

MARX'S EPISTEMOLOGY:  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REALITY AND KNOWLEDGE

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MARX'S EPISTEMOLOGY:  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REALITY AND KNOWLEDGE

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## **ABSTRACT**

### MARX'S EPISTEMOLOGY: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REALITY AND KNOWLEDGE

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The purpose of this thesis is to elaborate on the Marx's theory of knowledge. Historical materialism presented in the *German Ideology* and the methodological remarks in *Grundrisse* have led to many discussions concerning the relation between knowledge and reality in Marx's philosophy. This thesis tried to explore the interrelationships between the kinds of knowledge we produce, abstract concepts and the concrete material conditions, as elaborated by Marx. In contrast to traditional epistemology, and more along the lines of Hegel's epistemology, Marx does not see theory and reality as belonging to two distinct spheres. This thesis endeavors to elucidate the terms abstract and concrete in Marx's usage and tries to make a clear Marx's relations to Hegel in light of these terms.

Keywords: Marx, Hegel, epistemology, abstract, concrete

## ÖZ

### MARX'IN EPİSTEMELOJİSİ: BİLGİ VE GERÇEKLİK ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİ

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Bu tezin amacı Marx'ın bilgi teorisini açıklanması ve ayrıntılandırılmasıdır. Marx'ın Alman İdeolojisi'nde ortaya koyduğu tarihsel materyalizm ve Grundrisse'de ifade ettiği metodoloji, günümüze kadar bilgi ve gerçeklik arasındaki ilişki konusunda birçok tartışmaya neden olmuştur. Bu tezde bizim tarafımızdan üretilen bilgi ve soyut kavramlar ile somut gerçeklik arasındaki karşılıklı ilişki Marx'ın metinlerine dayanılarak detaylı bir şekilde ifade edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Klasik epistemolojinin tersine ve Hegel'in epistemolojisi'ne benzer şekilde, Marx teori ve gerçekliği iki ayrı alan olarak görmemektedir. Bu tezde, soyut ve somut terimlerinin Marx'daki anlamları üzerinde durulayarak, bu terimlerin gösterdiği anlamlar ışığında Marx'ın Hegel'le ilişkisi ortaya koyulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Marx, Hegel, soyut, somut, epistemoloji

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCPE	Contribution to Critique of Political Economy
Cv3	Capital Volume 3
CvI	Capital Volume 1
Encl	Encyclopedia of Logic
EW	Early Writings of Karl Marx
G	Grundrisse
GI	German Ideology
LecRev2	Lectures on Religion Volume II
LecRev3	Lectures on Religion Volume III
LHP	Lectures on History of Philosophy Volume I
LHP vIII	Lectures on History of Philosophy Volume III
MEC	Marx Engels Correspondence
MECW V	Marx Engels Collected Works Volume V
MER	Marx Engels Reader
NAW	Notes on Wagner
PH	The Philosophy of History
PhM	Philosophy of Mind
PhS	Phenomenology of Spirit
PP	Poverty of Philosophy
PR	Philosophy of Right
SL	Science of Logic
SV	Theories on Surplus Value
TF	Thesis on Feuerbach

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I explore Marx's theory of knowledge. Even though Marx is not primarily an epistemologist, the historical materialism presented in the *German Ideology* and the methodological remarks in *Grundrisse* have led to many discussions concerning the relation between knowledge and reality in Marx's philosophy, to use the traditional epistemological terms. However, as I try to show in my thesis, Marx's epistemology does not allow us to speak of the relation between knowledge and reality in the traditional sense. So, to put it more accurately, I explore the interrelationships between the kinds of knowledge we produce, abstract concepts and the concrete material conditions, as elaborated by Marx. As I will explain in my thesis, in contrast to traditional epistemology, and more along the lines of Hegel's epistemology, Marx does not see theory and reality as belonging to two distinct spheres. Rather, there is a 'circular process' in the production of theory where theory "begins and ends with concretes" (Resnick and Wolf, 43).

In Marx's philosophy both reality and theory are referred to in terms of a certain concept called 'the concrete' (a concept that Marx has inherited from Hegel). There is 'the real concrete' and 'thought concrete', and an ongoing dialectic relation between the two. This complicated relation raises a lot of questions in terms of methodology for Marx, such as the question of 'the starting point', where and how to

make abstractions from the real concrete so as to produce the correct theory as opposed to ideology, and so on. It is these questions about methodology when producing ‘the concrete for thought’ that I want to explore in my thesis.

