

Rereading Marx Again and Again

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Abstract

Theory, which most accurately captures reality, is a fundamental prerequisite of any analysis of some phenomenon, even hypothetical ones. If dialectical laws of motion exist than, how dialectics of reality express itself in the human mind, i.e. in the form of man's thoughts (categories)? How we ought to read Marx? I prefer to read all of Marx's manuscripts, where he made a vast number of notes, comments, etc. These writings were "for himself", for "clarification for himself". They are draft research papers intended to clarify things for him. For example, in *Grundrisse* is Marx's talking to yourself. It does not only reflect results but, first of all, the process of their emergence. The most interested are so-called digressions, unexpected retreat from the main theme. It was not isolated provocation Jacques Derrida's affirmation of 1994, that "it will always be a fault not to read and reread and discuss Marx".

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Introduction

*Theory cannot be absurd
if it only reflects absurd reality.*

Once Oscar Wilde wrote that "If one cannot enjoy reading a book over and over again, there is no use in reading it at all". I read and reread all volumes Marx's and Engels' writings in Polish, Russian, and English. Unfortunately, I cannot read it in German. However, I carefully studied all comments concerning translations of Marx's writings into English. It is difficult to agree with the position of The Neue Marx Lektüre school that one should only read specific texts of Marx in German, rendering all international non-German interpretations invalid. But the language barrier does not prohibit thinking.

The work of translating is not an easy deal, but if you read in three languages simultaneously, you are able to compare these texts. It can help to understand what the author really said. Frederick Engels described interesting fact in the article Frederick Engels "How not to translate Marx". [MECW, vol. 26, pp. 335–334]. The

first English translation of Volume I of Capital was prepared in 1887 by Samuel Moore, Edward Aveling, and Marx's daughter Eleanor Marx-Aveling, under supervision of and edited by Frederick Engels. Engels wrote: "To translate such a book, a fair knowledge of literary German is not enough. Marx uses freely expressions of everyday life and idioms of provincial dialects; he coins new words, he takes his illustrations from every branch of science, his allusions from the literatures of a dozen languages; to understand him, a man must be a master of German indeed, spoken as well as written, and must know something of German life too". [ibidem, p. 335]

Marx, according to Engels, was not only "the most untranslatable of German prose writers" but also "one of the most vigorous and concise writers of the age. To render him adequately, a man must be a master, not only of German but of English too. [...] Powerful German requires powerful English to render it". [ibidem, p. 336] "...technical term has to be always rendered by one and the same equivalent" [ibidem.]. Analysis of exchange value is "one of the most delicate analyses in Marx's book" [ibidem, p. 337]. Oth-

erwise, it means the turning of German sense into English nonsense.

Let us call things by their names. Thus, it is an urgent necessity to brush Augean stable of so-called “modern interpretation” of Marx. Notably, it concerns to kind of “Marxism”. What do I understand under the term ‘Shallow Marxism’? It is when shallowness of the criticism stems from the depth of misunderstanding. It also involves a “particular confusion among Marxists, who devote, on average, substantially more labour time to finding fault with Marx’s theory than to understanding it” [Freeman, 2016]. What do I understand under the term ‘Monkey Marxism’? It is when they jump from one level of abstraction to another without taking into account intermediate links. In *Grundrisse* Marx wrote: “It is just as impossible to pass directly from labour to capital as from the different races of men directly to the banker, or from nature to the steam-engine” [MECW, vol. 28, p. 190]. Is it possible to interpret the first Volume of Capital without taking into account all that Marx said in the third Volume and Notes on Adolph Wagner’s “Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie”? As Marx wrote: “The direct transition from the fetish of the African to Voltaire’s *être supreme*, or from the hunting gear of a North American savage to the capital of the Bank of England, is not as absurdly anti-historical as is Bastiat’s transition from the fisherman to the wage labourer” [MECW, vol. 28, p. 15].

Marx’s political economy is shooting at a moving target. The subject matter of Marx’s political economy is infinite movement. To analyse theoretically dialectics of this movement we should make many, many freeze frames. But it is not the state of equilibrium. Marx’s political economy is anti-equilibrium one. In Afterword to the Second German Edition Marx wrote: ... dialectic ... [I]n its rational form ... regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence [MECW, vol. 35, p. 20]. This “momentary existence” is snapshots of reality as it is. Such frozen movement is a domain of algebra.

Karl Marx’s writings provide a uniquely insightful explanation of the inner workings of capitalism, which other schools of thought generally have difficulty explaining. From this

vantage point, Marx’s works can help to explain important features and economic problems of our age, and the limits of their possible solutions.

Ethical Position

Marx was one of the greatest humanists in the history of humankind. In a letter to Sigfrid Meyer of 30 April 1867 [MECW, vol. 42, p. 366] he wrote: “Why then did I not answer you? Because I was the whole time at death’s door. I thus had to make use of every moment when I was capable of work to complete my book, to which I have sacrificed my health, happiness, and family. I hope this explanation suffices. I laugh at the so-called ‘practical’ men and their wisdom. If one wanted to be an ox, one could, of course, turn one’s back on the sufferings of humanity and look after one’s own hide. But I should really have thought myself unpractical if I had pegged out without finally completing my book, at least in the manuscript.” It is because, as Marx wrote in a letter to Auguste Jean Marie Vermorel of 27 August 1867, “We are both pursuing the same aim, the emancipation of the proletariat” [MECW, vol. 42, p. 414].¹

Some time later in a letter to Engels, he wrote “In a few days I shall be 50. As that Prussian lieutenant said to you: “20 years of service and still lieutenant”, I can say: half a century on my shoulders, and still a pauper. How right my mother was: “If only Karell had made capital instead of etc.” [MECW, vol. 43, p. 25].

