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Marx's Critique of Bourgeois World

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by

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ABSTRACT

Marx's Critique of Bourgeois World

by

Sam Salour

This article is an attempt to clarify the meaning of 'critique' in Marx's *Capital: A critique of political economy*. I argue that critique does not mean criticism, nor does it simply refer to a detailed analysis of a text. Rather critique is Marx's distinctive method whereby social reality is explained by revealing social relations of domination that hide behind ideological abstractions. By tracing Marx's critique, from theory of alienation in 1848 to his value theory in 1867, I show that Marx's life work forms a single project of exposing the historically specific nature of capitalist relations of domination. Furthermore, by delineating the historically specific nature of capitalist relations of domination, Marx's theory of value opens up the space for imagining the possibility of human emancipation.

Introduction

The initial goal of this paper was to provide a Marxian critique of Keynesian economics. This immediately raises the question of what we mean by a Marxian critique. Is it a matter of showing the inability of Keynesian theories in explaining the empirical phenomenon? This seems to be the path taken by the academic discipline known as Marxian economics. Marxist economists remain within the realm of economics and attempt to show that Marx provides us with a better understanding of the actual movement of prices, the rate of profit, competition, the tendency towards crisis, etc. One of the best examples of such work is Anwar Shaikh's recent book (Shaikh 2016) where he provides us with a thorough criticism of Neo-classical, Keynesian and even Marxian economic theories based on empirical grounds. He shows that the theories of classical political economists, i.e. Smith, Ricardo and Marx, still provide the best explanation of the economic aspects of capitalism.

According to Shaikh, Marx showed the inconsistencies of Smith and Ricardo (I use these two as the representatives of the classical school), developed their analysis, and also incorporated a lot of sociological and historical materials to show the exploitative character of capitalist production and the class struggle between capitalists and wage workers. I accept all of this as aspects of Marx's work, but I believe his project and his goal was entirely different. I do not believe that Marx accepted and developed Smith and Ricardo's categories in order to provide a better understanding of empirical reality. Instead, I think he made a radical critique of the very categories used by classical economists in order to grasp the social form of our existence and to show the social relations that these categories express in a fetishized form. Marx's aim is not to explain to us why prices and profits rise or fall (although, as I mentioned, this is a necessary aspect of his research) but to show that prices and profits are nothing, but the forms taken by historically specific social relations.

Therefore, what needs to be explained is the historical specificity of these categories. This was the source of Marx's frustration with classical economists who took their categories for granted as being eternally true without explaining their historical nature. For example, in the 1844 manuscripts, Marx remarks that "political economy starts with the fact of private property; it does not explain it to us ... it takes for granted what it is supposed to explain" (CW 3, p 271).¹ Any economic discipline, whether Marxian, Keynesian or Neo-classical remains open to Marx's critique as long as it takes its categories for granted without analyzing their historical nature and the social relations hidden behind them.²

Therefore, instead of providing a critique of Keynesian economics, I will explore Marx's critique of political economy and attempt to show that it is at the same time a critique of all bourgeois thought.³ The foundations of Marx's critique lie in his theory of alienation, which was later developed through his theory of the value-form and commodity fetishism. From this standpoint, alienation is not about a notion of trans-historical human essence; rather it tries to capture the social relations underlying the capitalist form of production. From this standpoint, Marx's work should be viewed as an effort to grasp the social form of *capitalist* production.⁴

¹ I will refer to 'Marx and Engels Collected Works' as 'CW'.

² I will again emphasize that this is not to undermine Marx's empirical work. It is only through painstaking empirical endeavor that he could analyze "men, not in any fantastic isolation and fixity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions" (CW 5, p. 37). However, this is very different than the work of an economist, because "as soon as this *active life-process* is described, history ceases to be a collection of *dead facts*, as it is with the empiricists (themselves still abstract), or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealist" (ibid).

³ By bourgeois thought, I refer to any form of thinking that eternalizes what is specific to capitalism. When, in our thinking, we eternalize categories that are the expressions of historically developed social relations, we fail to grasp the very relations that we want to explain. This is why Marx set himself the task of 'the ruthless criticism of the existing order' and why most of his works took the form of a critique.

⁴ In my understanding of the centrality of the social form in Marx's thought I am heavily indebted to the works of Bertell Ollman, David Harvey, Ellen Wood and Simon Clarke amongst many others. My greatest debt, however, is to my mother with whom I have studied and discussed Marx over the past two years. I should also acknowledge the role of many lively debates in our Capital study groups at the Marxist Education Project

Foundations of Marx's Critique

The starting point of Marx's critique is the abstract egoistic individual that forms the basis of bourgeois thought. In bourgeois theory, society exists as the solution to a philosophical problem, the problem of the co-existence of these abstract individuals. For John Lock the solution exists in the social contract, Smith sees the market as the regulator of privatized interests and the later Hegel finds the embodiment of the universal interest in the state as the only institution that can overcome the antagonism between particular interests. For Marx such an individual does not exist, the individual is a social being and it can only exist as an individual within society. The individual is inseparable from society and there can be no categorical opposition between the two. In the 1844 manuscripts we read: "above all we must avoid postulating society as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual. The individual is *the social being*" (CW 5, p. 299, Marx's emphasis). The abstract individual and society in the bourgeois mind are the reflections of a concrete historical form of existence of individuals in the capitalist society. Therefore, what needs to be understood is precisely the social form of existence of these individuals.⁵

Notice that Marx's critique applies both to Smith the materialist and Hegel the idealist. This is because he is not simply opposing materialism to idealism: "The crude materialism

in New York on the development of my thinking on Marx. Lastly, this paper could not have been written if not for the patience of professor Mattei who gave me the time to clarify my thinking. Marx was a revolutionary and Capital is a book about revolution, not economics. My aim is to express this understanding of Marx and to lay the foundation for further research on capitalism based on Marx's work in order to understand the *concrete* possibilities of its overcoming. At the same time, I would like to express my frustration with what I see as 'Marxian economics'.