The two central texts in so far as Max’s epistemology is concerned are *Grundrisse* and *German Ideology*. But until recently *Grundrisse* has not received much attention, and most commentators have taken *German Ideology* as the central text. However, the way the *German Ideology* is usually read, it has been quite vulnerable to many criticisms. Especially the relation between the base and superstructure has led to the criticism of social subjectivism. According to crude orthodox interpretations of Marx, his theory grasps a certain reality, but according to this interpretation, this reality one-sidedly determines the production of knowledge. *Prima facie*, Marx seems to hold an empiricist position in the *German Ideology* epistemologically, while ontologically, what he presents might seem to be a crude kind of materialism; in other words, what is meant by “materialism” seems to amount to no more than the emphasis on the primacy of economic relations of production, without sophisticated ontological arguments. This interpretation gives rise to many objections and questions: not only is the kind of materialistic ontology it claims to support not sufficiently justified, it also even seems to give rise to a social subjectivism. In other words, if knowledge is determined by economic conditions how can it rise above and determine those conditions? The debates revolving around this objection require an answer to two questions: (1) How can Marx’s theory claim to hold some truth about the real concrete as opposed to being mere ideology? (2) Is there indeed a one-sided determination of theory by reality (which, according to the crude interpretation, is

simply economic)? If not, how can we make sense of the other side of the determination?

As I said above, in the debates over these questions the *German Ideology* is usually taken as the reference point. But *German Ideology* is also alleged to mark Marx's break from Hegel by some Marxists, who misinterpret Marx's reaction to other young Hegelians and Feuerbach in *German Ideology*. This claim itself has created a lot of debates on the question of Marx's relation to Hegel. Some (e.g., Althusser) claim that the influence of Hegel on Marx is limited to his early writings and starting with *German Ideology* Marx has completely cut himself from Hegel while others claim that Hegel's influence on Marx continues throughout his life. The latter group shows *Grundrisse* as evidence of Hegel's continuing influence. This debate certainly concerns our topic since I believe that Marx's epistemology, especially in *Grundrisse*, is very Hegelian. While Marx was working on *Grundrisse*, in a letter he wrote to Engels dated 1858, he wrote:

In the method of treatment the fact that [...] I again glanced through Hegel's Logic has been of great service to me [...] If there should ever be the time for such work again, I would greatly like to make accessible to the ordinary human intelligence, in two or three printer's sheets, what is rational in the method which Hegel discovered. (MEC)

Thus I try to show that a closer examination of *Grundrisse*, provides fresh insight into these questions. And in order to do this, it is to best to begin with an overview of Hegel's philosophy.

For this reason, *the second chapter* is devoted to Hegel. Here, I try to show the general framework of Hegel's philosophy and his views on knowledge, and give some details about his methodology wherein I believe we can see the influence of

him on Marx's philosophy, especially his political epistemology. I begin by presenting Hegel's views on knowledge and his dialectic method against the background of Enlightenment thought to which he was reacting and responding. In this examination, we can find Hegel's attempts to overcome dualities that were created by traditional and modern philosophers by means of his dialectic logic. In Hegel's logic, dialectic as a movement shows us the unity of the opposite terms of traditional and modern philosophies, and here I endeavor to indicate the unity of the terms 'abstract' and 'concrete' in the dialectic movement of the Spirit. Finally, I come through to two types of cognition described by Hegel that are equally important in achieving 'absolute truth' in the Spirit's dialectic movement throughout history—we can see here the influence of Hegel's Logic on Marx's methodology as well.

In *the third chapter*, I attempt to indicate what the terms 'concrete' and 'abstract' mean in Marx's philosophy. To define them I examine Marx's usage of these terms in his different works –such as *German Ideology*, *Grundrisse*, *Capital*—and his letters. In this examination, we see that these terms have double meanings. On the one hand, the term 'abstract' firstly indicates conceptualization (determining differences among particulars as well as identifying similarities between them, separating them from each other and defining particulars in accordance with differences and resemblances.) In this sense, the abstract belongs to conceptual thought; it theoretically expresses material relations. However, in a second sense, it refers to something existing in the real world that has resulted from abstractions in thought, such as labor, capital, exchange value, etc. On the other hand, the term 'concrete' is ascribed to a whole which consists of socio-historically constituted

material relations; including theories on those relations, regardless of whether these theories are correct or not and whether they serve ideology or science. This whole is conceptualized as ‘the real concrete’. And secondly, it refers to reproduction of the real concrete in thought in order to comprehend the real concrete, and it is conceptualized as ‘the concrete for thought’.

Some questions arise here such as how to decide what to abstract and what not to abstract from the real concrete, what the relation between the abstract and the concrete is, and finally how the real concrete is reproduced in thought as the concrete for thought. These questions orient us to the correct methodology that serves to grasp the relationship between the abstract and concrete and that constructs the real concrete in thought as the concrete for thought so that it can be distinguished from ideology.

