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Class Politics as the Unity of Theory and Practice and the Criticism of Epistemology

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The position of practice in Marx's method

In the "Theses on Feuerbach" Marx identifies the defect of former materialism as its disregard for praxis: metaphysical materialism conceives the objective world in abstraction from human activity and the historically specific form of its actualization. From the outset, Marx emphasizes that the objective social world we encounter is the product of objective human corporeal and intellectual activity; in other words, objectivity is human activity objectivized. Marx does not aim at casting doubt on the existence of the objective world and the objectivity of human knowledge of the world; "nature" is the necessary condition of human action, that is, the necessity of human activity is due to her confrontation with a world "independent" of

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herself; objectivity, however, is the transformation of that nature into a determinate moment of human activity in the form of the inorganic extension of human's existence.

A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a *natural* being, and plays no part in the system of nature. A being which has no object outside itself is not an objective being. A being which is not itself an object for some third being has no being for its *object*; i.e., it is not objectively related. Its being is not objective. (Marx, 1975: 337)

The transformation of material nature and creation of commodities (in the general sense of the term, commodities as useful things or as use-values), rather than destroying the objectivity and independence of material nature proves the objectivity of human labour and human activity in general and its dependence on objective independence of material nature. Objectivity of nature is the precondition and the source of objectivity of human labour and consciousness. Consciousness is external; the unity of consciousness and nature, the subject-object unity is attainable only externally as the unity *in* nature. Because a human is a material thing and an external entity, its activity can take an objective form; it can be effective and can transform and produce nature. Similarly, the source of the truth and reality of human thinking, the source of the truth of, say, natural laws that she "discovers", is this externality, or her objective being. Were she not an external, objective being, were she a mere internality, a sort of consciousness in opposition to the external (be it conceived of as her ideas, perception, impressions or as an objective world of ideas independent of her) she would not have affected nature and she would not have any window opened onto nature. The semblance of interiority in contrast to exteriority, the real semblance of subject-object dichotomy is the product of a mode of production where things appear not as inter-related processes but as self-contained fetish-like entities with a life of their own.

Therefore, despite the idealist attribution of objectivity and absoluteness to the spirit, had the self-consciousness or the spirit been the absolute in the idealist sense, it would have no such objectivity and would fall short in realizing itself in nature owing to its lacking an objective nature. The absoluteness of the self-consciousness is nothing but absolute emptiness: a void similar to the absolute emptiness and lack of vitality of capital. The Spirit is the reflection of the emergence of value, from the void at the heart of capital, which posits itself as the absolute presence and the use-value as a moment of its own non-being (Arthur, 2004: 153-4); as Marx puts it, "A non-objective being is a *non-being*" (1975: 337).

Marx's concept of nature is historical in contradistinction to all other approaches. Since nature, for Marx, is the primary source of all instruments and objects of labour, from the outset it is considered in relation to human activity. Disregarding human activity and its role in manipulating the social nature, mechanical materialism recapitulates the idealist attitude that considers abstract thinking as the only genuine activity and the estranged entities of this activity, such as the state, the law, and religion as "thought entities" or "pure, abstract philosophical thinking" (Marx, 1975: 331). Hence, Marx states,

Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity. In *Das Wesen des Christenthums*, he therefore regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and defined only in its dirty-Jewish form of appearance. Hence he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary", of practical-critical, activity. (Marx, 1976: 3, emphasis original)

Marx's rejection of idealism is not an abstract rejection similar to that of Feuerbach's. He does not simply invert the relation between object and subject. He does not replace the Subject with Man. Human, in Feuerbach's philosophy, is still the unhistorical, abstract being that is identical to its own nature. So is the extra-human existence. Marx accepts the "idealist" thesis that the world exists through the mediation of Subject. He, however, brings this thought to its true essence: The subject is neither the Spirit, nor the Ego, nor the transcendental Subject; it is neither the Man. The subject, as the creator of reality is the socio-historical human, the active human. Extra-human reality is a function of human's productive activity. It is the inorganic extension of human's historically determinate social organization. As Schmidt notes,