⁵ Historical Materialism is nothing but the determinations of social forms, their perpetual movement and change in history. "Marx saw the determination of social forms as an historical process; a process eventuating through time in which every precipitated form becomes in turn dissolved, changes into a new form, a process whose dynamic is internal to it, which has no external cause, existing outside history, of which it is an effect"

of the economists who regard as natural properties of things what are social relations of production among people, and qualities which things obtain because they are subsumed under these relations, is at the same time just as crude an idealism, even fetishism, since it imputes social relations to things as inherent characteristics, and thus mystifies them” (Marx 1973, p. 687). For Marx, it is society, as the everyday practical activity of human beings, that mediates between the material and the idea. It is in this sense that, in his 1844 manuscripts, he characterizes his own position as that of naturalism or humanism: “Here we see how consistent naturalism or humanism is distinct from both idealism and materialism, and constitutes at the same time the unifying truth of both. We see also how only naturalism is capable of comprehending the action of world history” (CW 3, p. 336). Shortly after, in his theses on Feuerbach, Marx develops his practical materialism and chooses neither matter as such nor the idea as his starting point but “sensuous human activity, practice human activity ... as objective activity” (CW 5, p. 5). For Marx, humans existing within certain social relations make history, not reason, nature or technology. By focusing on the specific form of human relations in capitalism, Marx shows that the dualities in bourgeois thought, such as the opposition between the individual and society, are not the attributes of reason or nature, but those of a form of society characterized by generalized commodity production.

How, exactly, does Marx provide a critique of the abstract individual? The distinctive feature of the abstract individual is her private interest that sets her in opposition to others. Therefore, Marx needs to grasp private interest as an expression of a specific mode of life of these individuals: “The point is rather that private interest is itself already a socially determined interest, which can be achieved only within the conditions laid down by society and with the means provided by society” (Marx 1973, p. 157). But private interest itself is

(Elson 1979, p. 140). For the best exposition of this world view or method of analysis see Ollman (1976, chapters 2 and 3 in particular) and Thompson (1978).

based on nothing but private property. In the bourgeois mind, private property is the natural relation of the abstract man to herself and consequently to her product: “Every man has property in his own person: This nobody has any right to but himself. The labor of his body the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatever that he removes from the state that nature has provided, are properly his. Whatever the he removes from the state nature hath provided, and left in it, he hath mixed his labor with, and joint to it what is his own, and thereby makes it its property” (Locke 1764, p. 107). Who is this ‘Man’? Has he just popped out of the ground? The moment we answer that he must be living in a society or a commune of some kind the question immediately arises: how do the members of this commune produce their means of subsistence? In what relations do they exist to one another in this production? In what ‘mode’ are they producing their material life? As Marx remarked in the German Ideology: “this mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individual. Rather it is a form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express their lives, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce it. Hence what they are depends on the material conditions of their production” (CW 5, p. 31). To produce their means of life humans must appropriate nature and make it their own. The question is of the form of this appropriation, the specific human relations within which it happens. “All production is appropriation of nature on the part of an individual *within and through a specific form of society*. In this sense it is a tautology to say that property (appropriation) is a precondition of production. But it is altogether ridiculous to leap from that to a specific form of property, e.g. private property” (Marx 1973, p. 87, my emphasis). Therefore, to show the

historically specific social relations underlying property relations, is at the same time a critique of both philosophy and political economy.

It is important to mention the emancipatory nature of Marx's project. In capital, perceived as a historically specific social relation, Marx sees the *possibility* of the formation of different un-alienated relations. The possibility of socialism is not to be found in the laws of history or morality imposed on human beings, but in their very activity that results from the contradictory nature of their social relations. In my opinion, the contradiction between forces and relations of production is not a law of history but that of capital, it expresses the specific form of capitalist class relations. The opposition between forces and relations of production can only be understood through their unity so that "Capital itself is the moving contradiction" (Marx 1973, p 706).⁶ It is this contradictory nature that drives capital to increase the forces of production without limit and to provide the possibility for un-alienated

⁶To posit the contradiction between forces and relations of production, division of labor or rationality as the motive force of history, is precisely to eternalize what is historically specific to capitalism. Marx's approach to history is to first realize that "history is nothing but the activity of Man pursuing its ends" (Quoted in Bonefeld 2001, p. 58). These individuals, however, only exist within certain social relations, therefore, "definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations. Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production. The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they really are; i.e. as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will" (CW 5, p. 37). Marx's own empirical analysis had shown him that in western class societies "The specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labor is pumped out of the direct producers determines the relationship of domination and servitude, as this grows directly out of production itself and *reacts back on it* in turn as a determinant. On this is based the entire configuration of the economic community arising from the actual relations of production, and hence also its specific political form. It is in each case the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the immediate producers - a relationship whose particular form naturally corresponds always to a certain level of development of the type and manner of labor, and hence to its social productive power - in which we find the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social edifice, and hence also the political form of the relationship of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the *specific form* of state in each case" (Marx 1981, p. 927-8, my emphasis). This is the approach that he applied to the capitalist form of production and great confusion arises if we do not keep in mind that Marx's subject in his major works such as the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* was capitalism and he only analyzed other modes to further clarify the specificity of capitalism. Look at Wood (1995, chapter 4) for a thorough exposition of the issues raised here. It is also important to understand the openness of Marx's method of approach and that he is not bounded by any rigid formulations. As Anderson, in his investigation of Marx's approach to non-western societies (Anderson 2016), masterfully shows, Marx was constantly developing his thinking and abandoning any of his ideas that failed to account for the empirical phenomenon and the essence hidden behind it.

social relations. The realization of this potential is not the job of technology but human sensuous activity. Marx saw the possibility for the formation of new social relations in the struggle of the working class against capital, a struggle, a sensuous human activity, that is not posited by Marx but is brought about by the relations of capitalist production themselves.

Alienation and the Critique of Capitalist Property

Our analysis so far shows that Marx's critique must be directed at private property as the hidden presupposition of bourgeois thought. Behind the bourgeois individual who has isolated herself by private appropriation of the social product there exists historically developed social relations, the juridical expression of which is private property.