Very many writers who consider themselves Marxists have a strange habit of throwing out the baby with the bathwater — and, as a rule, along with Marx too. All of Marx’s economic writings are a tremendous humanistic message. Their vital theme is Man. All of Marx’s writings are devoted to one essential theme — to Man. And Marx’s political economy is also about Man. It is not only about the material and social re-

¹ Meyer, Sigrid (c. 1840–1872) — prominent figure in the German and American working-class movement; engineer; member of the General Association of German Workers; opposed Lassalleanism; member of the International; in 1866 emigrated to the USA, member of the New York Communist Club and an organiser of the International’s sections in the USA; follower of Marx and Engels. Vermorel, Auguste Jean Marie (1841–1871) — French journalist, editor of *Le Courrier français* (1866–67), member of the Paris Commune (1871).

ality of the world but also about reflecting the consciousness of Man.

Marx stated that Feuerbach's outstanding achievement was, among others, "the establishment of *true materialism* and of *real science*, by making the social relationship of 'man to man' the basic principle of the theory" [MECW, vol. 3, p. 328]. And Marx, by making the social relationship of 'man to man' the basic principle of his own theory, was the world's first theorist of *globalisation*.

Prejudgements

Some time ago Tony Norfield wrote, "So the logic of the question was: what is the point of Marx's theory if one can do without it when explaining what is going on in the world?"² Of course, the system has developed a great deal in the more than 150 years since *Capital* was written. Therefore, the changing forms of capitalism have led many to argue that Marx's theory is outdated or invalid today.

As the case with Borkiewicz shows, the so-called inconsistency/contradiction arises from trying to turn Marxism into bourgeois economics, in particular through completely inappropriate and absurd use of reproduction schemes to 'solve' for equilibrium market prices using *matrix algebra*.

Many authors concluded that Marx suffered from 'unclarity' or a 'lack of clarity' as to his own abstractions, a judgment more appropriate for their own arguments. It is always so when shallowness of the criticism stems from the depth of misunderstanding.

I do not like the word 'theory' concerning Marx's economic works. It is because many authors of articles and books understand the word 'theory' as a product of Marx's thinking, as a random or unexpected turn of concepts and definitions. It implies the possibility of logical errors in the process of thinking, false or unrealistic assumption etc. For example, they write whole books state that 'for Marx money must be commodity'. Of course, it is an absurd statement. Indeed, as Charles Dickens already said: "There are books of which the backs and covers are by far the best parts".

As Engels already wrote, "For the people who cannot or do not want to read, who, even in

Volume I, took more trouble to understand it wrongly than was necessary to understand it correctly — for such people it is altogether useless to put oneself out in any way" and added, "if it were not labour in vain to open the eyes of those who do not want to see".

As already said, Alan Freeman "presuppose" is not an idle word and the assumption is not a simplification, an approximation, or an option. Without it, there is no theory. Notably, it concerns those who conclude that Marx's economic arguments do not stand up to critical examination. This judgement, however, stemmed from a particular reading, or interpretation, of Marx.

I rely on Marxist concepts as starting points for understanding the world today because they provide the best way to explain what is going on. The significance of Marx's theory is that it so clearly spelt out the dynamic of capitalism that his analysis provides critical building blocks from which to understand significant features of the world economy today.

I want to reiterate that we cannot prove things by quoting authorities, even such an authority as Karl Marx. Because Marx said something, it does not make it true. However, a man like Marx has the right to be heard himself [MECW, vol. 37, p. 875].

Marx was an economist not by vocation, but by necessity. His passion was history and philosophy. Marx studied political economy and capitalist society through the eyes of a philosopher. He looked at the economy by the philosophical magnifying glass. Therefore, you cannot read Marx's texts through the eyes of a contemporary accountant. It means to change the power of abstraction to the pettiness of the accountant. For example, Marx determines general aggregate laws which apply regardless of the outcome and makes no pretence of calculating individual prices.

Every Marx's text was written in a specific context and time. Also, the world in which Marx lived is different from the world in which we live. Therefore, the main question is how to interpret these writings to understand the sense of contemporary events, phenomena, and crises. However, for the modern reader, the most significant difficulty is to read Marx's writings through Marx's eyes.

² [https:// economicsofimperialism.blogspot.com](https://economicsofimperialism.blogspot.com)

Our reading of Marx is severely distorted by our knowledge as well. It leads to a tendency to perceive Marx's writings as obsolete by definition. Moreover, as Alan Freeman already noted, Marx's concepts, when summarised or 'interpreted', have mutated to the point where readers cannot see what he actually wrote, and writers systematically attribute things to him which he simply did not say at all.

In every case, we can only comprehend the person's theories after clearly grasping the problems he set out to answer, what he wants his theories to do. However, the objectivity of the study does not exclude personal attitude to the analysed issues. This personal attitude is primarily due to the purpose of the study. So, what was the purpose of all Marx's multitudinous activities, including his economic writings?

