

2: THE YOUNG AND THE OLD MARX

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

In the old European social democratic parties, Karl Marx was honored as a great economist, as the writer of *Das Kapital*, a book intended to prove the inevitable decline of the capitalistic system with scientific rigor. In the perspective of Lenin's interpretation of Marxism and the activities of the Communist International, Marx appeared to be first of all a political thinker who taught the working class to create its own organization as a basis for the seizure of political power. Under this perspective, the "Critique of the Gotha Programme" was praised as one of Marx's most important contributions. However in the development of the Communist *Weltanschauung* of the Socialist and of Communist parties, Friedrich Engels and even Joseph Dietzgen were far more significant and influential than Marx himself.

In part this view results because the young Marx, that is, Marx the philosopher, was almost unknown and absolutely neglected until the publications of Karl Korsch and Georg Lukács in 1923. The early writings of Marx, known to some experts, were held to be brilliant but not genuinely Marxist, and as such they were at best believed to be significant for our evaluation of the genesis, not for the understanding, of Marx's mature works. In this respect, the words with which Mehring in his 1918 biography of Marx ended the chapter on his early writings are characteristic of the then prevailing appreciation of the young Marx:

Thus in shadowy contours we observe an outline of socialist society beginning to form. In the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, Marx is still ploughing the philosophic field, but in the furrows turned over by his critical ploughshare the first shoots of the materialist conception of history began to sprout, and under the warm sun of French civilization they soon began to flower.¹

¹ Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx, The Story of His Life*, Ann Arbor 1962, p. 73.

Consequently the philosophical writings of Marx were understood as the first steps toward a scientific method of historical materialism that obviously was not considered to be a philosophy, and thus Marx's early writings were inevitably considered "immature" whereas even the publications of a socialist as theoretically feeble as Kautsky were taken to be far-reaching applications of the supposedly scientific method inaugurated by Marx.

Karl Korsch and Georg Lukács had grown up in an entirely different intellectual climate. They not only knew the neo-Kantian theory of knowledge but also Hegel's philosophy; moreover Lukács was familiar with the problems of the differentiation between the natural sciences on the one side and the humanities and the social sciences on the other through his early contacts with such outstanding representatives of neo-Kantianism as Emil Lask and Max Weber. The logic of inquiry within these disciplines could no longer be conceived of as a universally applicable theory, and consequently difference between causal and/or functional analysis on the one hand and the interpretation of cultural phenomena in their complete totality (*Sinnverstehen*) on the other was, from now on, held to be fundamental. Wilhelm Dilthey, no less than Max Weber, belonged to the great inspiring masters. Consequently Lukács and Korsch, illuminated by the ideas of this most recent epoch of the history of German philosophy and with the intention of helping the revolutionary consciousness to an adequate and deeper understanding of its own contemporary status, went back to Hegel and the young Marx although they did and could not know all early writings of Marx of that time.

The reproaches against Lukács and Korsch from the side of the social democratic and Communist orthodox writers were raised as a defense. Not only was the older interpretations of Marx's theory as an economic theory threatened, so also was a general method of historical investigation. Lukács and Korsch insinuated that Marx had cast the problems of the bourgeois philosophy into a more adequate mould with deeper understanding than could have been achieved by the bourgeois philosophers themselves and on a new basis which definitely opened a way for final solution. To the ideologues of the social democratic and Communist parties, it still appeared necessary to emphasize the radical difference between the bourgeois and the proletarian revolution, on the one hand, and the two *Weltanschauungen*, on the other hand. Lukács, and later on Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin,

Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno even thought that to stress the continuity of the bourgeois and the revolutionary movements was most important because of the fact that the German and Italian bourgeoisie were in the age of fascism about to betray the ideals of their own past. They endeavored to show to the bourgeois intellectuals the gulf between the liberal principles and humanitarian aspirations of the early bourgeoisie and the meaning and scope of the modern barbarianism which grew out, as they thought, of the antagonism of contemporary capitalist society and led to fascism.

Both the dangers of fascism and the reappraisal of Hegel's philosophy led to a new interpretation of Marx's early writings. Humanism, a genuine constituent of Marx's early works, could no longer be taken for granted. It was negated in practice and disavowed in theory by the fascist movements as well as Stalinism. Thus the time was obviously ripe to win the young Marx as an ally in the fight against these forms of rising barbarism.

This in turn necessitated reappraisal of Hegel's philosophy. Therefore the authors just mentioned set out to fight against the myth of Hegel as the Prussian state philosopher. They took up an issue with which Marx and Engels had already dealt but which had again become accentuated by the mystification of Hegel in works like those of Kuno Fischer and other authors of imperial Germany.