I seek the answers to these questions, and I argue that we can find them in Marx’s ‘political epistemology’. His ‘political epistemology’ consists of setting the criteria of truth in which methodology plays an important role as it constructs the real concrete by abstraction in thought as the concrete for thought and presupposes that this constructed concrete serves to change the real concrete. When examining the relation between the real concrete and the concrete for thought, he sets an aim ‘to change world’ and this point separates him from prior philosophies in which “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways” (T.F. 12). Marx does not separate the realm of theory from practice, and constructing ‘scientific theory’ is not enough to change world.

In *chapter four*, the relation between Hegel and Marx is taken up more systematically, and similarities between the analytic and synthetic methods Hegel describes in the *Logics* and Marx's methodology in political epistemology are identified.

To sum up, I try to educe Marx's method that claims to facilitate a comprehension of the real concrete that corrects 'reversed appearances' of it as in ideology, and does not see or present it as a 'chaotic whole' but as an 'ensemble of social relations' or 'a unity of the diverse'. Carrying dialectic movement to the level of knowledge also serves to the attempt for changing the world. In doing all this, I also endeavor to show that Marx's method and political epistemology are closely related to the influence of Hegel's Logic.

## CHAPTER 2

### HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY AND METHOD

#### 2.1. Introduction

Before embarking on an account of Hegel's undeniable contribution to Marx's philosophy and Marx's critiques of Hegel, Hegel's philosophy in general has to be clearly understood in terms of his views on knowledge and his method as a guide to reaching absolute knowledge.

For this purpose, in this chapter I will, *firstly*, try to show Hegel's relation to the Enlightenment and modern philosophy as I believe that Hegel's views on knowledge and his dialectic method will best be understood against the background of Enlightenment thought to which he was reacting and responding. With the secularization of philosophy and science in the modern period, there occurred a shift of focus in reasoning on the world and the main concern of epistemology turned to empirical observations, experiences or human faculties. However, traditional philosophy added its own dualities to those already existing in traditional philosophy, such as being and nothing, one and many, essence and appearance object and subject body and mind. In this atmosphere, Hegel wants to overcome these dualities by defining 'dialectic' as a movement. Thus, *secondly*, I will endeavor to indicate what



the terms ‘dialectic’ means in Hegel philosophy. Dialectic, for Hegel, is a movement in which the opposite terms of traditional and modern philosophies are seen in their interrelations. That is, opposed terms can be applied to one and the same entity and these interrelations shows us their unity. In this context, I will, *thirdly*, emphasize that the terms ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’ in the dialectic movement play an important role in Hegel’s theory of knowledge, which serves us to see similarity between Hegel and Marx. And *finally*, when these first three tasks are done, I will be giving some details about Hegel’s method—I believe that we will find here influences of Hegel’s Logic on Marx’s method. In this section, I will examine analytic cognition and synthetic cognition as described by Hegel in the *Logics* and in conclusion I will try to show how the abstract and the concrete relate to each other in his method.

## **2.2. Hegel’s relation to the Enlightenment**

Our understanding of how we get to know nature, which significantly changed with the rise of modern science, is a central issue for Enlightenment thinkers. Thinkers of the Enlightenment attempted to provide a metaphysical framework for the new science. In the period of Enlightenment, stressing reason and its secular status is the prominent thought. The natural world is freed from mysteries and divine authorities, and is taken as sphere of empirical observation and scientific reasoning. For example, Kant tries to determine the limits of knowledge by examining the human faculties, and he defends human reason as playing a necessary role in natural science. However, partly as a reaction to the Enlightenment thought that attempts to subject nature and society to scientific inquiry, we see the rise of a Romantic movement as

well. Romantic thought, against the Enlightenment, defends that “nature and society are only means of fulfilling the desire and drives of the human ego” (Luther, 31)

In this atmosphere, dualities present the main problem to traditional and modern philosophy, such as those between mind and matter, essence and appearance, the universal and the particular, being and nothing, one and many, and so on. Hegel wants to overcome these dualisms by indicating that there is an interrelation between the opposite terms of these dualities and he defines the relation as ‘dialectic.’ He concerns himself with the connection of each term in the opposed duality to the other term of the duality. (Norman, 25-29) As Norman spells out that Hegel’s interconnection of opposites involves contradiction. “Two opposed terms can both be applied to one and the same entity, and the possibility of applying the one term depends upon the possibility of applying the other” (Norman, 31). Hegel insists that an object be comprehend as opposed elements within the unity, as can be seen in the following passage:

This true and positive significance (expressed generally) is that everything actual contains opposed determinations within it, and in consequence the cognition and, more exactly, the comprehension of an object amounts precisely to our becoming conscious of it as a concrete unity of opposed determinations. (Encl, 93)

In criticizing modern epistemology, Hegel returns to Descartes’ starting point and finds there another possible line of development for epistemology—one that has often been overlooked and that would not lead to the dualisms that Descartes’ philosophy.

