

THEORETICAL PRACTICE

"Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity."

Lenin

PAT PROPOST

nov/6
11:15

THEORETICAL PRACTICE editorial

On Leninism

(1) Lenin's Theoretical and Political Practice

In this issue we are developing the positions taken up in the editorial in Theoretical Practice No. 1, in particular on the following three questions: why we consider Leninism of paramount importance in revolutionary struggle, why it is important to clarify the general principles of Leninism, and why it is more possible to do so today than a decade ago.

In the classic writings on political struggles of Marx and Engels, political relations are no longer viewed in ethico-juridical-philosophical terms as rational or irrational, as the essential determinant or epiphenomenal expression of civil society, but as a level of the social formations of class societies which will disappear with the elimination of classes. For Marx and Engels the political level was neither essence nor epiphenomenon but a relatively autonomous, determined determination, with a vital effectivity in the abolition of class society and therefore of its own existence. What is clearly evident from these writings is their insistence on the necessity of a Communist, a proletarian, position for a correct and scientific politics. Marx and Engels thought this necessity in the concepts of Scientific Socialism and its opposite Utopian Socialism. The essence of Scientific Socialism is that its political positions are founded upon the knowledge of a science, Historical Materialism. This knowledge indicates the place and the task of proletarian

political struggle within the capitalist social formation. Theoretical-political deviations, deviations from Scientific Socialism, necessarily lead to an incorrect and unscientific politics, and therefore an ineffective politics, which is objectively reactionary. The struggle against deviations was for Marx and Engels a vital aspect of revolutionary struggle and party building. From part 3 of the Communist Manifesto (1848) the existence of reactionary, bourgeois and utopian socialist ideologies shows the absolute necessity of ideological struggle in a Marxist movement. In the struggle for the formation of the First International (1864), Marx's relation to the anarchist tendencies illustrates the necessity of combating the organisational and political deviations which they represented. And in the most famous case of all, Marx's Critique of the Gotha Programme (1875), Marx emphasises the disastrous consequences of concessions in theory in the drawing up of a party programme (Engels had cause to criticise the very same deviations in his critique of the French party's agrarian programme in 1894).

Lenin in What is to be Done? (1902) takes up this complex struggle against deviations when he states the classic arguments for the necessity of organisation at the political level, that is, organisation around a proletarian political position. This argument, although brilliantly stated by Lenin, can be found in the later writings of Engels and the earlier writings of Kautsky, as Lenin carefully acknowledges. But Lenin's position is also an important

theoretical advance. Lenin provides the concepts to think the political practice of the proletarian position, its organisational forms (the party), and the major forms of deviation from that practice. To the scientific discoveries of Marx and Engels, (Historical Materialism-Scientific Socialism), which establish the specific effectivity of the political level in the complex social formation, Lenin adds the concepts which scientifically found Marxist practice within that regional effectivity.

A Marxist political position, Lenin argues, cannot be a reflection of spontaneous struggles which are necessarily ideological in the conditions of their development. A purely reflective relation to such struggles succumbs to tailism, to opportunism, and to 'cringing before spontaneism'. The classic example of Lenin's critique of spontaneist deviations is his case against Economism. He demonstrates that this deviation is not merely the product of passivity (the mere acceptance of given struggles), but the theoretical-political elaboration of a position stemming in the last instance from class interests opposed to the proletariat (a position which seeks to confine the workers struggle to its primitive and immediate forms, forms which are in no sense revolutionary, eg the wage struggle and the legal-political struggle of Trades Unions). However, if Marxist politics is not simply a reflection of spontaneous struggles it does not seek to oppose them, or to confine them to this form, unlike the political positions of spontaneism itself. The whole essence of a scientific politics is that the spontaneous movement is transformed at the political level. Without this transformation, this translation of partial, sectoral demands into a revolutionary proletarian political programme, there can be no proletarian revolution. Without this transformation there can be no Marxist-Leninist politics; Marxist-Leninist politics cannot be developed abstractly

in a programme which legislates struggles apart from their conditions of existence. This is the central idea of Marxism-Leninism.

We wish to stress here the crucial political consequences of the difference between the scientific conception of the social formation as a complex totality, and the ideological notions which produce a simple totality. This distinction we owe to Althusser, and it is his concepts which make it now possible to produce a genuinely theoretical reading of Lenin. The conception of the social formation as a simple totality is accompanied by a notion of 'pure revolution'. The latter refers to the idea of a unique contradiction which is reproduced at different levels (economic, ideological, political). Consequently, these levels have no real existence; an analysis may have more or less levels at will, it may be more or less complicated. Every analysis of this kind essentially reflects the purity of a single master contradiction of which the levels are epiphenomenal expressions. The existence or non-existence of reductionism in this form of theory does not alter its character, for the effect of the theoretical structure is the potentiality of reductionism. This ever present potentiality of reductionism at the level of theory is realised in political ideology by the replacement of the complex combination of political forces which make up any revolutionary movement, by the myth of two homogeneous hostile blocs.

'To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and Europe, without the revolutionary outbursts of a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of non-class conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against the oppression of the landlords, the church, the monarchy, the foreign nations, etc. - to imagine that means repudiating social revolution. Only

those who imagine that in one place an army will line up and say, 'We are for socialism', and in another place another army will say, 'We are for imperialism, and that this will be social revolution!... Whoever expects a "pure" social revolution will never live to see it (Lenin: 'Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up') live to see it.' (Lenin: 'Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up')

This indicates the distinction between the scientific position and the ideologies founded on a notion of the social formation as a simple expressive unity. There is no identity of essence between class consciousness and Marxism: a spontaneous raising of class consciousness cannot therefore be equated with a scientific politics. Indeed there is a real dislocation between science and ideology. Lenin is insistent that Marxism is a science and as a consequence that theoretical training is dominant in the proletarian political organisations. It is thus fundamental to Leninism that classes are never completely homogeneous in political position, and that the revolutionary polarisation of classes involves splits and divisions within classes as well as between them. It is inevitable that intellectuals will divide, and that some will take up a proletarian position; it is inevitable that the proletariat will divide and that some will take up an anti-proletarian position. This will appear paradoxical only to a position founded on an essentialist sociology which equates 'class' ideology and correct political line.

(2) Some Fallacies and Some Misreadings

Most of the fallacies concerning Leninism stem from a reading of Leninist positions based on a notion of the social formation as a simple expressive totality.

(A) Essentialism

rather than complex

This particular form of error includes reductionism, sociologism, geneticism etc. This general error sees every worker as essentially proletarian politically; or reduces all the statements intellectuals make to their petty-bourgeois class position. The reduction of levels, of political position to class situation, or the conflation of levels, produces effects in the political position. From this vulgar Marxism, a crude economic determinism springs ultra-leftist or rightist political positions, rigidity in organisation, and ferocious sectarianism, since the essential element (the workers, the blacks etc.) are the source of the true line. We do not assert that all organisations of the working class are essentialist, but that essentialist doctrines, whether of class, race or sex, lead to various political deviations which are always reactionary.

Thus it can be seen that the particular political errors attacked by Lenin - Economism, Terroism, Ultra-leftism - are variations at the political level of serious theoretical mistakes stemming from essentialism. The expressive simplicity that underlies these positions is contained in their mode of production: the passive/reflective elaboration of the ideological effect of the spontaneous movement (this passive/reflective mode in theory may result either in intense political activism or quietism). Marxism is the foundation of proletarian political consciousness. Marxism as a science has an effect on the worker's movement; it breaks with and transforms the spontaneous ideological movement and combats the deviations which result from the theoretical elaboration of those spontaneous ideological positions.

(B) Political Objections which stem from Disguised Essentialism

This form of criticism comes from either Social Democratic or Ultra-egalitarian positions. This reveals a

curious feature that is one of Lenin's particular discoveries: the identity of the ultra-left and the Right. This objection to Leninism is that the emphasis on theoretical training leads to the development of a corps d'élite which sows the seeds of authoritarianism. This entails the notion that the break between science and class consciousness is false and undemocratic.

The Ultra-left and Right deviations have a common characteristic, their concepts of science are indifferent to its mode of production, that is, its characteristic as a practice. For them, science only exists as a result, it is approached only from the point of view of its political and ideological consequences. Ultra-leftism treats the existence of science as in contradiction with its ideal of abstract equality; Social Democracy treats science as in contradiction with its ideal of unrestrained liberty for revisionism. Science, however, is a practice which involves a specific break with ideology, an epistemological break made through a particular theoretical apparatus, and not by concrete individual subjects.

Leninism is a clear refutation of these two positions: it is not individuals that are put to work discretely on theory and politics, but theoretical Marxism that must guide the practice of the proletariat, and it is the duty of all Communists, whether workers or intellectuals, to study Marxism. The idea of an intellectual elite was repugnant to Lenin, and to Marx. But the notion that science is open to the immediate assessment of all is a nonsensical position related again to the essentialist notion that science is an open book. The difficulty of all sciences cannot be easily eliminated by fiat. It makes not the slightest difference to say all have the right of criticism in a science, if there is a real inequality in knowledge and technical level. Science as a theoretical practice cannot be reduced to a nice simplicity: 'there is no royal

road to science' (Marx).

(3) The position and the tasks of this journal

In the struggle for Leninism this journal seeks to facilitate a recognition of the theoretical work that must be accomplished as the preliminary basis for engaging in the direct task of the formation of the revolutionary party in this country. We believe that no revolutionary party exists in Britain that can claim to possess a Marxist-Leninist political practice. But this does not mean that the work we are engaged upon is theoreticist, that is, without politics at all. Clearly, all political movements and political struggles do not wait for theory - they are spontaneous products of the class struggle. Marxist-Leninist politics does not develop from spontaneous struggle but in a break with it. Theory, the forms and concepts in which this break is thought and produced, is thus dominant in the formation of Marxist-Leninist politics.

Politically our position is, as we have said in our first issue, firmly within the anti-revisionist movement and we are firmly opposed to the ideologies of Trotskyism and neo-Stalinism. The spectacular fragmentation of the Marxist sects of the Ultra-left and the frozen entities of the revisionist camp are both cause and consequence of the present great theoretical backwardness, and we have no hesitation in rejecting all pressure for the production of a political programme from the material both theoretical and organisational at our disposal.

From the response that we have had for the first issue of Theoretical Practice it is clear that there is a demand for serious Marxist theory, and that serious work is going on. As we said in our first issue we want to hear from individuals or groups who are interested in our position and have similar objectives.

FASCISM & POLITICAL THEORY

by Antony Cutler

Nicos Poulantzas 'Fascisme et Dictature' Paris
Francois Maspero 1970 23, 70 fr.

This book is an ambitious attempt to pose important theoretical questions in areas where Marxist theory is largely undeveloped. The problem of the theoretical analysis of fascism is situated within a discussion of the theory of the state in general¹ and in particular within the theory of exceptional forms of the state, that is forms of the state which deviate from the bourgeoisie democratic form (Fascism, Bonapartism, Military Dictatorship). However, this book is not merely a contribution to these vital theoretical questions but also, as the subtitle indicates ('la troisième internationale face au fascisme'), the reflections of a Marxist-Leninist theorist upon the history of Marxist-Leninist theoretical and political practice. These reflections are an attempt to think the effects of the political and theoretical deviations of the Third International in the era of fascism. Poulantzas attempts to produce both a de-mystification of a vital stage in the history of the workers' movement and to present a Leninist political analysis of the deviations which every Marxist-Leninist militant faces in political practice.

It should already be apparent that the scope of the book makes an exhaustive analysis of its contents impossible. The aim of this review is to discuss some central problems which I shall analyse under the heading of the theory of political representation. The mode of exposition in this text will be to place in context the crucial theoretical problems of Poulantzas' analysis, and to illustrate the theoretical criticisms by discussing Poulantzas' concrete analyses.

The Theory of Political Representation

The major theoretical problem raised by Poulantzas' text is that which concerns class interests and their political representation. It is necessary to present the general theoretical context of this problem in order to situate the limitations of Poulantzas' position.

It is a basic principle of Marxism that the class struggle is represented in the political arena by the various political parties and by the apparatuses of the state. But here, as everywhere else, it is essential that the concept of representation does not collapse into that of expression, such that the content of the class struggle can be read empirically in the behaviour of the parties. To avoid this empiricism two questions must be posed:

I What is the content of representation at the political level, that is, what is represented?

II What are the conditions of representability and the means of representation.

These questions demand the posing of another, the question of the nature of the space in which representation take place, and therefore of the nature of the political level.

If these questions are not posed, then class interests,

which have been traditionally regarded as the content of representation in the Marxist theory of politics, will fall below the level of theoretical reflection and assume the character of givens. The implications of this failure are that a Marxist concept, class interests, will be read in a pre-Marxist way. Any 'given' is the appearance of a given, its conditions of existence are the repression of its own determinants. Althusser has shown us that 'givenness' is no accident but the effect of a particular mode of causality. His concept of this mechanical causality has two components. Firstly, the homogeneous space in which objects assume the character of givens and relate to one another; this space which creates and underlies the objects is the product of anthropological assumptions. Secondly, there are the given objects themselves which are empirical manifestations of this anthropological essence. The paradigmatic form of mechanical causality is that which operates in classical economics.²

In the case of class interests, the form this relation between space and given assumes is that between egoistic theories of human nature (anthropological assumption) and class interests (given objects). The results of this ideological reprise of a Marxist concept are twofold: the theoretical effects of the assumption and the theoretical effects of the given objects. Firstly, the existence of the anthropological assumption means that class interests are not produced, as they are in Marxist theory, by the complex articulated combination of practices (Economic, Political, Ideological) but by an essential constitutive subject (the economically egoistic class member/class as a whole). Therefore classes are aggregates of similar subjects and class interests the resultant

of the aggregates' interests. Secondly, the effect of the given objects is to reduce to a simple homogeneity the complex combination of practices of the Marxist theory, thus class practices will always be in essence economic practices. The referent of 'ideological' or 'political' struggles is thus always the economic level, of which they are at best an epiphenomenal expression.

In contrast to this ideological reprise, the Marxist concept of class interest must be founded upon the mode of causality which is the basis of scientificity in Marxism, structural causality. In Marxist theory class interests are the product of a complex articulated combination of practices (Economic, Ideological, Political), and each practice has its conditions of existence in its articulation in the complex whole. Thus the conception of an essentially 'economic' level is alien to Marxism; in the economic production process itself class interests are an effect of a complex structure. To illustrate the rupture Marxism effects in respect of the ideological conception of class interest Marx's discussion of cost price in Capital Vol. III will be outlined.

Marx distinguishes between the cost price of the commodity and its actual cost. The former is a function of the means of thinking his economic practice available to the capitalist. This means is the accounting system which makes it possible for the capitalist to calculate the cost to himself of producing the commodity, a cost divided into constant and variable capital. The combination of constant and variable capital represents the portion of the value of the commodity which replaces 'what the commodity costs the capitalist himself' (Marx).³ According to Marx, the capitalist identifies his conception of cost

price with the actual cost of the commodity. There are two possible ways of conceiving the cost of a commodity, its cost as expenditure of capital and its cost as expenditure of labour. The former, the ideological notion, is designated by Marx the 'cost price' and represents the cost of the commodity to the capitalist. The latter, the scientific concept, is designated by Marx the 'actual price' of the commodity. The capitalist does not recognise this distinction and takes the former for the latter. How does this occur? The accounting system as a technical practice produces a knowledge effect adequate to the position of the capitalist as a subject in the productive process. Labour under capitalist conditions appears to the capitalist in the following terms, 'after the labourer enters the production process he himself constitutes an ingredient of operating productive capital, which belongs to the capitalist.'⁵ The structure of the capitalist production process produces two ideological effects in respect of this problem: the capitalist emerges as the producer of the commodity because labour appears as subsumed within capital, and, as a correlate, labour only appears as variable capital, as a cost of production, and not as the creator of value, which is a role displaced on to the capitalist by the first effect. 'For this reason the cost price of the commodity necessarily appears to the capitalist as the actual cost of the commodity'.⁶ The capitalist class interest in the struggle over the price of labour power is thus a combination of economic practice (the capitalist as an agent in the process of production) and ideological practice (the ideological conditions of existence of such an agent are that labour appears only as variable capital, as a cost, and not in its creative role).

