system and the resulting social conflicts and crises that 'must' follow from the general truths he has developed. However, the Grundrisse notebooks (like the Introduction of 1857) also record a self-consciously investigative attitude towards such general conclusions. Though apparently convinced of the truth of his propositions and

conclusions, he presses forward to more detailed studies, apparently with the expectation of seeing his earlier work modified 'significantly' by the examination of specific cases. But, as ever, he was deeply interested in the development of truths at a high level of generality as a clarificatory exercise, so that the details of the functioning system could be grasped correctly without mistakes attributable to logical, philosophical, or historical confusion or misapprehension. (See GR 246-7 / PGR 341.)

From the definition of surplus value he deduces these conclusions: (1) the capitalist strives to increase surplus exchange-value, not use-value as such, (2) surplus value is derived from a proportional division of value produced; increasing the productivity of labour by some factor alters this proportion, but does not multiply the surplus value itself by the same factor, (3) as the productivity of the labour employed by capital increases, surplus value diminishes as a proportion of the total value of capital:

Firstly: The increase of the productive power of living labour increases the value of capital (or decreases the value of the labourer) not because it increases the quantity of the product created with the same labour or increases use-value -- the productive power of labour is its natural power -- but because it decreases the necessary labour, hence in the proportion in which it diminishes these [it] creates surplus labour or, what is the same thing, surplus value, [and] because the surplus value of capital which it acquires through the production process consists in general only in the excess of surplus labour over necessary labour ...

Secondly. The surplus value of capital is increased not by the multiplier of productive power, i.e. the number by which the productive power (taken as unity, as multiplicand) is increased, but by the surplus of the fraction of the living work-day -- which represents the labour originally necessary -- beyond that same fraction divided by the multiplier of the productive force. Hence if the necessary labour = $\frac{1}{4}$ of the living work-day and the productive power is doubled, then the value of capital is

not doubled, but [grows] by $1/8$ [i.e. $\frac{1}{4} - (\frac{1}{4} \div 2) = 1/8$] ...

Thirdly: ... Its [capital's] surplus value rises, but in an ever diminishing ratio to the development of productive power. Hence the more capital is already developed, the more surplus labour it has created, the more furiously must it develop productive power in order to put itself to use [sich ... zu verwerten] in a restricted relation, i.e. to add to surplus value -- because it is always limited by the proportion between the fraction of the day which expresses necessary labour, and the whole of the working day. (GR 244-6 / PGR 339-40; see also PGR 760-1, where Marx discusses the relationship between total surplus value and profit.)

Profit

The famous law of the declining rate of profit is simply a detailed formulation of the third conclusion quoted above. Marx spells out the exact relationship between productivity and 'constant' capital (raw materials and instruments of production): profit (a portion of surplus value) diminishes with respect to the amount of constant capital already employed and hence with respect to the amount needed for any further increase in productivity.¹ Capital would cease (for practical purposes) to be 'self-expanding'. (GR 649 / PGR 763; see also PGR 753.) Some of the political conclusions which he derives from his presentation are these, familiar from all of his work after 1843:

Hence the highest development of productive power together with the greatest expansion of existing wealth will coincide with depreciation of capital, degradation of the labourer, and a most straightened exhaustion of his vital power. These contradictions lead to explosions, cataclysms, crises ... these regularly recurring catastrophes lead to their repetition on a higher scale, and finally to its [capital's] overthrow. (GR 636 / PGR 750; Marx wrote this passage entirely in English.)

1. This relationship between constant capital, profit, and productivity, is not taken into account in the comments in Lichtheim (1967), 188, although he is correct when he writes that 'the value of capital per worker employed might remain unchanged though productivity rose'.

But at least twice in the Grundrisse notebooks he introduces a note of skepticism, or at least a hint that judgements like those above should be suspended for the time being:

All these propositions [are] only correct in this [degree of] abstraction for the relationship [of necessary labour, surplus labour, and productive powers] on the present standpoint. There will [be] further relationships coming in which modify them significantly. (GR 246-7 / PGR 341.)

In general we must not be led astray by the consequences which follow from the laws [on surplus value and profit] and by going over them in one way and then another. (GR 650 / PGR 764.)

But then why does Marx deal at length with general categories, general relationships, and general laws? Consideration of ordinary economic situations was, for him, no guarantee of truthful results, since these would represent only 'appearances'. As we have just seen, he did not, on the other hand, endorse a method of obtaining results purely by deduction from general principles without further reference to actual practice.¹ In the passage below, for example, he explains that it is necessary in the first instance to grasp the general nature of profit: 'the profit of capital'. Appearances in ordinary economic situations can, he argues, be misleading:

Instead of exchanging a capital of 500 as soon as it has become commodity, simple exchange-value, for 500, he [the capitalist] exchanges it for 550 (at 10%) ... This often happens in commerce, but explains only the profit of one capital by the loss on another capital, hence [it does not explain] the profit of capital, and without this pre-supposition there exists neither profit on the one side nor on the other. (GR 255 / PGR 350.)

By deriving 'the profit of capital' from his understanding of the production of exchange-value, Marx thought that he had accounted for

1. Formulating such principles obviously requires some knowledge of economic practice.

the creation of profit¹ -- by the labourer. Hence he saw his own account as logically more consistent than those of other political economists who accepted the premiss that labour is the origin and measure of value:

The confusion of costs of production from the standpoint of capital with the quantity of labour objectified in the product of capital, including surplus labour, has allowed people to say that 'profit [is] not included in natural price'. It would be 'absurd to call the excess or profit a part of the expenditure'² ... This leads to a mass of confusion; either by having profit not realized in exchange but arising out of it (which can only ever be the case relatively, if the one exchanger [of two] does not obtain his equivalent) or by ascribing to capital a magical power of making something out of nothing. (GR 646-7 / PGR 761.)

However, according to his comments in the Grundrisse, Marx expected to be able to draw completely truthful conclusions about capitalist society only after the general results of conceptual investigations (based on the work of the political economists, and on arguments from philosophy, logic, and experience) had been expanded to cover economic phenomena of ever increasing specificity: the 'further relationships' mentioned above.³ But surviving drafts of Capital do not tell us whether an 'expanded' Marxian theory would have been directly testable against the surface phenomena of economic life in capitalist society. Instances of the actual functioning of capitalist enterprises considered by Marx in the

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1. This view is criticized below, pp. 202-4.
 2. For the material in quotes, see Robert Torrens, Essay on the Production of Wealth (London, 1821), 50-2.
 3. See, for example, Marx's criticism of Ricardo's method in A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy: 'If Ricardo had set out his theory abstractly in the way that we have done, without introducing concrete relationships and incidental points diverting attention from the question itself, then its hollowness would be striking.' (MEW xiii. 148.) See also the comments on other monetary theorists in CCPE 186-7, the criticisms of Adam Smith's procedure in TSV i. 96-7, Marx's comment that histories

extant volumes of Capital are almost entirely hypothetical. His accounts of working conditions in the England of his day (however factual) are not themselves a confirmation of his critical representation of the categories of political economy -- commodity, value, labour, money, profit -- nor is an account of the Marxian sort (a critique of political economy) the only way, or even the best way, that an explanation for these conditions might be developed. Few historians, however, can match the vigour of Marx's account of the process of capitalist accumulation and the history of the English working class up to the mid-nineteenth century. And few economists can match (in modern terms) the logical rigour of his investigations into the meanings and interrelations of some of the concepts we use to explain economic life, though I criticize some of this theoretical material in my next chapter.

of prices cannot be improved until theory shows what has to be investigated (TSV ii. 111), and further comments on Ricardo's method in TSV ii. 164-5, 169. It might be possible to argue that by 'further relationships' Marx meant revolutionary activities, but I think that the evidence points to his more academic interests.

CHAPTER VI The critique of political economy: plans,
methods, and ideas on method from late 1857
to 1883

1. Plans and publications from late 1857 to 1883

This plan appeared in the Introduction (1857), just after the section in which Marx had decided to begin the substantial part of his critique with capital:¹

... 1) the general abstract determinations which more or less belong to all forms of society ... 2) The categories which constitute the inner arrangement of bourgeois society and on which the fundamental classes are based. Capital, wage-labour, landed property. Their relationship to one another. Town and country. The three great social classes. Exchange between them. Circulation. Credit in general (private). 3) Summary of bourgeois society in the form of the state. [The state] considered in relationship to itself. The 'unproductive' classes. Taxes. National debt. Public credit. Population. Colonies. Emigration. 4) International relation of production. International division of labour. International exchange. Export and import. Rate of exchange. 5) The world market and crises.

Book 1 on 'the general abstract determinations' represents a clarificatory introduction (presumably a tidied-up version of certain sections of the Introduction of 1857) which did not appear as the opening to Marx's A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (published in Berlin in 1859) or Capital, i (published in Hamburg in 1867),² though some of his material on that theme appeared in these works passim. He opened the published works with

1. For a discussion of that section of the Introduction (1857) on capital, see above, pp. 112-116.

2. I disagree with David McLellan on this point; see McLellan (1971b), 85. Roman Rosdolsky suggests that Marx was still intending to write an introduction on the 'general abstract determinations' as late as January 1863, since Marx's plan of that date opened with 'Introduction. The Commodity. Money'. However, he did not specify in any further detail what that introduction was to cover. (Rosdolsky (1968), i. 24-5n; MEW xxvi(1). 389 / TSV i. 414.) See also n.1 on p. 170 below.

the first section of book 2 on bourgeois society (capital, wage-labour, landed property), his 'proper subject', as he put it in the Introduction (1857).

However, he had by no means solved all his organizational problems in September 1857. Having decided to begin the substantial part of his critique with capital, he was left with the question: Where do I begin in that presentation?

Marx's plans of October and November 1857 (see GR 138-9, 175 / PGR 227-8, 264) corresponded in general to the plan of August/September 1857 as given in the Introduction to the Grundrisse, though the introductory book on the 'general abstract determinations' had disappeared.¹ Instead, he said that 'in the first section, where exchange-value, money, and price are considered, commodities always appear at hand'. This was probably the substance of the 'introductory chapters' to which he referred in his letter to Lassalle of 22 February 1858, where he recorded some rearrangements in his plan of August/September 1857: 'capital, wage-labour, landed property' (the former book 2) became books 1-3, and the former books 3-5 became books 4-6. Marx now envisaged the critique of political economy falling into six books, rather than five, and he suggested that those six books would be the 'abstract' or

1. There are, however, references (dating from late November/mid-December 1857) in the Grundrisse itself to a chapter on 'production in general'; see PGR 298, 320, 362. I think that an opening chapter on the 'general abstract determinations' of economic life (mentioned in the plan of September 1857) was probably dropped by Marx sometime between late December 1857 and late February/early March 1858, though the evidence is not conclusive. See Rosdolsky's view in n.1 on p. 169 above. It may have occurred to Marx to sacrifice theoretical precision in dealing first with general categories, in favour of an immediate confrontation of the reader with his views on capitalist society.