According to Descartes, we can know something without any doubt. As is well known, Descartes employs a method, in which we doubt everything until we find something we cannot doubt. This method leads to him to abstract from the content of all our experiences in order to reach something certain and true. Using this method, he arrives at the “existence of one fact which I cannot doubt” (Hinchman, 12): “I think, therefore I am”, most famously known as “*cogito ergo sum*”. As Hinchman simply explains in the following passage:

My existence is absolutely certain because if I doubt it, I cannot doubt that I doubt; the “I” which does the doubting apparently cannot itself be an object of doubt without a self-contradiction. (Hinchman, 12)

The promising thought for another line of development that Hegel sees here is that Descartes’ philosophy is based on “knowledge as the unity of Thought and Being” as Hegel puts it (LHP, 224). Traditional philosophy treats knowledge and truth as consisting in the correspondence of thought with something outside itself, being. Even though Descartes’ starting point is the subject, the significance of the *cogito* argument in terms of the traditional problem of knowledge and certainty is that in the act of doubting and thinking of the self the immediate identity between thought and being is attained. Hence Descartes is able to find one certain truth because in the act of doubting and thinking of the self, the gap between the subject and object is not found to exist. What Hegel finds particularly noteworthy in this argument is how Being is deduced from thought in Descartes’ argument (LHP VIII, 228, EncL, 114). Although “Being is different from thinking”, thinking and being are linked without any reference, as Hegel exposes in the following passage:

Thought as Being and Being as thought- that is my certainty, “I”; in the celebrated Cogito, ergo sum we thus have Thought and Being inseparably bound together. (...) they [...] constitute an identity. (LHP v III, 228-229).

However, knowledge of objective reality turns into a problematic in Descartes’ cogito as a subjective principle. As Hegel says, “If we take that Being as truth, it is an empty content, and it is with the content that we have to do.” (LHP v III, 233) According to Descartes, the existence of God secures the transition from immediate certainty (the “I”) into truth and warrants the existence of the external world and perception. However, even though God secures the transition from the mind to external reality, Hegel does not find this position satisfactory. He opposes taking God to be a third thing, as can be seen in the following passage:

[T]he beginning there are two things, thought or soul and body and that then God appears as a third thing, outside both- that He is not the Notion of unity nor are the two elements themselves Notion” (LHP vI, 251-252)

Thus as Descartes goes on to develop his ontology which is well-known as Cartesian dualism, he is not able to retain this unity between thought and being. According to Hegel, separation of mind and world is the characteristic attitude of modernity and he criticizes the distinction that the modern perspective makes between object and subject or thinking and being. For him, philosophy has to reconcile the Cartesian dualism and attain the unity of thinking and being. Although Descartes’ principle (saying that we must doubt everything) turns thinking into an ‘absolute beginning’- that is true beginning- and the Cartesian view allows thinking to abstract from all content, the abstract opposition of thinking and being must be reconciled (Hinchman, 11-12).

Hegel wants to abolish Descartes' dualism of body and mind by means of preserving the identity of thinking and being in consciousness. The strength of Descartes' philosophy according to Hegel is that, with him, philosophy got its ground back again, as he says in the following passage:

Philosophy has regained its own ground that thought starts from thought as what is certain in itself, and not from something external, not from something given, not from an authority, but directly from the freedom that is contained in the "I think"( LHP vI, 231-232)

Houlgate describes this identity of thinking and being in Hegel as "exhibit[ing] a logical form or structure that is intelligible to thought and is the same as the structure of our basic categories" (Houlgate, 117). According to Hegel, there is nothing outside of consciousness, but he defines consciousness as "spirit as a concrete knowing [...] in which externality is involved" (SL, 28). Hegel wants to overcome the duality between being and thinking by showing that "thinking in its immanent determinations and the true nature of things form [...] one and the same content" (SL, 45). The logical structure of being constitutes what it is to be, the basic concepts of thought provide an understanding of the nature of being

In this strategy of Hegel's we can see the influence of Kant as well. According to Kant, reason is able to know the object only under the condition that the object lies in the real of our experience and its legitimate use is limited to the faculty of the understanding. What is outside of experience cannot be known as objective. Setting things as they appear to us (*phenomena*) apart from things as they are in themselves (*noumena*) and defining the limits of objective knowledge so that it is limited to the realm of things as they appear, Kant rejected that there is knowledge of things as

they are in themselves. For Kant, things as they are in themselves are originally different from objects of thought. Knowledge can be comprehended under the categories as pure concepts of the understanding. On the other hand, “God, the beautiful, purposiveness in organic nature, and even mind, except in its logical function as transcendental apperception are not amenable to rigorous, scientific study” (Hinchman, 23). Therefore, for Kant, we can never know anything beyond experience.