Thus there is a radical distinction between the Marxist conception of class interest and the ideological reprise on this concept. This ideological conception of the content of representation produces two possible ways of analysing the means of representation: either a reductionist theory which reduces representation to a reflection of 'economic' interests, or, if the relative autonomy of politics is affirmed, the effect of this theoretical structure is formalism. Formalism in this context means the mere affirmation of the autonomy of existing political institutions in the absence of a theoretical founding of the relative autonomy of the political level of the social formation. I shall concentrate upon this formalism, as the weaknesses of reductionism are evident to all but congenital vulgar marxists.

If class interests are regarded as givens, then the means of political representation become formal channels of transmission of such interests, without having any effectivity on the form or content of the interests themselves. Changes in the type of channel 'used' reflect changes in the mode of representation which is functional for the realisation of the class interests. Channels are merely 'forms' that are available to the determinant class interests: the means of representation and representability are determined by the represented. In such a formulation the relative autonomy of politics has been stated but the conditions of the specific effectivity of the political level have been denied. Formalism is a complicated form of reductionism. Its complication consists in the contradiction between the assertion of the relative autonomy of politics and the fundamentally simplistic conception of the social formation which is entailed in its notion of class interests. Simple reductionism

involves no such contradiction.

This analysis has posed the problem of political representation in general. Poulantzas raises the problem implicitly in his analysis of the conjunctures 'fascisation and the advent of fascism.' This is conceived of as: 'corresponding to a situation of acute deepening and exacerbation of internal contradictions among the dominant class and class fractions'.⁷ The correlate of these contradictions is a 'crisis of hegemony': 'In the case of the process of fascisation and of fascism, no class or fraction of the dominant class seems capable of imposing its "direction" on the other classes and fractions of the power bloc either through its actual means of political organisation or through the "parliamentary democratic state"'.⁸ This crisis is reflected in a 'crisis in the political representation of the dominant class and class fractions: ... one can establish a rupture simultaneously of the order of representation - in the state system - and in the order of organisation between the classes and fractions of the dominant class and their political parties'.⁹

Poulantzas' use of the concept of 'representation' is descriptive and empiricist. For him a crisis of 'representation' is equated with a manifest withdrawal of support by the dominant class, or class fractions, from the parties which represent them, and/or from the system of political parties in general. In the case of a general rejection of the party system by the classes, a rejection based on the failure of this 'form' to fulfill class interests, another 'form' is adopted as the means of representation of these interests. Representation is displaced from the political party to branches of the state apparatus.

Representation is determined by the represented.

Poulantzas unwittingly founds his analysis of 'representation' on the empirical given to be explained, the manifest withdrawal of support. Thus, in the absence of a scientific foundation of the concept of representation, Poulantzas' analysis is condemned to pure circularity; to explaining the changes at the political level by changes founded on class interests, and discovering the class interests through their manifestation at the political level.

The theoretical consequences of the errors in Poulantzas' notion of representation have been demonstrated, we will now illustrate the effects of these errors in relation to the concrete problems which are the central point of his analysis.

Working Class Political Strategy

Poulantzas correctly criticises the Comintern's economic deviation of equating economic crisis with an offensive period of the working class movement in the class struggle.

'If fascism is only the index of the "feebleness" of the bourgeoisie that it bears witness to the catastrophic economic crisis of capitalism, it cannot but be paired with the "power" of the mass revolutionary movement: power itself automatically and abstractedly deducible from this crisis. The process of fascisation thus itself necessarily corresponds to an offensive stage of the worker's movement and to a defensive stage of the bourgeoisie and to the reduction of class struggle to the economic and the mechanistic equation "economic crisis = offensive of the working class".¹⁰ This criticism is repeated in a more general form in Poulantzas' analysis of the results of working class political defeats preceding the accession to power of the fascists. He speaks of:

'The characteristic of the process of fascisation that the bourgeoisie class struggle against the working class assumes a more and more political character, while that of the working class against the bourgeoisie is more and more limited to the domain of economic demands'. 'For reasons relating to the recent past of political struggles the progressively dominant role of economic struggle is hidden under forms of action inherited... from periods corresponding to the actual dominance of politics: mass demonstrations, factory occupations, forms of "direct action", at the point of no return this dislocation between the content of the struggle and its forms clearly appears.'

Three theses are put forward here: (1) the influence of the economic deviation on Comintern theory and political practice led to a complete misunderstanding of the relative autonomy of political practice. (2) This economism, however, is 'hidden' under forms of political practice inherited from the past. (3) The result of this process is an asymmetry in the class struggle. The bourgeoisie increasingly 'fights' at the political level, the proletariat at the economic.

All the failings of Poulantzas' positivist conception of class interests may be found here. Classes and class struggle appear as the confrontation of two expressive wholes. For Poulantzas the proletariat's defeat is based upon illusion; the Comintern and the parties think that a defensive stage in the class struggle is equivalent to the restriction of class struggle to the economic level. This illusion is maintained by the false appearance of political struggle conveyed by the outmoded political forms available to the working class. These forms, however, are merely expressions of this fundamental illusion, they have the status of survivals since they do not possess any independent effectivity. This theo-

retical structure is based on a simple opposition between illusion (proletarian economism) and consciousness (bourgeoisie realisation of the specific effectivity of political practice).

Poulantzas conceives these forms of political struggle as inappropriate and outmoded forms; for him they become mere survivals. He effectively treats the political forms as survivals in an historicist manner. The correlate of his treatment of the forms of political struggle is that Economism loses its character as a theoretical concept. In Marxist theory Economism does not represent a real reduction of political struggle to the economic struggle (that is, the disappearance of politics), but the theory of an incorrect relation between economic and political struggle.

Poulantzas therefore reduces Economism from a theoretical-political deviation within Marxism, to a real process (the disappearance of the political level in the social formation). Poulantzas does not establish the forms of this deviation and the conditions of its production and reproduction in Marxist political struggle. Economism is an ever possible deviation from Marxism determined by errors that are political/theoretical. In the absence of such a recognition of this basic principle of Leninism Poulantzas is driven to postulate that Economism in the period of fascism is due to a hangover from the Second International. He suggests this when he argues that the Third International by-passed Lenin's critique of Economism and produced an economic reading of his Imperialism.

Lenin in What is to be Done? analysed Economism in a way which precludes an analysis based upon survivals. Poulantzas is therefore guilty of a misreading of Lenin no less serious than that he attributes to the

Third International. This misreading reveals Poulantzas' failure to think the political level rather than merely assert its existence.

Lenin treats Economism coupled with Terrorism as forms of spontaneism. Although both deviations represent the spontaneous reactions of different class positions in politics, their status as deviations does not derive from being the immediate modes of struggle of class militants, but from being taken up politically-theoretically within Marxism. The 'bowing before spontaneity' of political leaders means that the spontaneous practice of the class is not transformed at the political level by Marxist practice. Marxism is itself retarded behind the spontaneous actions of the class militants, since the deviationists petrify into dogma given and immediate forms of struggle. Marxist theory and organisation are necessary because of the dislocation that supervenes between political effectivity and the economic level. The spontaneous economic struggles of the workers reproduce capitalist economic relations.

Analysis in terms of survivals is therefore useless since it never explains the cause of the "original" deviations, nor indeed, how and from what it is a deviation. The absence of a concept of deviation leads again to the grounding of the analysis on the object: the Second International's 'Economism' and the trade union struggle. Poulantzas does not explain the production of political deviations in the Comintern, and in the Italian and German parties in the era of fascism nor does he explain their nature as deviations.

The State

As a final example of the errors of Poulantzas' theoretical position I will examine the dominant aspect of

his analysis of the State, that is the relation between the Ideological State Apparatuses and the Class Struggle. I shall treat this problem in relation to Poulantzas' criticisms of Althusser's paper Ideologie et Appareils D'Etat.¹²

Poulantzas' main criticism refers to the means by which Althusser attempts to establish the proof of the relative autonomy of the ideological apparatuses of the State:

'It is here, it seems to me, that the most contentious aspect of the interpretation proposed by Althusser resides. It is true that he mentions their relative autonomy but in a descriptive mode. On the other hand (p 17 ff)¹³, he insists on their unity only in relation to the following reasons (a) Their unity is due to the dominant ideology; (b) The dominant ideology is "that of the dominant class which detains state power". Result: the "unity" of the ideological apparatuses is abstractedly reduced and through ideology alone to that of state power. Now, this analysis is abstract and formal in so far as it does not (concretely) take the class struggle into consideration: (a) it does not take into consideration the fact that in a social formation several contradictory and antagonistic class ideologies exist; everything happens as if Althusser in speaking of the "dominant ideology" as unity of the ideological apparatuses meant in this case by "dominant ideology" what he calls "mechanism of ideology in general" (?); (b) it does not take into consideration the dislocations present in state power. In effect, the work of the cultural revolution in China has shown what Lenin presented so well: that the power relations in the State ideological apparatuses do not depend directly on the class nature of the Statepower and are not exhaustively determined by it. Notably, the transformation of these

apparatuses can only be the result of a "revolutionisation" which concerns them directly. State power (its class nature) poses limits (variable in relation to the class or classes in power) on the ideological apparatuses of the state. These limits... which circumscribe the "unity" of the ideological apparatuses are not at all the exclusive effect of the "dominant ideology", but of State power itself... It seems especially necessary to stress this for if one does not clearly establish these points one risks falling precisely into reformism's "official" interpretation of Gramsci.¹⁴

Althusser takes up this issue in a postscript to the same paper written in April 1970.

'The "mechanism" of ideology in general is one thing. We have seen that it can be reduced to a few principles expressed in a few words (as 'poor' as those which, according to Marx, define production in general, or in Freud, define the unconscious in general). If there is any truth in it, this mechanism must be abstract with respect to every real ideological formation.

'I have suggested that the ideologies were realised in institutions, in their rituals and their practices, in the ISAs. We have seen that on this basis they contribute to that form of class struggle, vital for the ruling class the reproduction of the relations of production. But the point of view itself, however, real, is still an abstract one.

'In fact, the State and its Apparatuses only have meaning from the point of view of the class struggle, as an apparatus of class struggle ensuring class oppression and guaranteeing the conditions of exploitation and its reproduction. But there is no class struggle without antagonistic classes. Whoever says class struggle of the ruling class says resistance, revolt and class

struggle of the ruled class.

'That is why the ISAs are not the realisation of ideology in general, nor even the conflict-free realisation of the ideology of the ruling class. The ideology of the ruling class does not become the ruling ideology by the grace of God, nor even by virtue of the seizure of State power alone. It is by the installation of the ISAs in which this ideology is realised and realises itself that it becomes the ruling ideology. But this installation is not achieved all by itself, on the contrary, it is the stake in a very bitter and continuous class struggle: first against the former ruling classes and their positions in the old and new ISAs, then against the exploited class.

'But this point of view of the class struggle in the ISAs is still an abstract one. In fact, the class struggle in the ISAs is indeed an aspect of the class struggle, sometimes an important and symptomatic one: eg, the anti-religious struggle in the eighteenth century, or the 'crisis' of the educational ISA in every capitalist country today. But the class struggles in the ISAs is only an aspect of a class struggle which goes beyond the ISAs. The ideology that a class in power makes the ruling ideology in its ISAs is indeed 'realised' in those ISAs, but it goes beyond them, for it comes from elsewhere. Similarly, the ideology that a ruled class manages to defend in and against such ISAs goes beyond them, for it comes from elsewhere.

'It is only from the point of view of the classes, ie, of the class struggle, that it is possible to explain the ideologies existing in a social formation. Not only is it from this starting-point that it is possible to explain the realisation of the ruling ideology in the ISAs and of the forms of class struggle for which the ISAs are the seat and the stake. But it is also and above

all from this starting-point that it is possible to understand the provenance of the ideologies which are realised in the ISAs and confront one another there. For if it is true that the ISAs represent the form in which the ideology of the ruling class must necessarily be realised, and the form in which the ideology of the ruled class must necessarily be measured and confronted, ideologues are not 'born' in the ISAs but from the social classes at grips in the class struggle: from their conditions of existence, their practices, their experience of the struggle, etc. '15

The question we are asked to think through in this difference of theoretical position is that of the conditions of thinking the relative autonomy of the State Ideological Apparatuses, Poulantzas thinks this question from the point of view of a result; that there are dislocations within the ideological apparatuses of the state, that these dislocations exist as a function of the class struggle, and that they are necessarily not negated by the possession of state power by any particular class. Any other position implies for Poulantzas a reductionism, that is, that the ISA will be conceived as a pure expression of class rule and will be immediately deducible from the possession of state power by a particular class. What is missing in Poulantzas' analysis is the concept of these ideological apparatuses, and the concept of this class struggle in the region of ideology. For Poulantzas the relative autonomy of the ISA derives from an absence, that is from the fact that class rule is not univocal. Again, relative autonomy is stated but not established. This is exemplified by his recourse to the real object itself, in his example of the Cultural Revolution. The relative autonomy of the ISA can only be founded by answering theoretically a superficially paradoxical question, what

does it mean to say that these apparatuses work through ideology?

Althusser gives the pre-requisite of such an answer in his postscript, that is, in the conception that ideologies are not created in the ISA. On the contrary they are 'born' in the practices, experiences of struggle and conditions of existence of the various classes. The weakness of Poulantzas' position is that this question is denegated by the problem he poses. Poulantzas' point of departure is the assertion of the relative autonomy of the ISA; this is deduced from his position that if the ISA are not relatively autonomous univocal dominance of the state by a class is the result. This is no solution to the problem since it merely reproduces the terms of the problem in another form. Ideological autonomy is deduced from the political effects of ideological dependence. In the way in which Poulantzas has posed this problem no conceptual distinction between ideology and politics can be produced.

Althusser shows that the conditions for thinking the relative autonomy of the ISA can only be founded on a concept of the specificity of the ideological level. Althusser shows that the theoretical foundation of the relative autonomy of the ideological state apparatuses can only be established on the basis of a theory of ideology in general. It was established in the discussion of cost price that all economic practice is articulated through ideological practice, ideology is an ever-already given level of the social formation. The distinction between the ideological and repressive apparatuses of the State and the nature of the specific effectivity of ideology can only be founded in a theory of the specificity of ideology.

Ideology produces recognition, recognition which is

ever already immediate. It produces this effect through a structure composed of two elements; the production through ideology of subjects and the work of the subject as a constitutive category of ideology. Why is immediate recognition ideological? All science is built on a distinction between the thought object and the real object. Within the structure of scientific practice there are mechanisms by which the confusion of these two objects is precluded. Even if this explicit distinction is missing from the science the effect of such a distinction is always present in the internal criteria of proof of the science. This is possible because the scientist is not the subject of the practice but its support. The structure of science is not unified by a perceiving subject but by a system of concepts which define a thought object.

In ideology, in contrast, men relate to their real conditions of existence as subjects. In science, the thought object is never immediate but rather mediate, its condition of existence is a prior production process. In ideology, the effect of the category of subject is to impose the requirements of immediate recognition. A subject always has a defined place as a perceiving. This immediacy means that the subject's relation to its real conditions of existence is imaginary. The practice of science establishes a rupture between its thought objects and real objects. In ideology there is a dependence on the real object.