To conceptualize capitalist social relations, in his 1844 manuscripts, Marx develops the concept of alienation and that of alienated labor. Under capitalism products are produced as commodities and "the worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces ... labor produces not only commodities: it produces itself and the worker as commodity. This fact expresses merely that the object which labor produces confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. Labor's realization is its objectification. Under these economic conditions realization appears as loss of realization; objectification as loss of the object; appropriation as estrangement, as alienation" (CW 3, p. 272).⁷ This passage already contains much that is to follow. The point is not that the worker does not own most of what he produces, which is true of all class societies. The fundamental issue raised here is that

⁷ In the section on estranged labor in the 1844 manuscripts Marx provides a vivid description of the dehumanizing effects of capitalism on human beings, their relation to nature and to each other. Furthermore, at a more abstract (general) level, alienation can be a category for class societies referring to the subjugation of human beings to an external power. Marx saw the liberation from the *specific form* of alienation under capitalism to be general human emancipation. I will only treat this specific form of alienation to the extent that it serves to illuminate the nature of Marx's critique of the bourgeois world. For a much broader treatment of alienation see Ollman (1976), and Connell (2010 and 2013).

both the worker and his products are produced as commodities, that they exchange for money. The weakness of this early work is that although the significance of the commodity character of the product is recognized and forms the starting point of the analysis, it is not investigated as such. This is of course remedied in *Capital* where Marx begins by saying that “the wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an immense collection of commodities ... Our investigation therefore, begins with the analysis of the commodity” (Marx 1976, p. 126). He comes back to this point in his notes on Wagner emphasizing that “neither value, nor exchange-value are my subjects, but the commodity” (Marx & Carver 1975, p. 183). The worker can only appropriate her own products as commodities i.e. through exchange with money. Alienation of the laborer from her product expresses the form of production where products take the commodity form and are appropriated through money as the medium of exchange. General exchangeability means that products attain a social power, a power that is concentrated in the money form. In his comments on James Mill we read that “the essence of money is not, in the first place, that property is alienated in it, but that the mediating activity or movement, the human, social act by which man’s product mutually complement one another, is estranged from man and becomes the attribute of money, a material thing outside man” (CW 3, p. 212). This already implies the difference between capitalist and pre-capitalist forms of social relations as it appears on the surface of society. The wealth created by the slaves or peasants did not exist as an autonomous power over and above them, their masters did. The relations of domination were far more direct, the king or the master appropriated the products directly from the producers through political or legal means. In capitalism, however, this domination is mediated through the money form and the power of the capitalist over the worker appears as the objective power of money. “[Capital] does not appropriate the worker, but his labor –

not directly, but mediated through exchange” (Marx 1973, p. 498). However, this does not mean that the power of money is not real; it is very real and dominates both the workers and capitalists. As such, it is the complete manifestation of alienation. General exchangeability results in the fact that the product of human labor can only be realized as useful labor after it has been exchanged. For Marx, this means that labor not only objectifies itself in natural form of its product but also in money. In contrast to Hegel who saw objectification as alienation, for Marx it is this peculiar form of objectification of labor, specific to the capitalist era that constitutes alienation. “All production is an objectification of the individual. In money, however, the individual is not objectified in his natural quality, but in a social quality which is, at the same time, external to him” (Marx 1973, p. 226).

The alienation of worker from the products of his labor implies all the above consequences. For the labor to relate to its products as alien objects they must be produced as commodities and appropriated through money as the medium of exchange. Although our analysis captures the form of capitalist social relations it must go beneath this form to uncover the human relations that are mediated by them. Many pre-capitalist societies had developed complex networks of trade and exchanged products as commodities. However, the point is not that products take the form of commodities, but that production is the production of commodities, that products are produced for exchange. But why? What is the fundamental relation between human beings that manifests itself in this form? The fundamental presupposition of this form of production is the separation of the workers from the means of production, a presupposition that is re-established by the everyday activity of the workers in reproducing themselves as commodities on the market. It is precisely this separation, as a historical fact, that forces them to sell themselves to be united with the means of production. It is only the separation of workers from means of production that

establishes social production based on exchange and signifies the specificity of the capitalist mode of production. “It is inherent in the simple character of money itself that it can exist as a developed moment of production only where and when wage labor exists” (ibid, p. 223). This is not just the historical presupposition of Capital but the foundation of the capitalist mode of production which is established by the very activity of workers in reproducing themselves and society. If alienation is to express this historically developed social relation, then it must internalize the separation of workers from their means of production as the fundamental presupposition of capitalist production. As we will see, Marx achieves this by locating alienation in the very act of production itself.⁸

Having analyzed the relation of the worker to her products as alienation, Marx goes on to observe that the very act of producing commodities must be active alienation. “How could the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, where it not that in the very activity of production he was estranging himself from himself” (CW 3, p. 274)? The worker, having been separated from her means of production, relates to production as an external activity, as a means towards earning a living. To be united with the means of production she must alienate herself, and property over her labor and its products. Labor, this essential human activity, has been turned against her and is no longer “the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it” (ibid, p. 274). So, alienation not only expresses the fact that the worker produces her products as commodities but that she exists in a state of separation from means of production and has to alienate herself and her activity to be united with them. The alienation of the worker from his products is the expression of

⁸ This implies that the alienation of workers from the products of their labor is the result of their alienation in the very act of production. This leads Ollman to explore Marx’s concept of alienation by first analyzing the relation of workers to their productive activity and then to their products (Ollman 1976). I have, similar to Marx, started with the alienation of workers from their products, because this is the surface appearance of capitalist relations. Marx makes the same move in Capital where he analyzes commodities and money first, in

an estranged activity, the alienation in the activity of labor itself, the fact that the worker's labor does not belong to her. Before we proceed further, let us investigate two more aspects of alienation that can be deduced from the ones analyzed above. The alienation of humans from their species-being and from one another. For Marx, we become conscious of our existence when we reproduce ourselves and this reproduction can only be a social act. "In creating a world of objects by his practical activity, in his work upon inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species-being ... this production is his active species-life. The object of labor is, therefore, the objectification of man's species-life" (CW, 3, p. 276). If objectification of labor under capitalism is its alienation, and in its object humans objectify their species-life, then the result can only be the alienation of humans from their species-being and in turn from one another. This leads Marx, in a remarkable passage, to provide the strongest possible critique of individualism and to show self-interest as the form of consciousness corresponding to alienation. He says: "In estranging from Man (1) nature and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity, estranged labor estranges the species from man. It changes for him the life of the species into a means of individual life. First it estranges the life of the species and individual life, and secondly *it makes individual life in its abstract form the purpose of the life of the species*, likewise in its abstract and estranged form" (CW 3, p. 276, my emphasis).