Marx described extra-human reality which is both independent of men and mediated, or, at least, capable of being mediated by them by using the following synonymous terms: 'material', 'nature', 'stuff of nature', 'natural thing', 'earth', 'objective moments of labour's existence', 'objective' or 'material; conditions (*sachlich*) of labour'. Since men constitute a component of this reality the concept of 'nature' is identical with the 'whole of reality' in the Marxist view. This concept of nature as a whole of reality did not result in an ultimate *Weltanschauung* or a dogmatic metaphysics but simply circumscribed the horizon of thought within which the new materialism moved. (1971: 29)

Humans perceive in nature what they experience in their social existence and their mode of activity (production and practice). Nature for Marx appears only through social labour. Even time and space are social in their origin. Time is the time of activity; it is the regular succession of human activities (Azeri, 2013: 1107). So is the case with the thesis that motion is matter's form of existence. Materialism accepts that, say, laws of motion of external bodies are independent from consciousness. However, this "in-itself" is relevant only if it is made in to a "for-us", in other words, as far as nature is drawn into the web of human's social practice. Even the motion of stars is meaningful to the extent that it functions within the web of social practice. Such functionality is not a pragmatic matter; the "in-itself" does not have an existence independent from the "for-us"; it is identified as the "in-itself" only as a determinate moment of the "for-us". Just as the concept is not simply a lens through which the allegedly "neutral" reality is conceived but is an organ of objectification of social human activity and of changing and constituting it as this historically specific social reality, the "for-us" functionality does not simply stand over the "in-itself" and coexists with it peacefully but constitutes it. It is not the case that the first one perceives the forest and then, say, she identifies it as a source of firewood; rather, the forest is perceived because one looks for firewood—the two are inseparable moments related by human activity as their middle term. It is in this sense that the whole reality is the reality of human social activity in the world.

The reality of thinking

Marx has not written on method as much as he has critically analyzed a vast spectrum of phenomena with a unique critical methodology—materialist dialectics. Philosophically speaking, Marx stands between Kant and Hegel. Like Hegel he refuses to make epistemological reflections before the concrete content of knowledge is investigated; he criticizes the duality between the form and the content, essence and appearance etc. Yet, contrary to Hegel he does not intend a speculative identity of subject and object. As Murray puts it,

Marx is more interested in breaking down the dualism of being and consciousness, base and superstructure, than in simply inverting idealism, and that historical materialism is not a science of history. Rather, it is a propaedeutic to actual historical work, a polemic against an idealism that turns history into a parade of thoughts and thinkers, while dehistoricizing practical, material life. (1988: 3)

Marx links logics of practical, material life, such as the logic of commodity exchange to logics of schools of thought such as utilitarianism and the logic of early modern natural science. Marx considers Hegel a crude empiricist not because the latter refers to empirical data; not even solely because Hegel does not seem to be aware that conceiving of the factual itself is conceptual; rather, the core of Marx's unease with Hegel is the latter's separating the content and the form, the concept and the fact as if one is a vase and the other the liquid that fills it up. In this, Hegelian mediation looks mechanical and externally attainable only, whereas mediation, in Marx's approach, is immanent; it works from within; it signifies the contradictions within a system and synthesis through mediation as forming a higher level contradiction.

The identity between the subject and object, between the essence and the appearance is one that is attainable only through the mediation of social human activity. Hence, Marx states,

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which isolates itself from practice is a purely scholastic question. (1976: 3, emphasis original)

Marx's suggested model is not a method of verification, falsification, or corroboration of thought and theories against facts. Such a model is the replica of the aforementioned dualisms Marx intends to criticize. Furthermore, such models suffer an insurmountable incoherence: a comparison of any kind between thought and reality or between theory and fact requires the knowledge of both reality or fact and thought or theory – a god-like third position; otherwise, making a comparison becomes impossible. However, if such knowledge is available, then theorizing or thinking and therefore the comparison becomes redundant as either thinking or theory will not add anything to our already existing knowledge. Marx's method, to the contrary, emphasizes the reality of thinking, its outwardness as a historically specific social activity *not about* but *on* the object and thus its objectivity. Thinking happens in the world and not in the head or brain or the mind. The scholastic consideration of thinking in isolation from practice is thus mistaken as it is a perverted reflection of the relation between thinking and reality.