The production of this ideological effect takes place through the structure of ideological practice. This structure simultaneously produces subjects and works through the category of subject. This is not a temporal process individuals are not temporally prior to subjects. Every individual is ever-already a subject. Thus, for any individual there is no 'pre-ideological' phase.

Ideology in general has no history, it has the invariant structure of an ever-already-given level of the social formation. The nature of the relative autonomy of Ideological State Apparatuses thus derive from their specificity, which is to reproduce the structure of ideology, that is the structures of the production and operation of the subject. The alternative is to fall into a pragmatist view of ideology which is precisely incapable of grasping the nature of ideology as a practice (production of subjects, production of structures of immediate recognition of various levels of complexity) and therefore its specificity. The following passage indicates that this danger is realised in Poulantzas' analysis: 'In effect the first element which it is necessary to underline is that the growing role of repression is necessarily accompanied by the ideology which legitimates this repression.'

If the discussion of the problems raised by Nicos Poulantzas' book has been unable to do justice to the scope and richness of its analysis it will have achieved its aims if it indicates a crucial ambivalence which pervades the work. This ambivalence stems from a contradiction between the practice of scientific theory which develops purely within theoretical practice on one hand and a collapse of this project into empiricism on the other. It is an ambivalence of which the reader must be aware if he is to give this book the level of critical reflection that is so greatly deserves. I wish to conclude with two quotations from the text which clearly exemplify this ambivalence.

'an attempt has been made to grasp the central characteristics of this phenomena by analysing its causes and effects going beyond its secondary traits which characterised it where it has been established. But, in order to do this there is only one correct mode of

research procedure and exposition of the results in the order of presentation: to pursue a thorough examination of fascist states where they have been established by analysing concrete situations. It is only thus that one can separate the secondary factors from real causes and in disengaging the latter determine the possibilities and the conditions of the resurgence of the phenomena... '16

'a general plan has been opted for... in putting forward in each chapter a series of general propositions; followed by the concrete analysis of the German and Italian cases; analyses which then assume the role in the exposition of illustrations of these propositions.'¹⁷

Notes

1 Poulantzas has written extensively on the State, his main writings are: L'Examen Marxiste de l'Etat et du Droit Actuels et la Question de l'Alternative Les Temps Modernes No 219-220 August - September 1964; Preliminaires a l'Etude de l'Hegemonie dans l'Etat (in two parts) Les Temps Modernes nos 234 and 235 November and December 1965; The State in Capitalist Society New Left Review No 58 November/December 1969; Pouvoir Politique et Classes Sociales (Paris Francois Maspero 1970). He has also written a study in the philosophy of law, Nature des Choses et Droit: Essai sur la Dialectique du Fait et de la Valeur (Paris Pichon and Durand-Auzias 1965), a paper on the science-ideology relation in political theory, Political Ideology and Scientific Research in Lars Dencik (ed) Scientific Research and Politics (Lund Sweden: Student Litteratur: 1969), a critique of Althusser Vers une Theorie Marxiste Les Temps Modernes No 240 May 1966, and a critique of Perry

Anderson and Tom Nairn's work on British history, Marxist Political Theory in Great Britain New Left Review no 43 June/July 1967.

2 For the relation between mechanical causality and classical economics see Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar Reading Capital (London New Left Books 1970) pages 182-3, and for a discussion of the modes of causality op cit Chapter 9.

3 Karl Marx Capital (Moscow Foreign Languages Publishing House 1962) Vol III Page 26.

4 Technical practice is defined by Althusser in the following terms: 'Any technical practice is defined by its ends: such and such effects to be produced in such and such an object in such and such a situation. The means depend on the ends.' For Marx (London Allen Lane 1969) p 171 footnote 7.

5 Capital III page 26

6 Op cit page 26

7 Fascisme et Dictature page 71 (referred to as F and D hereafter)

8 F and D p 72 (emphasis in original)

9 F and D p 73 (emphasis in original)

10 F and D p 81 (emphasis in original)

11 F and D pp 15-152

12 La Pensee No 151 June 1970

13 Poulantzas refers here to Althusser's paper here.

14 F and D p 336 footnote (emphasis in original).

15 Ideologie et Appareils d'Etat pp 37-38. I have used Ben Brewster's translation of this paper in the quotations which appear in this text. His translation is to appear in Louis Althusser Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (New Left Books, forthcoming).

16 F and D pp 7-8. Poulantzas's methodological position has two empiricist components: (i) the factorial language of positivist causality (primary and secondary causes), which are (ii) found in the real itself. That is, the

'real' is composed of atomistic factors which are distinguished in their degree of relative effectivity. All we have to do is to observe concrete situations to discover their causal hierarchy within the real.

The consequences of this methodology taken to its extreme are that Marxist-Leninist politics is no longer founded in Marxist science but in the real itself. Once this course is adopted the results are amazing paradoxes. For Perry Anderson, for example, the validity of Marxist-Leninist politics is situational and depends upon the existence of a form of the state which is the truth of Civil Society. That is, on a form of the state which is theoretically impossible for Marxism. Once this course has been adopted, another theoretically impossible formulation, that Civil Society is the truth of the state, is invoked as the basis of a rejection of the validity of the basis of Marxist-Leninist politics in the Western countries.

'When there is no literacy or common culture; when there is no civic political tradition; when there is no real national identity - the State tends to become the sole repository and reality of the society as a society. 'Civil society' is so protoplasmic, disarticulated, amorphous, impalpable that its only tangible existence is its crystallisation in the State. It is only there that this inchoate magma coagulates into a form. In underdeveloped societies - today even more than in Lenin's time - the State is the univocal meaning of the nation. It is by definition, Hegelian.' Perry Anderson Problems of Socialist Strategy p 228 in Perry Anderson and Robin Blackburn (eds) Towards Socialism (London Fontana/New left Review 1964).

'Leninism and social-democracy are apparently in

every way poles apart: violence against legality, vanguardism against passivity, discipline against democracy. Yet in one respect there is a fundamental similarity between the two. They both polarize their whole strategies on the State civil society remains outside the main orbit of their action. Here lies the clue to the real adaption of the one and the false adaption of the other. For in the East, the State was the sole vector of social action and transformation: civil society had no structural existence independent of it. To change society, Leninism in one form or another was a necessity. But in the West, just the opposite is true. There, in conditions of diminishing scarcity, civil society predominates politically over the State, and determines it in its image. The heteronomy of the State is the root cause of the failure of social-democracy.' (emphasis in original) Anderson op cit p 237. 17 F and D pp 9-10. The procedure recommended by Poulantzas here is in direct contradiction to the method suggested by him in the quotation immediately above. Here, the validity of theoretical propositions are to be established within the discourse of theoretical practice itself. Consequently, concrete analyses have the role of illustrations of propositions already established in theory. The quarantee of the validity of these theoretical propositions are no longer the real itself.

ALTHUSSER AND PHILOSOPHY

by Paul Hirst

1 THE LENINIST PRACTICE OF PHILOSOPHY

'Marxist-Leninist theory includes a science (historical materialism and a philosophy (dialectical materialism)).' (L. Althusser, 1968. NLR 64 p 5)

Althusser is a Marxist-Leninist philosopher: a communist partisan in philosophy. His works are 'philosophical': to the chagrin of those positivistic Marxists who demand 'substantive analyses of concrete situations' as a proof of concepts and distinctions. His philosophy is political: uncomfortably so for those philosophers who seek in him a theory of scientific discourse independent of the 'confusions' and 'contingencies' of politics.

Philosophy is an arm of revolutionary struggle, an instance in the complex totality that is Marxist-Leninist theory and practice and an instance as necessary as historical materialism or party organisation. The space of Marxist philosophy's struggle is the political-theoretical conjuncture.¹ The stakes of Marxist philosophy's struggle; the defence and demarcation of Marxist theory and political practice from the ideologies which besiege it. The Marxist practice of philosophy is distinct from all previous philosophical practice; it is

a non-philosophical practice founded upon an objective knowledge of its political function and its theoretical limitations.

These claims for 'philosophy' are unthinkable and intolerable to the majority of Marxists: to positivist historians and economists, to humanist philosophers and to practical politicians. They are intolerable because they are a political intervention in theory at the site of a problem long considered settled by the ideologies which occupy it; the question of the specificity of the Marxist dialectic and the scientificity of Marxism. They are intolerable because they are a theoretical intervention in politics which thrusts before us the most 'abstract' questions as urgent political necessities; because of the insistence that the future of the workers movement itself may hinge upon concepts and mere 'theoretical debates.'

'To be extremely schematic, it may be said that, in the history of the Marxist movement, the suppression of this distinction (between historical and dialectical materialism) has expressed either a rightist or a leftist deviation. The rightist deviation suppresses philosophy: only science is left (positivism). The leftist deviation suppresses science: only philosophy is left (subjectivism). (Althusser, 1968. NLR 64 p 5)

'If it is true, as the whole Marxist tradition proclaims,

*Althusser's texts considered:

Lénine et la Philosophie, Maspero, Paris, 1968
For Marx, Allen Lane, London, 1970
Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon, NLR 64
and 'From Capital to the Philosophy of Marx' in
Reading Capital, NLB, London, 1970

that the greatest event in the history of the class struggle . . . is the union of Marxist theory and the workers' movement, it is clear that the internal balance of that union may be threatened by those weaknesses in theory known as deviations. . . ; we can understand the philosophical scope of the unrelenting theoretical disputes unleashed in the Socialist and then in the Communist movement, over what Lenin calls mere "shades of opinion", for, as he said in What is to be done?, "The fate of Russian Social-Democracy for very many years to come may depend on the strengthening of one or the other 'shade'".' (Althusser, 1968. L&P p 27)

The definition of philosophy, its precise scope and function in theory, its relation to the other instance of Marxist practice, this, for Althusser, is the stake at issue in his own philosophical struggle. The consequences of this definition are not 'abstract'; they are crucial effects in theory and practice. The nature of dialectical materialism and its relation to historical materialism have been the object of a constant theoretical (philosophical) reflection, criticism and re-thinking in Althusser's work. Althusser's definition of philosophy as 'the theory of theoretical practice' was advanced in his book Pour Marx (1965) and retained in his contributions to the collective text Lire le Capital (1965). This definition was criticised in his Preface to the Italian edition of Reading Capital (1968) and the new definition presented in Lenine et la Philosophie (1968). This new definition is the result of thoroughgoing overhaul of his positions in the earlier works. This new definition broadly corresponds to the position on philosophy outlined at the beginning of this introduction.

Far from being elements in the architecture of a philosophical 'system', Althusser's works are 'investigations':² the posing and solving of problems within

a definite but open problematic; involving, in the theoretical practice of that solution, the rigorous examination and re-formulation of those problems; and leading, in the case of the definition of philosophy, to the rejection of certain of those terms as logically untenable within that problematic.

However, much of this re-working is not explicitly presented in Althusser's criticisms of the earlier position, nor is it explained in Lénine et la Philosophie. It is our intention to examine this 'difference' between the old and the new definitions of philosophy, to examine the terms in which each definition is thought and to indicate the consequences of the change of definition. It is necessary to give a systematic Althusserian criticism of the earlier position (1965-67) and to expose and dispell the misreadings that may result from the error in this conception of philosophy and from the extremely brief and ambiguous formulation it received in the earlier texts. It must be emphasised that the change of definition is the precise correction of a specific error; an error whose site is localised in the definition of philosophy and its correction does not affect the other concepts in the earlier texts. It must also be emphasised that the method of exposition in this paper is to present a systematic misreading of the old definition; a misreading which its terms and ambiguity allow the 'innocent' and the 'philosophical' reader. It is not intended to be taken as Althusser's own position. Indeed, it is this ambiguity of the old definition and its contradiction with the other concepts of the earlier texts which have clearly contributed to Althusser's clarification and elaboration in later works.

2. PHILOSOPHY: 'THE THEORY OF PRACTICE IN GENERAL.'

A The Old Definition

The 'old' definition of philosophy is developed by Althusser in his paper On the Materialist Dialectic (1963):

'I shall call Theory (with a capital T), general theory, that is, the Theory of practice in general, itself elaborated on the basis of the Theory of existing theoretical practices (of the sciences), which transforms into "knowledges" (scientific truths) the ideological product of existing 'empirical' practices (the concrete activity of men). This Theory is the materialist dialectic which is none other than dialectical materialism.' (FM p 168)

'... the general Theory (the dialectic) in which is theoretically expressed the essence of theoretical practice in general, through it the essence of practice in general, and through it the essence of the transformations, of the 'development' of things in general.' (FM p 169)

What relation does this definition of philosophy produce between dialectical and historical materialism, and, more generally, between Marxist philosophy and the sciences? A philosophy 'in which is theoretically expressed the essence of theoretical practice in general' is a scientific philosophy: a philosophy which produces an objective knowledge of its object (theoretical practice - practice in general).³

'The essence of theoretical practice in general' must not be confused with those concepts Althusser uses in On the Materialist Dialectic to think theoretical practice as a specific form of production process. In particular, the Generalities, developed from the general

concepts by which Marx establishes the necessary conditions of all forms of production,⁴ do not reveal the essence of theoretical practice; they do not tell us in what 'knowledge' consists, they merely establish the necessary conditions by which it can be thought as a practice.

In the 'Materialist Dialectic' the Generalities perform this function in that they enable us to think the specificity of scientific practice: to think the demarcation of Marxist theoreticity (dialectics) from the claims of the Hegelian (or any Idealist/Empiricist) 'theory of knowledge! But having accomplished that primary demarcation⁵ their scope as concepts is exhausted⁶: the process of theoretical production, thus circumscribed, must be penetrated and the structure of Marx's scientific discourse disclosed in a theoretically reflected form.⁷ But Theory, far from being this philosophical practice of uncovering the dialectics existent 'in the practical state' in a scientific discourse, is claimed to be a science in its own right.

This claim made for Theory installs 'a philosophy radically different from Althusser's own practice in On the Materialist Dialectic and Reading Capital⁸. A scientific philosophy's knowledge must be a knowledge of scientificity: of what is and what is not within knowledge. It is a knowledge which specifies the "essence" of scientific practice. Ideology and science are distinguished not by their effects and the form of discourse in which these effects are produced, they are distinguished because philosophy is itself a science and knows internally (in reflection upon its own knowledges) the difference of the instances of science and ideology.⁹ Theory, as a science of the sciences, is a guarantee of their scientificity independent of (but not prior to) their own practice.¹⁰ This guarantee operates

at the level of a meta-science: it ensures the sciences their own logic by reason of its Logic, and in a distinct theoretical space; the space of a theory which thinks the space of all knowledge.¹¹

But we have only the claims of this Theory, which in Althusser's text are ambiguous, and not its proof. What are the conceptual proofs of the existence of this theoretical space? What are the proofs of the possibility of its process of theoretical production; of the existence of its object and of the concepts which can think that object? We are in a logical trap: the proof of these claims is unthinkable in an Althusserian problematic, and since this is the space in which the problem is posed, we must conclude that it is not the problem of that problematic.

In Reading Capital, a text prior to the change of definition, Althusser produces a systematic refutation of all philosophies which seek to guarantee knowledge independently of scientific practice.¹² He makes it perfectly clear that this search for guarantees is not his object and not his practice. In For Marx and Reading Capital he indicates that Theory does not have an existence prior to or independent of the sciences.¹³ In both these texts, however, Theory is defined unambiguously as a scientific practice; a scientific philosophy. Any search for a scientific philosophy leads in one direction only, away from the practice of the sciences and toward the philosophy of guarantees.