Out of the four aspects of alienation, it is the alienation of workers from their productive activity that is the determining aspect. Labor as an alienating activity and the relationship of the worker to production is absolutely crucial for Marx. This is not an abstract trans-historical assertion but rather an observation on the peculiarity of capitalism's class relation as constituted in production. "Political economy conceals the estrangement inherent in the

what he terms simple commodity circulation (not simple commodity production), and then moves to the 'hidden abode of production'.

nature of labor by not considering the direct relationship between the worker and production ... When we ask, then, what is the essential relationship of labor we are asking about the relationship of the worker to production” (ibid, p. 273). He comes back to this in the Grundrisse and spends a great amount of time analyzing the relation of labor to production and comparing that to pre-capitalist forms of this relation. Why is this significant? Because it internalizes all that is specific to capitalism. Marx asks that if neither my commodity nor my own activity belongs to me then who does it belong to? The answer, of course, is that the alien being appropriating my labor and its products must be a human being. Therefore, I create “the domination of the person who does not produce, over production and over the product” (CW 3, p. 279). In sharp contrast to pre-capitalist modes of production, in capitalism, the very activity of the worker creates her relation to the capitalist without the mediation of any political force. The peasant, for example, did not produce her goods as commodities and was the owner of her means of production. Part of her product was appropriated through taxation or other means of political coercion. Such relations are radically different from capitalist ones and have their own form of property and laws of motion. Capitalist form of property, however, is command over alien labor and its products. “Through estranged, alienated labor, then, the worker produces the relationship to this labor of a man alien to labor and standing outside it. The relationship of the worker to labor *creates* the relation to it of the capitalist. Private property is thus the product, the result, the *necessary consequence*, of alienated labor, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself” (CW 3, p. 279, my emphasis).⁹ This statement has baffled Marxists since the publication of the 1844 manuscripts, in particular, those who hold that capitalism is a mode

⁹ Marx repeats the same point a few pages later in his significant but neglected discussion of the division of labor. He emphasizes that “only when (alienated) labor is grasped as the essence of private property, can the economic process as such be analyzed in its real concreteness” (CW 3, p. 317). This point is repeated many times in the third manuscript.

of production based on the private ownership of means of production. For example, Allen Oakley, in his commentary on Marx's critique of political economy asserts that in the 1844 manuscripts Marx "found the roots of alienation in private property. Such ownership of the means of production gives the capitalists the power to determine the form of labor and thus to dominate the situation of man and the nature of his being" (Oakley 1984, p. 80). Oakley's claim is in direct contradiction with Marx's and shows the pitfalls of an essentialist viewpoint on alienation. It is not the capitalists that determine the form of labor but it is precisely the form of labor that determines the relation of worker to the capitalist. What determines the form of labor, as I will explain in more detail below, is the historical process of their separation from means of production and their transformation into wage workers.¹⁰ Based on the analysis presented so far, however, this passage shows the centrality of social forms to Marx's thought and how his theory of alienation was meant to capture the specifically capitalist relations of production. We can see Marx repeating the same view, only more forcefully, in his later works. In the Grundrisse he says: "It will ultimately be shown that private property in the products of one's own labor is identical with the separation of labor and property, so that labor will *create* alien property and property will command alien labor" (Marx 1973, p. 238).¹¹ The same point appears in *Capital*: after having analyzed commodities and money as the alienated forms of social relations, Marx introduces human beings as only the guardians of commodities. "In order that these objects

¹⁰ To explain capitalism through the private ownership of the means of production is to presuppose precisely what needs to be explained; the capitalist form of property. For a thorough critical analysis of the views of various Marxists on the relation between private property and alienation look at Clarke (1991, p. 68).

¹¹ A word of caution to prevent misunderstanding. My integration of Marx's mature works into his early writings is not to suggest that he had developed all his ideas at the young age of 26, but to emphasize his fundamental insight into the social nature of human existence as the basis of all his critiques. It is this insight that informs all his work and is the key in understanding the development of his thought and his experiments in early works such as *German Ideology* and *Poverty of Philosophy*. Meanwhile, I do believe that the arguments of *Capital* are a further elaboration of his insights in the 1844 manuscripts and that there is a close relationship between the structure of these works and between his analysis of alienation and that of the value-form.

may enter into relation with each other as commodities, their guardians must place themselves in relation to one another as persons whose will resides in those objects, and must behave in such a way that each does not appropriate the commodity of the other, and alienate his own, except through an act to which both parties consent. The guardians must therefore recognize each other as owners of private property. This juridical relation, whose form is the contract, whether as part of a developed legal system or not, is a relation between two wills which mirrors the economic relation” (Marx 1976, p. 178). They are owners of private property only because they produce their goods as commodities, which is another way of saying that they alienate their products from themselves so private property becomes the result of this alienation.

In my opinion, the causal relation between alienated labor and private property is both historical and systematic. By this I mean that alienated labor both tries to grasp how private property came into existence and how it is the particular form of appropriation of the capitalist mode of production viewed as a (contradictory) self-reproducing totality. In his extensive commentary on the 1844 manuscripts, to emphasize the systematic relation between alienated labor and private property, Christopher Arthur remarks that “alienated labor, and capital, stand in internal relation which structures the whole of capitalist society in such a way that its reproduction depends on the constant reflection of these moments into each other ... When he (Marx) gives priority to labor over property he is not posing it as historically antecedent but rather as ontologically more fundamental in the social totality established by their dialectic ... private property is a social institution. Ultimately it has to be grasped as a human creation. Otherwise one would be illegitimately naturalizing (treating as a given basis of human existence) what is produced and reproduced in and through human

history” (Arthur 1986)¹². This is an elegant summary of our analysis so far but it fails to notice (or it does not clarify) that the systematic analysis of the dialectic between alienated labor and private property internalizes the historical becoming of their relation. When, after having analyzed alienation as the cause of private property, Marx asks: “How does man come to alienate, to estrange, his labor? How is this estrangement rooted in the nature of human development” (CW 3, p. 281)?¹³, he is asking about the historical origins of alienated labor or that of the capitalist mode of production. The answer, as I mentioned, resides within the analysis of alienation itself for “when one speaks of labor, one is directly dealing with man himself. This formulation of the question already contains its solution “(ibid). It was the analysis of alienation that showed us the social relations of capitalism where the mass of people, living in a state of separation from the means of production, have to sell their labor capacity and alienate themselves and their labor to the capitalists. The rise of capitalism is the history of forceful separation of workers from their land, means of production and means of subsistence in order to turn them into wage laborers. Marx’s first thorough treatment of the origins of capitalism appears in the Grundrisse, where he says: “For the domination of exchange value itself, and of exchange value producing production, *presupposes* alien labor capacity itself as an exchange value – i.e. the separation of living labor capacity from its objective conditions; a relation to them – or to its own objectivity – as alien property; a relation to them, in a word, as capital” (Marx 1973, p. 509-10).