'scientific' (wissenschaftlich) section of his work, and that the critique (presumably specific criticisms) and history of political economy and socialism 'should on the whole form the subject of another work' (this combined critique and history corresponds in part to the material in the later Theories of Surplus Value). In other words, he still had in mind something like the three-volume plan of 1850-1 -- critique of political economy, critique of the socialists, and history of political economy --- but with these differences: the critique of political economy was now to be an abstract presentation of the economic categories (arranged according to their importance in the theory and practice of capitalist society), and his material on particular economists and on specific questions in political economy (apart from the opening abstract re-presentation of the subject) was lumped together with the history of the science and with socialism; the third volume -- a 'brief historical sketch of the development of the economic categories and relations' -- was a new work along lines suggested in the Introduction (1857), where he had carefully distinguished the historical order of development of economic relations and categories from an ordering according to their logical relationships, and from their order of importance in modern bourgeois society. It seems that the clarificatory work of the Introduction (1857) resulted in a sharper distinction in Marx's mind between the history of theories or doctrines (of political economy and socialism) and the history of economic 'forms of life' (the 'historical sketch' of economic categories and relations begun in the section of the Grundrisse known as Pre-capitalist Economic Formations). In a letter dated 22 February 1858 he wrote:

Dear Lassalle ... The first work in question is the Critique of the Economic Categories ... The presentation, I mean the style, is completely scientific, and therefore not police-prone in the usual sense. The whole is divided into six books. 1. On capital (contains a few introductory chapters). 2. On landed property. 3. On wage-labour. 4. On the state. 5. International trade. 6. The world market. Naturally I cannot resist taking a critical look at other economists now and then, especially a polemic against Ricardo, so far as he himself, qua bourgeois, is forced to commit blunders from a strictly economic point of view. On the whole, however, the critique and history of political economy and of socialism should form the subject of another work. Finally, the brief historical sketch of the development of the economic categories and relations [should form] a third [work]. (MEW xxix. 550-1; see also GR 1012.)

In his next letter to Lassalle, Marx drew a distinction between the sort of work he intended to do in the first three books -- capital, landed property, and wage-labour -- and the less detailed work necessary for the books on the state, international trade, and the world market:

[11 March 1858] It is in no way my intention to work equally on all six books into which I divide the whole, but to give the last three in bold strokes, while in the first three, which contain the basic economic development proper, detailed discussions are not on the whole to be avoided. (MEW xxix. 554.)

Marx's letter to Engels of 2 April 1858 repeated the same general plan that he had recorded in the letter to Lassalle of 22 February, but gave more information on the organization of the first three chapters of the first book (of the six-book critique of political economy), as well as further details on the nature and content of his critical presentation:

I. Capital. First section. Capital in general ...
 1. Value ... 2. Money ... a) Money as measure ...
 b) Money as the means of exchange or simple circulation ...
 c) Money as money ... d) Simple circulation considered for itself ... 3. Capital. This is really the [most] important [chapter] of the first instalment, on which I must have your general view. (MEW xxix. 312-18.)

The index to the seven Grundrisse notebooks was written in June 1858 in the same notebook (Heft M) as the Introduction of August/September 1857; it recorded a plan for the opening instalment on capital the same as the one Marx had given to Engels in April:

I) Value ... II) Money ... III) Capital in general. (GR 855-9.)

But in late November Marx wrote again to his friend, indicating a change in plan -- the first instalment on capital now begins with 'the commodity', rather than 'value':¹

[29 November 1858] Dear Frederick ... the first part has grown bigger, since the first two chapters, of which the first: The Commodity, has not been written in rough draft, and the second: Money or Simple Circulation, is only in quite a short outline; the first part has been argued more elaborately than I had originally intended. (MEW xxix. 371-2.)

In January 1859 Marx had only his two expanded sections on the commodity and money ready for the press; he was somewhat put out at having to contradict the plan for a 'self-contained brochure' mentioned in an earlier letter to Lassalle. (MEW xxix. 554.) Since chapter 3 was not completed, Marx was in the embarrassing position of beginning his critique with capital (as he had decided in the Introduction of 1857), but in a way not obvious to the reader, who would see only chapters 1 and 2. Nevertheless, Marx found some advantages in the situation:

[13-15 January 1859] Dear Engels ... The manuscript is about twelve printer's sheets (three notebooks), and ...

1. For a discussion of this change, see above, pp. 95-7. See also the fragments of Marx's first draft of the Contribution (dating from August to November 1858) published in the Appendix to the Grundrisse, GR 871-947. Chapter one and the first section of chapter two are missing; the extant sections of chapter two (on money) cover 'means of circulation', 'money', the function of 'the noble metals' as money, 'the law of appropriation', and the 'transition to capital'; the opening section of the third chapter (on capital) is entitled 'transformation of money into capital'.

although [it has the] title 'Capital in general', these notebooks still contain nothing on capital, except only the two chapters: 1. The Commodity, 2. Money or Simple Circulation. You see that the part worked over in detail (in May, when I came to see you) has still not appeared at all. This is a good thing in a couple of ways. If the thing comes off, then the third chapter on capital can quickly follow. Secondly, in the published part, according to the nature of the thing, the dogs cannot limit their criticism to mere bitching about [political] tendencies, and the whole looks exceedingly serious and scientific; [thus] I force the scoundrels to take my later views on capital rather seriously. Moreover, I think that, aside from all practical purposes, the chapter on money will be interesting for specialists. (MEW xxix. 383.)

The plan for Marx's book of 1859 called for two chapters, one on the commodity and the other on money; but superimposed on that scheme were three sections in which he criticized the work of various political economists on the commodity, money, and the circulation of money. He had evidently changed his mind about a general separation of his historical and detailed critical material on political economy from his abstract presentation, or perhaps he simply could not resist including polemics against the political economists which he had been polishing up for years. Engels objected (in letters of 1858 and 1867) to an overly abstract presentation of Marx's critique, both in connection with A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy and the first edition of Capital, i. Ryazanov suggests that the reinstatement of the historical sections in the Contribution was a case of Marx following Engels's advice. (MEW xxix. 319; xxxi. 303-4; Ryazanov (1930), 22.)

After the publication in June 1859 of his two chapters on the commodity and money, Marx planned for a time to write the third chapter, 'capital' or 'capital in general' (he used both designations). A draft plan of February/March 1859 for part of the

third chapter appears in the Appendix to the Grundrisse. (GR 969-80.)

In a letter to Kugelmann¹ of 28 December 1862 Marx indicated that he was still working on the third chapter, and confirmed that he had not abandoned the six-book critique of political economy. But he suggested that he was beginning to give up hope of ever completing the job himself, particularly books 4-6. Separate critical works on 'law, morality, politics etc.', 'the socialists', and the 'history of the economic categories and relations' seem to have dropped out of the picture altogether:

I was very pleased to see from your letter that you and your friends take such a warm interest in my [A Contribution to the] Critique of Political Economy. The second part is finally finished, i.e. up to making a clean copy and the final polishing for the press. It will be approximately thirty printer's sheets. It is the continuation of the first instalment, but it will appear self-contained under the title Capital with 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy' only as a subtitle. In fact it only comprises what was to form the third chapter of the first part, namely 'Capital in general'. Therefore it does not include the competition of capitals and the credit system. This volume contains what the English call 'the principles of political economy'. It is the quintessence (together with the first part [already published as the Contribution]); and the development of the following parts (with the exception perhaps of the relations of the different forms of the state to the different economic structures of society) would be easily worked out by others on the basis which I have provided. (MEW xxx. 639.)

In January 1863, a month after his letter to Kugelmann, Marx drafted a plan for Capital which indicated that he had scrapped the idea of publishing a third chapter on its own, in favour of a revised presentation of the chapters on the commodity and money, together with his new material on capital in general -- though he

1. Ludwig Kugelmann (1829-1902) was a doctor, a participant in the revolution of 1848, and a member of the International. (MEW xxxii. 875.)

did not get round to explaining this to Kugelmann until 1866.¹

(MEW xxvi(1). 389 / TSV i. 414.)

The critical and historical material on political economy (part of the middle volume, according to the plan of 22 February 1858) turned up again in the 'final' arrangement of Marx's critical work into four books -- but if he had lived to prepare the materials designated for books 2-4 of this plan beyond the rough manuscript stage, he might have rearranged things yet again. In a letter of 31 July 1865 he indicated that there were to be three theoretical books and one 'historico-literary' effort:

Dear Engels ... as far as my work is concerned, I'll give it to you straight. There are still three chapters to be written in order to get finished with the theoretical part (the first three books). Then there is still book 4 to be written, which is historico-literary, which is for me relatively the easiest part, since all questions in the first three books have been resolved, and the last book is therefore more repetition [sic] in historical form. But I cannot decide to put anything aside before the whole lies in front of me. Whatever shortcomings they may have, the virtue of my writings is that they are an artistic whole, and that is only possible with my way of never publishing them until they lie complete before me. With Jacob Grimm's method [of publishing the Deutsches Wörterbuch in instalments], that is impossible, and anyway it is better for writings which are not dialectically articulated. (MEW xxxi. 131-2.)

In a letter to Kugelmann of 13 October 1866 Marx spelled out the four-book plan for his critical work, and explained the relation of Capital, i, to his Contribution, as published by Franz Duncker in 1859 -- he had revised the two chapters of the Contribution to improve (but not reject) his earlier work:

1. A manuscript chapter intended for Capital, i, but not included in the work as published, survives from this period; see 'Results of the immediate Production Process' (Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozess), Arkhiv Marksa i Engel'sa, ed. V. Adoratskii (Moscow, 1933), ii(vii). 1-267; see also McLellan (1971b), 84, 118-20.

The whole work divides into the following parts:

Book I. Production Process of Capital.

Book II. Circulation Process of Capital.

Book III. Form of the Process as a Whole.

Book IV. Contribution to the History of the Theory.¹

The first volume contains the first two books. [Marx later altered this, since book I appeared as the first volume in 1867.]

The third book, I think, will fill the second volume, and the fourth book, the third volume.

I deemed it necessary to begin the first book again ab ovo, i.e. to summarize the work published by Duncker into one chapter on the commodity and money. I consider it necessary, not only for completeness, but because even good brains did not comprehend the thing completely correctly, therefore there must be something defective in the first presentation, particularly the analysis of the commodity. (MEW xxxi. 534.)

After the publication of Capital, i, in 1867, Marx prepared a second German edition, which is dated 1872 (though his Afterword -- Nachwort -- is dated 24 January 1873). A French translation (with substantial alterations by Marx) appeared in Paris in 1872-5; a Russian translation (for which he gave advice) was published in St. Petersburg in 1872. A third German edition (based on the French edition) appeared in 1883, the year of his death.

Capital, ii, The Circulation Process of Capital (book II of Marx's plan of 1866) was edited by Engels from manuscripts which Marx had written between 1867 and 1879, and was published in Hamburg in 1885. Capital, iii, The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole (book III of the plan of 1866) appeared in Hamburg in 1894, and was also edited by Engels, but from manuscripts written (for

1. As early as 11 March 1858 Marx indicated that his discussion of 'Capital in general' was to include 'Production Process of Capital', 'Circulation Process of Capital', 'Unity of the Two or Capital and Profit, Interest', that is, what later became books 1-3 of Capital as published. (Marx to Lassalle, MEW xxix. 554.) For a time 'Theories of Surplus Value' was included under 'Production Process of Capital'; see the plan of 1863 in TSV i. 414.

the most part) between 1864 and 1865 (i.e. before the final manuscript of Capital, i, which dates from 1865-6).

Book IV of Marx's plan appeared as Theories of Surplus Value, i-iii, edited by Karl Kautsky from manuscripts of the years 1861-3 (i.e. before the manuscript of Capital, i). Volumes i and ii were published in Stuttgart in 1905; volume iii, in 1910. (Rubel (1956), 169-73; see also Engels's introductions to Capital, ii, and iii.)