B The Problematic of the Philosophy of 'Guarantees'

Philosophies of the sciences which seek guarantees for knowledge which are independent of its process of production of necessity seek them in a knowledge whose conditions of existence are not those of production.

Beyond the labours of the sciences a knowledge existent in the 'real' object or in the 'knowing' subject underlies and secures their validity. This knowledge has always existed; its conditions of existence are identical with those of the objective or subjective reality of which it is a part. Only illusion and oversight have barred the path to the truth; they must only be torn away to reveal it.

The philosophical problematic of positivism establishes its guarantees in relation to the 'real object', albeit, in a complex relation constituted by a permanent retreat from the forms of vulgar realism which have underlain it. It demands that the sciences' hypotheses correspond to aspects of a 'real' object and that these correspondences be demonstrable in experimental proofs (variously conceived). The materialist category of 'matter'¹⁴ the empiricist 'theory of knowledge' and the experimental practice of the natural sciences are systematically conflated in this problematic. Matter is essentially an object of perception. The equation of perception and scientific practice is no accidental or 'innocent' confusion in this philosophy; it has a precise theoretical function. That function is to guarantee the consensus of the 'epistemological contract'¹⁵: the recognition by individual scientists that certain propositions are true/false by reference to a common standard accessible to all individuals through their natural faculties of sense and reason. It is the pre-judged individual who cannot accept the conditions of testing, who holds to 'fixed ideas in the face of the facts', which constitutes the primary epistemological obstacle to this philosophy.

The movement in the positivist problematic from the pole of an empiricist epistemology to a rationalist psychology/sociology of the sciences reflects the transformations of scientific practice. Its debates now con-

sist in the rumination of the form of proof required to reject/confirm scientific theories under the impact of post-Einsteinian physics, a retreat into descriptivism and the sociologism of the 'norms' of the scientific community.

This philosophical problematic, despite its equivocations, can never break with the 'realist fallacy' refuted by Bachelard. For Bachelard science is founded in a break with all theoretical elaborations of practico-social experience. The orders of perception and knowledge are absolutely distinct because the substantialism of social perceptions is an 'epistemological obstacle' to be overcome by science. Scientific knowledge is the product of a 'rational materialist' practice which consists in the realisation of theory: in the production of phenomena which can only exist through the reflection of scientific concepts upon their theoretical object, and through the 'phenomeno-technique', the instrumentalities in which the theoretical is invested and materialised in experimental practice.¹⁷

The philosophy of the knowing subject, in its various forms, gestaltist, phenomenological, neo-Kantian etc, is the mirror-reflection of the positivist engagement with the object. It is the act of cognition of this hypostasized 'subject' which structures the incoherent (once that logic is known through a radical inner cognition, stripping from thought all illusions stemming from its own externalisation/alienation in the world). This subjectivist philosophy appropriates the real (in this case, the objective knowledge of the sciences) in the only way open to it, through the ingestion of knowledge into subjectivity in the coincidence of subject and object in thought's knowledge of itself. This 'cogito' is a necessary and prior act of internal cognition which guarantees the subject its balance in consciousness;

which prevents the vertigo of an unconscious externalisation in the world. The subject embarks upon an endless spiral of reflection and meta-reflection to forestall its own appropriation in the unconscious facticity of nature. This 'guarantee' leads to a 'philosophy of nature'; a philosophy in which the order of nature can only mirror the known internal laws of reason or stand opposed to them in essence as their negation in the 'thing'.

But it is now over fifty years since the scientific discoveries of Freud; the discoveries which explode the problematic of a subject-consciousness psychology. These discoveries induce a reorganisation of philosophical categories. This philosophical effect of Freud's epistemological break consists in reflecting the consequences of the displacement of the 'conscious' to the position of one level in the complex totality of the psyche. A displacement which induces the elaboration of categories which separate the domains of the psychical and knowledge. This separation is rigorously thought out by Bachelard. The 'conscious', in the classic sense, is a fundamental misrecognition; an ideological effect of the structure which denegates¹⁸ its own position as a particular effect of a complex process. 'Consciousness', like the substantialist notions of 'earth', 'blood' and 'fire', is an impossible point of departure for any science of the psychical; a point of departure as unthinkable as that of alchemy for any rational chemistry.¹⁹

Lest Freud be considered an 'irrationalist', it must be insisted upon that the scientific subject is not the determinant moment of scientific practice. Science is an objective system of production: a process without a subject. Its determinant moment is its mean of production, its 'theory' (GII), its problematic which im-

poses a particular structure and modality of thought. The problematic provides the conditions of existence of a particular mode of thinking: the 'scientific mind' is determined by the particular state of development of the theoretical. It requires men only as supports; as living instrumentalities which are a specific element of its combination. The 'great names' of science are the effects of this problematic and not its source; any psychological or sociological explanation of the sciences is therefore beside the point. Bachelard, who reflected deeply upon Freud's discoveries, insisted that the 'scientific mind' is nothing other than the particular forms of scientific practice.²⁰

This search for 'guarantees' has taken us into the domain of the Idealism/Empiricism couple²¹. This search inevitably leads to a level below that at which the concepts of Bachelardian/Althusserian epistemology can think their object; since the object they are asked to think (an absolute scientificity and its conditions) is not the object of their concepts. Thus at this level the very concept of Theory becomes groundless; the guarantees of knowledge preclude a guaranteeing knowledge which has a process of production. The object of Theory produces either a logical contradiction in the concepts of the problematic or the philosophical rumination of an in-existent object which demands the concepts of another problematic. Theory, as a concept, is in fundamental contradiction with the concepts of theoretical practice, and, as a concept, has no place within the Althusserian problematic.

C The Process of Theoretical Production

The concepts of the process of theoretical production developed in On the Materialist Dialectic enable us to

criticise this error in the conception of philosophy present in the same Text.

'But what, then, is Generality I, that is, the raw material on which the labour of science is expended? Contrary to the ideological illusions - illusions which are not 'naive', not mere aberrations, but necessary and well-founded as ideologies - of empiricism or sensualism, a science never works on an existence whose essence is pure immediacy and singularity ("sensations" or "individuals"). It always works on something "general", even if this has the form of a fact.' (Althusser 1963 FM pp 183-4)

The objects of the sciences are the objects of concepts, theoretical objects: the process of production of knowledge takes place within knowledge, and not by that act of 'extraction' whereby 'abstract' concepts prise from the 'real' object its 'essence', an essence which is knowledge in itself.

'What is the moment, the level or the instance which corresponds to the means of production, in the theoretical practice of science? . . . it is what I shall call Generality II, constituted by the corpus of concepts whose more or less contradictory unity constitutes the theory of the science. . . , the theory that defines the field in which all the problems of the science must necessarily be posed. . . ' (Althusser 1963 FM pp 184-5)

Thus there is no 'problem of knowledge' only problems within knowledges. No scientific problem, concept, or proof can ever be examined scientifically except within its own problematic: it has no scientific existence outside of that problematic. The space of knowledge is a finite space established by the epistemological break, but the space within knowledge is infinite; its infinity consists in the openness of the scientific problematic.

'There is never an identity of essence between Generality I and Generality III, but always a real transformation, either by the transformation of an ideological generality into a scientific generality. . . ; or by the production of a new scientific generality which rejects the old one even as it englobes it, that is, defines its "relativity" and the (subordinate) limits of its validity.' (FM p 185)

The process of theoretical practice is a continuous discourse; a discourse of concepts in the penetration of their object, the effect of which is the reorganising of that object, the reformulation of its concepts, the production of new knowledges organically linked with existing knowledges. This constant problematisation of the relation of concepts and object is itself an effect of the openness of the scientific problematic. The history of the sciences is a history of those effects. The closure of ideological problematics produces the endless repetition of their discourse: an effect which is constant and spiral, endlessly reproducing itself and therefore without a history.

How can a Theory (philosophy), which, whatever its pretensions, installs a closed hierarchy of categories, legislate the conditions of scientificity for sciences which produce reorganisations of their own knowledges, for new sciences, which not only reorganise their previously ideological domains, but which may produce a revolution in the 'theoretical' - in the forms of discourse and proof of the sciences?22

D Why Philosophy is not a Science

Only the concepts of a science can think its object: it is the object of those concepts. The concepts of a science do not correspond to a real object of which they are

merely an abstraction. The state of the 'theoretical' is determined by the development of the sciences. Thus Theory (Philosophy) finds the objects of the sciences inaccessible to it, except through the concepts of the sciences themselves. Scientificity is the production of knowledge by concepts of their object: philosophy cannot therefore evaluate the concepts of a science independently of the relation of concepts/object in scientific practice. The conditions of scientificity are specified internally by a science and in its practice.

Philosophy is excluded from the interior of the sciences. It has no direct access to the scientific object. It has no privilege in the realm of discourse and proof (it is not itself the 'theoretical'). It cannot have the sciences for an object, for the object of a knowledge, since it cannot independently conceptualise the concepts or objects of the sciences.

Philosophy can only 'read' the existent discourses of the sciences. It can only 'reflect' their concepts/objects in the mode of demarcation between science and ideology, and between the different forms of scientificity. It can only demarcate externally on the basis of differences of effects and of order of discourse. This demarcation does not constitute scientificity: it is necessary for science to exist for this 'reflection' to have any point of departure. Until the distinct instances of science and ideology exist 'philosophy' can have no basis for its demarcations. So-called 'pre-Socratic' and 'Eastern' philosophies are no more than a continuation and systematisation of 'world outlooks' and necessarily a part of the ideological province of religion, myth and magic. Ideology is a necessary instance in all social formations: philosophy is not:

'the foundation of mathematics by Thales "induced"

the birth of Platonic philosophy. . ." (Althusser October 1967 FM p 14)

It is the existence of science which creates the conditions of existence of philosophy. It is the state of the development of scientificity which determines the order of appearance of categories in philosophy, which constitutes the history in philosophy.

E Althusser's Critique of Theory

'On the other hand, we now have every reason to think that, despite all the sharpening it received, one of the theses I advanced as to the nature of philosophy did express a certain "theoreticist" tendency. More precisely, the definition of philosophy as a theory of theoretical practice. . . is unilateral and therefore inaccurate. In this case, it is not merely a question of terminological ambiguity, but one of an error in the conception itself. To define philosophy in a unilateral way as the Theory of theoretical practices (and in consequence as a theory of the differences between the practices) is a formulation that could not help but induce either "speculative" or "positivist" theoretical effects and echoes.' (L. Althusser, 1968, RC pp 7-8)

'I did not show what it is, as distinct from science, that constitutes philosophy proper: the organic relation between every philosophy as a theoretical discipline and even within its theoretical forms of existence and exigencies, and politics. I did not point out the nature of this relation, which in Marxist philosophy, has nothing to do with a pragmatic relation. So I did not show clearly enough what in this respect distinguishes Marxist philosophy from earlier philosophies.' (1967 FM p 15)

This precise error in Althusser's text establishes the conditions of the philosophical misreading we have just

eliminated by demonstrating its contradiction with the key concepts of the problematic. But the negative is insufficient: this error and its effects can only be corrected by the criticism of the old definition of philosophy and the production of a new definition compatible with the terms of the problematic. In what did this theoreticist tendency, this unilateral definition of philosophy, consist?

In its theoreticism: it places the sciences outside of the social formation, apart from the crucial struggles of our age, in an absolute autonomy guaranteed by an autonomous philosophy.

In its unilateralism: philosophy is concerned with all practice but only as a science. Marxist philosophy is a science like Historical Materialism and guarantees its truths independently of the class struggle. As a 'Theory of practice in general' philosophy knows the 'essence' of political practice from the side of theory alone:

'The rightist deviation suppresses philosophy: only science is left (positivism).' (loc. cit.)

This unilateralist exaltation of philosophy destroys its conditions of existence and its raison d'être.

Philosophy, as the 'Theory of practice in general', denegates the political except as a part of its object within knowledge. It refuses to think the 'fact' that all philosophy is political through and through: that the struggle of parties in philosophy is a struggle in which the stakes are political-theoretical. The result of this omission is that not only is philosophy's relation to politics obscured, but its relation to the sciences is therefore developed unilaterally. Like Social Democratic consciousness in the economic struggle, philo-

sophy is induced by an external relation, its existence as a specific instance is the resultant of the existence of the instances of science and politics.

3 THE 'NEW' DEFINITION OF PHILOSOPHY

Lénine et la philosophie is a sketch 'of an objective knowledge of philosophy's mode of being' and an exposition of the 'quite different practice of philosophy' founded upon that knowledge of philosophy as the 'falsest of all false paths'.²³ It is developed through a reading of Lenin's text Materialism and Empirio-Criticism. A reading which demonstrates that Lenin thought through the philosophical implications of Marx's scientific discoveries in the following form: the science of history produces neither an annulment of philosophy by science nor a new system of philosophical categories, but a new practice of philosophy. Philosophy is not at an end as The German Ideology pronounces; Marxism is not a 'new' philosophy as the humanist philosophers have contended. Then what reorganisations or philosophy has the science of history induced; what is this new practice discovered and practiced by Lenin?

A. Althusser's Theses on Philosophy. Althusser summarises his position at the beginning of his paper Lénine devant Hegel.

'I have attempted to prove that Lenin should be regarded as having made a crucial contribution to dialectical materialism, in that he made a real discovery with respect to Marx and Engels, and that this discovery can be summarised as follows: Marx's scientific theory did not lead to a new philosophy (called dialectical materialism), but to a new practice of philosophy, to be precise to the practice of philosophy based on the proletarian class position in philosophy.

This discovery, which I regard as essential, can be formulated in the following theses:

- 1 Philosophy is not a science, and it has no object, in the sense in which science has an object.
- 2 Philosophy is a practice of political intervention carried out in a theoretical form.
- 3 It intervenes essentially in two privileged domains, the political domain of the effects of the class struggle and the theoretical domain of the effects of scientific practice.
- 4 In its essence, it is itself produced in a theoretical domain by the conjuncture of the effects of the class struggle and the effects of scientific practice.
- 5 It therefore intervenes politically, in a theoretical form, in the two domains, that of political practice and that of scientific practice: these two domains of intervention being its domains, insofar as it is itself produced by the combination of effects from these two practices.
- 6 All philosophy expresses a class position, a 'partisan-ship' in the great debate which dominates the whole history of philosophy, the debate between idealism and materialism.
- 7 The Marxist-Leninist revolution in philosophy consists of a rejection of the idealist conception of philosophy (philosophy as an 'interpretation of the world') which denies that philosophy expresses a class position, although it always does so itself, and the adoption of the proletarian class position in philosophy, which is materialist, ie, the inauguration of a new materialist and revolutionary practice of philosophy which induces effects of class division in theory.'

Althusser's position in these theses will be explicated by a commentary which draws on his argument in Lénine et la Philosophie.

B. Philosophy and the Sciences

(i) 'Philosophy is not a science: it has no object...'
The grounds of this thesis have already been demonstrated in the critique of "Theory".'

Although philosophy is not a science it is not a 'world-outlook'. Philosophy and ideology are not coterminous. Philosophy is not a domain of illusion pure and simple; a series of distorted effects and reverberations of the class struggles. What is at issue in the struggles of tendency in philosophy is a matter of the first importance.

(ii) Science and the Social Formation

Science is not the property of a class subject: there is no such thing as 'bourgeois knowledge' or 'proletarian knowledge'. A process without a subject, science has effects which are of universal significance. The knowledge effect is not an effect contained in a particular historical epoch - thus Euclidian geometry is part of the continent of mathematics, its scientific validity is not confined to the epoch of classical antiquity.

Science is not autonomous from the social formation (although the precise form of its relation, its specific effectivity in different formations, is not known in theory) - it suffers the effects of the class struggle.