Hegel objects to this limit on that which we can know. He rejects Kant’s view that there is a realm beyond our experience and claims that we conceive “of being ‘in itself’ as the intelligible, ontological structure of the very things we experience.” (Houlgate, 131) Things in themselves, for Hegel, are inherent in things as they appear to us; things as they appear to us are not independent from things in themselves. Hegel spells out in *Science of Logic* that Kant’s ‘things in themselves’ are abstractions “from all beings for other.” (SL, 121) For Hegel, all thought relates to object and without any determination we know that things in themselves are “nothing but truthless, empty abstractions” (SL, 121). They lack all determination, which means they are “nothing”. From a Hegelian standpoint, Kant does not take into consideration “what they are in themselves without the abstract relation to the ego common to all, what is [...] their relationship to each other” (SL, 63)

### **2.3. Hegel's Anti-foundationalism in the Phenomenology**

Hegel also objects to modern foundationalism. Foundationalism claims that there are first principles or basic beliefs upon which all other knowledge or beliefs rest and through which they are justified. Such is the view of empiricism which claims that sensations are the source and criterion of knowledge and the view of rationalism which claims that objects of reason are the source of all knowledge. Furthermore, “he sees rationalists, empiricists, and transcendental idealists alike as engaged in the task of seeking to discover some given, universally shared bases for knowledge and action within the individual, either as rational or natural sensing being” (Luther, 364). However, Hegel rejects the view that philosophy must begin with presuppositions or any ‘first principles’ which are accepted as self evident from the outset and then derive or deduce a number of consequences as its results. (Solomon, 229). He points out that foundationalism’s search for a knowledge or belief that is not justified by another knowledge or belief but by itself alone is self-contradictory. But Hegel’s anti-foundationalism should not be understood as a kind of relativism since his philosophy is “critical philosophy.”: “Hegel’s approach tries to conceive reality from the standpoint of autonomous reason. Nonetheless, his system does not absolutize reason in the sense of denying that there is any limit to it” (Luther, 228)

The Hegelian criterion of knowledge, as opposed to foundationalism, is not static. Hegel simply says about this criterion that “consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself. [...] [And] we have the standard which consciousness itself sets

up by which to measure what it knows” (PhS, 53). In line with this idea, Hegel’s *Phenomenology* proceeds through a series of forms of consciousness. At each stage, i.e., within each form of consciousness, consciousness discovers a contradiction in its conception of the object and in removing this contradiction it moves to a higher stage of consciousness. In other words, for each ‘form of consciousness’, there is “a specific criterion which is intrinsic to that form of itself” (Solomon, 308). The *Phenomenology* thus moves towards a congruence of consciousness with its object. “Truth, in a phrase, is consciousness coming into agreement with itself” (Solomon, 306).. As can be seen from the following passage, Hegel does not seek a standard as in foundationalism which is seeking self evident principles or basic beliefs for knowledge:

We do not need to import criteria, or to make use of our own bright ideas and thoughts during the course of inquiry; it is precisely when we leave these aside that we succeed in contemplating the matter in hand as it is in and for itself (PhS, 54)

Coherence as the standard is self-satisfaction as integrity of self-identity.

To illustrate how this method works, it may be helpful to look at a couple of stages from the beginning of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel begins with the form of consciousness, “sense-certainty” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Sense-certainty, the simplest form of consciousness, is immediately knowing the object without changing the object as presented itself. It has concrete content and “appears as the *richest* kind of knowledge.” (PhS, 58) Without mediation of language or concept, it is conscious of the pure particularity; in addition to this, it “appears to be the *truest* knowledge” but “this certainty proves itself to be most abstract and poorest *truth*” (PhS, 58). This



is because consciousness realizes that sense certainty also relies on universals; even the simplest way of focusing on the particular, the “this here”, means making use of the most general concepts such as “now” and “here” which require the mediation of consciousness. (PhS, 66). In Hegel’s point, immediate certainty does not capture truth because it has truth as universal. But the universals involved in identifying the objects of sense-knowledge remain vacuous as such and can not capture the distinctions in the manifold of phenomena. He thus moves on from sense-certainty to perception. He expresses this by stating that

the wealth of sense-knowledge belongs to perception, not to immediate certainty, for which it was only the source of instance; for only perception contain negation, that is, difference or manifoldness, with its own essence”. (PhS, 67)