Therefore, Marx appreciates achievements of Hegel's philosophy for emphasizing the role of the active subject while criticizing it for its inevitable positivism and apologetic stance before religion, the law, and the state. The positive side of Hegel's philosophy is that he conceives of self-creation of human as a process; he conceives objectification as loss of object or as alienation. In this, Hegel sees the relation between human's self-creative activity and labour: Yet, one might add that his one-sided emphasis on and his identification of objectification with a historically-determinate form of this objectification as alienation deprives itself of the critical potential it has. Hegel ontologizes this determinateness, meaning that he

reduces the historically-specific to a general abstraction; this in turn explains the speculative makeup of his philosophical stance. As Murray aptly puts it,

Marx repeats the language of “thing” (Ding), which complements etymologically Marx’s criticism of Hegel and the logic of value. Marx reads Hegel as reducing objectivity to thinghood: to the mere externalized product of self-consciousness, of abstract thinking. Marx believes that such a product is no actual object at all. Value follows the same logic. Here the products of labor are reduced to values, to mere congelations of undifferentiated human labor (abstract labor). Marx labels this crystallized abstract labor a “ghostly objectivity”. (1988: 48)

The problem of the reality of thinking is also related to concepts and conceptual thinking and to the problem of the “concrete” in Marx’s method. Marx defines the “concrete” as the unity of diverse aspects. The concreteness of thinking is its success in reconstructing the real essential bonds between diverse phenomena and revealing the identity in the difference, i.e., the concreteness of thinking is to bring phenomena under the concept where the latter does not signify an enumeration of common features of diverse phenomena but a reconstruction of their common phylogenetic root. True concepts reveal the essence of things. They are not abstractions made from sense-experience (sense-data). They appear in human consciousness at spiritual-theoretical culture level. Such concepts mature and crystallize in human intellect gradually. They are not self-obvious and if intellect does not develop within cultural-theoretical context, they will be absent. That concepts develop and do not come to be in their completeness and entirety implies that they are instruments of action; concepts are not mere reflections or ideal mirror-images of phenomena that are produced by abstracting (peeling off) impurities of the phenomena and which reside in the head of the knowing-acting subject. Rather, they are tools of active grasping and thus of manipulating and changing reality.

Concepts, revealing the essence of the real and of the object and as tools of cognitive activity, thus facilitate accessing the essence of the real and acting upon that essence and uncover the necessary connections among aspects of diverse objectivity. As Ilyenkov formulates it,

The concrete in thinking also appears, according to Marx’s definition, in the form of combination (synthesis) of numerous definitions. A logically coherent system of definitions is precisely that ‘natural’ form in which concrete truth is realized in thought. Each of definitions forming part of the system naturally reflects only a part, a fragment, an element, an aspect of the concrete reality – and that is why it is abstract if it is taken by itself, separately from other definitions. (1982: 37)

Concepts are the instrument of idealization of the real and thus of achieving the real identity between the subject of activity and the object through socially determined practice. “Ideality, according to Marx, is nothing else but the form of social-human activity represented in the thing, reflecting objective reality; or, conversely, the form of human activity, which reflects objective reality, represented as a thing, as an object” (Ilyenkov, 2012: 176).

The relation between human and nature, as well as the relation among human beings, together with their forms of activity (their consciousness, will, imagination, and forms of thinking) inevitably bear the mark of the peculiar socio-historical relations (of production) within which humans perform their activity. “It is not ideality that is an ‘aspect’, or ‘form of

manifestation' of the sphere of consciousness-will but, on the contrary, the consciously-wilful character of human mentality is a form of manifestation, an 'aspect' or mental manifestation of the ideal (i.e., socio-historically generated) plane of relationships between man and nature" (Ilyenkov, 2012: 190-91). In contrast to fetishism (in the form of, say, idolatry), ideality or the ideal represents a form of mediation between human and the social reality (including "nature") which is peculiar to the capitalist society, on the one hand, and which is rooted in previous forms of human activity and yet, is not reducible to neither, meaning that it can be separated from the conditions of its formation and be projected, although critically, onto the future forms of societies. The form of appearance of the ideal and ideality is concept and conceptuality.