(iii) The Struggle of Parties in Philosophy

These effects of the class struggle, of the political-ideological upon the scientific, are the matter of the tendency struggle in philosophy.

Philosophy consists in the ideological recovery of the sciences: the deformation, circumscription and limitation of the sciences' revolutions in knowledge by spiritualist and subjectivist categorisations in philo-

sophy (idealism).²⁴ The effects of these ideological interventions are not confined to the elaboration of a 'cordon sanitaire' in the theoretical, but, at certain crucial theoretical conjunctures, may effect scientific practice itself. In the conjunctures of epistemological breaks and reorganisations of the object (re-working of concepts) within a science, these effects can produce misrecognitions in the theoretical and real obstacles to scientific practice.

Philosophy consists in the defense of scientific practice (materialism) against such ideological incursions. In the elaboration of categories which provide firm epistemological foundations for scientific practice. The materialist category of 'matter', the presupposition that matter exists prior to and independently of thought, establishes the conditions of the objectivity and knowability of the world necessary for scientific practice. Science is of necessity materialist; idealism is an assault on its conditions of existence. In the reading and reflection of the forms of the theoretical existent in the sciences: a reading by which it is possible to demarcate between science and ideology; to provide the science with a clear guide to the conditions of its own practice in conditions of scientific crisis.

Philosophy has a double relation to the sciences:
(a) the elaboration of scientific concepts into philosophical categories - Kant's elaboration of the philosophical categories of substance and cause from the concepts of Newtonian physics.
(b) the elaboration in categories of theoretical positions necessary for the production of scientific concepts - Descartes' category of causality provided the basis for a break with Aristotelian causality that Galileo's new physics lacked.²⁵

(iv) The New Practice of Philosophy

Philosophy consists in the struggle of parties in theory: in the defense of the sciences (materialism) against the effects of ideological incursions in the form of idealist philosophical categories.

Philosophy's 'Kampfplatz', the struggle of materialist and idealist tendencies in philosophy, has hitherto existed in the theoretical space of the Idealism/Empiricism couple. In a problematic whose structure is bounded by the 'subject' and the 'object'. On both sides of tendency philosophy has consisted in the elaboration of 'systems', 'interpretations of the world', which claim an ultimate and objective knowledge. Systems which claim the universality of sciences when they are closed reflections of theoretical-political conjunctures, governed by a basic misrecognition structure. Systems which establish a closed order of categories which are a synthesis of scientific concepts and ideological notions.

Philosophy has no history: its struggles consist in the repetition of the conflict of materialism and idealism, in the hierarchy and precedence given to the basic presuppositional categories of 'matter' and 'thought'. There are no epistemological breaks in philosophy: no possibility of the solution of the 'problems' of knowledge and being, since these are the problems of inexistent objects, of objects which systematically conflate the misrecognition of the subject with the objective production process of knowledge, which conflate the development of the real and the appropriation of the real in thought. Philosophy's 'self-consciousness', its history, is an ideological effect which denegrates the fact that there is only a history in philosophy; a history constituted by the effects of the instances of science

and politics.

Philosophy hereafter must reject this path, 'the falsest of all false paths', in the knowledge of its own limitations. Philosophy can abandon the space of the Idealism/Empiricism couple only if it abandons the problematic of the subject and confines itself to its real space, the space between science and politics. Philosophy must face the reality of its relation to politics; a relation to the class struggle, and not to an ethic of the political 'subject' (the just citizen, the rational state). It must recognise the nature and effects of its struggles in the theoretical and the political as they exist, and not as they have existed in the misrecognition of its categories.

C. Philosophy and Politics

But there is no such thing as Philosophy. There are philosophies. The 'reform of philosophy' apart from particular scientific and political positions is unthinkable. There is no dialogue in philosophy. Philosophical discourse consists in division: the demarcation of positions irreconcilably opposed, those of materialism and idealism.

How do these positions stand in the present political-theoretical conjuncture. We are faced with a fact, Marx's epistemological break which founded a new science; that of history. The science of the social formation creates the conditions of existence of a scientific politics: scientific socialism. That science is committed in the struggles within the real concrete of which its knowledge is an appropriation, a concrete-in-thought; it is committed by its knowledge to the cause of the proletariat and to the victory of the oppressed. Its relation to politics is a relation to the politics of the proletariat, and to the specific forms of politics

dictated by the specific effectivity of the political level in capitalist social formations: the Marxist-Leninist workers' movement.

But the union of Marxist theory and the workers' movement is no immediate self-reflecting unity of 'theory-praxis'. It is a relation of distinct instances, theoretical and political practice, party organisation and the spontaneous actions of the workers. Theoretical practice is effective only in the transformations of its object, in the production of knowledge, and, only on the condition that the conditions of its practice are respected. Marxist theory produces no direct reading of the 'current situation', no 'scientific strategy'. It provides through its knowledge the theoretical conditions of thinking that 'current situation', but at another level, a level which has that situation always for its object, politics. Politics is always confronted with a situation which is 'ever pre-given', ever-current, which demands that it be thought in its effectivity.

The relation of the instances of theoretical and political practice is a complex relation fraught with the effects of those theoretical-political 'current situations' (conjunctures). It is subject always to those effects which overthrow that complex unity; those effects we know by the name of deviations. The instances of science and politics must be reflected, represented, each to the other, since they are distinct instances externally related and not a single expressive unity. Among the conditions of existence of their unity, of their over-determined complex unity, are the conditions of their mutual representation by a third instance: philosophy.²⁶

Thus the struggle of the parties in philosophy takes a specific form in our age, a form governed by the development of the instances of science and politics.

Althusser's claim to be a 'partisan' in philosophy, far from being a claim of pragmatism in politics and expediency in philosophy, is a massive rejection of all positions which reduce philosophy to a matter of polemics, protestations and manifestoes.

Notes

The English translations of Lénine et la Philosophie and 'Lenine devant Hegel' quoted in this paper will be published in the autumn.

Althusser's paper 'Lenine devant Hegel' is unpublished.

1 See: NLR 64 p 8 and FM pp 5 - 15.

2 See: FM p 1.

3 Althusser's use of the term 'essence' here is symptomatic: his whole theory is directed against the notion of science as knowledge of essences, and defines science as a knowledge of its theoretical object. The use of this ideological term indicates that 'knowledge', strictly defined, is unthinkable in this context.

4 See: FM p 166; Karl Marx, 'Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy'. 1857, in C.J.Arthur (ed.), The German Ideology, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1970; Karl Marx, Capital Vol. I, pp 177-186. Progress Publishers, Moscow 1965.

5 In the Materialist Dialectic this demarcation consists in a strict proof that the relations between Marx and Hegel cannot be thought as Marx's 'inversion' of the Hegelian dialectic in its application to the 'real' as opposed to the 'ideal'. The empiricism of this inversionist position is evident, in that it claims that a form of discourse can be separated from its problematic (and its object within that problematic) and applied to the real concrete.

This question of the differing structures of the two dialectics is a question within knowledge. The difference concerns the form of discourse and proof within a problematic and not a difference of form in the development of a real process (history). Hence the importance Marx attaches to the demonstration that the order of appearance of categories in the discourse of a science and that in the process of historical development are completely distinct.

6 The Generalities are not 'abandoned' in Althusser's later work; they are not a Generality I which is displaced in the process of the production of knowledge. These concepts which enable us to think science as a process of production remain valid throughout Althusser's work. However, since they establish the conditions of all theoretical practice they are inadequate to reflect the specific form of Marx's scientific discourse.

The value of the Generalities is not confined to thinking the difference between Hegel and Marx, they are invaluable in the critique of all Positivist and Idealist epistemologies.

7 This is the task of Reading Capital: this text is devoted to reflecting the discourse of Capital; the character of Marx's 'revolution in the theoretical'. It is therefore a text on Marxist dialectics like For Marx. The concepts of the process of the theoretical production are not 'abandoned' in Reading Capital, rather the specificity of the Marxist process is reflected in the concept 'Darstellung' which designates the Marxist mode of explanation:

'It can be entirely summed up in the concept of 'Darstellung', the key epistemological concept of the whole Marxist theory of value, the concept whose object is precisely to designate the mode of presence

of the structure in its effects, and therefore to designate structural causality itself.' RC p 188.

Reading Capital is misread if it is conceived of as a study-guide to Capital: see, M. Gane, Review of Althusser in English, Theoretical Practice No I 1971.

8 As will be seen later, the practice of Althusser's earlier works does not differ from that role ascribed to philosophy in Lenine et la philosophie; this later text merely reflects theoretically the earlier practice. The correction with respect to Theory does not overturn the other concepts in the earlier works: see, RC p 8, para 2.

9 'In every case, the relation between technique and knowledge is an external unreflected relation, radically different from the internal reflected relation between a science and its knowledges.' FM p 171.

The relation of philosophy to the sciences is an external relation. Philosophy is induced by the development of science, by an external relation - just as Social Democratic consciousness is brought to the economic struggle from without, from another instance, that of politics.

10 The apparent 'a priori' rationalism of this position is in fact the rationalism of a positivism. All other philosophy is pure illusion - accounts are settled with it in a simple knowledge of this illusion and the Materialist Dialectic's self-reflection of own truths. Philosophical struggle, the struggle of 'parties' in philosophy, is at an end, settled by a unilateral knowledge of its unreality. See: FM p 28.

11 This space is the space of an ideological closure; the 'vicious circle' of all theories of 'Knowledge'. See RC Pt. I, Section 15.

12 See, RC pp 68-9.

13 See, FM p 174 & RC pp 68-9.

a common standard of rational interest constituted by the appeal to reason and nature, reveal the systematic connection of positivism with Eighteenth Century liberal political philosophy.

In its resolute opposition to the 'irrefutable and therefore false' theories of Marxism and Psychoanalysis this philosophical tendency reveals 'a certain investment of politics, a certain continuation of politics, a certain rumination of politics.' L&P p 15.

16 See, I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (ed), Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge, Cambridge University Press, 1970.

17 See, Gaston Bachelard, The Philosophy of No, Orion Press, New York, 1968, for a systematic refutation of the claims of realism in the natural sciences.

See, Dominique Lecourt, L'Epistemologie Historique de Gaston Bachelard, J. Vrin, Paris 1969, for a good summary of Bachelard's concepts.

18 For an explanation of the concept Denegation, see, Reading Capital - the Glossary.

19 Bachelard considered these substantialist notions as 'complexes'; as definite psychical formations inhibiting the development of knowledge and as formations drawing their power from a libidinal source. A psychoanalysis of such formations, the exposing of such psychical elements within objective knowledge, was an important task of philosophy in aiding the development of science.

See, Gaston Bachelard, The Psychoanalysis of Fire, Routledge, London, 1964.

In, La Formation de l'Esprit Scientifique, Bachelard shows the systematic connection of the Alchemist's theories with sexuality and their theoretical- experimental dependence on sexual metaphors and 'sexual'

29

processes in real objects.

20 See, L. Althusser, Freud and Lacan, NLR 55. See, S. Freud, On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Standard Edition Vol. XIV.

21 The Idealism/Empiricism couple denotes for Althusser the misrecognition structure of classical bourgeois philosophy, in which:

'... the terms presented and their relations only vary within the invariant type-structure which constitutes this very problematic: an empiricism of the subject always corresponds to an idealism of the essence (or an empiricism of the essence to an idealism of the subject.' FM p 228.

22 The impossibility of this relation between the closed problematics of philosophies and the open problematics of the sciences is the main theme of Bachelard's Philosophy of No.

23 This is a term of J. Dietzgen, 'der Holzweg der Holzwege', quoted by Lenin in Materialism and Empirio-Criticism. Lenin quotes with approval Dietzgen's strictures on the nature of academic philosophy, 'philosophy is not a science, but a means of defence against Social Democracy,' and again of the necessity of a new practice of philosophy for the proletarian cause.

'Now, in order to follow the true path without being led astray by all the religious and philosophical gibberish, it is necessary to study the falsest of all false paths.' Lenin pp 340-1.

The work of Dietzgen quoted by Lenin is The Workings of the Human Mind (Das Wesen der Menschlichen Kopfarbiet) 1869. Althusser quotes the passages Lenin remarks on in Lenine et la Philosophie.

24 See, Alain Badiou, Le Concept de Modèle, F. Maspero, Paris, 1969.

25 Since all classical bourgeois philosophy has been governed by the structure of the Idealism/Empiricism couple it is not paradoxical that philosophers regaled by Marxists as incorrigible idealists have made significant contributions to the defence and development of scientific theory, nor is it paradoxical that these same philosophers have constituted obstacles to theoretical development. Hegel is an excellent example.

26 'Overdetermination designates the following essential quality of contradiction: the reflection in contradiction itself of its conditions of existence, that is, of its situation in the structure in dominance of the complex whole.' FM p 209

The Concept of 'Critique' and the 'Critique of Political Economy'

(From the Manuscripts of 1844 to Capital)

by JACQUES RANCIERE

(continued from Theoretical Practice number one)

II CRITIQUE AND SCIENCE IN 'CAPITAL'

Preliminary

This exposition proposes to show what problems articulate the reorganisation of Marx's conceptual field, the reorganisation which constitutes the transition from the ideological discourse of the Young Marx to Marx's scientific discourse. Actually, there can be no question of a systematic exposition, which would presuppose that Marxism's concept of scientificity were fully grasped and that it could be expounded in a unitary discourse. Hence my method will be to start from different points, different sites, in an attempt to circumscribe the specificity of Marx's discourse in Capital by a series of approximations.

In general, Marx no longer gives this specificity the name

'critique', but rather the name 'science'. A famous letter to Kugelmann (28 December 1862) ranks Capital among the 'scientific essays written with the intention of revolutionizing a science.' This project to revolutionize a constituted scientific domain is something quite different from the project to read into a discourse an implicit sub-discourse, the project which characterized the anthropological critique. However, Marx does also use the term 'critique' to designate this new specific project - the sub-title of Capital is ample evidence of this. Thus, in a letter to Lassalle on 22 February 1858, he writes:

'The first work in question is critique of the economic categories, or, if you like, the system of bourgeois economy critically presented. It is a presentation of the system and simultaneously, through this presentation, a criticism of it.'

In approaching the problems raised by this project to revolutionize a science I shall assume familiarity with a number of points; these are, essentially:

- the location of what I have called economic reality in the 'economic structure of society' as defined by Marx in the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy (1859). I.e. I shall presuppose familiarity with the concepts of historical materialism.

- the problematic of the method expounded in the general Introduction of 1857.

The questions I shall attempt to pose are therefore as follows:

If Marx revolutionized a science, founded a new scientific domain, what is the configuration of that domain? How are its objects and the relations between those objects defined? If Marx founded this new science by the critique of economic categories, what is the basis for the essential dif-

ference between this new science and classical economics? Further, what in its theory will enable us to understand the economic discourses it refutes, that of classical economics and that of vulgar economics? At the same time, I shall tender another question, as I promised: What becomes of the anthropological problematic of the 1844 Manuscripts in Capital?

This last question can be posed by using a particular interpretation of Marx as a reference: the interpretation developed by Della Volpe's school. According to this interpretation, to criticize classical economics in Capital, Marx used the critical model he had worked out in the Manuscript of 1843 entitled Kritik des hegelschen Staatsrecht (translated as Karl Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right by J. O'Malley, CUP, Cambridge 1970).

In this text, in order to criticize Hegel's philosophy of right, Marx used the Feuerbachian critical model, the model of the subject/predicate inversion. This model aimed to show that Hegel everywhere turned the autonomized predicate into the true subject.