While the representatives of positivist neoliberalism denounced Hegel (and with him Rousseau and other modern philosophers of democracy), these authors emphasized the perspicacity with which Hegel had anticipated the pitfalls and inconsistencies of the liberal society and its elementary dynamics and with which he already had seen through the liberal formulation of the rights of man.

The interpretation of Marx's early writings, of course, depended to a great extent on the evaluation of the bourgeois philosophical tradition. Whereas Lukács and Korsch interpreted Marx's intentions as an attempt to solve by a radical theory and revolutionary *praxis* the problems with which the bourgeois philosophy could not come to grips, Marx was, according to the doctrines of Social Democrats and Communists, the founder of a scientific proletarian *Weltanschauung* that they contrasted emphatically with the *Weltanschauung* of the bourgeoisie. Because both political movements, Social Democracy and Communism, intended to create their own *Weltanschauung*—each of course with a specific character—they had to stress the difference

between Hegel and the young Marx on the one hand and the old Marx on the other; and consequently, both had to de-emphasize Marx's early writings. To the ideologues of Stalinism, the discussion of and the references to the young Marx were inexpedient because Marx in his early writings spoke of the proletarian revolution and socialism as a means for the realization of a genuinely human society and not as absolute and dogmatic standards. The new Soviet society, labeled socialist by its own ideologues, was threatened to be exposed to criticism based on the characteristics Marx attributed to a truly "human society." This conception obviously and definitely stood, among other things, in sharp contrast to the conception of the state and law as it was propagated by the Stalinist orthodox writers as by many others.

In the light of the motives I have just mentioned, which functioned as an impediment to the incorporation of the young Marx into the theories and doctrines of the labor movement, the rather late and first publication of the important parts of his early writings, above all the *Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts* and the *German Ideology* (both first published in 1932), was less relevant. One should not forget that some of the early writings, like Marx's contribution to the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* were previously known and that leading social democrats were well informed about Marx's literary bequest without pressing for publication. Not until recently were there signs of a reappraisal of the young Marx in the "socialist" states—a reappraisal which was triggered, however, as Adam Schaff once remarked by the intensive research and studies of Western scholars. Moreover it seems to me that the achieved status of the Soviet society and the perspectives of as well as the planning for a transition to a "real" Communist society nowadays also favor a frank confrontation with the young Marx. The disparity between contemporary socialist states and Marx's conception of a real human society can be more easily described today as the distance between the socialist phase and the terminal Communist stage of the transition. This now sounds more credible than at an early stage of the movement originated by Marx; at that time this transition was still so far removed in time that the distance between socialism and Communism would have been considered only as a contrast.

Undoubtedly we should also consider the fact that the misery in which the working class had to live for decades in capitalist societies

was, by and large, done away with by the development of modern techniques and by the political and social interventions of the state, so that the more subtle and more critical arguments of the young Marx were welcomed in those countries as an enrichment to the polemical arsenal of the Communist parties.

II. THE MEANING OF MARX'S EARLY WRITINGS FOR AN INTERPRETATION OF THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

The historical distance which separates the present from the political, social and economic problems characteristic of Marx's time has grown so great that we are at least able to come to grips with his critical theory as a whole. I do not think that this is due to its obsolescence or outdatedness. Rather I believe that Marx's theory was worn out by the various kinds of interpretation which were placed on parts, rather than on the whole, of his theoretical framework. Consequently it seems to me that, as a consequence, the appreciation of the whole of Marx's writings was best and most successfully provided in those cases where individual critical scholars—without a close party affiliation and, therefore, without any total allegiance to an ideological body of doctrine—turned to Marx. The insight, by the way, that independence from organization and parties is an indispensable precondition for any genuinely scientific work was reiterated many times by Engels, for example, in a letter to August Bebel (April 1, 1891) where he wrote: "You, within the party, need the socialist science and this science cannot prosper without liberty."

The grasping of the meaning of Marx's theory as a whole with all of its complexities and problems has been impeded, among other things, by the fact that his method was reduced to "historical materialism" and that historical materialism was conceived of as a particular case of the application of so-called "dialectical materialism." The mere inclusion of Marx's critical theory into a comprehensive and allegedly scientific *Weltanschauung* made an adequate understanding of all its complexities impossible. Isolated elements of Marx's theory were integrated into the system of a supposedly global materialistic *Weltanschauung* at the very time that Marxist intellectuals were integrated into a hierarchically structured party machine which became more

petrified the further the time of revolutionary transition was left behind and the more the movement changed into a new system of domination. Adam Schaff vaguely alluded to these contingencies when he wrote that the epoch of the personality cult had prevented many intellectuals from adequately appreciating Marx's early writings.