The form of knowledge and the form of activity

Knowing is the outward activity of manipulating the social world – the only world before us. Genuine knowledge is the revealing of the essence of this world of appearances. As Bonefeld puts it, "There is only one world, and that is the world of appearance. This world has to be deciphered to reveal its social constitution in social relations" (2009: 125). To reveal the essence is to ideally reconstruct those social relations or the human core of this socially constituted reality. Marx views science as a matter of getting to the logic of things themselves. These logics are not *a priori* and thus are not formalistic; rather, they are historically determined and historically attainable. As Murray puts it, Marx does not aim at an inversion of idealism and constituting historical materialism as a science of history; rather he is interested in revealing the human essence of historical and scientific "progress" meaning that he aims at "a propaedeutic to actual historical work, a polemic against an idealism that turns history into a parade of thoughts and thinkers, while dehistoricizing practical, material life" (Murray, 1988: 3).

The Marxian conceptualization of cognitive activity is drastically different than the age-old rationalist-empiricist conceptualization. The latter is based on "observation-learn"; whereas, the former is rooted in "activity-change". The rationalist-empiricist asserts the object of science as trans-historically given, immutable and atomic fact; the subject of cognitive observation, on the other hand, is a neutral, pure spirit whose cognitive activity is motivated by her natural curiosity. Hegel draws attention to this activity-based nature of knowledge in contrast to the empiricist formulation of observation-based knowledge when mockingly criticizing the rationalist-empiricist dictum stating that

Even the animals ... show themselves to be most profoundly initiated into [wisdom]; for they do not just stand idly in front of sensuous things as if these possessed intrinsic being, but, despairing of their reality, and completely assured of their nothingness, they fall to without ceremony and eat them up. (2004: 65)

A particular object is only a moment in the negative movement of the formation of the concept. Attributing truth, certainty and reality to the object of the sense is to fetishize it as an absolute – as something that is absolutely in-itself. However, as stated above, the in-itself, although precedes the for-itself or the for-us, is logically preceded by the for-itself and can only be realized as moment of the for-us. Object is the history of the object; it is the genesis of objectivity; it is the continuous negation of "these" and "those" through objectivized activity; the truth of the pudding is in the eating.

For the materialist dialectician the quest for knowledge is the socio-historically determined activity of manipulation of the world and is not separable from the historically-specific *social* needs and the form of relations of production. Thus, criticizing Feuerbach's contemplative materialism Marx states,

Feuerbach speaks in particular of the perception of natural science; he mentions secrets which are disclosed only to the eyes of the physicist and chemist; but where would natural science be without industry and commerce? Even this "pure" natural science is provided with an aim, as with its material, only through trade and industry, through the sensuous activity of men. (Marx & Engels, 1976: 40)

Thus, for Marx, the so-called natural and social sciences form a unity; Marx criticizes the views that assume such a distinction for being ideological in the sense of being blind to the historical determination of these modes of activity. There is no world other than the world of human activity; humans productive activity, her sensuous labour and creation, is "the foundation of the *whole* sensuous world *as it now exists*" (Marx & Engels, 1976: 40, emphases added). Thus the natural and the cultural are united in the historically determinate human activity. Hence, states Marx,

We know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of men. The two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on each other so long as men exist. (Marx & Engels, 1976: 28)

According to Marx, the distinguishing characteristic of human beings, when compared to other animals, is the production of the means of their own subsistence, through production of which they indirectly produce their material lives. "This mode of production ... is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life" (Marx & Engels, 1976: 31), the form of existence of which "coincides ... both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce" (Marx & Engels, 1976: 31-2). The same goes for human consciousness and ideas that are interwoven with the material life and are expressed in "the language of real life" (Marx & Engels 1976, 36). At the initial stages of the phylogenesis and ontogenesis of consciousness, ideas and mental products appears as an immediate counterpart to material activity. Although at later stages such immediacy might disappear, mental and ideational production will never happen in a void independent of the specific form of social human activity. Even when the products of consciousness and the consciousness itself appear not as historically specific products but as entities with a life of their own, this semblance of independence is rooted in the historically specific mode of human activity and production. "If in all ideology men and their relations appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their life-process" (Marx & Engels, 1976: 36). Hence follows the question concerning the reason of the emergence of such a semblance; as Hegel puts, "the essence has to appear"; the question, however, is, why does the essence appear in this specific form?