Many authors concluded that Marx suffered from 'unclarity' or a 'lack of clarity' as to his own abstractions, a judgment more appropriate for their own arguments. It is always so when shallowness of the criticism stems from the depth of misunderstanding. For example, the most frequently used in 'Marxists' literature is the term 'labour theory of value'. Those who carefully read Marx's economic writings know well that it is absurd collocation. Oiled oil — no more.

Another example. Anitra Nelson, which some Marxists consider to be a great specialist in money theories wrote: "It is due to the fact that Marx assumes labour 'value', as an already established concept in the school of political economy, and reconstructs the category 'labour-time' — as 'abstract labour' and 'socially necessary labour-time' — in order to explain the everyday world of prices, non-commodity currencies and the legal standard of price, the money commodity. He was conscious that he failed to do this in a transparent way, emphasised later by many Marxians in terms of the 'transformation problem'. This failure arises from the fact that in *Capital I* (1976a) price is proportional to value, whereas in the third volume (1981) prices are not proportional to values" [Nelson, 2001, p. 51]. It is a striking example of how to turn every Marx's sentence into 'marksists' nonsense.

Premises

Unfortunately, Marx's early work is usually seen to carry little weight. Vainly! It was not only for

self-clarification, even if left to the gnawing criticism of the mouse, but at the same time levelling the field and marking it. It is impossible to understand the *Poverty of Philosophy*, *Grundrisse*, all volumes of *Capital* (including *Theories of Surplus Value*) without *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction, Holy Family, German Ideology, Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, Reflections, Comments on James Mill Eléments d'économie politique*, Summary of Frederick Engels' article "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy" (written in the first half of 1844), Frederick Engels' *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* (Written in October and November 1843 and published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, 1844) and his book *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* published in 1845. (see MECW, vol. 4), Moses Hess *The Essence of Money* written in 1845.

In *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction* Marx determined the main aim of his scientific activity: "Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates *ad hominem*, and it demonstrates *ad hominem* as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself" [MECW, vol. 3, p. 182].

Marx always was analysing only the facts. Already in the *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx wrote: "It is hardly necessary to assure the reader conversant with political economy that my results have been attained by means of a wholly empirical analysis based on a conscientious critical study of political economy" [MECW, vol. 3, p. 229]. He hated speculative philosophising, aka metaphysics that is juggling categories.

Some time later, in the famous *German Ideology* Marx and Engels formulated what is today known as premises of the materialist conception of history: "The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity, and the material conditions of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way" [MECW, vol. 5, p. 31].

In unpublished ‘Introduction’ of 1857 (Economic Manuscripts of 1857–58) Marx precisely determined scope of his analysis “To begin with, the subject to be discussed is *material production*. Individuals producing in a society — hence the socially determined production by individuals is of course the point of departure” [MECW, vol. 28, p. 17].

In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx concretised: “As useful activity directed to the appropriation of natural factors in one form or another, labour is a natural condition of human existence, a condition of material interchange between man and nature, quite independent of the form of society” [MECW, vol. 29, p. 278].

“So far therefore as labour is a creator of use-value, is useful labour, it is a necessary condition, independent of all forms of society, for the existence of the human race; it is an eternal nature imposed necessity, without which there can be no material exchanges between man and Nature, and therefore no life” [MECW, vol. 35, p. 53].

The same is repeated in *Marginal Notes on Adolph Wagner’s Lehrbuch der politischen Oekonomie* [MECW, vol. 24].

More fully the starting point of the analysis Marx presented in a letter to Ludwig Kugelmann 11 July 1868 “Every child knows that any nation that stopped working, not for a year, but let us say, just for a few weeks, would perish. And every child knows, too, that the amounts of products corresponding to the differing amounts of needs demand differing and quantitatively determined amounts of society’s aggregate labour” [MECW, vol. 43, p. 67]. Unfortunately, every child becomes an adult, and many forget about it, especially when they become economists.

Totality

What is *totalität* (totality) in Marx economic writings? I think the whole of Marx’s writings is the study of the infinitely complex organism that is modern society as it evolves and changes over time. But once “useful labour, it is a necessary condition, independent of all forms of society, for the existence of the human race” more factual determination of totality is the sum total of labour of society.

The total labour-power of society, which is embodied in the sum total of the values of all

commodities produced by that society, counts here as one homogeneous mass of human labour-power, composed though it is of innumerable individual units [MECW, vol. 35, p. 49]. The sum total of the labour of all these private individuals forms the aggregate labour of society [ibidem, p. 83].

The main question — how the total disposable time of society is disposed of. Law of value describes the mechanism of this disposition. The law of competition requires to sell cheaper than all other producers. It is possible only when you spend less time to produce than all other producers. Time is the sole *criterium* and nothing else. Moreover, there is no choice for the producer — he/she must sell. Anyway, and at market price, that is at definite socially determined value.

Division of labour is a distribution of total disposable time of society. What is the mechanism of that distribution? What is a mediator in the definite mechanism? What is the only mechanism that exists in societies founded on individual exchanges (market economy) for determining whether a given product meets a social need?

Thus, there arises the question of what are the inner driving forces, determining purpose, the driving concern, etc. of these different movements as it concerns social life? What is the mechanism of the renewal and continuity of the production process itself? What is the mechanism of distribution the total mass of social labour-time *among the various spheres of production* according to the social need?