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After these introductory remarks, let me get down to the substance of the problem and allow me to first state a thesis which I shall try to prove during the remainder of my paper. As in the works of most great thinkers, one unique and central issue can be traced through the whole of Marx's work, i.e., in his scientific investigations and his instructions for praxis, one fundamental problem was uppermost during all his lifetime. The central problem is the question: *how did it happen that the bourgeois revolution did not achieve its proclaimed aims, and why, despite formally legalized freedoms, individuals came, in the course of the division of labor and modern market mechanism, to be dominated by social processes which prevailed behind their backs and prevented everybody from achieving a status of humanity which could have been realized in the light of the wealth of the society that already existed?*

Marx's central and most important insight was that this new dependence was not the consequence of the bad intentions of individuals or of a particular social group, but rather the inevitable implication of a specific socioeconomic structure. More specifically his task consisted, first, in the identification of a social class, which more than any other had to be interested in the transformation of this economic structure; secondly, in furnishing an irrefutable proof that the dynamics of the contemporary society made this transformation increasingly easier even if one supposed that the minorities possessing interests in the perpetuation of the prevailing order would resist any reorganization of society. The smaller the privileged class, the greater is its *interest in the concealment of the real social conditions* and the less valid is the "bourgeois economics" which, in its "heroic" early phase, had even once advanced a rudimentary critique of political economy on which Marx could build up his own theory.

With these remarks I am trying to indicate the possibility of an interpretation that encompasses Marx's writings as a whole; up to this time the inherent unity of his work has not been proved. I intend to

do this by discussing the critical categories that Marx developed in the *Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts* and in his notebook of the midforties and by showing that these categories are still the basis of the critique of political economy in *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie* (1857–1858) as well as in *Das Kapital* (1867) and were never disavowed by the old Marx.

In other words I intend to show that an interpretation of the early writings not only helps us to recognize the motives which led Marx to write a critique of political economy (*Das Kapital*) but also, in addition, that the critique of political economy implicitly and, in part, even explicitly, still contains that same critique of alienation and reification which was the very topic of his early writings.

A. ALIENATION AND REIFICATION IN THE WORKS OF 1844

The manuscripts of 1844 had, by and large, been planned as a critique of political economy. In his introduction Marx wrote that he wanted to publish successively brochures containing his critiques of law, ethics, politics and so forth and that he intended finally to approach the whole subject once again in a separate work.²

The starting point in this first attempt at a critique of political economy was the critical study of the "political economy" to which Marx was led mainly by Engels' "Outlines." As for the method to be used, Marx referred here (as in the introduction to his "Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right") to Ludwig Feuerbach; moreover an explicit reference to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* evidences an influence which can be traced even to the point of the manuscripts' whole literal formulations.

"Critique of political economy" at this time and later always meant first a critique of the capitalist economy accepted as absolutely rational by bourgeois economists and secondly, a critique of the corresponding theoretical self-consciousness. In Marx's mind, this critique did not first of all and exclusively lead to a moral condemnation in the name of some absolute ethical norms. Rather it was intended as proof of the deficiencies of the capitalist and all preceding modes of production, measured against and based on the standards of a truly human society, which had now objectively become possible because of the

² MEGA, I, 3, 33; cf. Karl Marx, *Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts*, trans. by M. Milligan, Moscow 1961, p. 15.

scientific and technological knowledge and wealth that the most developed nations had secured. Marx praised the historical achievements of capitalism for its superiority over all preceding modes of production and to a corresponding extent criticized its limitations, the obstruction of further human progress.

The early writings stress the limitations, the repressions, the inhumanity and the shortcomings of capitalism much more than any appreciation of its achievements, it is true. But it would be completely wrong to insinuate that in 1844 Marx radically and a-historically condemned capitalism. As the main deficiency of the theoretical self-consciousness of the bourgeoisie Marx considered its inability to grasp that capitalism was a phenomenon that had grown out of history and, consequently, was a relative and surmountable mode of production.

Political economy starts from the fact of private property but it does not explain it to us. It conceives the *material* process of private property in abstract and general terms . . . which then, serve it as laws. It does not *comprehend* these laws. . . .³

That is to say, the bourgeois political economy did not understand that these allegedly *natural* laws grew out of specific social relations of both production and property and that these "laws" only reflect human relationships which constituted themselves as quasi-objective and independent patterns, *vis á vis* and opposite to the interacting individuals.