Forms of thinking and knowing as objective activities cannot be independent from forms of human activity in general and forms of production, as the height of human activity, in particular. Thus Marx states that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force is at the same time its ruling *intellectual*

force" (Marx & Engels, 1976: 59, emphases original). The dominance of the ideas of the ruling class is not a "super-structural" phenomenon that in one way or another "reflects" the "sub-structural" social relations of production. Rather, the dominance of ruling ideas is due to the *form* of their production, which in turn is inseparable from the means of their production. "The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means mental production" (Marx & Engels, 1976: 59). Marx defines the ruling ideas as the "ideal" reconstruction of the dominant material relations. The ruling class members do also think; they have consciousness and they produce ideas concerning the social world of appearances of which their consciousness is a constituent. Furthermore, as is the case with material (physical) production, where to the extent that the workers as the negative image of capital participate in production of commodities and value and thus contribute to the self-valorizing movement of capital, in mental production, too, individuals that are not physically part of the ruling class do contribute to the production and constitution of ruling ideas, their own consciousness and knowledge as social relations. The division of labour both within the ruling class and within society as whole between the "theoreticians" and "practitioners", on the one hand, and between the "heads" and the "hands", on the other, is a showcase of the production of consciousness and knowledge as a social relation under the capitalist relations of production. A peculiar consequence of such a division is the continuous constitution of the "illusion" that the head and the hand are discrete each of which has an independent existence of their own – an illusion that is also produced in the form of age-old dualities such as subject-object, mind-body, and essence-appearance. In other words, the division between head and hand is a reality that is expressed in a perverted form; to the extent that it is referred to as a reality in and by itself, it is not grasped in its actuality; to the extent that its human essence is grasped, that is, it is grasped in its actuality as a social relation that is to be produced and constituted constantly, it loses the semblance of its transhistorical existence and is conceived of in terms of historically specific forms of human activity – its history and actuality is understood in terrestrial terms, just as the history, say, of religion, should be critically conceived of not in theological terms but in material terms. As in the case of knowledge, this semblance appears in the form of the human capability to produce "pure" knowledge with means other than the body. Kant's questions concerning the possibility of pure metaphysics and pure mathematics are perverted reflections of this perverted reality, so is Hegel's depiction of history as the history of the self-alienation and unfolding of the Spirit. As Marx states,

Once the ruling ideas have been separated from the ruling individuals and, above all, from the relations which result from a given stage of the mode of production, and in this way the conclusion has been reached that history is always under the sway of ideas, it is very easy to abstract from these various ideas "the Idea", the thought, etc. as the dominance force in history, and thus to consider all these separate ideas and concepts as "forms of self-determination" of the Concept developing in history... Hegel himself confesses at the end of the *Geschichtphilosophie* that he "has considered the progress of *the concept* only" and has represented in history the "true *theodicy*" (p. 446). (Marx & Engels, 1976: 61)

The same is valid concerning other social products such as identity, nation, ethnicity, and religion. Marx's emphasis on the fact that ideas and consciousness are historical products in need of continuous constitution signifies an important feature of such products. Similar to every product, the capitalist relations of production as well as consciousness are in need of

continuous production and reconstitution. It is not the case that consciousness is historically formed once and for all; it should be continuously constituted. For instance, “nation” not only is a “historical” product of the social relations of production that acquires a semblance of an independent life of its own, but it should be continuously constituted by nationalism which is a specific political movement of a particular class.

A critical study of mental products in general and of scientific knowledge in particular inevitably acquires a criticism of the *form of production* of such products. A critique of epistemology is not a critical-normative study of the content of scientific claims; it is neither the logical reconstruction of scientific propositions (as logical positivists and neo-positivists assumed in one way or another) nor is an attempt to unify scientific knowledge in the form of a “dialectical” totality. As Ilyenkov & Korovikov state,

Marx and Engels showed that the basic task of natural science, and science as such, studying the socio-historical order, confronting them in the 19th century, is the task of collecting the totality of the finest results achieved in the 2000 year development of philosophy, which amounts to the demand to think correctly, grammatically, in the theoretical analysis of phenomena. Marx provides an exemplar of the constructive application of philosophy to particular branches of concrete knowledge, in particular to political economy.