Indeed, since commodity production necessitates a division of labour, society pays for this article by devoting a portion of the available labour-time to its production. Therefore, society buys it with a definite quantity of its disposable labour-time [MECW, vol. 37, p. 185].

Purely Ideal or Mental Form

Marx never wrote “in my opinion,” because “Our ‘meaning’ has nothing at all to do with the essential characters of the thing we consider” [MECW, vol. 32, p. 315]. It is of fundamental meaning when we talk about abstraction — who does make (or has made) this abstraction. Is it abstraction made by humanity in the course of development of human

reasoning? Or it is the pure scientific method of inquiry?

Besides material products, we also have products of human thinking. Thinking is a reflection of the material world. It is about the human practice and comprehension of this practice. As Engels wrote, we are dealing here not only with a purely logical process but with a historical process and its explanatory reflection in thought, the logical pursuance of its inner connections. [MECW, vol. 37, p. 882]. The ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into forms of thought. Taken it more concrete Marx clearly indicated that the price or money-form of commodities is, like their form of value generally, a form quite distinct from their palpable bodily form; it is, therefore, a purely ideal or mental form. If some phenomenon “is presented to them” or is perceived by them it means that it is ideally reflected as in a mirror, that the life of the subject-matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror.

How dialectics of reality express itself in the human mind, i.e. in the form of man’s thoughts (words, terms, categories, concepts)? The full answer you can get from *Anti-Dühring*. We ought to remember that Marx took a direct part in the writing of *Anti-Dühring* (he wrote a critical outline of Dühring’s views on the history of economic doctrines), read and approved the whole manuscript. *Anti-Dühring* was thus the result of creative collaboration by Marx and Engels, reflecting their joint views.

Can we make abstraction though may not be aware of it? Of course, the ability to abstract thinking is a property of the human psyche. A person can abstract even without knowing it. It is the same as with Molière’s newly baked nobleman Monsieur Jourdain is treated by the wag who announces to him the news that all through his life, he has been speaking prose without knowing it.³

Maybe people had the ability to abstract thinking, and Marx only explained why and how it happened? Therefore, the question is how categories or concepts as a mental reflection of reality fit to reality. In dialectics, we saw the science of the general laws of change,

not only in society and in human thought, but in the external world, which is mirrored by human thought.

As concerns abstract labour (or, precisely, *labour in the abstract*) the issue is to explain how humankind in the course of development of commodity exchange abstracted this common for all commodities ‘element’ (*identity* between different concrete labours) which fulfilled the principle of equivalence. This comparative analysis lasting centuries led to reduction of all differences (measurable and no measurable as well) to unique one — *time as such*. On what basis could humankind come to such an abstraction and why?

Marx investigated and discussed the fundamental, major problems of the classical political economy of his time. He does not consider the vulgar political economy as a topic of his research. Marx has not written the textbook on how to calculate the value of each and every commodity produced. Ian Steedman as a representative of “Monkey Marxism” where they do not make a difference between accounting practice and political economy.

Basic principles of exchange reciprocity and equivalence (or equivalent reciprocity) implies comparison. So, the exchange needs a comparison. Comparison implies measurement. What features of labour make it possible to see it as a labour in the abstract and to find a common feature of all kinds of labour?

If somebody states that categories of labour and value are redundant in economic sciences, it is tantamount to saying that **time does not exist**. Indeed, there is possible only a very futile metaphysical discussion or a still more discreditable purely verbal dispute.

Appropriation and Alienation

Marx devoted the period between 1844 and 1847 to an intensive study of the political economy. Already in the “Poverty of philosophy” it is evident that at that time, Marx had a holistic understanding of the mechanism of functioning and development of capitalism. The main question that should be investigated was the discovery and description of the underlying mechanisms and forces driving the phenomena visible on the surface. Even then, it was clear to Marx that capitalism is just as

³ J.B. Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, Act II, Scene 6.

absurd and barbarous and, at the same time, an inevitable way of satisfying human needs.

“Hegel’s standpoint is that of modern political economy. He grasps *labour* as the *essence* of man — as man’s essence which stands the test: he sees only the positive, not the negative side of labour. Labour is *man’s coming-to-be for himself* within *alienation* or as an *alienated* man. The only labour which Hegel knows and recognises is *abstractly mental* labour” [MECW, vol. 3, p. 333].

He was analysing the facts. Even in the *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx wrote: “It is hardly necessary to assure the reader conversant with political economy that my results have been attained by means of a wholly empirical analysis based on a conscientious critical study of political economy.” [MECW, vol. 3, p. 229] He hated speculative philosophising aka metaphysics that is juggling with words and categories and justifies “starting out from the positive facts which we know by the senses.”

The key to understanding Marx’s economic work is in his early writings. And Marx asks himself “Is it a high appreciation of man for him to figure as a ‘force’ alongside horses, steam and water?” [MECW, vol. 4, p. 285] and “What in the evolution of mankind is the meaning of this reduction of the greater part of mankind to abstract labour?” [MECW, vol. 3, p. 241], “political economy knows the worker only as a working animal — as a beast reduced to the strictest bodily needs” [ibid., p. 242], “Political economy considers labour in the abstract as a thing; labour is a commodity” [ibid.].