In the manuscripts of 1844 Marx searched "for the essential connection between private property, avarice, the separation of labour, capital and landed property, exchange and competition, value and the devaluation of man, i.e., *between this whole alienation and the money-system.*"⁴ In this context, "money economy" stands as a metaphor for capitalism in which products (and even individuals) are degraded to the category of pure commodities, the value of which is totally distinct and finds its most complete expression in money (and its more and more abstract forms to the very credit system). As you may remember, Marx begins his discussion with the famous description of alienated labor, and he proceeds in four steps; moreover he refers to the same phenomena under various perspectives.

³ MEGA, I, 3, 81; cf. trans., p. 67.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 82; cf. trans., p. 68.

1. *The alienation of the laborer from the product of his activities* leads to a consolidation of the product as an independent power; as a result this means that:

The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces and the more his production increases in power and range. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more goods he creates. The devaluation of the human world increases in direct relation with the increase in value of the world of things.⁵

Hegel's conception of the humanization of man through a creative transformation of nature by work stands behind this description. Unlike the animal, man must become what he can be through labor. As an entity with only potential faculties, he can only come to self-consciousness and to a conscious relationship with all other men through an objectification of his powers. But this process, which is the more evident the more perfect man's domination over nature becomes, leads to alienation as soon as the objects created by man stand "alien and hostile," or in opposition to its creators and as soon as the objects are subject to their own patterns of behavior and "coldly" disregard the hopes, wishes and aspirations of the individuals.

2. The alienation of the worker from his product, from the perspective of the working class, appears as an *alienation of the productive and creative activity itself*. Alienated labor cannot be understood as a proper articulation of one's faculties but as forced labor conceived simply as a means for sheer subsistence. Labor, therefore, does not live up to Marx's requirements; it is not "the satisfaction [of a genuine human] need but only a means to satisfy needs external to it [namely labor]." Since labor is not a pleasurable activity but rather one of self-sacrifice and "self-castigation," all human behavior consequently becomes perverted.⁶

At this point Marx's arguments become moral and normative, but he nevertheless considers the standards of his critical appreciation as part of a *historical analysis* and as the *expression of the anticipation of future possibilities*, definitely not as a *Wesensschau* of allegedly eternal and moral norms.

From all this, it can be seen that man (the worker) feels himself to be freely active only in his animal functions—eating, drinking and

⁵ *Ibid.*, 83; cf. trans., p. 69.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 86; cf. trans., p. 72.

procreating, or at most also in his dwelling and personal adornment—while in his human functions he is reduced to an animal. The animal becomes human and the human becomes animal. Eating, drinking and procreating are, of course, also genuinely human functions. But, considered in abstraction from the sphere of all other human activity and turned into final and sole ends, they are animal.⁷

If a man's productive activities are nothing other than forced labor necessary for subsistence and for that reason external to him, his interests shift entirely to those animal functions (mentioned by Marx); or as we would rather say today, all of his aspirations become absorbed in his wish for further consumption, made possible and imposed on him by modern economy. Moreover this consumption has become more senseless in the same degree that his productive work has become more spiritless.

3. As alienation from his productive activity effected through indirect coercion, or other-directedness, and not on his own initiative and responsibility, the worker becomes *alienated from his species*. To construe man's animal functions as his proper ones means a loss of humanity itself. "Free conscious activity is the species-character of human beings," and "productive life is species-life."⁸ Only man can fail to realize his real potentialities. His privileged status vis à vis the animal, which consists in his faculty to turn external nature into his "inorganic body," is converted into a serious disadvantage, because through alienation he is deprived of this "inorganic body."

4. The immediate consequence of this alienation of the worker from his species-life (and of humanity) means the "*alienation of man from other men*" which can most impressively be inferred from the relation between the sexes.

This broad description of alienation can hardly be found in the later works of Marx. But we can assume that he did not question it later and that it is consonant with the brief hints in the *Grundrisse* (1857–1858) and in *Das Kapital* (1867). In contrast to these later works, Marx in 1844 had only a vague idea about the abolition of alienation; in any case he did not then relate the revolutionary *praxis* to the self-antagonism of the capitalistic mode of production as directly as he did in later works. In 1844 his argumentation was as follows: the alienated relation to the labor-product mediately produces the power

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 88; cf. trans., p. 75.

of one person over others, just as religious alienation produces the power of a heavenly being over its believers. Private property no longer appears as the basis, but as the product and consequence of alienated labor, "just as the gods originally were not the source but the effect of the illusion of man"⁹ only much later on this relation becomes an interrelation.