And this is the best proof of the proposition that positive knowledge is itself able to reach, and is obliged to reach, that very final essence of the object of research, beneath, above and beyond which there is nothing to find for the reason that there is nothing more. (2016: 28)

What distinguishes different economic epochs is *not what* is produced but *is how* and *by which* instruments. What is important is the *form* of production and the instruments of labour deployed in the production process are an aspect of this form (Marx, 1993: 286). A critique of scientific knowledge in the shape of a critique of the content of scientific propositions will be as unrewarding as a critique of political economy that aims at discovering the essence of value through a chemical analysis of gold or the material bearer of value. Just as a critique of political economy aims at revealing the specific form of the mode of production and its forms of appearances, a critique of epistemology should aim at revealing the particular form of scientific production and the form of appearance of its products.

Capitalist division of labour and “pure” knowledge

A specificity of modern scientific knowledge is its conceptual structure: scientific theories appear in form of well-structured conceptual machines, that is, modern science deploys conceptual machines (theories) as a new genre of organs of action and cognition –named conceptual cognitive organs (Azeri, 2013). The conceptual structure of scientific knowledge, on the one hand, contributes to the idea that scientific knowledge is attainable through non-corporeal means, as is in particular in the case of theoretical sciences where scientific truth is seemingly attainable by armchair thinking and applying purely mathematical models. On the other hand, it apparently verifies the claim to the universal truth of modern scientific knowledge – what is attained in a laboratory is universally true both in time and space. The former contributes to the illusion that theoretical knowledge in general and scientific knowledge in particular is a set of propositions, the latter to the idea that scientifically –

attained truth has a transhistorical form and thus scientific knowledge is socially and politically neutral (in the mainstream philosophy of science tradition, even in “anti-positivism” of Kuhn, Lakatos, and Feyerabend social and political factors are considered “external” to the process of scientific knowledge production even if a role may be attributed to them).

The “pure” mental (non-corporeal) appearance of scientific knowledge is itself a mode of appearance of the capitalist division of labour that posits large masses of workers as proletarians and a smaller number as capitalists or the “leaders”. Production process is at the outset individual and thus the producer is under her own command. Yet, with the division of labour and in particular with the capitalist division of labour she comes under the command of others. With the development of capitalist production the division between head and hand amounts into the transformation of the product from the mere produce of an individual labourer into a social product. So does change the concept of productivity; it becomes more extensive. For a worker to be productive is not necessary to put her hand to the object; “it is sufficient for her to be an organ of the collective labourer, and to perform any of its subordinate functions” (Marx, 1993: 643-4).

The concept of productive labour will also become “narrower”. Capitalist production is not a mere production of commodities but it is the process of production of surplus-value. It is also the only truly *social* form of production as it organizes the whole productive forces of society around the goal of production of value and surplus-value. To be considered productive, therefore, the worker should produce surplus-value. “The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus-value for the capitalist, or in other words contributes towards the self-valorization of capital” (Marx, 1993: 644). Even a school teacher can be productive if she works to enrich the owner of the school. This narrowing of the concept of productive labour pertains to the historically-specific form of the relations of production. Marx states,

The concept of a productive worker therefore implies not merely a relation between the activity of work and its useful effect, between the worker and the product of his work, but also a specifically social relation of production, a relation with a historical origin which stamps the worker as capital’s direct means of valorization. To be a productive worker is therefore not a piece of luck, but a misfortune. (1993: 644)

The value producing labour, which is the source of value and surplus-value is not labour in general as a transhistorical human activity, but is the specific capitalist form of labour, that is, abstract labour. Value is determined by the average expenditure of labour time which is socially necessary for the production of a particular commodity as the carrier of the value. Commodities “can no longer be distinguished, but are all together reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract... As crystals of this social substance, which is common to them all, they are values—commodity values [*Warenwerte*]” (Marx, 1993: 128). Abstract labour is not “abstract” in the sense of being incorporeal as Sohn-Rethel (1978) and later Hartstock (2004) assume; abstract labour is not identical to mental activity, say, to thinking. It is the mode and form of human activity under the capitalist relations of production that has the sole aim of production of value and exertion of surplus-value from labour, which amounts to the formation of society as an organism that has been separated into “head” and “hand”; thus, scientific knowledge-production is abstract not because it produces knowledge “with means other than manual labour” but because it deploys a historically specific form of labour, that is, capitalist labour, which reproduces the process of value-production as it puts