It is very important to grasp the significance of this argument for an understanding of Marx’s concept of social relations and the specificity of capitalism. Marx’s question on the origins of alienated labor has created as much confusion as his claim that alienated labor is

¹² Available at: <https://chrisarthur.net/dialectics-of-labour-marx-and-his-relation-to-hegel/>

¹³ This, again, resembles the analysis in capital where Marx turns to the historical origins of capitalism after having analyzed it as a self-reproducing totality. Of course, we do not find the answer in 1844

the cause of private property. Simon Clarke (Clarke 1991, p. 71) provides an overview of the contending views. Here I will analyze his own view and that of Bertell Ollman on the origins of alienation. Ollman tells us that “division of labor occurs and it brings alienation in its wake” (Ollman 1976, p. 159). I find this to be in sharp contrast with Marx’s view and the analysis presented here. Division of labor cannot be anything but a manifestation, an expression of a certain form of social life, of human relations. Division of labor cannot be abstracted from the historically developed relations within which it occurs and be posited as their cause. It is true that division of labor has existed in all human societies and it must exist if we are to survive. What needs to be understood, however, is the particular form of the division of labor. As an abstract trans-historical category, the division of labor has no actuality, it can only exist within a certain form of society. The matter becomes clear if we compare Marx’s *Capital* with Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*. Smith starts his analysis with the division of labor, since he correctly sees it as a powerful productive force. His fault, as that of all bourgeois theorists, is that he eternalizes the category and sees human history as the development of division of labor and the market. Marx, on the other hand, starts his *Capital* with commodities as the form of wealth specific to capitalism and goes on to explore the social relations of this mode of production and their fetishized value-forms. He analyzes the division of labor in chapter thirteen, as a form of manifestation of these relations. This is not to say that these relations exist outside the division of labor and are external to it; on the contrary, they can only exist through the division of labor. The objection may be raised that I am conflating Marx’s ideas in *Capital* with those of his youth, that the young Marx, ‘as is obvious in the *German Ideology*’, saw history as the development of division of labor and forms of property corresponding to it. This is not true, however, for as early as 1844, Marx

manuscripts and one can only speculate that he intended an analysis similar to that of ‘The Original Accumulation’ in *Capital*.

saw (capitalist) division of labor internally related with alienated labor and private property.¹⁴ Marx could not have been more clear than in this passage: “The division of labor is the economic expression of the social character of labor within the estrangement ... of the manifestation of life as the alienation of life ... nothing else but the estranged, alienated positing of human activity as a real activity of species or as activity of man as a species being” (CW 3, p. 317). As is clear from this passage, Marx sees all aspects of alienation manifested in the division of labor. The problem is that we read ‘division of labor’ as a phrase with a fixed definition, and as such we eternalize it in our mind. Whereas for Marx, division of labor is understood as the *capitalist* division of labor in internal-relation with alienation and private property. The cause for all of capitalist relations, for the totality that is capitalism, must be found in the historical development of human relations, this historical process ‘was the divorce of elements which up until then were bound together’ that resulted in property-less individuals who found the objective conditions of production as the property of someone else, as alien property.¹⁵

Clarke rightly criticizes Ollman and others who see the root of alienation in the division of labor. However, he goes on to find the root of alienation in money and argues that “with

¹⁴ Look at chapter three in Ollman (ibid) for an introduction to the philosophy of internal relations.

¹⁵ Ollman takes this position, following Marx’s analysis in *The German Ideology*. Marx seems to provide a trans-historical view of the division of labor as the driver of history in sharp contradiction to my presentation of his thought. A thorough analysis of the contradictory statements of *The German Ideology* is beyond the scope of this paper. In the *German Ideology* Marx does seem to posit the division of labor as the driving force of history, Comninel (1987, Ch. 7) analyzes such elements of bourgeois thought in *The German ideology*. The confusing element in Comninel’s work is that he does not seem to differentiate between alienation and property, and their specific capitalist forms as alienated labor and private property. Therefore, he says that the history of class societies is the “history of alienated labor” (Comninel 1987, p. 134). To re-emphasize the centrality of historically specific social relations and to put the issue beyond any doubt, let us look at the following passage from Marx’s important letter written to Annenkov in 1846: “In the really existing world, on the other hand, the division of labor and all Mr. Proudhon’s other categories are *social relations* which together go to make up what is now known as property; outside these relations bourgeois property is nothing but a metaphysical or juridical illusion. The property of another epoch, feudal property, developed in wholly *different set of social relations*” (CW 38, p. 100). So, Proudhon fails to understand the “historical and transitory nature of the forms of production in any one epoch. Failing to see our social institutions as historical products. That man develops certain inter-relations and economic categories are but abstractions of those real relations (ibid).”

the extension of exchange and the division of labor the activity of labor becomes an alienated activity ... it is only this mediation of social relations by things that defines the alienation of labor and constitutes the product of labor as private property” (Clarke 1991, p. 74-75). Monetary exchange does not cause alienation; on the contrary, in a society where labor has been alienated, products take the commodity form and are appropriated through monetary exchange. In my opinion, Clarke confuses money as the essence of private property with monetary exchange as the cause of alienation. Similar to private property and division of labor, monetary exchange does not bring about capitalism, but it takes a particular form under these relations. “The mere presence of monetary wealth, and even the achievement of a kind of supremacy on its part, is in no way sufficient for this dissolution into capital to happen. Or else ancient Rome, Byzantium etc. would have ended their history with free labor and capital” (Marx 1973, p. 506). It is the separation of workers from the objective conditions of production that enables money to buy labor power and to transform itself into capital, into power over alien labor.

Now one might ask: but how can the worker who has been expelled from land be bought as a wage laborer if commodity production and monetary exchange were not already prevalent in society? If they existed prior to capitalism, does this not mean that they are not specific to capitalism and therefore, alienated labor is also not an expression of capitalist social relations? It is indeed true that commodity production and exchange are historical presuppositions of capital. “For capital to be formed and to take hold of production, trade must have developed to a certain level, hence also commodity circulation and, with that, commodity production” (Marx 1894, p. 117). However, commodities, money and property as presupposed by capital can only be understood within the social relations of feudalism. Capital posits them as its own categories, within its own social relations. The circulation of

commodities as capital is radically different from any kind of pre-capitalist trade. It is only within capitalism that circulation is a moment of production and is necessary in reproducing the society and its class relation. Therefore, capital (understood as a relation of labor capacity in separation from the objective conditions of production ruled by an alien will) takes money as a feudal relation, as a “relation of intercourse belonging to a stage of production preceding capital” (Marx 1973, p. 670) and transforms it “into a form adequate for its own ends; hence attempting to make it into a representative of one moment of circulation” (ibid, p. 671). I confess that it is very hard to grasp this mode of thinking precisely because of the fetish power of economic categories. As soon as we think about machinery, money, rent, etc., they present themselves as natural categories with fixed definitions. Therefore, we fail to see that it is only in a specific form of society that money buys machinery as capital and that ownership of land justifies appropriation in the name of rent.¹⁶ For there to be any history, human beings must exist and reproduce their material existence. In their reproduction, they inevitably enter into certain relations with one another that, at a certain stage of their development, find their abstract expression in economic categories. Capital, as an economic category, can exist only in a society where masses of people have to alienate their activity in order to have access to their means of subsistence. Machinery is capital to the extent that labor relates to it as an alien property in production and money is capital to the extent that it buys alien labor and mediates its products. It is in this sense that capital is a social relation and posits money, division of labor, machinery etc. as its own determinants.