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Marx believed that the solution to the problem could be found by putting the question in a different way. No longer did he seek the origin of private property but rather "the relation of *alienated labor* to the evolution of humanity":

If one speaks of *private property*, one thinks of dealing with something outside man. Speaking of *labour*, one immediately deals with man. To state the problem in this way includes its solution.¹⁰

The abolition of an alienated society can only be carried out by the workers, for the "non-worker" it appears only as a state (*Zustand*) of alienation, whereas by the worker himself it is experienced as an "activity [*Tätigkeit*] of alienation."¹¹ By his alienated mode of production, the worker simultaneously produces himself and his opposite; he becomes a commodity, but as a "self-conscious and self-active commodity"¹² he obtains the basis for abolishing the entire world of commodities. Marx interprets this insight (following Engels) as a consequence of the evolution of economic theories from mercantilism to the physiocrats and the bourgeois political economy to the final socialist criticism. This theoretical development runs parallel to the development of civil society. By 1844 Marx knew that the victory of capitalism over all precapitalistic modes of production was a precondition for the abolition of all alienation.

Marx separated the theories of the *Aufhebung* of alienated society into two or three logically successive forms: into a first form of Communism, which meant only the generalization of private property into Communist property. This leads to *crude Communism*. There

⁹ *Ibid.*, 92; cf. trans., p. 80.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 93; cf. trans., p. 82.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 94; cf. trans., p. 80.

¹² *Ibid.*, 98; cf. trans., p. 85.

is no connection between this way of abolishing private property and the real appropriation of alienated reality. On the contrary all people would be reduced, according to this notion, to the unnatural simplicity of poor people without needs and wants. "Community [in this case] is only a community of labor and equality of salary paid out by the Communist capital, the community as the universal capitalist."¹³ The obvious indication of this kind of brute Communism which Marx understood as a primitive generalization of private property is the *Weibergemeinschaft*, the community of women. This Communism is inhuman, not because it destroys capitalism but because it makes capitalism broader, more radical and more absolute. *It does not transcend capitalistic society but even lags behind some of the more progressive aspects of private property.* Nevertheless Marx thought at this time that at least from the theoretical point of view this kind of Communism was a stage through which one necessarily had to pass.

The second type of Communism, Marx considered, is of a political nature, democratic or despotic. It too remains imperfect and "affected by private property, i.e., the alienation of man."

In its third form alone, "Communism means the positive transcendence of private property and consequently, a *genuine appropriation of the human essence by and for man.*" By this Marx meant a society in which all people can freely employ all their manifold and differentiated faculties in order to be able to appropriate their products in the free and many-sided way of "total men." In it, the mere possession of goods no longer prohibits the many-sided and more differentiated forms of appropriating humanized nature. The refined eye, ear and emotions of all are now able to appropriate the past and present achievements of the human creativity.¹⁴

A complete description of this unalienated society was furnished by Marx in his *Exzerpthefte*, the notebooks written during this period, where he tried to show how in such a society the productive activities of free individuals are correlated, and how these activities reflect the human species, and not an alien, objectified and reified world. In it, there would be no more greed, competition, profit-making, cheating, fraud and exploitation; rather all relationships would be

¹³ *Ibid.*, 112; cf. trans., p. 100.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 114 ff.; cf. trans., p. 102 ff.

in harmony, and an atmosphere of love would be initiated by free consciousness so that all of man's activities would enrich man.¹⁵

B. THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION AND REIFICATION AS ELABORATED IN THE "GRUNDRISSE DER KRITIK DER POLITISCHEN ÖKONOMIE" (1857-1858)

Since the publication of the *Grundrisse*,¹⁶ which were edited in Moscow in 1939 and 1941, it is easier than before to prove the continuity of Marx's thought. These manuscripts date back to the time when Marx prepared the *Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, published in June, 1859, and of which the first volume of *Das Kapital* is but an enlarged and revised version. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx pondered problems and topics he had dealt with in his early writings and made use of the results of his more recent economic studies.

The historical process which led to an extreme alienation of individuals from their social relationships is described here in a more precise way than in 1844. In the money system, the intercourse of individuals with that entire society of which they are a part became completely objectified. Money has become an alien power to them. The individual "carries his social power and his relationship to society in his pocket." Thus "the activity and the product of activity is the exchange-value, i.e., a universal in which all individuality and particularity is negated and extinguished."¹⁷ The difference between modern and precapitalistic societies is to be found in the fact that the social character of their productive activity, the participation of the individual in the social production process and the social character of the product today appear alien and contradictory to individuals. On the surface, no relations of personal dependency exist; rather all individuals appear as free; but in reality, everybody is totally subject to alien objective laws (*fremde Sachgesetzlichkeit*) that result from blind social and economic processes. More than ever before, Marx emphasizes, however, at the same time the progressive and necessary character of these social relationships. He contrasts them to the restricted and limited relationships in previous modes of society (for example,

¹⁵ MEGA, I, 3, 544 ff.