scientific knowledge in the form of a “natural force” (Marx, 1993: 927-28) at the service of capital. Furthermore, knowledge as the end-product of scientific activity assumes an abstract form after the image of value; it appears as universal (Azeri, 2016) and separated from the totality of human activity –just as value seems as if it subsists by itself and is the sole force behind all production that valorizes itself, scientific knowledge appears as if it is just the outcome of coherently formed propositional systems independent of the totality of social human activity and once produced should be “applied”, “verified”, “falsified”, or “corroborated” against facts.

The social division of labour between the head and the hand, that is, between the capitalist as the owner of the means of production and the worker as the owner of the special value-producing commodity, that is, labour-power, is intensified with the deployment of machines and the process of the scientification of production. Machine is the materialization of the capitalist relations of production. Capital is the soul of the machine; hence machine looks as if it has a life of its own; as if it is alive. As the materialization of capital-relation it is the instrument or the organ of capital in order to subsume labour. Furthermore, machine replaces the worker and throws many of them onto the streets; it appropriates their lives and turns them into human trash. Thus, Marx states,

The struggle between the capitalist and the wage-labourer starts with the existence of the capital-relation itself... But only since the introduction of machinery has the worker fought against the instrument of labour itself, capital’s material mode of existence. He is in revolt against this particular form of the means of production because it is the material foundation of the capitalist mode of production. (1993: 553-4)

The machine takes over the worker by subsuming him to time; by making him the carcass of time: The world of machine is the temporal word of temporary inconveniences for the working people. The temporary effect of the machine on the lives of workers is in fact permanent (Marx, 1993: 558).

Machine is a revolutionary tool of production; it is not merely a complex of simpler tools that were deployed in pre-capitalist modes of production; furthermore, and contrary to the views of those such as John Stuart Mill, it is not a tool to lighten the burden of work for the worker. As Marx states, “The machine is a means for producing surplus-value” (1993: 492). Machine is a capitalist means of production and not a complicated tool. With the introduction of machines, the process of production acquires an objective form meaning that the relation between the worker and the tool differs; while in pre-capitalist modes of production and even in the capitalist mode of production in the manufacture era it is the worker who employs the tool, in the large-scale industry that marks the emergence of the specifically capitalist mode of production the relation is inverted and the producer is deployed by the tool.

In manufacture, it is the workers who, either singly or in groups, must carry on each particular process with their manual implements. The worker has been appropriated by the process; but the process had previously to be adapted to the worker. This subjective principle of the division of labour no longer exists in production by machinery. Here the total process is examined objectively, viewed in and for itself, and analysed into its constitutive phases. (Marx, 1993: 501)

Considering scientific theories as conceptual machines, one can conclude that science, thus, is subsumed to capital in a hybrid way: it assumes the objective form that is brought into

production process by the use of machinery. Science, then, turns into a quasi-independent field of production of knowledge. Science is the means of manipulating the social world of appearances, that is, it is the means of human being's metabolic relation with social nature. As production in each era acquires a specific form, human forms of manipulating nature also undergo changes. In capitalist mode of production, social nature is conceived of as the source of raw material necessary for the production of value and exertion of surplus-value. The scientification of the process of production, i.e., the vast deployment of machinery in the capitalist process of production signifies the subsumption of science to capital in the form of a natural force. This explains why machines function not as means to ease the work or to reduce the labour time, but as means of exertion of a larger amount of surplus from labour. So be the case, science and its actualization in the form of technology are not neutral products that can be simply put in use in a post-capitalist society. The society of future, if humans manage to overcome the capitalist barbarity and continue to exist, will definitely assume a radically different form of relation with social environment. Just as machine as the tool-proper of the capitalist mode of production is different than a mere tool, the means-proper of production of the post-capitalist mode of production will inevitably assume a radically different form than their capitalist predecessors. These tools, similar to every human product, will not appear out of nothing; they will appear before an already existing social material, just as, say, thoughts can only be produced against an already existing social thought-material. A critique of epistemology, therefore, is not a romanticist rejection of science and a call for a return to "nature"; rather, it is the endeavour for identifying the inner contradictions within the process of knowledge production that facilitate an immanent criticism that would amount to transforming science to a force at the service of humanity.