Even if we consider Capital, i-iii, and Theories of Surplus Value, i-iii, as Marx's finished work, he still completed only a tiny fraction of what he had planned to write, at any stage of his plans after 1844 (if we discount proposals for scaled-down works to interest publishers). The published material represents very roughly, and not in the proposed order,¹ only part of the content of the six-book critique of the economic categories ('the system of bourgeois economy critically presented') and part of the historical and critical material which was to follow the six-book critique, according to his most ambitious scheme, developed directly from the ideas and plans of the Introduction (1857).

2. The 'Quintessence': methods and results in Book I of Capital

The opening chapters of Capital, i, are the quintessential result of the methods -- of the philosopher, logician, political economist, and historian -- used by Marx in his critical study of political economy. An analysis of this 'final' presentation (the

1. For attempts to relate the various sections of Marx's plans of 1857-8 to Capital, i-iii as published, see Rosdolsky (1968), i. 75, and McLellan (1973), 467.

most rigorous and intricate set of arguments ever put forward by Marx) confirms that these methods of investigation led directly to the fundamental propositions of his critique; conversely, a study of his methods makes this abstract and highly condensed text easier to understand. Moreover, Marx's results were necessarily influenced by the methods employed in the critical investigations summarized in Capital, i. Because he relied on certain methods and principles drawn from selected political economists (principally Ricardo), and because he used certain methods and distinctions¹ of nineteenth-century logic and philosophy in crucial arguments, it is not surprising that he reached conclusions that are, I shall argue, unconvincing.

Capital opens with an assertion about capitalist society:²

The wealth of societies, in which the capitalist mode of production predominates, appears as an 'immense accumulation of commodities', the individual commodity as its elementary form.³ (KAP i. 1 / CAP i. 1.)

In capitalist societies, Marx claims, wealth appears as commodities. The contrast between capitalist societies and other societies, where wealth does not take the form of commodities, is developed later in the chapter.

A commodity, he notes, is 'an external object', 'a thing', and moreover a 'useful thing', which may 'be considered from a dual point of view, according to quality or quantity'. The uses of

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1. Such as motion and stasis, form and content (or substance), quality and quantity, appearance and reality, cause and effect, essence and accident.
 2. There is a different view in McLellan (1973), 343.
 3. Marx quotes from his earlier work Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (Berlin, 1859), 4. See also the discussion of his method of presentation, above, pp. 92-7.

things, he continues, and the ways in which they can be measured, are derived in part from human discovery or social convention and from the nature of 'the thing itself', so both qualitative appraisal and ordinary quantitative measures have, in Marx's view, a basis in the social, material world. For him, this is at once a world of natural properties and necessities, and of human discovery, invention, convention, transformation, and self-transformation.

The usefulness of a thing, he notes, makes it a 'use-value' or 'good', and 'use-values' (useful things) 'form the material content of wealth, whatever its social form may be'. But in the particular type of society under consideration by Marx (capitalist, commodity-producing society) use-values are 'at the same time the material bearers of -- exchange-value'.¹ For Marx the notion of exchange-value and the practices of commodity production and exchange only arise in a particular type of society for very particular reasons; on the other hand, 'use-value', in his account, is simply a way of designating a useful thing. Hence 'use-value' could be mentioned in connection with any sort of society (though the term itself is modern), since men will always find some things useful, whereas exchange-value (and therefore the commodity) occur in some societies, but not others.

1. Marx detects a number of contradictions between use-value and exchange-value (and he says that there is an inner opposition between them, and that they have an immediate identity), but for him the commodity as the 'unity (identity) of two opposites: use value, exchange value' is neither 'starting point' nor conclusion; rather he specifies in detail the difficulties inherent in a system of social production where value in exchange is ascribed to useful things. The quotations above are from Martin Nicolaus's Foreword, PGR 41.

Then he presents the conventional view of exchange-value, and begins the task of clarifying -- using the methods of nineteenth-century logic -- the concept and the underlying practice. He discusses what seems to be the case, and later claims to reveal the 'necessary relation' or 'secret' hidden under this 'false appearance'; eventually he explains why he thinks the false appearance arises, and outlines the conditions under which he expects it to disappear. But first we learn how in capitalist society (and in classical political economy) things appear and seem:

To begin with, exchange-value appears as the quantitative relation, the proportion, in which use-values of one sort are exchanged for use-values of another sort, a relation which changes continually with time and place. Hence exchange-value seems something accidental and purely relative; an exchange-value immanent in, inside the commodity (valeur intrinsèque) [seems], therefore, a contradictio in adjecto.¹ (KAP i. 3; my emphasis / CAP i. 3.)

Marx tells us that exchange-value is not a quantitative way of stating an arbitrary relation; he claims that when we exchange commodities we are (according to accepted theory) trading interchangeable exchange-values in equal quantities. His reading of the 'bourgeois' theory of exchange entails the view that a commodity 'has' an exchange-value which can (in principle) be quantified and set equal to another such quantity; hence commodities are not merely said (in accepted economic theory) to 'have' an exchange-value -- they are said to be exchange-values:

1. A contradiction between a thing and that which is attributed to it; another term from Marx's studies in logic. For a discussion of 'appearance' and 'false appearance' in Capital, i, see Norman Geras, 'Essence and Appearance: Aspects of Fetishism in Marx's Capital', New Left Review, no. 65 (London, 1971), 69-85. In so far as the author argues that Marx thinks the 'appearances' of capitalist society more or less incomplete and more or less misleading, I agree with him.

A certain commodity, a quarter of corn, for example, is exchanged with x blacking, or with y silk, or with z gold etc. ... But since x blacking, like y silk, like z gold etc. is the exchange-value of one quarter of corn, x blacking, y silk, z gold etc. must be interchangeable with one another or be exchange-values equal in quantity to one another. (KAP i. 3 / CAP i. 3.)

From that account of the conventional theory of commodity exchange he draws two conclusions about exactly what happens there:

1. 'The current exchange-values of the same commodity express something equal [ein Gleiches].'
2. 'In general, exchange-value can only be the mode of expression, the "form of appearance" of a content different from it.' (KAP i. 3 / CAP i. 3.)

Marx explains his reading of 'bourgeois' theory by using an algebraic analogy, to which the expressions x blacking, y silk, and z gold lend themselves, and a 'geometric example'.¹ His examples are not, however, acts of barter. (See CAP i. 59.) Rather he gives a simplified, abstract account expressing the basis of actual practice in capitalist, commodity-producing societies. Moreover, since his account uses terms from accepted theory, it attempts to explicate both social practice and its theoretical expression. Saying that one commodity may be exchanged for another of equal value is equivalent, in Marx's view, to saying that exchange-values are traded in equal quantities, or that one quantity of value is exchanged for an equal quantity of the same. Unequal exchanges are not thereby excluded as a possibility. His claim is that in political economy the notion of value and the practice of commodity exchange are explained with reference to the rule one quantity of value for its equal, and that this rule is presupposed by exchangers

1. For other analogies drawn by Marx between his work and the sciences, see, for example, CAP i. 18, 43, 45, 197-8, 295-6.

in commodity-producing societies. (See Smith (1776), i. 33-4, 56-7; Ricardo (1821), 3-4, 9; CAP i. 45, 176.)

In his view, the common 'content' in commodities (implied by accepted economic theory) cannot be the fact that they have a money-value expressible in price, since for Marx price is a complex, mystifying expression of the necessary relation or content for which he is searching, and they are very much a matter of circumstances and accident -- they are not the direct expression of a necessary relation. (See CAP i. 15; see also Marx's comments on 'price' in CAP i. 74-5, 144n.) He argues that money is neither logically nor historically a presupposition of exchange, but he does not conclude that money is a logical consequence of the necessary relation at the basis of commodity exchange simply because it has been developed gradually in practice. Rather the argument is that money is a special sort of commodity, and that the definition (in 'bourgeois' terms) of commodity exchange must consist in an algebraic expression of the equal relation of any commodity to any other, as equal quantities of exchange-value:

Let us take two commodities, e.g. corn and iron. Whatever the proportion in which they exchange, it may always be presented in an equation ... e.g. 1 quarter corn = a cwt. iron. What does this equation signify? That a common something [ein Gemeinsames] exists, in the same quantity, in two different things ... Therefore both are equal to a third [thing] which is, in and of itself, neither the one nor the other. Each of the two, so far as it [is] exchange-value, must therefore be reducible to this third [thing]. (KAP i. 3-4 / CAP i. 3-4.)

Marx deduces the existence of a 'common something' from his reductio of commodity exchange to an equation showing equal quantities of exchange-value. But do his observations and arguments warrant this?

As he points out later in the chapter, Aristotle looked at

commodities-in-exchange and did not see a 'common content' or 'equal something'. Rather his view was that commodities are widely different, and only roughly commensurable (in terms of demand) with each other at first, and then later with money:

... such things as are the subjects of exchange must in some sense be comparable ... Hence arises the necessity of a single universal standard of measurement ... This standard is in truth the demand for mutual services, which holds society together ... Money ... is a sort of recognized representative of this demand ... Money is therefore like a measure that equates things, by making them commensurable; for association would be impossible without exchange, exchange without equality, and equality without commensurability.

Although it is in reality impossible that things which are so widely different should become commensurable, they may become sufficiently so for practical purposes.

(Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J.E.C. Welldon (London, 1902), 1133a16-1133b21, pp. 152-4; see also CAP i. 28.)

Aristotle argues that money is like a measure that equates things. Equations of commodities to money, and hence of commodities to each other, are not equations in the strict mathematical sense, in his view, but useful expressions for a rough commensurability in terms of demand, something extrinsic to the thing itself. Marx, however, was sure that there was an 'equal something' in an equation of commodity exchange such as 5 beds = 1 house, and that he knew what it was:

What is the equal something [das Gleiche], i.e. the social substance, which the house represents for the bed in the expression of the value of the bed? Such a thing can 'not, in truth, exist', says Aristotle. Why [not]? The house opposes to the bed an equal something, so far as it represents the real equal something in the two, the bed and the house. And that [equal something] is -- human labour.¹
(KAP i. 27 / CAP i. 29.)

1. With characteristic thoroughness Marx also develops a view on why Aristotle 'failed' to see the equality of commodities in terms of value, and to find the 'equal something' in expressions of exchange-value (i.e. simple abstract labour); see CAP. i. 29.

Marx's argument by elimination which is supposed to confirm this 'fact' is very much the work of an old-fashioned natural philosopher:

This common something cannot be a geometric, physical, chemical, or other natural property of commodities. In general, their material properties only come into consideration so far as they [the properties] make them [the commodities] useful, hence into use-values. But on the other hand, it is precisely the abstraction from their use-values which manifestly characterizes the exchange-relation of commodities ... As use-values, commodities are, above all, of differing quality, as exchange-values, they can only be of differing quantity, hence they contain not an atom of use-value.

If we disregard the use-value of the material bodies of commodities, then there remains only one property, that of [being] the products of labour. (KAP i. 4 / CAP i. 4; see also pp. 193-4 below.)

In a similar way, he argues that in the exchange-relation of commodities we are dealing with only the abstract, quantitatively equalizable aspect of labour, not the concrete, qualitatively distinct aspects of productive labour itself:

With the useful character of the labour-product there disappears [in exchange-value] the useful character of the labour represented in it, hence there also disappears the different concrete forms of that labour; they are no longer distinguished, but are all reduced together to equal human labour, abstract human labour. (KAP i. 4-5 / CAP i. 5.)