Here Marx formulated not only his understanding of the essence of private property but determined two laws of appropriation. 1) The law of appropriation through the labour, i.e. “labour as the original mode of appropriation” [MECW, vol. 29, p. 461–462]. 2) The law of appropriation through the alienation — “the alienation of the product as the necessary form of its appropriation” [MECW, vol. 34, p. 355]. “It is therefore only with the coming of capitalist production that use value is first generally mediated through exchange value” [ibidem]. How, we now ask, does *man* come to *alienate*, to estrange, his *labour*? How is this estrangement rooted in the nature of human development? [MECW, vol. 3, p. 281].

His chief concern is with a question other political economists have never asked: “Why is labour represented by the value of its product and labour-time by the magnitude of that value?” I share the opinion expressed by Bertell Ollman [1976] that it is the widespread misconception that in his later life Marx left the theory of alienation behind him bears most of the responsibility for the equally widespread misunderstanding of his term “labour.” Grasping “labour” in *Capital* as alienated labour is the key to understanding Marx’s economic theories. “Only by its alienation does individual labour manifest itself as its opposite. The commodity, however, must have this general expression before it is alienated. This necessity to express individual labour as general labour is equivalent to the necessity of expressing a commodity as money” [MECW, vol. 32, p. 323]. He must sell means he must alienate. And selling becomes the extreme condition of living. I return to these questions in the next paper.

Perverted Forms or Fetishism

The next question which has a principal meaning in Marx’s economic writings is how dialectics of reality express itself in the human mind, i.e. in the form of man’s thoughts (categories)? What is the interaction between man and Nature where results are not only material products but also products of man’s thinking? What is the source of perverted man’s conscious?

“Objects separated from this mediator have lost their value. Hence the objects only have value insofar as they *represent* the mediator, whereas originally it seemed that the mediator had value only insofar as *it* represented *them*. This reversal of the original relationship is inevitable. This *mediator* is, therefore, the lost, estranged *essence* of private property, private property which has become *alienated*, external to itself, just as it is the *alienated* species-activity of man, the *externalised mediation* between man’s production and man’s production” [MECW, vol. 3, p. 212].

The aim is the demystification aims to reveal the social constitution of the relations between things to show their human content.

Or, in other words, “[...] because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them

as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour” [MECW, vol. 35, p. 82].

“Bailey is a fetishist in that he conceives value, though not as a property of the individual object (considered in isolation), but as a relation of objects to one another, while it is only a representation in objects, an objective expression, of a relation between men, a social relation, the relationship of men to their reciprocal productive activity” [MECW, vol. 32, p. 334].

I will return to this question in the next paper, where I will discuss the validity of Marx’s understanding of money.

Panta Rhei – Mors Immortalis

Marx’s Political Economy is not only a matter of algebra but a matter of probability as well. And “Probability always entails from objective regularity,” wrote Marx [MECW, vol. 32, p. 143]. It is the political economy of motion. Why is it so? It was first clearly formulated by Heraclitus in his famous concept “Panta rhei” (πάντα ῥεῖ): everything is and is not, for everything is fluid, is constantly changing, constantly coming into being and passing away — “Everything changes and nothing remains still, and you cannot step twice into the same stream” (Seneca in *Epistulae*, VI, 58, 23). Thus, we ought to see the economic life of a capitalistic society as a *stochastic* process — even as Brownian movement or chaos [Farjoun & Machover, 1983].

Maybe, “The only wheels which political economy sets in motion are *greed* and the *war amongst the greedy — competition*” [MECW, vol. 3, p. 271].

At the same time, Marx’s political economy is shooting at a moving target. The subject matter of Marx’s political economy is infinite movement. To analyse theoretically dialectics of this movement we should make many, many freeze frames. But it does not mean to fix the state of equilibrium. It is snapshots of reality as it is. As already said, Alan Freeman “presuppose” is not an idle word and the assumption is not a simplification, an approximation, or an option.

Without it, there is no theory. Notably, it concerns those who conclude that Marx’s economic arguments do not stand up to critical examination. This judgement, however, stemmed from a particular reading, or interpretation, of Marx.

In written in the first half of 1844 comments on James Mill *Éléments d’Économie Politique* Marx has formulated his principal understanding of the stochastic, chaotic movement of economic variables. He wrote “[...] Mill commits the mistake — like the school of Ricardo in general — of stating the *abstract law* without the change or continual supersession of this law through which alone it comes into being. [...] In political economy, the law is determined by its opposite, absence of law. The true law of political economy is chance, from whose movement we, the scientific men, isolate certain factors arbitrarily in the form of laws” [MECW vol. 3, p. 211].

Engels in *Anti-Dühring* wrote “When we consider and reflect upon nature at large or the history of humanity or our intellectual activity, at first, we see the picture of an endless entanglement of relations and reactions in which nothing remains what, where and as it was, but everything moves, changes, comes into being and passes away. This primitive, naive but intrinsically correct conception of the world is that of ancient Greek philosophy, and was first clearly formulated by Heraclitus: everything is and is not, for everything is fluid, is constantly changing, constantly coming into being and passing away.” [MECW, vol. 25, p. 21]

But this conception, correctly as it expresses the general character of the picture of appearances as a whole, does not suffice to explain the details of which this picture is made up, and so long as we do not understand these, we have not a clear idea of the whole picture. To understand these details, we must detach them from their natural or historical connection and examine each one separately, its nature, special causes, effects, etc. [MECW, vol. 25, 21–22].