In place of conclusion

The process of knowledge production is not a purely theoretical internal process; it is at the service of life. That knowledge has a self-sufficient existence independent of humans is the expression of human's alienation. Under the capitalist relations of production, "life" becomes a reflection of the self-valorization movement of capital. Just as Hegel's Geist is a perverted image of capital as substance-subject of capitalist society, the image of knowledge that depicts it as independent from human practice and as an entity growing by itself, is a perverted image of the self-moving Concept. This in turn reveals the class character of scientific knowledge production which is reflected in the process of scientification of production. The use of machinery in production has a humanizing effect on the labour process (Schmidt, 1971: 146), as well as a degrading one. On the one hand, machines for the first time provide the means for drastically reducing labour time, while, on the other hand, under the rule of capital, they become means of more intensive and extensive exploitation of workers. Class conflict exists within science, just as it exists not alongside every human being but within every individual who produces surplus-value (Gunn, 1978: 18)—as mere producers of surplus-value, all producers are negative personifications of capital and the process of production is a reflection of its self-valorization movement; so is the case with science as a natural force at the service of capital.

Humans do not simply "reflect" reality in their consciousness but do act in reality; the reality "reflected" in human consciousness is the reality reflecting human practice. Furthermore, the reality that is "reflected" in human consciousness is mediated by human activity and is the product of human activity: reality is the unity of subject and object through

human practice. As Schmidt puts it, "By being transferred into industry, nature is annulled. As Hegel wrote in the *Phenomenology*, nature's 'being-in-itself descends to the level of empty appearance as a reality opposed to the active consciousness'" (1971: 115).

Human's confrontation with reality does not stop at the level of confrontation with the immediate existence. Rather, it goes beyond this limit through industrial (production) appropriation of nature. Similarly, human knowledge does not stop at the level of "concrete" sensuousness but leaps onto the conceptual level which is deeper and is in fact more concrete than the seemingly colourful realm of sensuousness which is in fact more abstract due to lack of determinations. Marx's materialism is directed toward its own supersession. If humans not only see theoretically through the laws ruling their lives but also gain control over these laws in practice, then they would be freed from the 'natural-historical' materialism they have been fallen victim to. The so-called "super-structural" or ideational products too are the products of human activity and a specific form of labour that is organized historically-specifically. What is to be overcome is the separation between head and hand which is the form of appearance of the separation of the immediate producers from the means of production, i.e. bourgeois property relations, which is the legal form of existence of the capitalist relations of production.

From the outset human's confrontation with nature is mediated by its labour and by the means of this labour – be it merely its hands and feet. The knowing of nature therefore is mediated by the forms of appropriation of nature so that nature assumes a form of existence that corresponds to its human manipulation. Moreover, every human form of appropriation of nature is meaningful, that is, it is bound to have a definite meaning; it is loaded by meaning. Yet, under the capitalist relations of production such knowing assumes an independent form as if knowledge is something to be *found* in nature. Knowledge assumes a totally abstract form in two senses: it is produced with the use of abstract means and becomes conceptual; and it appears as totally independent from human: just as under the capitalist relations of production labour is deprived of its own nature and is converted into a purely subjective force of labour that confronts its own product as an alienated value existing for itself, the knowing subject confronts its own product as a thing for itself.

Therefore, a critique of epistemology is a critique of the form of epistemological activity, namely, of scientific knowledge production; it is inevitably a critique from the perspective of practice; in other words, it is a practical materialist critique and hence it assumes a political form. As a political action, therefore, it is bound to class relations; it is actualized from within a class horizon and necessarily appears in the form of class politics – the practical materialist criticism of epistemology in its totality, which in turn is a specific form of appearance of the communist criticism of the totality of capitalist society. As Schmidt aptly puts it, "Knowledge, by revivifying the human historical processes which have been submerged in the established facts, proves that reality is produced by men and hence can be changed by them: practice, as the most important concept of knowledge, changes into concept of political action" (1971: 196). Hence follows class politics as the unity of theory and practice, that is, as the practical materialist criticism of the social world of appearances.

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