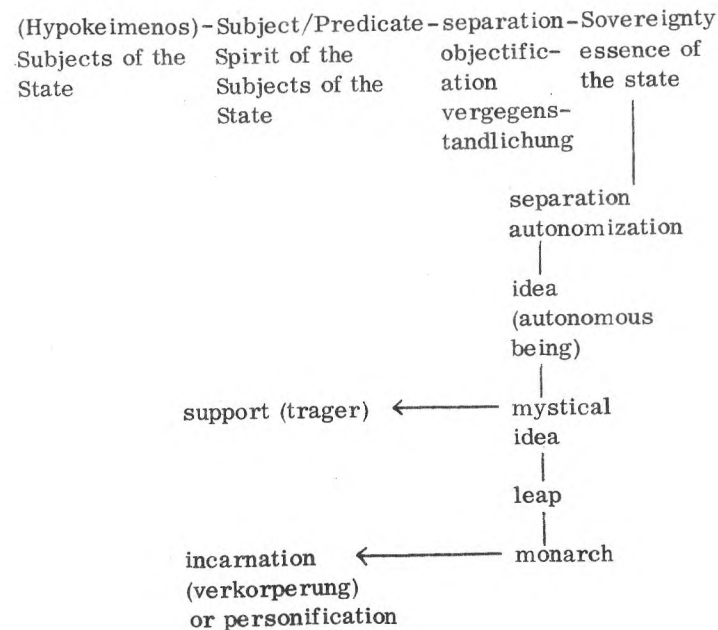
As a concrete example, Marx takes the concept of sovereignty. Sovereignty, he says, is nothing but the spirit of the subjects of the State. It is therefore the predicate of a substantial subject (Marx defines this subject as hypokeimenon, as a substance). In alienation, this predicate, this spirit of the subjects of the State, is separated from its subject. It appears as the essence of the State. This separate existence of the subject and the predicate enables Hegel to make the speculative operation: by a new separation he separates sovereignty from the real State, he makes it into an idea, an autonomous being.

This autonomous being has to have a support. This support is provided by the Hegelian Idea, what Marx calls the Mystical Idea. Sovereignty becomes a determination of

this Mystical Idea.

Once he has completed this movement of abstraction, Hegel has to make the inverse movement and redescend towards the concrete. The link between the abstract idea and the concrete empirical reality can only be made in a mystical way, by an incarnation. This incarnation allows the abstract determination to exist in the concrete. The Mystical Idea is incarnated in a particular individual: the monarch. The latter then appears for Hegel as the immediate existence of sovereignty.

Let me summarize this movement in the following diagram:



Marx calls this movement hypostasization. It consists of the separation of a predicate from its subject, its hypostasization into an abstract category which is then incarnated in some empirical existence. Marx also says that we are dealing with an inversion of the empirical into speculation (abstraction and autonomization) and of speculation into the empirical (incarnation). This critical model is thus governed by two oppositional couples: subject/object and empirical/speculation.

According to Della Volpe, this is the model Marx used to criticize classical political economy in A Contribution... and in Capital. Classical political economy separates the economic categories from their subject which is a determinate society, and hypostasizes them into general conditions, eternal laws of production. It then moves from speculation to the empirical by making the determinate, historical, economic categories of the capitalist mode of production into a mere incarnation of general categories which are those of all production.

A particularly clear example of the use of this schema can be found in Marx's critique of John Stuart Mill in the general Introduction of 1857. Thus, in Mill, private property appears as the empirical existence of the abstract category of appropriation. There is no production, says Mill, without the appropriation of nature by man. Hence property is a general condition of all production. This abstract category is then incarnated in a very special type of property, capitalist private property.

Using passages such as this, and the pages from the general Introduction on 'determinate abstraction', Della Volpe sums up the critical work carried out by Marx: he opposed classical economics by everywhere substituting determinate (historical) abstraction for indeterminate general abstractions or hypostases.

Such an interpretation seems to neglect one essential problem: that of the theoretical conditions necessary for the model of the 1843 Manuscript to be able to work. For this, the two oppositions subject/object and empirical/speculation must be pertinent oppositions within the theoretical field of Capital.

First of all, we must be dealing with a subject. For the model to be able to work, society has to play the part of a subject which humanity played in the anthropological discourse. Two passages in the general Introduction really do speak of society as a subject. But this definition of society as a subject is condemned by Marx elsewhere and, as we shall see, it is incompatible with the concepts he sets to work in Capital.

On the other hand, the application of the empirical/speculation model presupposes a certain kind of relation between economic reality and economic discourse. If this relation no longer exists in Capital, this couple ceases to be operational.

It is on the basis of this problematic that I shall seek to define the specificity of the 'critique of political economy' constituted by Capital. This will give us an index which enables us to determine whether we really are dealing with a change of theoretical terrain.

1. The Problem of the Starting-Point and the Critical Question

A) VALUE AND VALUE FORM

We know the importance Marx attributed to the problem of the starting-point of a science in the general Introduction of 1857. The fundamental character of this question is confirmed in Capital. Thus when Marx is criticizing Smith in Volume Two, for example, he states that the source of his errors

and contradictions has to be looked for in his 'scientific starting -points'. Hence this is the level at which we ought to be able to find the difference between Marx and classical economics.

What defines the scientificity of classical economics for Marx?

'Classical economics sought to reduce the different fixed and mutually foreign forms of wealth to their inner unity by analysis, and to peel from them the image (Gestalt) in which they stand indifferently one beside the other. It wished the conceive (begreifen) the inner connexion (innere Zusammenhang) as distinct from the diversity of the phenomenal forms (Erscheinungsformen).' (Theorien über den Mehrwert, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1962, Teil 3, p 497).

In Capital (Vol. III, p 809),¹ Marx uses the word auflösen (dissolve) to designate the work of classical economics. Classical economics dissolves the fixed forms of wealth, an operation which, in the same text, Marx describes as a critical operation. This dissolution is a return to an inner unity: the determination of value by labour time.

Classical political economy is thus constituted as a science by its installation of a difference between the diversity of phenomenal forms and the inner unity of the essence. But it does not reflect the concept of this difference.

Look at its application in Ricardo.

'Ricardo starts out from the determination of the relative values (or exchangeable values) of commodities by "the quantity of labour"... Their substance is labour. That is why they are "values". Their magnitude varies, according to whether they contain more or less of this substance.' (Theories of Surplus-Value, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1968, Part 2, P 164).

Ricardo determines two things: the substance of value which is labour, and the magnitude of value which is measured by labour time. But he neglects a third term:

'Ricardo does not examine the form - the peculiar characteristic of labour that creates exchange-values or manifests itself in exchange-values - the nature of this labour.' (Ibid.)

In the analysis of value which is Ricardo's scientific starting point, there is thus an absent term in the first chapter of Capital:

'The substance of value and the magnitude of value have now been determined. The form of value remains to be analysed.' (T. I. p 62).

This is the work Ricardo never did. He was satisfied with the restored unity. The dissolution (Auflösung) of the fixed forms of wealth he regarded as the solution (Lösung) of the problem of value. Marx's procedure, on the contrary, as Engels points out in the Preface to Volume Two, is to see in this solution a problem. Marx poses the question we can call the critical question: Why does the content of value take the form of value?

'Political economy has indeed analysed, however incompletely, value and its magnitude, and has discovered what lies beneath these forms. But it has never once asked the question why this content takes this form; and therefore why labour is represented (sich darstellt) in value and the measure of labour by its duration in the magnitude of the value of the products of labour.' (Capital, Vol I, p 80; Werke Bd 23, pp 94-5).

The critical question is the problematization of the content-form relationship. For Ricardo, value is labour. It does not matter in what form this substance appears. For Marx, labour is represented in value, it takes on the form of the value of commodities.

Given the equation: x commodities A = y commodities B, Ricardo resolves it simply by saying that the substance of the value of A is equal to the substance of the value of B. Marx shows that this equation is posed in very special terms. One of the terms only features as use-value, the other only as exchange-value or form of value.

Hence we must pose:

form of value of A = natural form of B.

B lends its body, its natural form, for the expression of the value of A. The value must therefore have its form of existence in the natural form of B.

Hence we cannot be satisfied with an affirmation of the identity of the content of A and B. We can see this from the critique Marx made of Bailey in the Theories of Surplus Value. For Bailey, value is merely a relation between two objects, just as distance is a relation between two objects in space.

'A thing cannot be valuable in itself without reference to another thing, any more than a thing can be distant in itself without reference to another thing.' (cit. Marx, Theorien über den Mehrwert, op. cit., Teil 3, p 141).

Look how Marx refutes this argument:

'If a thing is distant from another, the distance is in fact a relation between the one thing and the other; but at the same time the distance is something different from this relation between two things. It is a dimension of the space, it is some length which may as well express the distance of two other things beside those compared. But this is not all. If we speak of the distance as a relation between two things, we suppose something "intrinsic", some "property" of the things themselves, which enables them to be distant from each other. What is the distance between the syllable A and a table? The question would be nonsensical. In speaking

of the distance of two things, we speak of their difference in space. Thus we suppose both of them to be contained in the space, to be points of the space. Thus we equalize them as being both existences of the space, and only after having them equalized sub specie spatii we distinguish them as different points of space. To belong to space is their unity.' (Ibid. pp 141-2).

This text seems to me to be open to two readings. At one level, Marx is defending Ricardo against Bailey's criticism by disengaging the existence of a substance of value. The existence of this substance common to the two terms of the relation means that we are not dealing with a relation of the type A = table. This last relation is an absurd, irrational relation. By disengaging the substance of value, Ricardo avoids irrationality at this level. But since he does not disengage the form of value, he condemns himself to fall in his turn into contradiction and irrationality where more complex and developed forms than the commodity form are concerned.

What Ricardo omits is the critical question, the question of the sign =. As we have seen, this sign is problematic in that it relates together two terms which are presented in absolutely heterogeneous forms. On the one hand we have a pure thing, on the other a pure incarnation of value.

'A close scrutiny of the expression of the value of A in terms of B... has shown us that, within that relation, the natural form of commodity A figures only as the form of use-value, the natural form of B only as the form of value.' (Capital, T. I, p 74; Vol I, p 61).

The identity posed by the sign = thus conceals a most radical difference. It is an identity of opposites.

'The relative form and the equivalent form are two correlative and inseparable aspects; but, at the same time,

mutually exclusive, antagonistic extremes.' (T. I, p 63; Vol I, p 48).

This identity of opposites is only possible because one form (the natural form of B) itself becomes the form of manifestation of its opposite: Value.

Thus, we see, and could have read implicitly at a second level in the passages on Bailey, that commodities are only equal in the very special mechanism of representation (Darstellung). They are neither equal as mere things, nor even as items of the same substance; they are equal in determinate formal conditions imposed by the structure in which this relation is achieved.

We can make this reference to space say a little more than Marx says about it explicitly. The forms in which the things are related with one another by the dimension of value are forms determined by the structure of a certain space. The properties they take on in the equation must be determined by the properties of the space in which the representation, the Darstellung is achieved. The installation of this space which makes an impossible equation possible is expressed by a certain number of formal operations: representation, expression, adoption of a form, appearance in such and such a form, etc.

Let us consider one of these operations: 'Value takes on the form of a thing'. This examination will enable us to make the meaning of the content/form relation clear: it is a matter of the relation between the inner determination and the mode of existence, the phenomenal form (Erscheinungsform) of this determination.

In fact, the expression means that value has its mode of existence, its phenomenal form (or form of manifestation) in the natural form of the equivalent commodity. The paradox is that value is unable either to appear or to

exist. Insofar as it appears in the natural form of a commodity, it disappears in it as value, and takes the form of a thing.

Value thus has its form of manifestation in the exchange relation only insofar as it is not manifested there. We are dealing with a type of causality quite new in relation to the Manuscripts. In the Manuscripts, the equations which expressed the contradictions (e.g., the erection of the world of things into values = the depreciation of the world of men, or value of labour = value of means of subsistence) all referred to the equation: essence of man = essence foreign to man; i.e., they referred as their cause to the split between the human subject and its essence. The solution of the equation lay in one of its parts. The essence of man separated from the human subject provided the cause of the contradiction and the solution to the equation. The cause was referred to the act of subjectivity separating from itself.

Here, in the equation, or, what amounts to the same thing, the contradiction x commodities A = y commodities B, the cause is not in the equation. The latter presents a relation between things, a connexion between effects determined by the absence of the cause. This cause lies in the identity of useful labour, creative of use-values, and labour creative of exchange-values, of concrete labour and abstract labour. It is well-known that, in a letter to Engels dated 8 June 1868, Marx declared that the discovery of the double nature of labour (concrete labour and abstract labour) is 'the whole secret of the critical conception.' This distinction is indeed what enables us to problematize the unity of the two determinations. Classical economics took the concept of labour without making the distinction. Hence it could not understand the specific character of the unity abstract-labour/concrete-labour and fell into inextricable difficulties. Having thought the distinction, Marx can think the unity.

The latter is the result of a social process. The absent cause to which we are referred is the social relations of production.

Thus the formal operations which characterize the space in which economic objects are related together manifest social processes while concealing them. We are no longer dealing with an anthropological causality referred to the act of a subjectivity, but with a quite new causality which we can call metonymic causality, borrowing this concept from Jacques-Alain Miller, who formulated it in the exposition he devoted to the critique of Georges Politzer. Here we can state it as follows: what determines the connexion between the effects (the relations between the commodities) is the cause (the social relations of production) insofar as it is absent. This absent cause is not labour as a subject, it is the identity of abstract labour and concrete labour inasmuch as its generalization expresses the structure of a certain mode of production, the capitalist mode of production.²

In other words, the equation x commodities A = y commodities B is, as we have seen, an impossible equation. What Marx does, and what distinguishes him radically from classical economics, is to theorize the possibility of this impossible equation. Without this theory, classical economics could not conceive the system in which capitalist production is articulated. By not recognizing this absent cause, it failed to recognize the commodity form as 'the simplest and the most general form' of a determinate mode of production: the capitalist mode of production. Even if it did recognize the substance labour in the analysis of the commodity, it condemned itself to incomprehension of the more developed forms of the capitalist production process.

In his critique of the starting-point of classical economics, Marx disengages a problem which is that of the mode of

manifestation of a certain structure within a space which is not homogeneous with it. We must now make clear the terms of this last problem.

B) THE PROBLEM OF ECONOMIC OBJECTS

Take the object commodity. Three statements of Marx enable us to define its character as an object.

1. 'The products of labour take on the commodity form'. Here we see that strictly speaking there is not a commodity-object but a commodity-form.
2. 'The products of labour become values, sensuous-supersensuous or social things (sinnlich übersinnlich oder gesellschaftliche Dinge)'. (T. I, p 85, Vol I, p 72).
3. 'Commodities only have an objectivity of value (Wertgegenständlichkeit) insofar as they are expressions of the same social unity, human labour.' (T. I, p 65; Vol I p 51).

The question is to define the Gegenständlichkeit of commodities, i.e., their reality as objects.³ The latter is a very special reality. The thingness of commodities is a social thingness, their objectivity an objectivity of value. Elsewhere Marx says that they have a phantasmagoric objectivity. This objectivity only exists as the expression of a social unity, human labour.

We can therefore no longer have a subject-object couple like that of the Manuscripts. In the Manuscripts, the term Gegenstand was given a sensualist meaning, whereas here it is no more than a phantom, the manifestation of a characteristic of the structure. What takes the form of a thing is not labour as the activity of a subject but the social character of labour. And the human labour in question here is not the labour of any constitutive subjectivity. It bears the mark of a determinate social structure:

'Only a historically determined epoch which represents

(darstellt) the labour expended in the production of a useful thing as an "objective" (gegenständlich) property of that thing, i.e., as its value, transforms the product of labour into a commodity'.⁴

It is therefore a 'historically determined epoch', i.e., a determinate mode of production, which achieves the Darstellung of labour in the phantasmagoric objectivity of the commodity.