The connection between Marx’s economic writings and his mathematical studies will be the theme of another paper. In *Preface* to the second edition of *Anti-Dühring* Engels wrote about “the extremely important mathematical manuscripts left by Marx” [MECW, vol. 25, p. 13]. At that time, Marx comprehended that many questions could not satisfactorily be solved

without the use of mathematics. The first question was the stochastic character of exchange relations, i.e. emergence and movement of average market values. The second question concerns the difference between constant and variable. Simultaneously, Marx has begun to differentiate between *time past*, *time present*, *future time*.

Carefully reading of Marx's economic writings makes it possible to find the following kinds of movement:

- Elliptical movement
- Circular movement
- Spiral movement
- Oscillating movement
- Rotational movement
- Recurrent movement
- Perpetual movement
- Repetitive movement

This is generally the way in which real contradictions are reconciled. 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 go on, at the same time reconciles it. [MECW, vol. 35, p. 113]

In *Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx wrote: "All that exists, all that lives on land and under water, exists and lives only by some kind of movement" [MECW, vol. 6, p. 163] and further continued "There is a continual movement of growth in productive forces, of destruction in social relations, of formation in ideas; the only immutable thing is the abstraction of movement — *mors immortalis* [ibidem, p. 166].

In Statu Nascendi

The fact that most of Marx's writings were not published during his lifetime is of fundamental importance. However, even in the case of published works, Marx maintained a far-reaching criticism. In a letter to Kugelmann of 10 June 1867, he wrote: "I am always very dissatisfied with my things when I see them printed, especially at first sight" [MECW, vol. 42, p. 380]. But even not "at first sight" Marx critically reviewed his previous works. In a letter to Kugelmann of 13 October 1866, he wrote: "It was, in my opinion, necessary to begin again *ab ovo* in the first book, i.e., to summarise the book of mine published by Dunck-

er⁴ in one chapter on commodities and money. I judged this to be necessary, not merely for the sake of completeness, but because even intelligent people did not properly understand the question, in other words, there must have been defects in the first presentation, especially in the analysis of commodities" [MECW, vol. 42, p. 328].

As concerns the first Volume of Capital Engels witnessed in *Preface* to the third German edition of Capital "It was Marx's original intention to re-write a great part of the text of the first volume, to formulate many theoretical points more exactly, insert new ones and bring historical and statistical materials up to date" [MECW, vol. 35, p. 27].

On the other hand, the matter was further complicated by the circumstance of which Marx wrote in a letter to Engels of 31 July 1865: "But I cannot bring myself to send anything off until I have the whole thing in front of me. *Whatever shortcomings they may have*, the advantage of my writings is that they are an artistic whole, and this can only be achieved through my practice of never having things printed until I have them in front of me in their entirety [MECW, vol. 42, p. 173].

There is not something finished forever — the only fluid movement of thought. Therefore, follow the flow of thoughts, not the letters. It is relevant to reconstruct the reasoning, the method of enquiry, and the conceptual framework which allowed him to draw these conclusions.

Time, Natural Laws, and Social Laws

Marx devoted the period between 1844 and 1847 to an intensive study of the political economy. Already in the *Poverty of Philosophy*, it is evident that at that time, Marx had a holistic understanding of the mechanism of functioning and development of capitalism. The main question that should be investigated was the discovery and description of the underlying mechanisms and forces driving the phenomena visible on the surface. Even then, it was clear to Marx that capitalism was just as **absurd** and **barbarous** and, at the same time, an **inevitable way** of satisfying human needs.

⁴ *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* [MECW, vol. 29].

How to establish a relation between needs and disposable time? Distribution of disposable time is, at the same time, division of labour time. The basis of the exchange of commodities is the division of labour. This social division of labour is the division of disposable time of whole society. There is no production of commodities without division of labour, for there would in such circumstances be no need to exchange one thing for another. The exchange of commodities is based on the socially recognised principles of ownership, equality, mutual and equal benefit (equivalence), freedom of will. The basic underlying principles of exchange were reciprocity and equality (equivalence). It is an illusion, fiction because as Marx noted “However, individual exchange, as the bourgeois conceives it, is far from resembling individual exchange as it is practised [MECW, vol. 6, p. 144].

It was in 1846 when in *The Poverty of Philosophy* Marx formulated his understanding of the main characteristic of “societies founded on individual exchanges”: “If M. Proudhon admits that the value of products is determined by labour time, he should equally admit that it is the fluctuating movement alone that in societies founded on individual exchanges make labour the measure of value. There is no ready-made constituted “proportional relation,” but only a constituting movement. [MECW, vol. 6, p. 135].

Why labour time but not anything else? Because labour time is the most in-depth and objective criterion of comparison. If we abstract from so-called psychological time — the time is the only objective criterion of comparison of expended labour-power.

The main question that faced Marx was what mechanism determines the necessary labour time. It is “[t]he general law and to the basis of political economy, that the values of commodities are determined by the labour-time contained in them, ...” [MECW, vol. 37, p. 311].