Marx's arguments lead him quickly to these conclusions:

1. The 'common something' in relations of equal exchange-value (of two or more commodities) is represented by value.

2. Value can only be a representation of simple abstract human labour (human labour in its quantitatively equalizable aspect), or rather, insofar as exchange-value is said to have been produced in a certain amount (in useful labour-products), only simple abstract labour counts as its substance and measure.¹

1. See also PGR 359-60 where Marx investigates in scholastic terms the relationship between labour, labour-products, and the value of commodities.

The practice of commodity exchange and its theoretical expression in classical political economy are, according to Marx, characterized by abstraction and reduction: abstraction away from concrete, material, qualitative differences between useful things and useful types of labour, and hence a reduction of these straightforward properties of things and of different sorts of labour to a strictly quantitative equality in terms of a social substance -- simple abstract labour. Marx does not use 'social' to suggest that labour is somehow non-physical: the implication is that it is a substance which is part of the socio-material world, rather than the material world as it existed before or apart from human social life. Commodities, in Marx's view, present themselves as exchange-values, or values for short; or rather, in the definition of commodity exchange (deduced by Marx from the theory and practice of capitalist society) only their abstract character as values comes into consideration.

Commodity exchange, as I see it, often entails a measure of abstraction away from the useful properties of labour-products and the useful characteristics of human labour, but Marx has little convincing argument (other than his critical re-presentation of received theory) that: 1. the exchange-relations of commodities imply (by definition) their algebraic equality as exchange-values, 2. this equality as exchange-values is measurable (in some meaningful sense of the word) exclusively in terms of quantities of simple abstract human labour, 3. skilled or 'complicated' labour counts (in commodity production and exchange) as a multiple of simple abstract labour. In the key passage below he refers to 'experience' and a covert 'social process' as confirmation of these claims, but

the argument here is weak, or possibly even circular:

... the value of the commodity represents human labour pure and simple ... Simple average labour itself, to be sure, changes its character in different countries and cultural epochs, but it is given in an extant society. More complicated labour counts only as simple labour raised to a higher power, or rather multiplied, so that a smaller amount of complicated labour [is] equal to a larger amount of simple labour. Experience shows that this reduction takes place continually. A commodity may be the product of the most complicated labour, [but] its value sets it equal to the product of simple labour and hence it [value] represents only a determinate amount of simple labour. The different proportions in which the different types of labour are reduced to simple labour as their unit of measure are established through a social process behind the backs of the producers, and hence appear to them [to be] given by custom. (KAP i. 11; Marx's emphasis / CAP i. 11-12; see also CAP i. 19n.)

I shall discuss points 1-3 in more detail after dealing with three complex theories as they appear in Capital, i -- the 'twofold character of labour', the theory of 'surplus value', and the 'fetishism of commodities' -- which are derived logically by Marx from his propositions about the commodity, value, and labour.

The best things in Capital, according to its author, are the presentation of the twofold character of labour, and the treatment of surplus value apart from its specific forms.¹ The twofold character of labour, as he has already indicated, is simply its concrete character as the expenditure of useful labour-power, and its character as the expenditure of human labour-power in the abstract. Concrete useful labour (the expenditure of human labour-power in all its particular forms) is, of course, a natural

1. See Marx to Engels, 24 August 1867. The twofold character of labour is introduced in the first chapter of Capital, i; the theory of surplus value follows -- according to Marx's logical arguments -- from the definitions and distinctions presented there.

necessity, and simple abstract labour (the expenditure of human labour-power in the abstract) is a physiological fact, but a fact of greater or lesser social significance at different times in history. (See CAP i. 10-11, 42.)

Labour-power, according to Marx, is the capacity for labour; simple abstract labour-power is the unitary measure of that capacity in its abstract aspect; socially necessary labour-time is the minimum number of units of simple abstract labour (simple abstract labour-power multiplied by its duration) required for the production of a commodity. Marx could, with justice, call the twofold character of labour a scientific distinction: labour is part of the observable world, and his two abstractions were devised to represent its various concrete forms in general and its lowest common denominator.

In commodity-producing societies, according to Marx, useful labour-products, concrete useful labour, and simple abstract labour are treated in a peculiar way. The notion of the commodity and the practices of commodity production and exchange (as detailed in political economy) necessitate an abstraction away from concrete, qualitative differences and a reduction to what is qualitatively the same and only quantitatively different. Labour-products are thus 'transformed' into commodities with an (apparently) inherent value created and measured by the expenditure in production of a certain minimum quantity of simple abstract labour-power, that is, by socially necessary labour-time:

The labour-product is, in all social conditions, a useful object, but only an historically determinate epoch of development, which presents the labour expended in the production of a useful thing as its 'objective' [Marx's own quotes] property, i.e. as its value, [only such an epoch] transforms the labour-product into the commodity. (KAP i. 29; see CAP i. 31, where the quotes are omitted.)

For Marx the twofold character of labour and the theory of surplus value are directly linked, since only one aspect of labour (the expenditure of simple abstract labour-power) counts in the formation of value, and surplus value is simply the result of the same process 'prolonged'. (See CAP i. 12-13, 176.) By following the laws of commodity exchange (the exchange of commodities containing an equal measure of value) the capitalist could, according to Marx, buy labour-power at its value. He could pay out an equivalent for the socially necessary labour-time needed to maintain and reproduce it, and recoup this advance by the sale of the product at its value, yet quite legally and properly retain for himself a quantity of the value, i.e. commodity-values¹ produced by the labour-power he had purchased. This would be a surplus beyond the value required for the maintenance and reproduction of the labourer. (See CAP i. 175.)

The theory of surplus value explains, according to Marx, the origin of profit as part of value produced. The apparent origin of profits in capitalist society -- the way in which a certain amount of profit accrues to an individual capital -- is explained (in his earlier manuscript published eventually in Capital, iii) as the distribution of total surplus value according to a uniform rate of profit on capitals of different composition. Marx developed a theory of the origin and appearance of profit which was strictly consistent with the principle that value is produced and regulated

1. 'Commodity-value' is a term used by Marx to emphasize that, according to his clarified version of the work of the political economists, value always appears in the shape of a commodity, and commodities-in-exchange always contain value. (KAP i. pp. xxiv, 5; see also CAP i. 5, where this correction is neither noted nor incorporated.)

by socially necessary labour-time; Smith and Ricardo held that the principle must be modified in order to explain the acquisition of profit at the usual rate. Marx's view has the edge in logical consistency (something which he evidently valued very highly), though this is hardly a full test of these conflicting accounts, even by Marx's own standards.¹

With his theory of the 'fetish-character' or fetishism of commodities Marx puts his analysis into a social context, where men produce commodities and exchange them. In that sort of society, he argues, a number of uncomplicated facts and relations take on fantastic, enigmatical forms; this is why the work of the political economists requires, in Marx's view, a critical re-presentation. Moreover, those relations, which are man's own products, come to rule over him, to 'take on a life of their own'.² The facts and relations which Marx has in mind are these:

1. 'So far as it [the commodity] [is] use-value, there is nothing mysterious in it'

2. 'Therefore the mystical character of commodities does not derive from their use-value. Just as little does it derive from the content of the factors which determine value. For, in the first place, however different useful labours or productive activities may be, it is a physiological fact that they are functions of the human organism and that all such functions, whatever their content and their form, are essentially the expenditure of human brain, nerve, muscle, sense-organs etc.'

3. '... [we consider] what lies at the basis of the determination of the quantity of value, the duration of that

1. See my discussion of relevant passages from the Grundrisse, above, pp. 130-2.

2. Marx's work here can be read as a detailed account of the 'alien world of objects' mentioned in the 1844 Manuscripts; see for example ET 135. See also Rosdolsky (1968), i. 157-8, where this theme is discussed, and Paul Walton and Andrew Gamble, From Alienation to Surplus Value (London, 1972), passim.

expenditure, or the quantity of labour; the quality of labour is manifestly distinguishable from the quantity of labour. In all circumstances the labour-time, which the production of the means of life costs, must be of interest to men, although not equally at different levels of development.'

4. 'Finally, as soon as men work for one another in any way, their labour also assumes a social form.' (KAP i. 40; my emphasis / CAP i. 41-2.)

But when labour-products become commodities, in Marx's understanding of the term, the four straightforward phenomena listed above (usefulness, abstract labour-power, labour-time, labour in a social form) take on an 'enigmatical character':

1. 'From whence derives the enigmatical character of the labour-product, as soon as it takes on the form of the commodity? Obviously from that form itself [i.e. not from its character as a use-value or useful thing].'

2. 'The quality of human labour assumes the material form of the equal objectivity of labour-products as values'

3. '... the amount of expenditure of human labour-power, [multiplied] by its duration, assumes the form of the amount of value of the labour-product'

4. '... finally, the relations of the producers, wherein those social determinations of their labour are manifested, assume the form of a social relation of labour-products. (KAP i. 40-1; my emphasis / CAP i. 42.)

Marx's theory of the fetish-character of commodities serves as a resumé of points 1-4 above.¹ It is important to note that he used the word 'fetish' in this eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sense:

By writers on anthropology (following C. de Brosses ...)
... An inanimate object worshipped by savages on account of its supposed inherent magical powers, or as being animated by a spirit. (OED s.v. Fetish 1b; see also Marx's reading for 1842, discussed above, p. 17 .)

1. Marx also referred to the fetishism of commodities as the 'objective [gegenständlichen, i.e. having the character of a material object] appearance of the social determinations of labour'. (KAP i. 52 / CAP i. 54.)

As in the early writings,¹ Marx turns to the 'religious world' for the analogy most suitable to his elucidation -- in philosophical terms -- of the complexities of capitalist social life in practice and in received theory. Interestingly, the purely physical analogy applies, on his own testimony, only to a limited extent. The analogy with religion puts across his theory of the fetishism of commodities in a striking way:

Here [in the religious world] the products of the human mind appear endowed with a life of their own; [they appear as] independent forms standing in relations among themselves and with men. So [it is] in the commodity-world with the products of the human hand. This I call the fetishism which adheres to labour products as soon as they are produced as commodities, and hence [it] is inseparable from commodity production. (KAP i. 41 / CAP i. 43.)

The fetish-character of commodities derives, Marx argues, from the 'peculiar social character of the labour which produces them'. His view is that 'in general, useful objects become commodities only because they are the products of private labours carried on independently of one another', rather than labours carried on in a consciously social fashion. (KAP i. 41 / CAP i. 43.) In a capitalist, commodity-producing society, in Marx's view, relations based on the exchange-value of commodities ('social relations of things') come to control the distribution of labour-products and the distribution of the labourers themselves within the production process. Since, according to Marx, producers and their products are manipulated by the 'mysterious' workings of a fetish (the commodity-value), socio-economic relations in capitalist society are -- and appear to be -- 'material relations of persons and social

1. See for example ET 135.

relations of things'. Marx's task is, in part, to demonstrate that this state of affairs is historically transitory and, moreover, that it is destined to be superseded by a social organization where there will be 'direct social relations of persons in their labours':

... private labours are only carried on in fact as parts of the total social labour via relations wherein exchange disposes the labour-products, and, by means of them, the producers. Hence to the latter the social relations of their private labours appear as what they are, i.e. not as the direct social relations of persons in their labours, but rather as material relations of persons and social relations of things. (KAP i. 42 / CAP i. 44.)