Universality continues to operate as a principle in perception. This is because the object is perceived through properties, and since properties are sharable with other things they are universal. Hegel also moves beyond perception by pointing out that we can know ‘all’ but not the ‘whole’ by perception. In order to know the ‘whole’ we must think of the perceived object’s inner force, so the Phenomenology moves on to another section on force. As Houlgate explains, “understanding discovers that the inner character of things is not just force but force governed by law- the same lawfulness that governs understanding itself” (Houlgate, 151).

The *Phenomenology* proceeds in this manner through various forms of consciousness, in each of which, the subject-object relation becomes more entangled and sophisticated, Hegel’s point being that spirit and its object (nature) are not independent from each other and the object of consciousness can eventually be

known. At the end he concludes that knowledge of nature is knowledge of self. According to Hegel, absolute knowledge is self-reflexive subject, True nature is the “*product of my spirit*” and it is the product of “*my freedom*” (EncL, 55). In short, truth emerges as “the whole” (PhS, 11) and particulars carry truth only partially.

However, it should be noted that the *Phenomenology* is often considered to be the less significant work compared to Hegel’s *Logic*. It is often read as an introduction to the *Science of Logic*, or as a preliminary work that is merely preparing the way for the *Logic*. Therefore, with respect to the methodological question of how Hegel tackles the problem of the starting point, it is argued that the method employed in the *Phenomenology* is cast aside once it has accomplished its task of justifying the starting point of *The Logic*.

In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel asserts that “the starting point should be “something simple, something abstracted from the concrete SL, 801).”. He argues that on the one hand it might appear to be more reasonable to begin from the concrete actuality that is given to intuition—i.e., it might appear to be more reasonable to proceed from the particular to the universal--, because this is how we naturally begin: by an intuitive understanding of the immediate actuality (and, as a matter of fact, this is how the *Phenomenology* begins.)

It might perhaps be objected to this procedure in the scientific sphere that, because intuition is easier than cognition, the object of intuition, that is, concrete actuality, should be made the beginning of science, and that this procedure is more *natural* than that which proceeds in the opposite direction to its particularization and concrete individualization [...](SL 801)

However, “the aim”, Hegel states “is to cognize” (p.801). In other words Hegel makes a distinction between intuition and cognition.<sup>1</sup> Cognition is “comprehension [... that] has the form of Notion as its basis”. (SL 801). And when looked at in terms of cognition, it is in fact easier “to grasp the abstract simple thought determination than the concrete subject matter”. Since cognition is a matter of comprehending the Notion lying underneath, *actually comprehending* the immediate particularity as it is given to intuition would require taking note of the “manifold connection of such thought determinations and their relationships.” “[A]nd”, Hegel says, “it is in this manner that we have now to apprehend the concrete, and not as it is in intuition (SL, 801).

#### **2.4 The Abstract and the Concrete in Dialectic Movement**

It is in light of this key idea (the idea that particulars carry truth only partially and that truth can be understood only by looking at the whole) that we should read Hegel’s use of the terms concrete and abstract since the term ‘concrete’, in Hegel’s usage, indicates a comprehensive view of things which includes all determinations as “to the nature of the thing itself, its origin, and the relations which it sustains” (Hibben, 12) Hegel uses the term ‘concrete’ for that which is “many-sided, adequately related, completely mediated” (Harris, 71); “it is the thing plus its setting” (Hibben, 12) . He uses the term ‘abstract’, on the other hand, for that which is “one-sided, inadequately related, relatively unmediated” (Harris, 71) For him, abstractness, when viewed apart from its embodiment, is purely formal and lacks

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<sup>1</sup> “Intuition is for Hegel, like Kant, the constitution of that form of our cognitive experience in which we relate immediately to the singular as singular.” (deVries ,110)

content. While the abstract is purely formal and lacks content, the concrete implies ‘wholeness or integrity’ and is the result of dialectical movement.