Before exchanging something for anything else, we ought to *compare* these two things. It means we should find a *similarity* between what we offer and what we require. We have here three entities: human labour (disposable working-time), human needs, and useful things (use values). All we ought to do is to reduce them to one denominator. What are the means to ascertain the minimum of labour necessary

for the production of a commodity? An overall mode of evaluation in exchange relation is the evaluation of commodities by labour time. [MECW, vol. 6, p. 136]

The reduction of all three entities to time was a well-documented historical process of humanity’s development. Time is objective and independent of the human will. As such, time can serve as an ideal measure. However, it was needed the social validation for time to be an ideal measure. Human labour is the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labour created man himself. As Karl Marx wrote in *Capital* “In all states of society, the labour time that it costs to produce the means of subsistence must necessarily be an object of interest to mankind, though not of equal interest in different stages of development. And lastly, from the moment that men in any way work for one another, their labour assumes a social form” [MECW, vol. 35, p. 47].

It is self-evident that this necessity of the distribution of social labour in specific proportions is certainly not abolished by the specific form of social production; it can only change its form of manifestation. Natural laws cannot be abolished at all. The only thing that can change, under historically differing conditions, is the form in which those laws assert themselves. And the form in which this proportional distribution of labour asserts itself in a state of society in which the interconnection of social labour expresses itself as the private exchange of the individual products of labour is precisely the exchange_value of these products.

What really counts are the physical variables: use-value, people, needs and time. Maybe it is so why in the letter to Ludwig Kugelmann of 11 July 1868 Marx wrote: “[e]ven if there were no chapter on ‘value’ at all in my book, the analysis I give of the real relations would contain the proof and demonstration of the real value relation” [MECW, vol. 43, p. 67].

And in a letter to Engels of 8 January 1868 he wrote: “Actually, no form of society can prevent the labour time at the disposal of society from regulating production in ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. But so long as this regulation is not effected through the direct and conscious control of society over its labour time — which is

only possible under common ownership — but through the movement of commodity prices...” [MECW vol. 42, p. 515].

Marx discovered the *natural* laws of capitalist production. As he wrote in Preface to the First German Edition of Capital 1 “It is a question of these laws themselves, of these tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results”. Here Marx mentions the dialectics of elliptical motion. On the other hand, Lukacs claimed that that dialectical principles and methods do not apply to Nature and that the ‘dialectics of nature’ is a misinterpretation of Marx’s thought initiated by Engels.

However, it seems that what Marx wrote about elliptical motion and some other topics shows that he did indeed find dialectical features in nature. If there are contradictions in Nature, then there is a dialectics of nature, a conclusion that follows from the contradictory nature of elliptical motion. At the same time, we ought to determine how the relationship between dialectics as a theory of historical development and as a logic of conceptual relationships matches with the natural laws of motion.

Meaning of the mathematical writing of Marx will be the theme of the next our paper. Examination of Marx’s statements about elliptical motion will throw light on his views on how dialectical contradictions in society or nature cause change and find a resolution. During the last four decades of his life, Marx spent a great deal of effort studying various areas of natural science, including physics, astronomy, geology, physiology, chemistry, and mathematics [Antonova, 2004].

Marx’s extensive mathematical manuscripts, written in the 1880s, are well known, but his letters, manuscripts, and his personal library are evidence of his earlier mathematical studies, in the 1840s, ’50s, and ’60s. As in the case of natural science, there is still no sufficiently convincing answer to the question of the reasons and goals of Marx’s studies in mathematics, and in particular, differential calculus. The elaboration of this problem would make it possible to determine the place of these studies of Marx in mathematics in his work as a whole. Marx’s mathematical works still need adequate evaluation.

Although Marx recognised contradictions within theories and concepts, contradictions between theories, between what is apparent and what is real, between theory and practice, and between theories and reality, he also maintained that there are contradictions in reality itself. It ‘goes without saying’, Marx wrote, that ‘paradoxes of reality [Wirklichkeit]’ are expressed in ‘linguistic paradoxes [Sprachparadoxen]’, but ‘these contradictions lie in the thing [liegen in der Sache], not the linguistic expression of the thing’.

Why and for Whom?

A big deal like Capital should have a clearly defined aim and addressee. As a rule, the authors cite from Preface to the First German Edition “[...] it is the ultimate aim of this work, to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society” [MECW, vol. 35, p. 10]. What concerns addressee in the second German edition of *Capital I* he wrote: The appreciation which *Das Kapital* rapidly gained in wide circles of the German working class is the best reward of my labours [MECW, vol. 35, p. 13].

Marx deliberately downplayed the method of Capital to make the book more accessible to his working-class readers. It is the source of the tension between the complexity of the book’s content and Marx’s desire to find an attractive form of exposition because, as he wrote in the preface to the French edition of *Capital I* where Marx approves of the transformation of his book into a serial, in which case “the book will be more accessible to the working class, a consideration which to me outweighs everything else”.

In a letter to Engels of 22 June 1867 he wrote “With regard to the development of the form of value, I have both followed and not followed your advice, thus striking a dialectical attitude in this matter, too. That is to say, 1. I have written an appendix in which I set out the same subject again as simply and as much in the manner of a school textbook as possible, and 2. I have divided each successive proposition into paras, etc., each with its own heading, as you advised. In the Preface I then tell the ‘non-dialectical’ reader to skip page x-y and instead read the appendix. It is not only the philistines that I have in mind here, but young people, etc., who are thirsting for knowledge” [MECW, vol. 42, p. 384]

Averages and Ideal Types

One of the well-known “Marxist” authors, wrote, “Marx often fails to be explicit about the level of aggregation at which he is working. He frequently explains the aggregate behaviour of a system by discussing a typical or average element of it”. There are three answers to the question of where these judgments come from. First, he did not read Marx’s writings. Second, he understood nothing. Third, he did not want to understand what he really has read. His own confusion thus achieves the certain effect of confusing his readers.