In such a society, useful things are produced only or primarily for exchange; hence the character of useful objects as exchange-values determines (as a rule) their very production. In addition to the social relations of the producers (discussed in the passage quoted above), two of the social characteristics of their labours appear, not as what they are in themselves (social usefulness and simple equivalence), but as 'forms' (known in economic theory as use-value and exchange-value) which arise from the practice of commodity exchange:

The intellect of the private producers only reflects this twofold social character of their private labours in the forms which appear in practical commerce, in the exchange of products -- hence the socially useful character of their private labours [appears] in the form that the labour-product must be useful, and to be sure, useful for others -- the social character of the equality of heterogeneous labours [appears] in the form of the common value-character of those materially different things, labour-products. (KAP i. 42-3; my emphasis / CAP i. 44-5.)

Marx also draws this conclusion about the actual working of capitalist society:

The latter [amounts of value in commodities] change continually, independent of the will, foresight, and action of the exchangers. Their own social movement possesses for them the form of a movement of things, under whose control they stand, instead of controlling them. (KAP i. 44 / CAP i. 46.)

In the world of commodity production and exchange the labourer's own products confront him as alien objects; they rule over him as an independent, alien power. In the first chapter of Capital Marx suggests two illustrations of this movement of things: reductions in the labour-force, or the shifting of productive labour (with more or less friction) from one branch of production to another, and sudden crashes in the exchange-ratios of commodities because of alterations in their values, that is, in the socially necessary labour-time they contain. (See CAP i. 11, 46.) 'The determination of value by labour-time', he writes, 'is a secret hidden under the apparent movements of the relative values of commodities'; this is what is behind the apparently mysterious workings of the labour market and the markets for other commodities. Note that Marx is only committed here to the view that changes in socially necessary labour-time cause sharp fluctuations, crashes, and periodic crises. He has not necessarily committed himself to any quantitatively more precise thesis, for example, a thesis that a certain change in socially necessary labour-time always or generally produces a certain fluctuation in exchange-ratios. (See CAP i. 46.) But simply knowing the secret, in Marx's view, does not affect the working of the mechanism; what is required is its abolition and replacement by a consciously planned and regulated economy.

To elucidate his theory of the fetishism of commodities still further Marx (as historian and political economist) compares the 'peculiar' organization of labour in capitalist society (private labours carried on independently) with the situation in a hypothetical 'society' (Robinson Crusoe on his island), in a previous type of society (feudalism in the middle ages), in past and

present communal systems, and in a hypothetical future society. In none of those societies, in Marx's view, do labours and products 'take on a fantastic form [such as commodity, value, amount of value] different from their reality'. In a society of commodity producers, on the other hand, 'the overall social relation of production consists in treating their products as commodities, hence as values, and in relating, in that material form, their private labours to one another as equal human labour'.

The fetishism of commodities, according to Marx, consists in thinking and acting (because of the peculiar way in which production is organized) as if ordinary labour-products contained an inherent 'property (value), representing the socially necessary labour-time contained in that sort of commodity. Labour and its products are, in that system, related to one another by men as equalizable exchange-values. Hence labour-products appear (in a capitalist, commodity-producing society) to have 'inherent magical powers' or to be 'animated by a spirit', since their relationships to one another and to men (and some of the relationships between men) are determined less by conscious, collective human decision than by an unplanned, uncontrolled process of equalization in terms of value by means of money.

The societies preceding capitalist society (or primitive societies contemporary with it) were, in Marx's view, immature, since 'they are conditioned by a low level of development of the productive powers of labour'. Capitalist society represents a crucial stage in the development of the 'material foundation of society', the 'material conditions of existence' -- a stage on the way to a society of freely associated men who exercise 'conscious

control, in accordance with a plan', over a highly developed 'material process of production'. In that sort of society, he writes, 'the form of the social life process strips off its mystical veil', and commodity fetishism disappears. (KAP i. 45-9 / CAP i. 47-51.)

Marx's reasoning in the first chapter of Capital is an ingeniously (but not comprehensively) critical version of arguments developed by Smith, Ricardo, and others. Smith suggested that commodities contain value, and Ricardo used equivalent expressions. Marx rejected that view only insofar as it made value itself sound like an inherent substance or material property of labour-products. (See Ricardo (1821), 9, 85; also CAP i. 55.) But his own view was only slightly different, though more complicated. He held that labour-products function as commodities with exchange-value, according to the 'bourgeois' view of things, and that value itself is therefore thought to inhere in commodities.

Marx took the view that labour (its concrete forms, and hence its abstract form) is 'realized' or 'actualized' (verwirklicht) in labour-products. (KAP i. 26 / CAP i. 27.) However, his statement that '[being] the products of labour' is some sort of 'property' (Eigenschaft) of the 'material bodies of commodities', and the statement that human labour is 'materialized' (materialisiert) or 'objectified' (vergegenständlicht or objektiviert) or 'accumulated' (aufgehäuft) or 'actualized' there, seem to me to misrepresent the nature of labour and its relation to material things. (GR 208-9, 265, 506-7 / PGR 300-3, 359, 612-13; KAP i. 19 / CAP i. 20.) If he merely means to say that '[being] the products of labour' is a common quality of all labour-products, then he has produced an

uninteresting tautology. If he claims that this is some 'property' or quality in the 'form' of certain material things (or that certain material things are -- in some meaningful sense -- 'materialized' or 'vanished' labour or the 'static existence' of a force), then the thesis is false. I see no reason to reject the accepted view of the measurable expenditure of human labour (as a form of energy) on material things over time in favour of a theory that labour is 'materialized' in the 'material bodies' of commodities in some way (or that it is one of their properties, or that the material bodies of commodities are accumulated labour), since such a view entails a confusion of energy with matter or with its properties. The expenditure of energy can alter the properties of material things, but the fact that energy (human or otherwise) has been expended on them is not itself one of these properties. I take Einstein's equation of matter and energy to be irrelevant to Marx's presentation, so that for purposes of economic analysis matter is not equal to some quantity of energy. Similarly, I do not think that Marx's view can be saved by an analogy to the accumulation in matter of an electrical charge or other form of energy, since one is not the materialization of the other. Marx himself uses the language of physics when discussing labour as 'energy' or 'force', so reference to the physical sciences is not, I think, out of order.

The Marxian equation of labour and labour-products might have been intended in a less literal sense, as Marx himself suggested in his comments on Adam Smith in TSV i. 171-4, but if so, then the thesis is only acceptable if there are good reasons for adopting a view that value is the representation of something substantial, and

for believing that the sole substance for which value is the expression must be labour. Marx's thesis might be interesting to students of society if the participants in a capitalist economy generally avowed that value is itself a substance, or that it represents something substantial, or if they could be shown in general to have presupposed such views, either in Marx's time or ours. In my opinion, none of these conditions has been fulfilled. Marx may, however, be correct in claiming that in capitalist society some social relationships are perceived in the form of a thing (the commodity -- if we accept that it differs somehow from a labour-product), and that this constitutes a mystification, but in so far as he attempts to resolve the mystification by a representation of the principle that value is created and measured solely by labour, his work misfires.

Thus in Marx's account, value (as value 'contained' in commodities) is the mystifying expression of the fact that abstract labour-power (as opposed to labour-power in its concrete useful forms) has been expended in society in the production of something useful. When labour-products ('actualized' labour both concrete and abstract) are treated as commodities (said to contain value) exchange-relations based on relative quantities of labour-time (the duration of the abstract labour-power expended in the labour-products) come to dominate the relations of production, and 'social' relations among things (commodities) come to dominate the social relations of the producers.

The idea that value is based on something more or less objective (abstract labour 'actualized' in labour-products) is correct, in Marx's view, but value itself is only an 'objective' (i.e. supposedly

inherent) property of the commodity. Moreover the objectivity of the labour-product as materialized abstract labour is said to be merely 'ghostly', since abstract labour represents an abstraction away from the concrete, qualitatively different properties of human labour, and the reduction of those differences to something equalizable in quantitative terms.¹ In his account, the labour-product is closer to the whole substance of things (since no unnecessary abstraction and reduction away from its useful qualities is required), whereas the commodity-value has an objectivity that is 'purely social' -- not based on the full socio-material nature of things, but abstract, conventional, and subject to alteration by man. One day, Marx hints, labour-time (as the substance and measure of value) will not rule the socio-economic world, but will be utilized in a consciously regulated scheme without any notion of the commodity, value, and exchange-value.²

The historical character of Marx's presentation is superior to Smith's and Ricardo's, and his distinction between the qualitative appraisal of the concrete properties of things (and of their ordinary quantitative measures) and the more abstract appraisal of their value in exchange is a careful piece of analysis. But there

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1. This argument represents a more sophisticated version of some of Marx's earlier views; see for example this passage from the German Ideology: 'Private property estranges [entfremdet] not only the individuality of men, but also that of things. Earth and soil have nothing to do with ground rent; the machine has nothing to do with profit.' (MEW iii. 212 / GI 248.)
 2. See CAP i. 5, 15, 31, 50-1, 359-63; also this passage from Aristotle: 'But a substance exists in virtue of its quality, whose nature is definite, while quantity has an indefinite nature.' (Metaphysics, trans. H.G. Apostle (Bloomington, Ind., 1966), 1063a28-9, p. 184.)

are three fundamental steps in his presentation that I find unconvincing: 1. He has accepted the assumption of certain political economists that an exchange of commodities equal in value means that an equal quantity of value (determined by the amount of labour usually expended on that sort of commodity) is exchanged for an equal quantity of the same value-substance. (Marx states this clearly in PGR 446.) This objective view of value cannot, I think, be sustained. 2. He has also accepted the argument that what commodities have in common (apart from their materiality) can only be labour (of a certain abstract sort), though his reasoning is more sophisticated than Smith's. On pp. 146-8 above I question the view that commodities have labour in common in the way that Marx claims; hence I object to a step in his argument prior to the assertion that labour is the sole 'property' (apart from materiality) common to the 'material bodies of commodities', and that the simple abstract aspect of this labour is the substance and measure of value. 3. Moreover, Marx's argument that different sorts of labour are reduced by the process of commodity production and exchange to simple labour (since simple abstract labour must, according to the previous argument by elimination, be the substance and measure of the value of commodities) is merely a refinement of a view held -- but left unexamined -- by Smith and Ricardo. (See Ricardo (1821), 13.) Ricardo and Marx do not show that skilled labour is a multiple of simple labour, even in some sense that precludes precise, or even approximate measurement: they simply state it as a self-evident fact.