The status of this Gegenständlichkeit is made even clearer when Marx speaks of an illusion of objectivity (gegenständliche Schein).

'The scientific discovery... that the products of labour, so far as they are values, are but expressions of the human labour spent in their production, marks an epoch in the history of the development of humanity, but by no means dissipates the phantasmagoria in which the social character of labour appears to us to be a character of the things, the products themselves (... den gegenständlichen Schein der gesellschaftlichen Charaktere der Arbeit).' (T. I, p 86; Vol I, p 74).

The character of this Gegenständlichkeit is such that it is only recognized for what it is - i.e., as a metonymic manifestation of the structure - in science. In ordinary perception it is taken for a property of the thing as such. The social character of the products of labour appears as a natural property of these products as mere things.

This theory of the sensuous supersensuous object enables us to mark the difference between the problematic of Capital and that of the Manuscripts. In the Manuscripts, economic objects were treated in an amphibological fashion because the theory of wealth was overlaid by a Feuerbachian theory of the sensuous. The sensuous character of the objects of labour referred to their human

character, to their status as objects of a constitutive subjectivity. Here objects are no longer taken for anything sensuous-human. They are sensuous-supersensuous. This contradiction in the mode of their appearance refers to the type of objectivity to which they belong. Their sensuous-supersensuous character is the form in which they appear as manifestations of social characteristics.

The substitution of the relationship: sensuous/supersensuous → social, for the relationship: human/sensuous, is fundamental for an understanding of what Marx calls the fetishism of commodities.

To show this let us examine the beginning of the text from the first chapter entitled The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof.

'A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, on the contrary, a very complex thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.' (T. I, p83; Vol I, p 71).

I think it may be instructive to take this last phrase absolutely to the letter. It means that the commodity is theological in the sense the concept of theology has in the anthropology of Feuerbach and the Young Marx.

Let us follow this guiding thread in the analysis of the commodity.

'In the production of the coat, human energy, in a particular form, must have been actually expended. Human labour is therefore accumulated in it. In this aspect the coat is a value-bearer (Wertträger: value support), but though worn to a thread, it does not let this quality show through.' (T. I, p 66; Vol I, p 51).

The object is no longer transparent. The whole theory re-

lating the sensuous and the object to the human subject collapses. The coat has a quality which it does not get from the act of a subject, a supernatural quality. It is the support (Träger) for something which has nothing to do with it.

Here we have come once again upon the concept of the support which we located in the diagram of the anthropological critique of speculation, and with it we return to a function which corresponds to the function of incarnation in this same diagram. The empirical thing (the coat) becomes the support for the supernatural abstraction value just as the empirical existence of the monarch became the incarnation of the abstract category sovereignty in Hegel.

'The coat can in no way represent value in its outward relations unless at the same time value takes the aspect of a coat. A, for instance, cannot represent "your majesty" to B, unless at the same time majesty in B's eyes assumes the bodily form of A.' (T. I, p 66; Vol I, p 51).

It is not just because it is a question of majesty here and of sovereignty in the Manuscript of 1843 that we can affirm the homology between the structure of the manifestation of value and the structure of incarnation which constituted an element of the general structure of speculation in the text of 1843. Value is incarnated in the empirical existence of the coat, just as majesty is incarnated in the empirical existence of A, and sovereignty is incarnated in the empirical existence of the Hegelian monarch.

Thus we see emerging an identical form to that of the 1843 Manuscript. But it has neither the critical function that it had in the anthropological critique of speculation, nor the function which the Della Volpe school want it to play as a critique of the speculative operation performed by classical political economy. The union of the sensuous and the supersensuous here expresses the phenomenal form of value itself, and not its speculative translation. In the 1843

Manuscript, this union was presented as a speculative operation. Hegel transformed the sensuous (the empirical) he found at the starting-point so as to make a supersensuous abstraction from it which he then incarnated in a sensuous existence which served as a body for this abstraction.

This means that the pattern which designated the speculative procedure in the anthropological critique, here designates the process which takes place in the field of reality itself. This concept of reality (Wirklichkeit) must be understood to mean precisely the space in which the determinations of the structure manifest themselves (the space of phantasmagoric objectivity). We must carefully distinguish between this Wirklichkeit, real with respect to perception, and the wirkliche Bewegung (real movement) which constitutes the real with respect to science.

We see that the properties which define the Wirklichkeit, the space of appearance of the determinations of the economic structure, are the properties which defined the operations of speculative philosophy for the Young Marx. The commodity is theological, i. e., reality is of itself speculative, it itself presents itself in the form of a mystery.

There is another example of this change in function of the structure of incarnation in the text entitled Die Wertform (the first draft of Chapter One of Capital).

'This movement according to which the sensuous-concrete is only valid as a form of manifestation of the general abstract and not, on the contrary, the general abstract as a property of the concrete, characterizes the expression of value. At the same time it makes it difficult to understand. If I say, Roman law and German law are both laws, that is easily understood. But if, on the contrary, I say that the law, as an abstract, is realised in Roman Law and German law, as concrete laws, the connexion is then

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a mystical one.' (Kleine ökonomische Schriften, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1955, p 271).

The process which characterizes the mode of existence of value here is the one which characterized the speculative Hegelian operation for the Young Marx, and which he illustrated in The Holy Family by the dialectic of the abstract fruit realising itself in concrete pears and almonds.

If reality is speculative, an extremely important consequence follows: every critical reading which claims, along the lines of the Letter to Ruge, to speak or read things as they are is invalidated. The ambitions of the Letter to Ruge are refuted in one short sentence which tells us that: 'Value does not carry what it is written on its forehead (Es steht daher dem Werte nicht auf der Stirn geschrieben was er ist)'.

We are no longer concerned with a text calling for a reading which will give its underlying meaning, but with a hieroglyph which has to be deciphered. This deciphering is the work of science. The structure which excludes the possibility of critical reading is the structure which opens the dimension of science. This science, unlike Ricardo, will not be content to pose labour as the substance of value while deriding the commodity fetishism of the Mercantilists who conceived value to be attached to the body of a particular commodity. It will explain fetishism by theorizing the structure which founds the thing-form adopted by the social characteristics of labour.

Comments I

A glance at the concepts in action in this problematic of economic objects show us that what is at stake here is the critical question of the Kantian Transcendental Dialectic. Here too we find the problematic of the object (Gegenstand) and the two couples Phenomenon/Appearance (Erscheinung

Schein) and sensuous/supersensuous (sinnlich-übersinnlich). In Kant a dividing-line relating to the faculties of a subjectivity separates two domains:

Gegenstand

sinnlich

Erscheinung

übersinnlich

Schein

In Marx we have a quite different structure:

Gegenstand = Erscheinungsform (form of appearance)

sinnlich-übersinnlich gesellschaftlich

Schein (appearance or illusion)

The commodity is a Gegenstand insofar as it is the phenomenal form (Erscheinungsform) of value. This object is a sensuous-supersensuous object insofar as its properties are only the form of manifestation of social relations. It is the misrecognition of its supersensuous character, i. e. , the misrecognition of its character as a manifestation of labour in a determinate social structure which founds the appearance (Schein).

In Marx, and particularly here in Chapter One, we do find the relationship between an analytic and a dialectic, but this relationship presupposes a totally new distribution of the elements, a re-organization of the theoretical space of these concepts. We might call this re-organization Marx's Anti-Copernican Revolution (Anti-Copernican in the Kantian sense, i. e. , Copernican in the true sense). Phenomena are no longer centred around a constitutive subject. In the problem of the constitution of the phenomena the concept of the subject does not intervene. Inversely, what Marx does take seriously is the connexion between the phenomena and the transcendental object = X. The phenomena, the objects, are phenomenal forms of this object which is also the unknown that resolves the equations. But this X is not an object, it is what Marx calls a social relation. The fact that this social relation has to be re-

presented in something which is radically foreign to it, in a thing, gives that thing its sensuous-supersensuous character.

What characterizes appearance (Schein) is the fact that this thing appears in it simply as a sensuous thing and that its properties appear as natural properties.

Thus the constitution of objects does not appertain to a subjectivity. What does appertain to a subjectivity is perception. Appearance (Schein) is determined by the gap between the conditions of constitution of the objects and the conditions of their perception.

Comments 2

What radically differentiates Marx from classical economics is his analysis of the value-form of the commodity (or the commodity-form of the product of labour). The difference between the classical conception of abstraction and analysis and the Marxist conception is inscribed here. The theory of the form provides a solution at the level of the specific theoretical practice of Capital to the problems raised in the general Introduction by the concept of determinate abstraction.⁵

The historicist interpretation of this theory of determinate abstraction as it is found particularly in the Della Volpe school depends upon a non-pertinent relation: the relation between the abstract in thought and the real concrete. The determinate abstraction then appears to be the one which solidly preserves the richness of the real concrete.

Marx, on the other hand, is concerned here with the value-form of the commodity (the commodity-form of the product of labour) as a scientific starting-point within the thought process. From this view-point, the value-form is characterized as the most general, the simplest, the most abstract

and the least developed form. Here I shall not speak of the first of these determinations, which incidentally poses difficult interpretation problems. Simple and abstract are situated in the oppositions abstract/concrete and simple/complex which define the field of what is thought in the general Introduction. But the meaning of these two oppositions is made clearer here by the concept of development. This form is the least developed and the task of science, a task which was never undertaken before Marx, is to develop this simple form:

'Here, however, a task is set us, the performance of which has never yet been attempted by bourgeois economy, the task of tracing the genesis of this money-form, of developing the expression of value contained in the value-relation of commodities, from its simplest, least apparent outline, to the dazzling money-form' (T. I, p 63; Vol I, pp 47-48).

Ricardo was incapable of making this development. He was incapable of deducing the money-form from his theory of value. This was because he did not grasp the concept of the expression of value, the concept of form.

What he missed in this way was the motor of the development of the economic categories, a development which permits the constitution of the system of political economy. This motor is contradiction.

This poses the problem of the location of the concept of contradiction, the problem of the determination of its theoretical validity.

What is it that Marx, in the first chapter of Capital, calls sometimes contradiction (Widerspruch) and sometimes merely opposition (Gegensatz)?

There can be no question of providing a definitive solution to this problem here, but only of presenting certain givens

and indicating a possible direction for enquiry.

Take the relationship x commodities A = y commodities B. It can be said to be contradictory insofar as one of the terms appears only as use-value and the other only as exchange-value. This contradiction refers to the internal contradiction of the commodity, to its duplication into use-value and exchange-value, and from here we are referred to the identity of opposites which characterizes the labour represented in the value-form of the commodity - the identity of concrete labour and abstract labour.

Three comments can be made here.

1. The contradiction posed here cannot be reduced to the order of appearance and ideology, as was the case with the pseudo-contradiction in adjecto implied, according to Bailey, by the concept of an exchange-value intrinsic to a commodity. On the contrary, this contradiction only occurs in the scientific discourse. It is not perceived by the subjects of the exchange, for whom the relation $xA = yB$ is quite natural.

2. It does not consist of a split. In the equations in the 1844 Manuscripts which expressed the contradiction, the latter amounted to the separation of an original unity. The contradiction lay in the separate existence of complementary terms. Here, on the contrary, it lies in the union of two mutually exclusive terms.

This identity of two opposites exposes the hidden existence of a third term which supports their union. I. e. , of the term social, which supports the sensuous-supersensuous contradiction.

3. Nor does the contradiction consist of the fact that concrete labour is inverted into abstract labour, as in Hegel Being is inverted into Nothingness, or the concrete here-now into the abstract universal.

The contradictory union of concrete labour and abstract

labour is not determined by a dialectic supposed to be inherent in one of these two terms. It expresses the special form that the general characteristics of labour take in a determinate mode of production.

Marx shows in fact that all production is necessarily determined by the society's available labour time and by the distribution of social labour according to the different needs.⁶ This rule must be observed in one way or another in all forms of production. But it adopts different characteristics in each of these forms. Thus, in the text on the fetishism in Chapter One, Marx shows in the case of several different forms of production (Robinson, the middle ages, patriarchal peasant industry and finally communist society) how this natural law operates according to specific forms determined by each of these structures. Within the capitalist mode of production, where commodity production is the dominant form of production, the regulatory law of labour-time and its distribution follows a very special pattern, that of the contradictory identity of concrete labour and abstract labour, represented in the inherent contradictions of commodity exchange.

'Contradiction' could thus well designate precisely the structure's peculiar mode of effectivity. We have already seen that the space of representation (Darstellung) of the structure was a space of contradiction, in which the objects were not objects, in which the relations linked together things which did not have any relationship between them, etc. . . The existence of the contradiction thus appeared as the very existence of the structure. In this way we should perhaps give the concept of contradiction, as Marx uses it in the first Part of Capital, a purely indexical value: i. e. , in these Hegelian concepts 'contradiction' and 'development of the contradiction', Marx is thinking something radically new the concept of which he

has not succeeded in formulating: the mode of action of the structure as a mode of action of the relations of production which govern it.

Recognition of the contradiction is thus recognition of the structure within which the economic objects and their relations function, the structure of a determinate mode of production. By analysing the commodity form Marx discovered the contradiction, i. e. , he discovered that economic objects were determined as manifestations of a particular structure. The development of the forms is thus a development of the contradiction. The resolution (Lösung) of the contradiction is achieved in what Marx calls its forms of movement. The more complex, more developed forms are forms in which the contradictions of the simpler forms can develop and resolve themselves. This is the case for forms of exchange with respect to the contradictions inherent in the commodity form, and for the forms of capitalist production with respect to the forms of simple commodity production.

'As we have seen, the exchange of commodities cannot be achieved except by fulfilling contradictory mutually exclusive conditions. The development which makes the commodity appear as something with a double aspect, use-value and exchange-value, does not make these contradictions disappear. It creates the form in which they can move. This is besides the only way in which real contradictions are resolved. For instance, it is a contradiction to depict one body as constantly falling towards another, and as, at the same time, constantly flying away from it. The ellipse is a form of motion which, while allowing this contradiction to be realised, at the same time resolves it.' (T. I, p 113; Vol. I, pp 103-4).

'The contradictions contained in the commodity of use-value and exchange-value, of private labour which is bound to manifest itself as social labour, or concrete labour which

is only valuable as abstract labour, these contradictions immanent in the commodity acquire their forms of motion in circulation.' (T. I, p 122; Vol. I, p 114).

The development of the forms of bourgeois production - which constitutes the object of Capital proper - is thus thought as the development of forms of motion for the primitive contradiction, the opposition between abstract labour and concrete labour. Here, too, we can ask whether the concepts used by Marx (contradiction, development, resolution of contradiction) adequately express what is thought in them.

Let us leave this problem in abeyance and note the two essential elements that we have been able to extract from the analysis of the value-form:

1. This analysis and the theory of the form which it implies enable us to bring to light the constitutive structure of the relations of production and its mode of action at the level of Wirklichkeit.
2. It enables us to attain a systematic knowledge of the connexion and articulation of the forms of the capitalist mode of production. Classical economics was unable to handle this development of forms. (For example, Ricardo did not succeed in deducing money from the analysis of the commodity or in showing the connexion between surplus-value and the average rate of profit.)

We shall find that these two elements become clearer when we turn to the study of a special commodity: wage labour.

C) WAGE LABOUR AND THE THEORY OF THE IMAGINARY

It is well-known that the category of wage labour poses an insoluble problem for classical economics. What really happens in the exchange between the capitalist and the

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worker?