¹⁶ This is not to say that bourgeois theorists eternalize socioeconomic categories on purpose, it is rather their form of thinking that establishes them as such. In their mode of thinking, they do not and cannot go beyond Proudhon whom Marx criticized more than 150 years ago. “Mr. Proudhon does not directly assert that to him bourgeois life is an eternal truth; he says so indirectly, by deifying the categories which express bourgeois relations in the form of thought ... Thus, he fails to rise above the bourgeois horizon” (CW 38, p. 102). In my opinion, most Marxist and non-Marxist theorist or activists today fail to rise above the ‘bourgeois

If economic categories are expressions of social relations, then, having found the essence of capitalist social relations in alienated labor, Marx must be able to show the innerrelation between these categories and alienated labor. “Just as we have derived the concept of private property from the concept of estranged, alienated labor by analysis, so we can develop every category of political economy with the help of these two factors; and we shall find again in each category, e.g., trade, competition, capital, money, only a particular and developed expression of these first elements” (CW 3, p. 281). It is of utmost importance to understand that this is the project Marx undertakes in *Capital* – to connect labor to its alienated forms. The weakness of Marx’s early critique was precisely in the extrinsic connection between alienated labor and categories of political economy. Although alienated labor contains within itself the commodity form of production and the separation of workers from means of production, it does not establish an internal relation between the two, it cannot show that the products of alienated labor *must* exchange and be appropriated as commodities. In other words, through his category of alienation, Marx grasps capitalist production, distribution, exchange and consumption as internally related moments of a totality. However, both his knowledge and his categories are inadequate to establish this inner relation, to construct the concrete totality in mind as the concentration of many determinations. As we will see shortly, it was Value’s destiny to play this role, to develop every category of political economy as a form of alienated labor. Unfortunately, ‘value’ ended up mystifying this relation rather than clarifying it. In order to make an intrinsic critique of political economy, Marx took economic categories and turned them against the economists. The result, ironically, has been to identify his categories with those of political economy. Engels warns us of this problem when in the preface to the English edition of *Capital* he says: “There is,

horizon’ and to see the bourgeois form as historical and transitory. It is necessary to do so, both in theory and in practice, if we are to destroy this vampire that is sucking every drain of life out of us and the earth.

however, one difficulty we could not spare the reader: the use of certain terms in a sense different from what they have, not only in common life, but in ordinary political economy. But this was unavoidable” (Marx 1976, p. 111). Value is such a term and we can only begin to understand it if we let go of the Ricardian labor theory of value.¹⁷ Marx does not want to prove that labor creates value, he wants to know “why labor is expressed in value, and why the measurement of labor by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product” (Marx 1976, p. 174). The answer cannot lie in the economic categories themselves but in the historically specific social relations that they express.

The Value form and the Critique of Political Economy¹⁸

Marx’s aim in *Capital* is to show the totality of production relations of a society where the relations between human beings express themselves in the forms of commodity, money and capital. Value is the category to conceptualize these historically specific relations and their determination as value-forms. “The value form of the product of labor is the most abstract, but also the most universal *form* of the bourgeois mode of production; by that fact it stamps the bourgeois mode of production as a particular kind of social production of a historical and transitory character. If then we make the mistake of treating it as the eternal natural form of social production, we necessarily overlook the specificity of the value-form, and consequently of the commodity form together with its further developments, the money

¹⁷ Dian Elson for example, suggests that Marx actually has a value theory of labor rather than a labor theory of value (Elson, 1979). She is trying to emphasize that value theory is trying to determine the social form of labor under capitalism. But to determine the social form of labor is to determine the social relations within which that labor occurs. As we will see, Marx’s category of value internalizes the totality of capitalist production relations.

¹⁸ Here, I will condense my treatment of value theory and will not go into Marx’s logic, and method of analysis in *Capital*. This issue has been the center of many fascinating debates in the Marxist literature. For an overview, look at the introduction to Arthur (2002). My reference to these debates is implicit and the analysis presented should be accessible to readers who are familiar with Marx. My aim here is to dispel the understanding of value as an economic category and to show it as an expression of capitalist social relations of production.

form, the capital form, etc. (Marx 1973, p. 174, my emphasis).” It is obvious to anyone that we would perish without labor. As long as we have existed as a species we have had to labor in order to reproduce ourselves. However, labor as such is an abstract indeterminate category and has no existence on its own. It is only within a certain form of society that we labor. What is required then, is “a conceptualization of a process of social determination that proceeds from the indeterminate to the determinate; from potential to actual; from formless to the formed (Elson 1978, p. 130-1).” It is precisely through the value-form of the product that the social relations of capitalism and consequently the form of labor under capitalism is determined. In other words, it is the value-form of the product that by mediating social relations, actualizes them as capitalist relations. Therefore, Marx overthrows the classical labor theory of value by showing that it is only through the value-form that labor is constituted socially as the substance of value. Furthermore, this allows Marx to conceptualize capitalist production, distribution, exchange and consumption as ‘members of a totality, distinctions within a *unity*’ (Marx 1973, p. 99). Value is precisely the category that *internalizes* this unity by showing how abstract human labor time, the substance of value, under the pressure of social necessity, the magnitude of value, must take the monetary form, the form of value. To identify value with any of its moments is to deprive it of its power and to block the movement through which Marx constructs the totality of capitalist relations as the concentration of many determinations in the mind.