The term ‘dialectic’ in Hegelian philosophy expresses change, movement, process and is the main concept of his system. For him, dialectic is “in general the principle of all motion, of all life, and of all activation in the actual world.” (EncL 128-129)

With the concept of the dialectic we again witness Hegel moving beyond the epistemological limitations set by Kant. Kant approaches the dialectic negatively since it ends up negatively, i.e, in antinomies but, Hegel’s dialectic is the unity of negative and positive. Like Kant, Hegel spells out that the phenomenon is the starting point of our knowledge but he differs from Kant in regard to the limitation of knowledge. Kant sets a dualism between things as they appear and things as they are. For him, absolute knowledge of things as they are cannot be accessible to us whereas for Hegel, dialectic makes it possible. In Hegelian dialectic, “something is identified- it is grasped at its point of origin; then, something negative strikes, which, in turn, leads it to the next step where something of the earlier moment is retained still.”(Singh and Mahapatra, 6)

Hegel uses the terms ‘sublation’ and ‘negation’ to define the dialectic process. He describes “sublation” by stating that “to sublata has a twofold meaning in the language: on the one hand it means to preserve, to maintain, and equally it also means to cause to cease, to put an end to” (SL, 107). In Science of Logic, to define the term “sublation” Hegel begins with the dictionary meaning of the term and continues that “something is sublata only in so far as it has entered into unity with

its opposite” (ibid). The most important point to note here is that sublation is certainly not “reducing to nothing”. On the contrary, it is *mediation* which, as we will soon see, results in a “fundamental determination” since it is a “result of mediation”. (Ibid)

Hegel spells out that “the basis of all determinacy is negation”<sup>2</sup> (EnCL, 147). However, as said before, the term “negation” does not imply “reducing to nothing”. Negativity is a “making concrete” or self determination. Existence as determinate being is determination through negation. According to Hegel, existence is negation of nothing, i.e. not-nothing, or reality. Hegel does not use the term ‘negation’ to indicate a deficiency; on the contrary, the “determinate element of a determinateness” is to be understood in terms of negation (SL, 110). He explains that “negation taken as mere deficiency would be equivalent to nothing, but it is a determinate being, a quality, only determined with a non-being” (SL, 111)

The idea of preserving and ceasing plays an important role in Hegel’s dialectic. It makes it possible to overcome contradictions, turning them into a non-contradictory whole—in other words, “self-identity”. Sarlemijn describes the turning of contradictory members of the totality into a non-contradictory whole in following passage:

Everything within the whole is contradictory and in motion, whereas the whole itself is at rest in itself as the circle which is closed in itself and embraces everything. The members are contradictory, since they ‘detach themselves’, the whole, however cannot detach itself from anything. (Sarlemijn, 87)

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<sup>2</sup> This quotation is taken in EnCL but Hegel quotes this from Spinoza.

It is important to stress that identity of opposites refers in Hegel's thought to a concrete and dialectical identity, not to the abstract and formal identity of logic. He defines identity of traditional logic ( $A=A$ ) as 'law of the *abstract understanding*'. (EncL, 180) For Hegel, identity of traditional logic excludes distinction, as expressed by him in the following passage:

It is of great importance to reach an adequate understanding of the true significance of identity, and this means above all that it must not be interpreted merely as abstract identity, i.e. as identity excludes distinction. (EncL, 181)

It is now time to look a little more closely into this notion of 'dialectic movement' in Hegel as it has played an undeniable role in Marx's philosophy as well and is crucial to understanding the concepts of "the abstract" and "the concrete" in Marx's epistemology as well as in Hegel's.

In Logic of *The Encyclopedia*, Hegel writes:

With regard to its form, the logical has three sides (a) the side of abstraction or of the understanding, (b) the dialectical or negatively rational side, (c) the speculative or positively rational one. (EncL, 125)

According to Hegel, all logical concepts or realities are in this logical pattern but these three sides are "moments of everything logically real or of everything true in general" (Ibid), not the constitution of the logic only. To explain this logical pattern, we have to read more closely this passage. Firstly in (a), as said by Hegel in the continuation of the above passage, thinking as the understanding sticks to 'fixed determinacy' and its distinctness from what is other than it. Secondly in (b), Hegel defines the dialectical moment as the 'self-sublation' of finite determinations and,

category (b) emerges as the opposite of (a). In other words; category (a) passes into its opposite category of (b). Both categories are self-contradictory. Finally (c), “speculative or positively rational apprehends the unity of the determinations in their opposition, the affirmative that is contained in their dissolution and in their transition” (EncL, 131).