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (Rohentwurf)*, Berlin 1953.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

to the patriarchal modes of antiquity and the Middle Ages). He welcomes the dissolution of small-group subsistence economies and the development of the worldwide division of labor and the successive exchange of goods in the market as processes through which productivity is enlarged.

The exchange as mediated through exchange value and money presupposes mutually dependent producers and simultaneously the absolute isolation of their private interests and a division of social labour, the unity and mutual complementarity of which must exist as a quasi-natural relation outside the individuals and independently of them. The pressure upon each other of general demand and supply mediates the connection of mutually indifferent individuals.¹⁸

This corresponds very closely to the description of the systems of wants and needs and of the “*Not- und Verstandesstaat*” depicted by Hegel, which allegedly constitutes itself—without the knowledge and will of the individuals—through Adam Smith’s “invisible hand.” Marx blamed the indifference of people for each other and the impossibility of facing up to their relationship to society; but he clearly saw that the new mode of production was superior to all previous ones and that it simultaneously tended to destroy all genuine social relations, that it isolated the producers (and consumers) and that despite its immense wealth it impoverished people in both literal and figurative senses, i.e., that the increasing specialization of skills and abilities prevented the individual from realizing all of his powers.

Everybody must convert his product (his activity) into an exchange value, into “money,” because only in this, and in no other form, is to be found social power and indispensable power over others. From this fact one realizes that “people produce only for society and in society” and that on the other hand their production is not immediately social and not associatively organized. This means that everybody has to sell his product in order that he may take it over in the form of money as an objectification of the social character of his own production. In money, the individual producer acquires, though in alienated form, a part of social productivity; in money he appropriates in alienated form, without knowing it, part of the community. In as much as the division of labor extends over the whole world and leads to a world market (with a world-wide currency), the intercourse

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

of individuals becomes universal. But at the same time, as a result of these interrelations, the dependence of individuals becomes more and more radical; thus, Marx could see in this status the transitory conditions leading to a new form of society and economy.¹⁹

Moreover we must remember that Marx launched his polemics against any romantic glorification of "natural" precapitalistic relations with their local, functional, social and personal restrictions. *He definitely preferred the world-wide interconnections* of the participants of the capitalist world market. But Marx considered them as transitory and as a necessary precondition to the future subordination of all social relations to the control of associatively organized producers, because he did not conceive any status as something occurring naturally, but as a product of historical praxis. Any status had been hitherto achieved in history without being consciously sought for. The present situation constitutes the precondition of a future society in which man, as a whole being, will be a real possibility. Man will no longer be a product of nature but a product of history. In a word, *this means that the total emancipation of man presupposes his total alienation.*

Armed with this historical insight, Marx thought it equally ridiculous to long for the "original plenitude" of primitive social relations or to hold fast to the human emptiness that marks the present. However his essential point was that the *bourgeois consciousness could not overcome the undialectical contrast of romantic aspirations and cynical acceptance of both a rich and an impoverished present.*²⁰ These contrasts comprise its being, and will, consequently, remain with it to its end.

However progress toward a universal capitalistic mode of production does not appear only as a necessary precondition for the universal promotion of productive capacities; rather it leads to the final point where all personal relations are broken and subjected to the universal basis of new social interrelationships. As soon as most individuals are dominated by "material conditions" or by socially objectified interrelations, and not by other individuals, then the task for mankind is obvious: *to bring these interrelations under mankind's common control and so to break through the course of history, where until now*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80 ff.

power elites have been circulating without ever facing up to the root cause of dependence and repression. Surely, as Marx stresses, "individuals are now dominated by abstractions whereas they previously depended on each other," but these abstractions finally bring forth the preconditions on which also all previous modes of domination rested. Throughout history, the dependence of "slaves" on their "masters," has not resulted from the will of the dominating classes but can be explained only by the *primitive modes of production* and the necessities of those limited social conditions (which required specific organizations, as for instance, special military provisions). Whereas in previous stages of history the objective conditions appeared as personal, "in the modern world the personal relations are clearly seen as the pure expression of the modes of production and exchange." In the possibility of such an insight, Marx saw another important advantage of capitalist society.

As I have already intimated, Marx in the *Grundrisse* elaborated on the notion with which he first dealt in the *Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts*—the notion that "world history is nothing but the producing of man by man's work." More than in the early writings, the positive meaning of the capitalistic mode of production is stressed, but the lines of argumentation are by and large the same as before.