Marx has repeatedly pointed to the source of average quantities: Each of these individual commodities is a repository of the value of the *capital* and the surplus value produced by it. The labour applied to the individual commodity can no longer be calculated at all — if only because this would be a calculation of the average, hence a notional estimate, which covers the part of the constant capital which enters into the value of the total product merely as depreciation, and also the conditions of production that are consumed communally, and finally because it is the directly social labour, which is balanced out and estimated as the average labour of the many cooperating individuals. The labour applied to the individual commodity counts only as the aliquot part of the total labour which falls to this commodity and is estimated *notionally* [MECW, vol. 34, p. 363].

Therefore, in a general analysis of this kind it is usually always assumed that the actual conditions correspond to their conception, or, what is the same, that actual conditions are represented only to the extent that they are typical of their own general case [MECW, vol. 37, p. 142].

The main interest of Marx was the motion of moving weighted averages of analysed variables. For example, he wrote: “The formation of the average rate of profit is, therefore, not merely a matter of obtaining the simple average of the different rates of profit in the various spheres of production, but rather one of the relative weight which these different rates of profit have in forming this average [MECW, vol. 37, p. 161].

Moreover, “[i]t is evident that the balance among spheres of production of different composition must tend to equalise them with the

spheres of average composition, be it exactly or only approximately the same as the social average. Between the spheres more or less approximating the average there is again a tendency toward equalisation, seeking the ideal average, i.e., **an average that does not really exist**, i.e., a **tendency** to take this ideal as a standard. In this way, the tendency necessarily prevails to make the prices of production merely converted forms of value, or to turn profits into mere portions of surplus-value [MECW, vol. 37, p. 171].

Marx has stressed that in theory, it is assumed that the laws of the capitalist mode of production operate in their pure form. In a general analysis of this kind, it is usually always assumed that the actual conditions correspond to their conception, or, what is the same, that actual conditions are represented only to the extent that they are typical of their own general case [MECW, vol. 37, p. 142]. And once more, “Under capitalist production, the general law acts as the prevailing tendency only in a very complicated and approximate manner, as a never ascertainable average of ceaseless fluctuations” [MECW, vol. 37, p. 160].

Marx’s statement on the statistical nature of economic mechanisms as mechanisms of large-scale processes has an exceptionally great methodological significance for mathematical statistics. These mechanisms express the interactions of individual processes in the laws of probability; they dominate over any variations from the mean. Marx repeatedly returned to this problem. For example, in the *Grundrisse*, he wrote, in the chapter on money: “The value of commodities as determined by labour-time is only their average value. This average appears as an external abstraction if it is calculated out as an average figure of an epoch, e.g. a pound of coffee is one shilling if the average price of coffee is taken over, let us say, 25 years; but it is very real if it is at the same time recognised as the driving force and the moving principle of the oscillations which commodity prices run through during a given epoch. This reality is not merely of theoretical importance: it forms the basis of mercantile speculation, whose calculus of probabilities depends both on the median price averages which figure as the centre of oscillation, and on the average peaks and average troughs of oscillation above or below this centre”.

Conclusion

Capital must rank as one of the best known, but least read works ever published. Indeed, most of us will have gleaned what we know about *Capital* through commentators or interpreters. And there lies the problem. Marx's explanation of capitalist development is so far removed from conventional accounts of how our society functions, that it is particularly difficult to appreciate. In *Anti-Dühring* Marx and Engels wrote the credo of dialectics: "A system of natural and

historical knowledge, embracing everything, and final for all time, is a contradiction to the fundamental laws of dialectic reasoning [MECW, 25, p. 25]. One of the finest researches of Marx is that revealing the duplex character of labour. And his economic writings are the history of the development of congealed, homogenous, undifferentiated human labour. There is no end of history. This history is going on. What should an orthodox Marxist do? To follow Marx's advise "Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti."

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Перечитывая Маркса вновь и вновь

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Аннотация. Теория, наиболее точно отражающая реальность, является фундаментальной предпосылкой любого анализа какого-либо явления, даже гипотетического. Если существуют диалектические законы движения, то как диалектика реальности выражается в человеческом сознании, то есть в форме человеческих мыслей (категорий)? Как следует читать Маркса? Я предпочитаю читать все рукописи Маркса, где он сделал огромное количество заметок, комментариев и т.д. Эти сочинения были «для себя», для «разъяснения для себя». Это черновики исследовательских работ, призванные прояснить для него ситуацию. Например, в *Grundrisse* Маркс разговаривает сам с собой. Он отражает не только результаты, но прежде всего процесс их появления. Наибольший интерес вызывают так называемые отклонения, неожиданный отход от основной темы. Это не была единичная провокация, когда Жак Деррида заявил в 1994 г., что «всегда будет ошибкой не читать, перечитывать и обсуждать Маркса». *Ключевые слова:* Карл Маркс; Капитал; теория стоимости Маркса; отчуждение; диалектическая логика; закон стоимости; отчуждение; тотальность; социальные формы