It is possible that Marx intended his critical re-presentation of the labour theory of value (and his views on the society that

produced and supposedly accepted that theory) as a hypothesis to be tested by a statistical study of the exchange-ratios of commodities over time (to determine whether or not these ratios are, in general, regulated in proportion to the socially necessary labour-time 'materialized' in different commodities), but, on the whole, he has insulated his work from such treatment, merely referring to exchange-ratios as 'accidental and continually varying', and offering no encouragement on the determination of a unit of labour-power in the abstract, so that simple abstract labour and its multiples could be measured over time. Not only does he deny (as Smith and Ricardo had done) that market prices always conform to values, but he also denied that average prices do so 'directly'; and he denied that the value of a commodity is equal to the values advanced in its production, and that value is equivalent to cost-price, or to price or cost of production. (See CAP i. 144n, 550n; also MEW xix. 359.) Marx does say that value is equivalent over 'longer periods' to the 'average' price around which market prices fluctuate, but he offers no guide to finding these average prices other than Thomas Tooke's work in the History of Prices, 6 vols. (London, 1838-57). Nor would these prices make his re-assertion of the labour theory of value testable, unless inputs of labour in some standard unit could be measured over time. In the Grundrisse Marx denied that average or abstract labour could be measured as such. (See above, pp. 152-5 .) There is, in Marx's view, no contradiction between his work in the third volume of Capital on the complex appearance of economic relations in capitalist society (e.g. prices of production) with his more abstract discussion of value and surplus value in Capital, i. Value is said to be the secret hidden by the apparent

complexity of capitalist economic phenomena; his work in volume iii is said to be vague and senseless unless deduced logically from his views on value. (See CAP i. 46, and CAP iii. 157-65.)

At the opening of Capital, i, Marx's work is an attempt (using the methods of the nineteenth-century philosopher and logician) to establish general truths about capitalist society, or rather to elucidate certain presuppositions (thought by Marx to be fundamental to that society) already expressed in an incomplete or inconsistent way by the theoreticians of capitalist society, the political economists. One of these truths was their 'scientific discovery' of the labour theory of value. (See CAP i. 45-6, and TSV ii. 166.) Marx provided arguments from logic and mathematics intended, so far as I can tell, to confirm this 'discovery' or 'law' in physical terms -- or on analogy with physical terms -- and to explicate it as an important view actually held in capitalist society by theorists and presupposed by participants.

But in the transition from Ricardian political economy to modern economics (of whatever school) a view of value as a substance, or something like a substance, and views of value such that it could not be precisely measured (for example, in terms of labour-time) came under attack. During Marx's lifetime J.S. Mill wrote that value is a 'relative term' and that the value of a commodity is 'not a name for an inherent and substantive quality of the thing itself, but means the quantity of other things which can be obtained in exchange for it'. (J.S. Mill (1848), i. 543; see also Marx's comments on 'absolute' and 'relative' value in TSV ii. 170-2.)

Mill seems to be hinting at a line of criticism of certain

political economists and Marx which I think correct: a subjective view of value. As I see it, we value things in material or specifically monetary terms, things are said to have a value in those terms, and the values of things may be said to be roughly equal, or their prices exactly equal. The things themselves, cannot, strictly speaking, be said to be equal, nor does 'bourgeois' economics make this claim. Thus a commodity does not contain some quantity of value (as the political economists sometimes suggested), and labour-products are not the 'spatial' or 'static' existence of labour-time (as Marx claimed, in his own corrected version of the theory). More or less value is not produced or created in manufacture, in my view, though what is produced may, for a variety of reasons, become more or less valuable in material or monetary terms. Similarly, more or less labour is not contained or 'materialized' or 'realized' in labour-products, though more or less labour, hence wages or salaries, may be required in production.

In reply to this argument Marx seems to state that value must be the mystifying expression for something more or less substantial (simple abstract labour 'actualized' in labour-products), because Smith and Ricardo sometimes wrote as if value itself were a substantial property of commodities. Marx's implicit criticism of Mill is that the latter could not discuss the labour theory of value on a purely relativist basis, because that would be a misunderstanding of the theory. In Marx's view, Mill was yet another 'vulgar' political economist dealing only with 'appearances', losing himself in their 'accidentality', and failing to discover the 'secret' needed for a correct interpretation of capitalist economic life. (See CAP i. 46, 53 n, 55 n; see also TSV i. 206, ii. 164-5,

172.) In any case, if a subjective view of value (whether mine or J.S. Mill's) is false, Marx's work on value is still incorrect, unless my other arguments against it can be refuted.¹ (See above, pp. 196-202.)

Joan Robinson is wrong in claiming that value is 'just a word' and that the labour theory of value, as re-presented by Marx is unfalsifiable, or 'metaphysical' in her own sense of the term.² Marx views the first labour theories of value as rough deductions from experience of both micro- and macro-economic phenomena (such as simple exchanges, and long-term changes in exchange ratios). I take his exposition of the commodity-value to be a logical demonstration that what the political economists had guessed was basically correct, though certain improvements were necessary (such as the distinction between value and exchange-value, the twofold character of labour, and the theory of surplus value). Hence Marx's re-presentation of the labour theory of value was supposed to explain only the necessary existence (not the exact size) of marked fluctuations in commodity production and exchange. His argument is this: since value can be shown to be the mystifying expression of the fact that so much socially necessary labour-time has been

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1. I disagree entirely with the view that 'there is no logical flaw in the Marxian [economic] system' and that 'we may define "value" in whatever manner we please'; see Lichtheim (1967), 173, 180. Böhm-Bawerk is right in focusing on the methodology of the opening sections of Capital, i, but his criticisms of Marx's arguments themselves leave considerable room for improvement. (Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, Karl Marx and the Close of his System, ed. Paul M. Sweezy (New York, 1949), 64-90.) For an unsuccessful defence of Marx, see Rudolf Hilferding's Böhm-Bawerk's Criticism of Marx in the same volume, pp. 121-96.
 2. Joan Robinson, Economic Philosophy (1962; Harmondsworth, 1964, repr. 1970), 8-9, 29.

expended on -- or is 'materialized' in -- a certain sort of commodity, changes in the labour-time needed in production will affect the values of commodities, exchange-ratios will fluctuate sharply, manufacturers will be ruined by competitors who can reduce the labour-time required, and workers will be made redundant. Moreover, according to the logical extension of this view, the rate of profit will fall, and capital will cease to function as such. Marx argues that only labour (as the sole property common to commodities) can account for their equality (or rather for the possibility of their equality) as values. Hence he does not put forward his theory as an explanation for movements in prices or exchange-ratios (except in a very general way), and the inability to test his theory in quantitative terms does not strike him as a weakness in his work. In his view, the labour theory of value (correctly understood) states the principle behind value equations, and hence the reason for long-term shifts in exchange-ratios and for the collapse of the capitalist system. (See TSV ii. 176.)

The fact that Marx used general observations (on political economy and capitalist society) and distinctions from philosophy and logic as the basis of his demonstration (instead of deducing his views from a statistical study of exchange-ratios and labour-time,¹ or using such a study to test his assertions) does not make his work unfalsifiable. If the arguments for his critical re-presentation of the labour theory of value are unconvincing, then there is no reason to accept his views precisely as he expressed them, and that is that.

1. In KAP i. 16 / CAP i. 17 Marx announces that he will begin by considering value 'entirely independent of its quantitative aspects'. See also TSV i. 205.

Value is not 'just a word', but a term still in use. An interesting aspect of Marx's presentation is the attempt to explain how a commodity differs from a useful labour-product, or rather what we presuppose when we treat a useful labour-product as a commodity, something valuable solely or largely in terms of what can be obtained in exchange for it, or might be obtained in exchange. Marx's claim that this involves some measure of abstraction away from the concrete useful properties of the object is surely correct. Commodity speculators are an example of people who treat useful labour-products purely as values, that is, with maximum attention to what they will fetch in terms of other commodities or money (or what they might fetch), and minimum attention to their concrete useful properties.

However, Marx's view that the secret behind the exchange of commodities is their reduction as values to a strict equality in terms of simple abstract labour indicates that he overvalued some of his source material on capitalist society -- the works of Smith, Ricardo, and other classics of political economy. His representation of 'classical political economy' is critical and ingeniously consistent, but not, in my view, critical enough.

3. Last comments on method: The Notes (1879-80) on Adolph Wagner

The Notes on Adolph Wagner (Randglossen zu Adolph Wagners Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie), probably written between the latter half of 1879 and November 1880,¹ represent Marx's last

1. The dating of this manuscript, and of the large notebook from which it came, is uncertain. The editors of MEW xix state that the manuscript was written in the second half of 1879 to November 1880, and was contained in Marx's excerpt-notebook for

comments on the method and substance of his critique of political economy before his death on 14 March 1883. The book which prompted his 'marginal notes' was the second (improved and enlarged) edition of Adolph Wagner's General or Theoretical Political Economy, Part One, Foundations (Allgemeine oder theoretische Volkswirtschaftslehre, Erster Theil, Grundlegung), published in Leipzig and Heidelberg in 1879 as the first volume of a completely revised version of the Manual of Political Economy (Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie) by Karl Heinrich Rau,¹ Wagner's late mentor. Marx's Notes were found among his last excerpt-notebooks, and were first published in a Russian translation, edited by D. Ryazanov, in the Marx-Engels Arkhir for 1930.²

The Notes of 1879-80 demonstrate Marx's continuing concern, even at this late stage of his career, with some of the problems on which he had worked as early as 1844: What are the correct pre-suppositions about man, social life, and language, for a critical study of political economy and of life in capitalist society? What is the correct understanding of the basic concepts and categories of political economy? How are they related? What is 'hidden'

1879-81. (MEW xix. 581.) Rubel dates the manuscript as 1880, and says that the notebook contained extracts made during the years 1881-2. (Rubel (1956), 196; also Karl Marx, Oeuvres: Economie, ii (Paris, 1968), 1531-2.) Ryazanov gives the corresponding dates 1881 and 1880-1. (Arkhir Marksa i Engel'sa, ed. D. Ryazanov, ser. I, vol. v (Moscow/Leningrad, 1930, repr. Nendeln/Liechtenstein, 1969). 377, 380.) In CHRR 380 both the manuscript and notebook are dated ca. 1880.

1. Marx once referred to him as 'Rau-Rau -- the German [Jean-Baptiste] Say', and noted that his own views 'figured' in the 1860 edition of the first volume of Rau's Lehrbuch. (Marx to Engels, 7 May 1861, MEW xxx. 162, 718.)
2. This version is overlooked in Rubel (1956), 196; cf. CHRR 380.

beneath them? Some of these questions were also pursued at length in the Introduction (1857) to the Grundrisse. However, in the Notes on Wagner, Marx's work was no longer a preliminary investigation for his critique of political economy but a commentary on the published volume, Capital, i (particularly the crucial opening chapters).

In the course of his comments on Wagner, Marx dealt with the method of that political economist, as well as the content of his book, and with Wagner's paraphrases and criticisms of Marx's own published work. According to Marx, Wagner and other political economists, such as Rau and Rodbertus, were guilty of holding a wrong point of view, and of propounding bad history, bad philosophy, bad logic, and bad political economy. The logical aspect of his own method was revealed with particular clarity, since one of his principal complaints about Wagner and others was that they ignored or conflated important distinctions, especially those to do with labour and value.¹ Marx regarded that aspect of his own presentation as all-important for a clear, critical understanding of the science of political economy and of the society which had produced it, and he had gone to considerable trouble in Capital, i, and elsewhere, to try to explain exactly what was involved in certain concepts (such as commodity, labour, and value) which had been taken over from the language of contemporary economic life and then used, and allegedly clarified, by the political economists.