The capitalist buys a certain quantity of labour, the worker's working day, with a wage which represents a smaller quantity of social labour. We therefore see two commodities which represent unequal social labour times exchanged as equals, which clashes with the labour theory of value.

At the same time, we discover a circle: The wage appears to be the value of the labour. But the labour has been posed as the creator of value. How can one determine the value of what creates value?

The solution to this clash and to this circle lies in the introduction of a new category, absent from classical economics, the category of labour-power.

The wage represents the value of labour-power. This value, as we know, in accordance with the law of value, represents the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the reproduction of labour-power. Classical political economy had indeed formulated this determination of the value of labour-power, but as the value of labour. It therefore remained in a quidproquo.

In the 1844 Manuscripts, Marx, too, remained in this quidproquo, tied to the non-critique of the concept of the value of labour and of the concept of labour itself. Here, on the contrary, Marx attacks the concept itself, and with the help of the concepts of form and relation works it over so that a new concept appears, that of labour-power, so that the concept of the value of labour can be understood in its inadequacy.

Marx grasped the difference between the exchange-value of labour-power (the quantity of social labour necessary for its reproduction, represented in wages) and its specific use-value: to create value.

We can pose the problem in the following two statements:

1. Labour-power has an exchange value measured by the labour time necessary for its reproduction, and a use-value which is creative of value, which produces an exchange-value greater than its own value (which is not true of any other commodity).
2. Labour is creative of value. It does not have value.

In these two statements we can read the possibility of surplus-value. We can do so thanks to the analysis of the double character of labour, of the distinction between useful labour and labour creative of value, which enables us to penetrate the appearance of the capitalist mode of production.

'From all the appearances, what the capitalist pays for is the value of the usefulness which the worker gives him, the value of the labour and not that of the labour-power which the worker does not seem to alienate. The experience of practical life alone does not bring out the double usefulness of labour, the property of satisfying a need which it has in common with all commodities, and the property of creating value which distinguishes it from all the other commodities and, as a formative element of value, prevents it from having any value itself.' (T. II, p 211; Vol I, p 540).

We are confronted with the following contradiction: labour appears as a commodity whereas it cannot ever be a commodity. That is, we are dealing with a structure which is impossible. This possibility of an impossibility refers us to the absent cause, to the relations of production. The immediate producers, separated from their means of production as a result of Primitive Accumulation, are constrained to sell their labour-power as a commodity. Their labour becomes wage labour and the appearance is produced that what is paid for by the capitalist is their labour itself, and not their labour-power.

The revelation of the category value of labour-power concealed behind the category value of labour is the revelation of the determinant character of capitalist relations of production.

Unable to problematize the category value of labour as a phenomenal form of the value of labour-power, Ricardo could not reveal what sustains the whole mechanism, i. e., those relations of production, capital and wage labour.

'Instead of labour, Ricardo should have discussed labour-power. But had he done so, capital would also have been revealed as the material conditions of labour, confronting the labourer as a power that has acquired an independent existence and capital would at once have been revealed as a definite social relationship. Ricardo thus only distinguishes capital as "accumulated labour" from "immediate labour". And it is something purely physical, only an element in the labour-process from which the relation between labour and capital, wages and profits, could never be developed.' (Theories of Surplus-Value, op. cit., Part 2, p 400).

Marx, on the other hand, problematizes the category value of labour. This expression is an imaginary expression. In Marx this category of the imaginary designates the posing of an impossible relation which conceals the truly determinant relation.

There is a naive way of thinking the imaginarieness of this expression. This is to consider it as a mere abuse of language. Thus Proudhon states that: 'Labour is said to be valuable not as a commodity itself, but with a view to the values thought to be contained potentially within it. The value of labour is a figurative expression, etc. . . .' (Cit. Marx, T. II, p 208n; Vol I, p 537n.).

Thus, according to Proudhon, the whole world of capitalist

production is founded on a 'figurative expression', mere poetic licence. Here we have a very characteristic type of explanation: confronted by expressions which designate the mystery of capitalist production, its fundamental structural determination, it is said that these constitute only figurative expressions or subjective distinctions. In Capital, Marx repeatedly calls attention to this type of explanation by the arbitrary and subjective. (Ricardo, for example, states that the distinction between fixed and circulating capital is a wholly subjective one.)

For Marx, on the contrary, the imaginary expressions are not at all arbitrary. They express a rigorous necessity: that of the mode of action of the relations of production: 'In the expression "value of labour" the concept of value is not only completely obliterated, but reversed into its opposite. It is an expression as imaginary as, for example, the value of the earth. These imaginary expressions arise, however, from the relations of production themselves. They are categories for the phenomenal forms of essential relations (Sie sind Kategorien für Erscheinungsformen wesentlicher Verhältnisse'). (T. II, p 208; Vol I, p 537). 7

Here the theory of the form and of the development of forms acquire precision. The expression value of labour presupposes a change of form: the value of labour-power appears, manifests itself in a form of manifestation (Erscheinungsform) which is the value of labour. As a form of manifestation of labour-power, the value of labour is a form of manifestation of that relation of production essential to the capitalist mode of production: wage labour. The mechanism of transformation of the forms is thus determined by the relations of production, which manifest themselves in the Erscheinungsformen by concealing themselves. The imaginarieness is the index of this peculiar effectivity, this manifestation/concealment of the relations of production.

'Hence we may understand the decisive importance of the transformation of value and price of labour-power into the form of wages, or into the value and price of labour itself. This form of manifestation, which makes the actual relation invisible, and, indeed, shows the direct opposite of that relation, forms the basis of all the juridical representations of both labourer and capitalist, of all the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production, of all its illusions as to liberty, of all the apologetic shifts of the vulgar economists.' (T. II, p 211; Vol. I, p 540).

D) THE CONCEPT OF PROCESS

In the study of the phantasmagoric objectivity of commodities and in that of the imaginary expression value of labour, a certain structure can be apprehended. We see that the forms of Wirklichkeit are forms of manifestation for the social relations of production which do not appear as such in this field of Wirklichkeit but which structure the relations given there. At the same time, we see that all these forms of manifestation are equally forms of concealment. It is this structure which is misrecognized by classical economics. In the absence of a theory of form it misrecognizes its own object. It does not recognize the specific objectivity with which science is concerned: that of a determinate process of production.

For an understanding of this concept 'process', let us first recall Marx's definition:

'The word process. . . expresses a development considered in the totality of its real conditions'. (T. I, p 181n).

Let us complete this definition by mentioning the two essential characteristics of a process, i. e. :

- 1) its development leads to a constant reproduction of its starting-point.
- 2) the elements in it are defined not by their nature but by

the place they occupy, the function they fulfil.

These characteristics are valid even for the simplest process studied by Marx, the labour process in general. Marx shows that the same material elements can play the part of either product, raw material or means of labour in the labour process.

'Hence we see that whether a use-value is to be regarded as product, as raw material or as means of labour, depends entirely on the determinate position it fulfils in the labour process, on the place it occupies in it, and any change in its place changes its determination.' (T. I, p 185; Vol. I, p 182).

A confusion is already possible at this level, a confusion between a material property of the elements of production and their functional determination. But we know in fact that the production process always takes place in determinate production process. This means that the places, forms and functions which it determines must themselves serve as supports for those which are determined by the relations of production characterizing some mode of production. These relations of production in fact, determine new places and functions which give specific forms to the elements of the labour process. In Wirklichkeit, these forms appear as properties of the material elements which support them, whereas they are phenomenal forms, modes of existence of the hidden motor of the development. The same is true of the commodity form which, in the fetis-histic illusion, is severed from the social relations which found it, and of the form 'value of labour' behind which is hidden the value of labour-power, i. e., the capitalist relations of production.

This structure of the process of science implies the specific character of the concepts of the science which explains it. This is expressed by Marx in an opposition

which determines the true form of scientificity on the one hand, and the principle of the errors of classical economics, on the other:

'It is not a question here of definitions, beneath which things must be subsumed. We are dealing here with definite functions which must be expressed in definite categories.' (Vol. II, p 226).

Things (<u>Dinge</u>)	Functions
Subsume	Express
Definitions	Categories

Believing that it deals with natural relations between stable things, classical economics misrecognizes the specific structure of the capitalist process of production. In fact the latter is constituted by the concealment of the process of production in general, of the form of commodity production and of the forms peculiar to the capitalist process which itself develops at several levels (production, re-production, overall process). Classical economics, which flattens this structure down to a single plane, is trapped in a whole series of confusions: a confusion of the material determinations of the elements of production with the capitalist forms of these determinations, a confusion between forms of simple commodity production and capitalist forms, confusions between the forms of capital in the production process and in the circulation process. etc. . . Smith's conception of fixed and circulating capital, criticized by Marx in Volume Two, is a concentrate of all these confusions. Smith succeeds in reducing the determinations of fixed and circulating capital, determinations of the form of the capital involved in the circulation process, to the mobility or immobility of the material elements of capital.

Thus we see how the study of the starting-point of Capital leads us to recognize the peculiar objectivity with which

science is concerned, and to understand the basis of the errors of classical economics.

APPENDIX

Commodity Relations and Capitalist Relations.

Our analysis of the value form raised the following objection: in order to explain the identity abstract-labour/concrete-labour which determines the value-form of commodities, we introduced the capitalist relations of production. Now it is evident that the commodity-form existed long before the capitalist mode of production, and it seems that the analysis made of the commodity in the first part of Capital only introduces the characteristics of commodity production in general, independently of the part this form of production may play in different modes of production.

First let me restrict the range of the objection: it does not contradict at all what seems to me to be the fundamental point, namely the fact that the phenomena of economic reality (Wirklichkeit) are only comprehensible insofar as they manifest, in a specific distortion, the effectivity of the relations of production. However, what is at issue is the exact meaning of the function that the analysis of the commodity plays in the theory of the capitalist process of production, the function of the starting-point.

In fact, it seems at first that in Capital Volume One Part One it is only a question of commodity production in general, insofar as it is a necessary presupposition of the capitalist mode of production.

Thus we are concerned with the commodity in general and not with the commodity as an element of a capital-commodity. The identity of useful labour and labour creative of value simply defines commodity production, capitalist production being defined by the identity of useful labour

and labour creative of surplus-value.

In this first part we should thus be at a stage (theoretically and historically) prior to the peculiar determinations of the capitalist mode of production. Given this, a historicist reading is possible, one which sees in the first part a genetic exposition moving from primitive forms of exchange to bourgeois forms via those commodity islands which develop, as Marx puts it, in the interstices of societies prior to the capitalist mode of production.

But at the same time, Marx tells us that 'the value form of the product of labour is the most abstract and general form of the present mode of production which precisely thereby acquires a historical character'. (T. I, p 83n), and he affirms in a letter to Engels dated 22 June 1867 that the simplest form of the commodity 'contains the whole secret of the money-form and with it in embryo of all the bourgeois forms of the product of labour'. The metaphor of the embryo, like that of the cell in the Preface to the First German edition, indicates that the peculiar determinations of the capitalist mode of production are not simply added on over and above the simple determinations of the commodity and the exchange of commodities, but must in some way be already present in them. If so, we should have in the first chapter of Capital not at all an analysis of the general characteristics of all commodities but an analysis of the commodity form insofar as it is the simplest form of a determinate mode of production, the capitalist mode of production.

The accuracy of such an interpretation is clearly confirmed by Marx's praise of Stuart in the first chapter of A Contribution. . . :

'Stuart naturally knew very well that in pre-bourgeois epochs, too, products took the form of commodities and commodities the form of money, but he thoroughly proves

that commodities as the elementary form of wealth and alienation as the predominant form of appropriation only appertain to the period of bourgeois production and that consequently the character of labour creative of exchange-value is specifically bourgeois. ' (Werke, Bd. 13, p 44).

However, we must avoid the trap of a Hegelian reading of Capital, according to which the commodity form contains in embryo, in its interiority, all the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, of which capital is only the development - with the corollary, inevitable in a discourse of the Hegelian type, that this starting-point is itself mediated by the destination-point, that the commodity presupposes the whole development of the capitalist production process.

Note that Marx provides at least as many arguments for this Hegelian interpretation as he does for the historicist interpretation, and let me show the way I believe the problem can be posed correctly. To do so I can draw on the indications that Marx gives us in the Chapter in Volume Three entitled Relations of Production and Relations of Distribution.

'Capitalist production... produces its products as commodities. The fact that it produces commodities does not differentiate it from other modes of production; but rather the fact that being a commodity is the dominant and determining characteristic of its products. This implies, first and foremost, that the labourer himself comes forward merely as a seller of commodities, and thus as a free wage-labourer, so that labour appears in general as wage labour.' (Vol. III, p 857).

'Furthermore, already implicit in the commodity, and even more so in the commodity as a product of capital, is the reification of the social determinations of production and the subjectification of the material foundations of

production, which characterize the entire capitalist mode of production.' (Vol. III, p 858).

'The definite form in which the social labour-time prevails as decisive in the determination of the value of commodities is of course connected with the form of labour as wage-labour and with the corresponding form of the means of production as capital, insofar as solely on this basis does commodity-production become the general form of production.' (Vol. III, pp 859-860).

Only on the basis of the capitalist relations of production does the form of commodity production become the dominant form of production and the commodity-form appear in a general way and with all the determinations to which it is susceptible as a form of the product of labour. Or, to put it another way, the identity of useful labour with labour creative of value only determines social production overall on the basis of the identity of useful labour and labour creative of surplus-value.

This confirms the determinant character of the capitalist relations of production.

Given the separation of immediate producers and means of production, the conversion of the means of production into capital, achieved in the process of the constitution of the capitalist mode of production (Primitive Accumulation), the useful labour of the worker, of the immediate producer, can be manifested only as labour creative of value. This creates the condition which allows the identity of useful labour and labour creative of value to become the general law of production. It is in this way that the characteristics of the capitalist mode of production can be found already implied (eingeschlossen) in the simple commodity-form of the product of labour.

NOTES

1 References are generally to the Editions Sociales edition of Capital Volume One (T. I, T. II, T. III) and to the Lawrence and Wishart editions of all three volumes of Capital. References to Theories of Surplus Value are to the Lawrence and Wishart edition for Parts 1 and 2, Dietz Verlag edition for Teil 3 - Trans.

2 See the Appendix (in this issue of Theoretical Practice) for the problems raised at this point.

3 The question is to know the type of object we are dealing with and what founds its nature as an object.

4 This is a translation from the German Text (Dietz Verlag, Werke Bd. 23, p 76). The French version (translated by Roy) has the following:

'There is only one determinate epoch in the historical development of society which generally transforms the products of labour into commodities, the one in which the labour expended in the production of useful objects takes on the character of a quality inherent in those things, their value.' (T. I, p 75).

Note Marx's addition of the adverb 'generally'. This addition is surely not unrelated to the difficulty I stress in the Appendix.

5 It seems that this analysis of form defines for Marx the form of scientificity. It is interesting to read his admiration for Aristotle on this point; Aristotle is described as 'the great thinker who was the first to analyse so many forms, whether of thought, society or nature, and amongst them also the form of value.' (T. I, p 73; Vol. I, p 59).

6 See particularly the letter to Engels dated 8 January 1868 and the letter to Kugelmann dated 11 July 1868.

7 The word translated here as 'imaginary' is 'imaginär'. Roy's translation has 'irrationnel'. Rancière's use of 'irrationnel' throughout this section has been translated as 'imaginary' accordingly - Trans.

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Theoretical Practice: single copies 30p; by post 33p inland, 40p overseas,
Subscriptions; five issues £1. 30 post free inland, £1. 60 overseas

Subscriptions, contributions and correspondence to
Theoretical Practice, 13 Grosvenor Avenue, London N5

Published by Theoretical Practice

Printed in England by Expression, London N1