The substance of value is human labor in the abstract, an aspect of labor that is bereft of any concrete specificity. Commodities are values, they express a social relation, to the extent “that they are congealed quantities of homogeneous human labor, i.e., of human labor-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure” (Marx 1976, p.128). In the Marxian literature that is sensitive to the theory of social forms, many objections have been raised to

this formulation. It is usually asked that If value is a historically specific social relation, how can the substance of value be the expenditure of human labor power in the physiological sense? In other words, how can a historical category have a trans-historical substance? The strongest form of this objection is raised by Rubin, when he writes: “one of two things is possible: if abstract labor is an expenditure of human energy in physiological form, then value has a reified-material character. Or value is a social phenomenon, and then abstract labor must also be understood as a social phenomenon connected with a determined social form of production. It is not possible to reconcile a physiological concept of abstract labor with the historical character of the value which it creates” (Quoted in Bonefeld 2014, p. 122). The resolution of this apparent dilemma is to find abstract labor in the market, where the monetary form of the product of different concrete labors reduces them to a mere abstraction. For example, Heinrich says that “abstract labor is a relation of social validation that is constituted in exchange” (Heinrich 2012, p. 50). In my opinion, this analysis reduces value to its substance and is unnecessary. Marx never says that abstract labor *determines* value, instead he says that “as crystals of this social substance, which is common to them all, they are values – commodity values (Marx 1976, p. 128).” The other problem with this interpretation is the conflation of labor with its concrete aspect. According to Heinrich, “every hour of labor measured by a clock is an hour of a particular concrete act of labor, expended by a particular individual, regardless of whether the product is exchanged” (Heinrich 2012, p. 50). Every hour of labor is, however, an hour of a particular act of *labor* that is both abstract and concrete. What happens in exchange is not the reduction of concrete labor to abstract but the validation of abstract labor as value producing labor which is in turn determined by the rate of profit (we will see how in exploring the concept of social necessity). By explaining the dual nature of labor Marx is able to show that the value of

products is not the objectification of human labor, but that of abstract labor. This however, is a very peculiar objectification. The concrete aspect of labor objectifies itself in the use-value of its product. For example, a shoemaker objectifies the concrete aspect of his labor in the natural quality of his shoes. However, the abstract aspect of his labor has not been objectified yet, it is only when his commodity is exchanged for money (the form of value) that this aspect of it is objectified and hence attains a value form other than its natural form. It is in this sense that objectification is alienation, precisely as Marx had said in his 1844 manuscripts. More importantly, this allows for Marx's theory of value to internally link production and circulation as moments of a totality. Value is produced neither in production nor in exchange but expresses the relations within which *alienated labor* objectifies itself in money. It is only when the *unity* of production and circulation is realized that we can express the *difference* by saying that value is produced in production and realized in exchange. Unfortunately, however, this mode of expression by Marx has led many readers to violently separate production from exchange as a predetermined structure.¹⁹ Heinrich, of course, understands this and he wants to overcome this dichotomy by means of the 'real abstraction' of labor in exchange (ibid). I have tried to show that Marx's own analysis is quite capable of expressing the unity of production and circulation if we allow value to express the movement from abstract labor, its substance, to money, its form (as we will see shortly the analysis of the magnitude of value is necessary for this 'metamorphosis').²⁰

Next, we have the magnitude of value as socially necessary labor time which is implicit in the analysis of abstract labor. Time as a further determination of value necessarily arises out of the analysis of the substance of value. If we are to take every particularity from labor,

¹⁹ Look at Simon Clarke's article in Mohun (1994) for a critique of such theories.

all that remains is the time within which labor occurs. However, as Marx points out, it is not the time expended on products that determines the magnitude of their value but the time socially necessary for their production. But what determines social necessity? His initial answer, in my opinion, has been the least understood aspect of Marxism and the source of a lot of confusion about his theory of value. Marx tells us that “socially necessary labor time is the labor-time required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labor prevalent in that society” (Marx 1976, p. 129). This is an abstraction, the content of which is revealed as the process of presentation develops the concepts of money, profit, rate of profit and all the categories required for their determination. Unfortunately, this is a production-centered definition that has created much confusion in the Marxist literature. Firstly, It is very important to realize that value *is not* socially necessary labor time.²¹ Secondly, It is only after commodities have been turned into money and profits calculated that social necessity has any meaning. If as a capitalist, *I earn the general rate of profit, then I know that the labor of my workers is socially necessary.* No one knows whether their labor is socially necessary or not, it is only after the products of capitalists have been transformed into money that the abstract labor of the workers of one producer is validated as socially

²⁰ The necessity of magnitude of value in the metamorphosis of its substance to its form suggests that it is a mistake to distinguish between the ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ value problems (Sweezy 1964). See Postone (1993, Ch. 5) for a thorough critique of Sweezy’s notion.

²¹ Both Shaikh (1977) and Fine define (2016) define value as socially necessary labor time. Marx, as he explains his abstractions in chapter ten of volume three of *Capital*, takes the individual value of the average producer to be equal to the market value of his sector, in proportion to the socially necessary labor time spent on it. This, he calls value as a shorthand notation. He alerts us to this in his discussion of the form of value in *capital volume one*: “A commodity is a use-value or object of utility, and a ‘value’. It appears as the twofold thing it really is as soon as its value possesses its own particular form of manifestation, which is distinct from its natural form. This form of manifestation is exchange-value, and the commodity never has this form when looked at in isolation, but only when it is in a value-relation or an exchange relation with a second commodity of a different kind. *Once we know this, our manner of speaking does no harm; it serves, rather, as an abbreviation*” (Marx 1976, p.152, my emphasis).

necessary and as such produces value. Marx talks about average producers because under normal conditions they make the general rate of profit.²²

In a society of individual producers, it is only by submitting her commodity to the market that the producer becomes aware of the social necessity of her labor. This necessity manifests itself not in a conscious understanding of the needs of others, but in the inverted form of the rate of profit for the capitalist. This is how value “reflects an economy of individualized, private producers, where every producer must exchange in order to re-produce—so that labor power can and must ‘move’, or be moved, through the action of capital, into productive lines, so as to get the ‘socially necessary rate’ or ‘the average rate of profit’. Such an economy exists only where the direct producers have been separated from the means of production and especially the means of subsistence—i.e. under a system of free wage labor, where labor power is a commodity, in other words capitalism” (Brenner 1977, p. 52). Value can only reflect this society through the internal relations between its substance, magnitude and its forms. The moment we collapse value into one of its aspects the movement is lost and only an external relation can be established between production, distribution, exchange and consumption. I will follow Elson in saying that abstract labor, socially necessary labor time, and exchange-value “are not three discretely distinct variables, nor are they identical with one another. There is a continuity as well as a difference between all three” (Elson 1978, p. 135). The continuity is expressed in value as the abstract