C. THE FETISH CHARACTER OF THE COMMODITIES AND THE CONCEPT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF ALIENATION IN DAS KAPITAL

In *Das Kapital*, capitalist society is conceived of as a dialectical totality in which antagonisms, since they tend to transcend present social conditions, are necessary. As with any totality, the parts reflect the whole and every part is governed by the same principles as the whole. What characterizes capitalistic society is the commodity character it attributes to everything. In the societies of Marx's time this process of converting all things into commodities had not yet come to an end, but Marx thought that he could foresee that the process would closely follow this model. The dialectical reconstruction of social entities, which is only possible in so far as societies are truly governed by dialectical processes, does not construct the whole from its parts but presupposes that the parts can only be understood as parts of the whole. This means that the explication cannot properly begin until the analysis has been brought to its end.

In the beginning of *Das Kapital* Marx deals with "the Commodity." Everyone in a capitalistic society is familiar with commodities, but Marx wants to understand them in their historical genesis and becoming and in their structure. In his study of the commodity character of products, his analyses from his early writings are taken for granted.

In the chapter mentioned, Marx analyzes commodity according to four steps: 1) the double character of the commodity is reflected upon; it represents use-value and value. As use-value, it possesses specific qualities; as a value, it has no quality but represents a mere quantity. 2) This character of the product is traced back to labor's own twin qualities, which arise with its division. On the one side, the workers produce particular work (*besondere Arbeit*); on the other, as a result of their general work (*allgemeine Arbeit*), they produce exchange-values. What Marx does is to probe backward from the fixed being to the activities from which it results. 3) Marx shows, historically, how the value-form had developed from the simple and accidental to the money-form until in the money economy the absolute split of use-value from exchange-value has become clearly evident. Now all products of human activities represent only money-equivalents and the general work of society is only able to recognize itself in reification. 4) Marx analyzes the fetish-character of the commodity and its mysteries.

The mystery of the form of commodity consists in the fact that for individuals it reflects the social character of their own work, as objective qualities of the products of labor themselves, as social natural qualities of these things (*gesellschaftliche Natureigenschaften*) and, consequently, that it mirrors the social relations of the producers to the total work as a social relationship among objects existing outside them.²¹

The commodity character of a product of human activity consists in the phenomenon that this product possesses a value which can be abstractly expressed in money and therefore becomes interchangeable with other products. This quality of exchange and interchangeability appears as a quality of the object itself, a quality which is due to its being a part of the general (world) market, to the laws of which this commodity is subject. In reality, however, these reified relations of things reflect social relations of the producers and the owners of the

²¹ MEW, XXIII, 86; cf. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Moscow 1954 ff., vol. I, p. 72.

means of production. "It is only the determinate social relation of individuals which takes the chimerical shape of a relation of objects."²² This phenomenon, that an entity resulting from the activities of individuals comes to dominate their life, can only be analyzed according to the way Feuerbach saw the relationship between God and man.

To find an analogy, we have to take refuge in the nebulous sphere of the religious world. Here the products of our imagination appear as independent, intelligent and autonomous figures related to man. The same is true in the world of commodities with the products of man's work. This I call the *fetishism* which is attached to the labour-products as soon as they are produced as commodities and which is by consequence, inseparable from the production of commodities.²³

As soon as people relate themselves to their objects as to a fetish, they begin to attribute some qualities to this dead object which in reality stem from their own life, the power and impotence of their own social relations, for example. In other words, the magic power attributed to the fetish is only real in so far as belief in it makes possible the success of the tribe. But erroneously, this success is attributed to the fetish and not to the organized power of the tribe, just as the interchangeability of the commodity is believed due to the character of the products and not to the division of labor and the market mechanisms. There is a dearth of conscious organization of production in both cases. What Marx calls in this context *fetishism*, he described in his early writings as *alienation*.

Let me quote one more sentence: "Its own social movement possesses for them (the producers of commodities) the form of a movement of objects, which they are controlled by rather than controlling."²⁴ That the fetishism of commodities, i.e., the mysticism of the commodity world, is only the specific expression of the capitalist mode of production is proved by Marx in his examples of Robinson and of the medieval mode of production. In both of these cases, the measure of labor is regulated by the individual and social needs of specific use-values, i.e., the social character of production is presupposed, whereas in the commodity-producing society the social character of the production of independently producing private workers

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 89; cf. trans., p. 75.

is constituted in the process of circulation—and there only in alienated form. In the Middle Ages “the social conditions of individuals appeared in their works as their own personal conditions and were not concealed as the social conditions of objects.”²⁵ *The relations were transparent and not mystified.*

However as we have already seen in his manuscripts of 1857, Marx rejects any romantic glorification of these older modes of production. The commodity-producing society with its alienation is obviously necessary as one transitory stage which lays the material groundwork for a new society. In *Das Kapital* Marx compared this new society to an “association of free people” (a term which he borrowed from Max Stirner and which he mocked many times in other contexts).