As his study of political economy progressed, Marx had become more knowledgeable about (and critical of) the technical details of

1. Marx made similar points -- and used similar methods -- in his criticisms of Max Stirner in GI 227-8, 252-4, 300-10.

political economy. That sort of criticism was not omitted from the Notes of 1879-80. But it is mistaken to assume that he had lost interest in the basic logical and philosophical 'errors' of the political economists, or that he had changed his point of view or method in some fundamental, 'anti-philosophical' way.¹ He was never (after 1843, at any rate) interested in doing philosophy for its own sake, nor did he necessarily consider his philosophical and logical corrections to the work of philosophers and political economists his only (or even primary) achievement, since he prided himself that some of his critical work on, for example, the theory of money, would be 'interesting for specialists'. (Marx to Engels, 13-15 January 1859, MEW xxix. 383.) In addition, he pursued detailed historical investigations which were not, perhaps, directly connected with his critical work on political economy, though some of his results did appear in the critique passim. His hostility to academic philosophy, and his scorn for bad philosophy and bad logic when he found them on the printed page, were never tantamount to a rejection of philosophical and logical arguments as an essential part of his scientific method.

Marx's attacks on spurious conceptual 'derivations' were in no way incompatible with an interest in a correct account of concepts in general and of particular concepts, or 'social forms' -- expressions or concepts of certain social relations (which involve persons, concepts, and things) which are also in use within those relations. In fact, he stated in Capital, i, that an understanding

1. I disagree with the thesis put forward by Athar Hussain in his 'Marx's Notes on Adolph Wagner: An Introduction', Theoretical Practice, no. 5 (London, spring 1972). 18-34.

of 'the commodity' (an understanding of his own account of this 'social form') was absolutely necessary for the solution of the 'riddle' presented by money and for a correct account of the formation of capital. (See CAP i. 65.) This view, that concepts (specifically the basic concepts of political economy) must be examined and understood in the context of the social, material world, was thoroughly rehearsed and extensively employed in the Notes on Wagner.

What emerges most clearly from the text are Marx's concern with the exact wording of the definitions and distinctions fundamental to his critique of political economy, particularly his work on labour and value, and his lengthy attack, using the methods of the nineteenth-century philosopher, logician, and historian, on the two or three sentences in which Wagner gave an account of the way in which 'man' comes to ascribe value to 'goods, or respectively, things in the external world'. (MEW xix. 362.) Other passages in the Notes reveal Marx's keen interest in some of the more practical aspects of political economy, such as credit, prices, costs, effects of various discoveries and inventions on industrial technology, and speculation in commodities.

Marx's opening criticism was of Wagner's 'point of view', the 'socio-legal point of view', to which he strenuously objected. According to Marx, Wagner had inverted the real relationship between economic activities and social, legal relations. In Wagner's work the latter were treated as a presupposition of the former, whereas Marx had been arguing exactly the reverse since 1843. In the Notes of 1879-80 Marx commented that with Wagner there was 'first, the law, and then commerce', but that in reality it was the other way

round: 'at first there is commerce, and then a legal order develops out of it'. That thesis found further expression in Marx's summary (in the Notes on Wagner) of his own work on the formation of capital from the exchange of equivalent commodities: the capitalist need not, in theory, rob the workers (though Marx collected a great deal of evidence that this did occur), but could obtain 'with full rights, i.e. the rights corresponding to that mode of production, the surplus value'. Marx commented that he presented the capitalist 'as the necessary functionary of capitalist production', not, of necessity, as a robber or cheat. (MEW xix. 355, 359, 377.) This last passage does not, however, support a view that Marx's method was to exclude value judgements altogether. Rather he was concerned to dissociate his critical work from accounts which criticized capitalists for behaving as such: he thought this approach an obvious waste of time. He seems to have aimed at the clearest possible understanding of capitalist society, an understanding uncluttered with preaching and simplistic schemes for reform, but his own hostility towards that society, and his conviction that the evils therein would be overcome, were very near the surface, even in the most 'economic' sections of the first volume of Capital.

It should come as no surprise that Marx also attacked Wagner's conception of man and of human social life, since for many years that had been a standard Marxian method of criticism. According to Marx, Wagner's conception, as it emerged from his 'derivation' of the economic categories, presented an abstract 'man' whose social (or non-social) situation was not specified, whose relation to the external world was curiously stationary and theoretical, and whose

vocabulary somehow included the concepts which Wagner had set out to 'derive'.

Marx conceived of man (with respect to the critique of political economy) as a social language-user necessarily engaged in active, productive relations with the things of the external world. This view was as clearly expressed in the Notes on Wagner as in the 'early writings' of nearly forty years before and in Capital, i -- though in the Notes, the account of the development of language (of a certain sort) had been worked out in more detail. He took the view that men begin by 'relating themselves actively' to the external world (by eating, drinking etc., just as animals do), and that they take hold of things and satisfy their needs. 'Through the repetition of this process', they, like animals, come to distinguish certain things which satisfy their needs from all other things, but unlike animals, they come eventually to 'christen these things linguistically', because they 'stand continually in the production process ... in active association among themselves and with these things'. Language, he wrote, comes to express 'what repeated corroboration in experience has accomplished'. (MEW xix. 362-3.)

Besides attacking Wagner for starting out on historically and philosophically dubious grounds, Marx took him to task for the details of his treatment of labour, value, economic goods, capital, and other categories of political economy. According to Marx, Wagner's assertions were tautological, false, circular, spurious, confused, illogical, and apologetic for the German state and social order. Here Marx the student of logic was very much in evidence, as well as Marx the committed critic of capitalist society and of

theorists who, in his view, took that society too much on its own terms.

Marx claimed that Wagner had missed an important distinction under 'labour': the distinction between types of labour which are different in concrete ways, and labour in its most abstract form, common to all types of labour. Wagner, on the other hand, disputed Marx's 'clarification' of the labour theory of value, claiming that the latter's definition of value-creating labour as the expenditure of human labour-power in the abstract was unwarranted and politically tendentious. If, as Marx claimed, labour-power produces value, then the economic 'services' of capitalists and civil servants begin to look dispensable. Wagner advocated a 'broad' understanding of labour such that capitalists and civil servants may be said to labour, to create value, and hence to be in direct line for a share in the value created. (Wagner (1879), 24, 111.) Marx's 'twofold character of labour' tended to undercut any suggestion that capitalists and civil servants justifiably claim a share in value for any but purely conventional, transitory reasons, such as legal entitlement.

As one would expect, Marx and Wagner differed in their views on the social question. Wagner favoured government intervention to rectify abuses arising from the free market and exploitative employers. Marx agreed that capitalist society lacked conscious regulation, but argued (at length) that the very presuppositions and fundamental practices of a capitalist, commodity-producing society (commodity, exchange-value, private organization of the production process) were historically peculiar (albeit necessary for a time) and destined to be superseded by a better way of organizing and

understanding economic life. 'The point of bourgeois society', he wrote (somewhat dogmatically), is 'that a priori there is no conscious social regulation of production'. (Marx to Kugelmann, 11 July 1868, MEW xxxii. 553; my emphasis.)

But his chief quarrel with Wagner concerned the latter's treatment of Marx's own work on value, as published in Capital, i. In his comments Marx made it quite clear that he had never treated value as equivalent to price of production or market price, but that he distinguished them from one another. Furthermore, his consideration of value was not directed exclusively towards the determination of its quantity in any given situation, or in general. Rather (and here he comments on his method of presentation) he began with 'the commodity', 'the simplest economic concretum', 'the concrete social form of the labour-product', 'the simplest social form in which the labour-product is presented in contemporary society'; and from the commodity he moved on to discuss usefulness or utility, use-value, exchange-value, and value itself. Hence he remarked in the Notes that neither value nor exchange-value were his subjects, but the commodity, and claimed that he did not start from 'concepts' (his own quotes) but from a concrete, historically specific 'social form'. (MEW xix. 358, 361-2, 368-70.) Marx's view was very much that distinctions (and 'social forms') spring 'from real life into the textbooks', including textbooks on political economy. (GR 11 / PGR 90.)

But when Marx discussed the commodity as a 'social form', he was nonetheless dealing with a concept, albeit the concept of a concrete social thing. The point of his distinction between starting from 'concepts' and starting from a 'social form' (or

'social thing', or 'given economic form') was, I think, that Wagner and others had attempted to define and relate economic concepts in a nebulous, arbitrary way. Marx dismissed this in the Notes of 1879-80 as 'helter-skelter quibbling' over concepts or words. His own method was to elucidate the given, but confused theory and the physical and social reality of the commodity, taking into account the historical development of economic life and the assumptions and practices (as he saw them) involved in a society where men do not simply produce useful labour-products, but use-values for others, use-values for exchange, social use-value, commodities. In Capital and in the Notes on Wagner Marx did not disown concepts, any more than he could have rejected the use of words, but rather he scorned the pretence that an account of economic phenomena could be given 'from concepts', rather than from historical and contemporary facts (including 'social forms', such as the commodity) about human social life and about life in particular sorts of societies -- the 'economically-given social period' which he mentioned in the Notes. (MEW xix. 371.) Hence he criticized Wagner and Rodbertus for missing or conflating distinctions between use-value and value, value and exchange-value, value and the various 'value-forms' (including the 'money-form'), and value and costs and prices, and for depending on etymological coincidences¹ and alleged 'German usage' for their definitions and explanations, rather than the theory (i.e. political economy) and practice of commodity-producing societies as far back as the time of Aristotle.²

1. See also Marx's comments on the 'realm of synonymy' in the German Ideology, quoted above, p. 48.

2. Marx distinguished, of course, between societies where some commodity production takes place, and capitalist society, where, in his view, commodity production becomes general and dominating. See for example CAP i. 123.

In the Notes on Wagner Marx contrasted Rodbertus's complaints of 'illogical procedure' with his own account of a 'fact', or rather artifact, of contemporary economic life, the price-list,¹ where, Marx claimed, the distinctions which he had traced out in Capital, i, occur in real life. (MEW xix. 374-5.) In the list, commodities appeared as use-values (useful products of human labour, such as cotton and yarn), which are by nature qualitatively different from one another. Yet at the same time, in the list, they appeared to be qualitatively the same as equivalent (that is, exchangeable, or mutually interchangeable) commodities, but different from each other only quantitatively in terms of price. In the opening chapter of Capital he had concluded that a peculiar, though historically necessary organization of production ('private labours, carried on independently') was at the root of this characteristic and transitory way of dealing with the useful products of human labour, and at the root of the uncertainties, panics, and crises to which the capitalist system was inevitably subject. Nowhere in the Notes (1879-80) does Marx repudiate the methods of Capital, the Grundrisse, and even earlier critical works on political economy, nor does he suggest any significant alterations in the results presented in Capital, i. His brief comments in the manuscript of 1879-80 on industrial technology and on macro-economic indicators and phenomena (such as national income, gross annual product, imports, shipping) record only his continuing interest in the full range of problems covered by political economists, not a departure from his previous studies, nor indeed a probative

1. This example occurs in the Grundrisse; see the passage quoted above, pp. 139-40; also CAP i. 30.

confrontation of his general theories with statistical data about the capitalist economy.

CHAPTER VII Summary and conclusions

In this thesis I have shown that some of Marx's most important investigations and arguments employ -- in crucial ways -- methods and distinctions derived not only from logic that is characteristically Hegelian, but also from logic that is more orthodox and scholastic. I have given a general account of Marx's methods in his critical work on political economy, and have concentrated particularly on the logical aspects of his method of investigation, since these seemed to me to be fundamental to his work and to require the most elucidation. I have tried to state clearly and interpret briefly important facts about his studies and plans for a magnum opus; some of my deductions about his plans and methods -- and about innovations recorded in the Introduction (1857) to the Grundrisse -- are new. And I have tried to break new ground by analysing Marx's methods and conclusions in the seven notebooks of the Grundrisse and the first book of Capital. These texts represent some of the most fundamental and difficult parts of Marx's work: fundamental, because the arguments there form the logical basis of much of his social and political theory, and difficult, because he relies on methods and distinctions drawn from the logical science of his day.