²² Anwar Shaikh attempts to grasp this notion by saying: “Marx uses the term ‘socially necessary labor time’ in *two senses*. First, the average quantity of abstract labor-time required to produce a single commodity; this determines the magnitude of its value. Second, to total quantity of labor-time which would be required to produce a given type of commodity in the amount consistent with *effective demand*” (Shaikh 1977, p. 138, my emphasis). There are two notions for Shaikh because he violently separates production, as a predetermined structure, from exchange. Murray gets much closer to the point when he says that socially necessary labor “builds demand into the very concept of value” (Moseley 1995, p. 50). However, the same duality exists since he does not analyze why Marx makes the abstraction of average productivity. The answer lies in chapter ten of volume three of capital where Marx explains the reasons behind his abstractions in volume one. The analysis of this point is beyond the scope of this paper and will be the subject of my next paper. The key

expression of the totality of capitalist relations. Value is an abstraction that attains its concreteness as the theory develops through the determinations of forms of capitalist production. It is only at the end of the story, when the totality of capitalist production relations are revealed, that value manifests itself. Therefore, the proof of value, is its own development and its ability to capture the actual relations of capitalism. This is why Marx was so frustrated with attempts to prove ‘value’. One year after the publication of *Capital*, in a letter to Kugelmann, Marx writes: “Even if there were no chapter on ‘value’ at all in my book, the analysis I give of the real relations would contain the proof and demonstration of the real *value relation*. The chatter about the need to prove the concept of value arises only from complete ignorance both of the subject under discussion and the method of science” (CW 43, p. 68, my emphasis). Unfortunately, when scholarship is completely detached from human practice it takes the most unfortunate form of proving or disproving Marx’s value theory.²³ Marx himself, in his second thesis on Feuerbach, cautions us that the “question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question (CW 5, p. 4).”

methodological point is that all of Marx’s categories *pertaining to the capitalist epoch* presuppose one another and the totality within which they relate to one another.

²³ All the controversies surrounding the transformation problem and the falling rate of profit are of this nature. The analysis of social necessity as presented here renders the transformation problem obsolete. There is no such problem in Marx (Moseley 2016). Furthermore, the tendency for the rate of profit to fall is merely an expression of the fundamental tendency of capitalism to increase the forces of production and not a cause of anything. Crisis must not be found in the subjective response of the capitalists to the rate of profit but in the social form of capitalist production. At the level of abstraction in Marx’s discussion, It is the contradictory nature of capital as expressed in the contradiction between use-value and value that is the source of its crises. It is this contradiction that constantly drives it towards over-production and over-accumulation (Marx 1973, p. 402-420).

Conclusion

I hope it is clear by now that Marx's critique goes far beyond a critique of Keynesian economics. He is making a critique of an alienated world, as he wrote in the Fetishism section of *Capital*, where social relations between humans "assume, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (Marx 1976, p. 165). It is true that he criticizes this world through a critique of political economy, but his critique can be applied to all forms of thought that approach the world uncritically without questioning the historical nature of their categories and the historically specific human relations that they express. For example, today we are becoming more and more aware of discrimination against women, people of color, immigrants, etc. If we are to take the case of discrimination against women, it would be wrong to analyze this simply as the domination of men over women. In doing so, we fall into the trap of bourgeois thought where we posit an abstract man dominating an abstract woman. The point, however, is that men and women only exist within a specific set of social relations and as such, the domination of men over women is internally related to those relations and does not exist outside them. It is true that men have dominated women at least as long as class society has existed, in the same way that classes and the state have existed. But such domination is only an abstract domination and achieves its concreteness when the specific *form* of that domination is analyzed. This mode of thinking allows us to grasp race, gender and class as moments of a totality that only exist within and through one another as the 'concrete unity of the diverse'.²⁴

²⁴ To develop such an analysis, it is important to distinguish between levels of generality in Marx's method of abstraction. According to Ollman (2003, Ch. 5), Marx analyzes history in five levels of generality. The first level is that of human beings, the second is class societies, the third is a specific form of class societies or in our case capitalism, the fourth is a specific form of capitalism such as neo-liberalism and the fifth is the most concrete form of everyday life. Each level presides within the others and is internally related to them (the determinations of these levels is itself a process not a given recipe). In *Capital*, Marx analyzes capitalism at the third level by abstracting from its more concrete forms of manifestations. This is also why in *Capital*, Marx abstracts from all other determination of individuals and only treats them as "the

Marx does indeed, through his critique of classical political economy, try to grasp the general laws of motion of capitalist society. His primary aim, however, is to overcome these relations and find the concrete possibilities of an un-alienated society where the goal is not the endless accumulation of capital but human development. “This demanded a critique not only of capitalism or of political economy but also of the then available *oppositions* to capitalism, which meant subjecting the socialist tradition itself to critical scrutiny. The principal object of this critique was to transform the socialist idea from an ahistorical aspiration into a political program grounded in the historical conditions of capitalism” (Wood 1995, p. 12). Marx wanted to show the revolutionaries of his time that the problem is not that of distribution but the form of production itself. Monetary exchange is an expression of alienated relations of production and the overcoming of these relations goes hand in hand with the overcoming of the market. I cannot express this better than McNally where he says that “the greatest achievement of Marx’s critique of political economy was to show the inseparability of production for the market, money, wage-labor, competitive accumulation and exploitation. Marx’s theory is simultaneously a critique of market regulation and a critique of all efforts at market socialism. By de-fetishizing the world of commodities, Marx showed that the reified laws of the market are the *necessary* forms in which the alienated and exploitative relations of capitalist production manifest themselves. One cannot transcend capitalism, therefore, on the basis of market regulation; the one presupposes the other” (McNally 1993, p. 221). This is perhaps the most important lesson from Marx for any

personifications of economic categories, the bearers of particular class-relations and interests (Marx 1976, p. 92).” Marx does not neglect the analysis of race and gender in capital, they simply do not belong there as the central focus. Rather, they belong to a more concrete level of analysis where empirical analysis must show how class constitutes itself through race and gender (McNally, 2015). This method, the difference between levels of generality, can be seen most clearly if we compare Marx’s historical works to his more theoretical ones (Harvey, 2012). Finally, we can see that writers such as Sperber (2013) declare their own lack of understanding by saying that Marx only analyzed 19th century capitalism.

movement towards social change and human emancipation. The goal is neither to change the form of distribution nor to subjugate ourselves to an all-powerful state, but to change the social relations of capitalist production and replace them with “an association of free men, working with means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labor-power in full self-awareness as one single social labor force” (Marx 1976, p. 171).

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