In so far as such an association works with socialized means of production and the individuals consciously organize their individual powers to a social power . . . then all determinations of Robinson’s mode of production are reiterated . . . , but now socially, no longer individually.²⁶

The product of such an organized productive activity would immediately be social, and one part of it could remain social and be employed as means of production, whereas other parts could be distributed for the sake of individual consumption. Marx does not reflect in detail on the mode of distribution but considers it dependent on the level of the producers’ development. It might be organized along the socialist line of proportional distribution according to the amount of work performed by individuals or along communist lines according to genuine individual needs.

If one looks only at the chapter on the fetish character of commodity, one might believe that Marx expected the *Aufhebung* of alienation to be achieved solely through the common control of production based on the division of labor and that he no longer challenged the principle of the division of labor itself. One could insinuate that Marx considered it sufficient that the sum of all individual labor forces become one social labor force, a situation which could be consonant with maintenance of division of labor. But Marx unmistakably stresses the necessity to overcome the division of labor. His argument in chapter 13 of the first volume of *Das Kapital*—it is true—is based on the revolutionary character of technology and not on the individuals’

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 91; cf. trans., p. 77.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 92; cf. trans., p. 78.

needs to employ their own potentialities, but eventually it leads to the same conclusion as the early writings:

If change of special work is carried through rather like some overwhelming natural law, and with the blindly destructive effects of a natural law which finds obstacles everywhere, then large industry because of its catastrophes must make it a life and death matter to accept both the change of jobs and the greatest possible *individuality of the worker as a general social law of production, and to adapt the social conditions to the worker's normal realization*. It becomes a question of life and death to replace the monstrosity of a poor labour population—a reserve held for disposition to meet the varying exploitation needs of capital with the disposal of man for varied jobs; the partial individual (*Teilindividuum*), the bearer of a partial social function, by the *totally developed individual*, for whom many social functions constitute successive modes of activity.²⁷

The “total man,” whom Marx postulated in his early writings as a contrast-image to the impoverished one-sided, cripple individual who really existed, is here conceived as a necessity to which the capitalist mode of production itself is pushed. This is one of the many observations by which Marx showed himself far ahead of his time, for not until recently was there a widely shared opinion that modern modes of production require a most comprehensive training of the laborer to allow him to adapt himself to the ever-changing requirements of industrial production.

III. SOME FINAL REMARKS

Nobody would deny that the style and the ambiance did change in Marx's writings. There is indeed a difference between the sober explication in *Das Kapital* with its emphasis on theoretical vigor and empirical detail and the critical and moralistically sounding analyses of 1844. But there remains one *fundamental* topic which is the starting as well as the ending point: *the quest to transcend capitalist society toward a more human, free and satisfactory society*. There is no warrant for the conclusion that the old Marx buried the hopes of his youth and abandoned the fulfillment of his aims. His later writings can only be adequately understood in the light of his first writings. If later, the “how” of this transformation and its empirical chances of

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 511 ff.; cf. trans., p. 487. Our italics.

realization were stressed more strongly than the necessity of the "that" (of which Marx remained too deeply convinced to need stressing), this should not be mistaken for an escape into a general philosophy of history or an exclusive concentration on the analytical restructuring of the modes of the capitalist economy. His intentions, throughout his life, were directed towards a "critique of the political economy" and this means the practical critique of capitalist society as much as it does its theoretical conception in the doctrines of the bourgeois economists. Marx did not bring forth a new proletarian economic theory to stand beside the classical bourgeois theories. And the widespread notion of an "economic theory for the proletariat" sometimes sanctioned by Marx and Engels themselves, is, by and large, misleading.

In *Das Kapital* Marx's reflections centered around a critique of those alienated social relations he had already criticized in 1844. If Marx (and particularly Engels later on), were not always conscious of the continuity of this critical approach, this would not amount to a serious objection against my interpretation. *Das Kapital* remains a fragment, and being bound to the galley of his journalistic writings, plagued by illness and lack of genuine enthusiasm, overwhelmed by organizational duties, Marx was no longer able to ponder his work and treat it as a whole. His successors had already begun during his life time to pick out pieces of his theoretical reflections which they found expedient for their political and organizational aims. The story of the interpretation of his work was, as in all cases of great thinkers, a story of misinterpretations.

COMMENT

Marx W. Wartofsky

Fetscher's thesis is overwhelmingly correct: the old Marx is not a rejection nor even a revision of the young "moral" or "humanist" Marx. Nor does the later economic analysis abandon the dialectical character of the earlier writings. Rather, as Fetscher shows, the concepts of alienation and objectification which are central to the so-called "humanist" writings are central