To arrive at my conclusions, it was necessary to presuppose that Marx's writings, and particularly his distinctions and characteristic methods, were worth detailed scrutiny. This presupposition was, I think, worthwhile. Many commentators, in my view, fail to take Marx's writings seriously enough. Hence their

readings of his work are perverse or ungenerous, and their criticisms misfire. Moreover, Marx's work is often a critical commentary on the works of other writers, even when specific books are not mentioned. Some commentators lose sight of this and give a misleading impression; others misunderstand the character of the writings which Marx took as objects of criticism.

By taking a work seriously I mean obtaining a clear grasp of the problems under consideration (no matter how mistaken or confused they are on present-day standards) and a clear understanding of the terms employed (their exact definitions). Marx's work is not only vast but oftentimes intricately argued. Many commentators seem never to have read a whole paragraph, let alone a complete argument stretching across several printed pages. Moreover, where a precise account of Marx's views is required, nearly all English translations have proved unreliable.

Today Marx's critique of political economy seems a curiously theory-bound work: it is largely a criticism of theory, using theoretical arguments. The statistical data available to modern economists was obviously not at Marx's disposal, nor could he have gathered much information single-handed. However, he was, for example, interested in the history of prices, and it is not at all impossible that the later sections of his critique were to contain theoretical material for which 'economic fact' was to serve as the 'test'.¹ But it is difficult to know exactly what he envisaged as economic fact. In his work he relies more on general arguments from experience and from logical science to establish his case than on

1. These are Marx's own terms; see above, p. 130

what we recognize as economic data. These arguments now seem too general, the logic arbitrary, and the theory too abstract to support his views on capitalist society without additional confirmation from economic practice. From what Marx has left us we can conclude that he attached more importance to arguments from first principles (such as the labour theory of value) than we would today. His preference for a single-factor explanation for changes in the exchange-ratios of commodities is suspect as well. Why should these changes be traceable to a single cause? His argument by elimination does not stand up. Thus in his work Marx displays an overriding interest in the most logically consistent and economical explanations, while leaving unresolved the question of the exact compatibility of his theoretical deductions with the world of economic practice.

If someone were to undertake a logical analysis of present-day economic concepts as they appear in actual practice and in works of economic theory, he would probably not expect to be able to draw such sweeping conclusions about even the logical structure of capitalist economic practice, and certainly not about the future of 'capitalist society'. Nevertheless some studies along these lines are undoubtedly interesting, and at least one of Marx's theoretical achievements bears study: the logical and historical thoroughness of his conceptual accounts. A modern analyst might or might not want to emulate the specific methods used by Marx: traditional distinctions (like quality and quantity), as well as a version of the Hegelian dialectic (grasping the positive in the negative, and vice versa) and other Hegelian distinctions. These distinctions can, I think, be restated, or at least explained in

ordinary English. There are, moreover, efforts in Marx's work to distinguish in a careful, and thoroughly historical way what is generally true about social phenomena from what is true about them in specific eras or cases, to use the method of abstraction without introducing errors into analysis, and to examine the historical preconditions and logical presuppositions of social phenomena without misrepresenting the social process as a whole.¹

Marx was not of the opinion that the language of social theory is unimportant,² or that a scientific account must exclude the language of value judgements. He claimed to distinguish fact from opinion, and he excoriated those who, in his view, confused the two, but the idea that an account of a social fact should, through some linguistic alchemy, be politically or morally neutral would have struck him as perverse.

I think it misleading to suggest that Marx had his own method which can be discovered and then put to use by others.³ Marx uses various methods of conceptual analysis, and other methods, such as those of mathematics, but the notion of a peculiarly Marxian method is naïve. Though the conjunction of methods used by Marx, and indeed the nature and purpose of his critique of political economy

1. On Marx's so-called logical and historical methods, see Zelený (1969), 103-9. Zelený argues, correctly, that Marx's conceptual investigations (and his results when presented) were to take history into account, that is, they were not to contradict historical fact, nor were they to be in any way ahistorical. Tracing the actual historical development of economic practices was, as Zelený contends, a separate project.

2. For a discussion that supports this view on political theory, see Sheldon Wolin, 'Political Theory as a Vocation', American Political Science Review, lxxiii (Menasha, Wisconsin, 1969). 1073-82.

3. See, for example, Bertell Ollman, 'Marxism and Political Science', Politics and Society, iii (New York, 1973). 495-510; see also the 'Comment' by Isaac Balbus, pp. 511-15.

are to be found in no one else's work, I would term this conjunction of methods eclectic, rather than 'new'.¹

For its time, Marx's work was scientific; in so far as it shows his suspicion of unsupported opinions and assertions, and his ruthlessly deductive logic, it still is. But in so far as it sacrifices truth for theoretical economy and consistency, his work is less impressive as social science. Marx's critique is not an exercise in model building as such, since he aimed to uncover a great many significant truths about capitalist society by means of an analysis of the social theory which that society had produced. Nonetheless, we are left, in Capital, with something like a model: Marx's account is abstract and reductionist, as models usually are. Here we have a problem: if Marx's work in Capital, i, can be read as a model -- or the beginnings of a model -- of capitalist, commodity-producing society, why does he assume that commodities are exchanged on average at their values, when, having already drafted Capital, iii, he knew that they were not? Though Marx thought that there had existed simple commodity-producing societies in which exchange-ratios corresponded on average to the 'law of value',² the historical elucidation of the law offered by Engels and by Mandel³ is not strictly to the point. When Marx claims a theoretical (as opposed to historical) priority for the law of

1. Zelený (1969), 94.

2. Marx wrote (in English): 'As a general law we may, therefore, set it down that: --

The values of commodities are directly as the times of labour employed in their production, and are inversely as the productive powers of the labour employed.' (VPP 50.)

In this statement of proportionality, the possibility of a strict equality is, of course, implied; see, for example, CAP i. 176.

3. For Engels's view, see CAP iii. 891-907. See also Ernest Mandel, Marxist Economic Theory, i, trans. Brian Pearce (London, 1968), passim.

value, he is, I think, claiming that the concepts -- and the social reality -- of the 'commodity' and 'value' cannot be correctly understood, unless they are explained in terms of the exchange of equal amounts of simple abstract labour. Thus the law of value is, for Marx, a principle presupposed by the very conception of commodity exchange.

This is not an unusual type of claim. It might be argued that our concept of a legal right cannot be understood properly without some reference to 'equality', such as equal entitlement. An elucidation of what we mean by a legal right which made no mention of equality would certainly be unusual. As I have noted, Marx seems to have proceeded (in print) from his logical analysis of the commodity and its value to the foregone conclusion that the law of value is the secret behind the crashes and crises of capitalist society: that is, that changes in the labour-time required for the production of a commodity cause abrupt shifts in exchange-ratios, and other dysfunctional phenomena. But he does not provide a statistical demonstration that his thesis is correct, nor does he offer much hope for such a demonstration, since he implies in the Grundrisse that average labour is not measurable as such, and never suggests otherwise in Capital about simple abstract labour. Economists who argue that Marx's theory is correct (or substantially correct) invariably make assumptions about the measurability of labour that Marx never made, and, it seems, rejected.

Marx's work in Capital was to have included further socio-economic relations, and the eventual model was, presumably, to have fit the surface phenomena of capitalist society, while at the same time it was to have followed logically from the opening pages of

Capital, i. If he had any serious doubts about whether such a finished model could be produced, and about its 'fit' with capitalist economic life, he did not record them. Rather he seems to have been more interested in truths about the logical structure of capitalist society -- truths about the commodity, value, and labour -- from which the inescapable future of capitalist society could be read. Today we are much more skeptical than Marx of conclusions about social behaviour that are supposed to follow from the definitions of concepts, whereas he tended to see the capitalist class, for example, as fatally constrained by certain contradictory presuppositions. In the Grundrisse he mentions only a passing skepticism about such logically derived conclusions.

Political theory since Marx, and no doubt in large measure because of him, is thought to require (or of necessity to presuppose) a theory of society, or of the structure of a particular society. Theory about politics (what it is and should be), and, similarly, theory about political institutions and political behaviour in general, are thought incomplete unless some social context is provided: an account of what the people under consideration are like, what they are doing, what they are trying to do. The critique of political economy, which was to present the anatomy of bourgeois society, functions in this way for Marx's political theory, in so far as he offers generalizations about politics and political history, or in so far as such views can be deduced from his comments on particular political situations and events. One of his weaknesses as a political theorist is that the social anatomy is far more developed than the political theory. Indeed it is difficult to imagine that he would ever have sat down

to write such a work, even though he said at various times that he would, since he argued that revolutionary changes in social life are to be explained in the first instance from facts about economic life. Against this suggestion it can be stated that Marx never confined himself to what he thought was of revolutionary significance, but maintained an active interest in other areas, including emigré politics and the most academic sort of political theory.

Some of the ideas and methods of Hegel and of other philosophers that interested Marx can be identified in his work with considerable precision. It can also be determined in what senses he accepted these ideas and methods, and in what ways they were adapted to suit his purposes. I have stressed Marx's independence of characteristically Hegelian logic in certain instances, and his use of distinctions and methods from what is usually termed traditional logic. My point is primarily an interpretive one about Marx, rather than a substantive claim about the history of logic: not all that is obscure and old-fashioned in the abstract parts of Marx's work need be traced to a characteristically Hegelian logic, or even to Hegel's Logic itself. In certain arguments there is nothing particularly Hegelian in Marx's treatment of such distinctions as form/substance, abstract/concrete, quality/quantity, or in his use of the reductio and argument by elimination. Marx also makes explicit references, for example, to Aristotle's works, without taking up the Hegelian critique. There are great difficulties of interpretation if Hegel is taken as the key to Marx's work, even in the Grundrisse.

It might be possible to deduce a Marxian logic from his work on political economy and other subjects, since his views on many

questions in logic and, for example, epistemology are invoked or implied, but I do not think that this study would produce anything very surprising, or indeed, anything more interesting than the specific claims about which he was explicit. Moreover, it could easily mislead, if it were implied that his views on, for instance, value or labour followed directly from some general view of the world or of social reality: say, that everything is contradictory, or that everything is related to everything else. Marx's arguments -- to their credit -- do not proceed in that way, as the first chapter of Capital, for example, makes very plain indeed.¹

Marx's work on the commodity is not to be dismissed as merely economic, that is, extraneous to his political and social thought, nor is it the result of any gulf between the early and later Marx. I have stressed the continuity in his critical work on the categories of political economy from 1844 to 1880, while discussing continuity and innovation in his methods. Though the early work on alienation is presupposed by Capital, and though it reappears there with greater specificity and theoretical sophistication, Marx's critical re-presentation of political economy was to have stood without reference to the early manuscripts. Reading the early works into Capital, however interesting as an exercise, is no substitute for a critical examination of Marx's later work on its own terms. A study of Marx's methodology is of considerable use in interpreting his most intricate arguments, and only then can the strongest possible criticisms be formulated.

1. See, for example, Ollman (1971), 5.

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Primary Sources

A. Works by Karl Marx

- i. Letters
- ii. Selections
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B. Works by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

- i. Letters
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