Let us first analyze the first side, (a). Sticking to “fixed determinacies” is the task of thinking as the understanding. As Hegel states in *Science of Logic*, “it [reflective understanding] stands for the understanding as abstracting and hence as separating and remaining fixed in its separations” (SL, 45). What brings out fixed elements is abstraction, The term 'abstract' literally means to 'pull away' and the most basic definition of the term 'abstraction' which is also consistent with Hegel's usage of the term is “to separate” from the concrete whole. In ...Harris stresses that the term abstract in Hegel's usage means “the ‘drawing out’ from concrete whole of some element, which is then considered, or assumed, to be self-sufficient, and held in isolation from the rest” (Harris, 75). Abstraction brings out only one side of a dialectic unity, and therefore, as Hegel states, “abstraction stands in a relation of contradiction to its [Notion's] essential character, which is, to be concrete” (LecRev3, 63). Thus in the first step above we behold the “abstract universal” but it is one “from which the determinacy has been pulled away or stripped, leaving behind only an empty or indeterminate unity” (Dudley, 27).

Abstractness in step (a) implies absence of definite character and being without content. Thus, the abstract universal is used as opposed to actuality and lacks an

existence (PhS, 235). According to Hegel, the “abstract universal, which is an isolated, [is] imperfect moment of the Notion and has no truth” (SL, 604)

Hegel emphasizes not only that abstraction is empty without the concrete but also that it cannot be comprehensible without the concrete. For Hegel, “anything comprehensible is concrete, and can be comprehended only in so far as it is determined as a moment [in Spirit].” (LecRev3, 30). However, in Hegel's thought the abstract universal is not meaningless. The abstraction that expresses one-sidedness is the/ a constitutive element of the concrete.

Hegel also discusses universality and particularity in terms abstraction and concreteness under the chapter “Notion” in *Science of Logic* and states that:

the abstract universal contains all the moments of the Notion. It is (a) universality, (b) determinateness, (c) the simple unity of both; but this unity is immediate, and therefore particularity is not present as totality. [...] Therefore, what makes this universality abstract is that the mediation is only a condition or is not posited abstract universality itself. (SL, 608-609)

The universal is abstract as long as it is for itself and its self-mediation, self-reference remains absolute negativity. For Hegel, it is deprived of “life, spirit, colour and filling” to the extent that, in this moment “sublating is an *external* act and so a *dropping* of the determinateness” (SL, 619).

However, abstraction is also plays a role in the isolating of concrete determinations, as can be seen in the following passage from the *Science of Logic*:



Abstraction raises the concrete into universality, in which, however, the universal is grasped only as a determinate universality; and this is precisely the individuality that has shown itself to be self-related determinateness. Abstraction, therefore, is a sundering of the concrete and an isolating of its determinations; through it only single properties and moments are seized; its product must contain what it is itself. (SL, 619)

As a result, the term abstraction, according to Hegel, generally means that what is separated from whole, what is one sided of antithesis in dialectical movement as opposed to holding the opposed sides of their unity together, and the partial character of the whole comes out by means of abstraction. Also it shows an unmediated side of opposed elements i.e, positive side appears but what it negates is excluded. (Harris, 76-77)

On the other hand, Hegel expresses that the universal is not separable from the concrete, saying that “it is the soul of the concrete which it indwells, unimpeded and equal to itself in the manifoldness and diversity of the concrete” (SL, 602)

The concrete universal including all determinacy is one “that has grown together with its particulars” (Dudley, 30). The particular is the constructive content of the universal and it renders the universal what the universal is. Hegel states that the “particular is contained in the universal” (PR, 32) and the “universal constitutes a sphere that must exhaust the particular” (SL, 606). In that sense, Hegel distinguishes the concrete universal from ordinary universals which are taken in an abstract and external way. He signifies that universality is not considered a kind of generality or “self-identity which is fashioned by the understanding” (PR, 44) In other words, in contrast to universals as conceived in traditional philosophy (e.g. Platonic forms)

there is an interdependency relation between the particular and the universal in Hegel's philosophy. As Dudley states:

The universal and its particulars are also grown together in the sense that they thoroughly entangled or interdependent: the universal can be what it is only in virtue of the particulars that comprise it. And the particulars can be what they are only as constitutive moments of the universal. (Dudley, 30)

However, apart from interdependency between the particular and the universal, the concrete universal is a self-determining whole that has a conceptual structure. The particulars determined by the concrete universal serve to explain this conceptual structure. The concrete universal is not many, it can be just one because it refers to the whole, not any part of the whole and the particulars are not externally given to the concrete universal. Rather the concrete universal has its particulars in itself.

The concrete universal having its particulars is the whole, in short, the parts in the whole constitute its determinate unity; and the whole on the other hand "is also immanent in every one of the parts" (Harris, 75) Each part of the whole provisionally reflects the whole and in some degree it carries itself the whole. Also Hegel emphasizes that "in the concrete there are determinations, differences" (LecRev3, 140).

Hegel sometimes refers to category (c) as the 'negative of the negative'. It unites the preceding categories (a) and (b) and contains both of them. Uniting by means of preserving and abolishing is not a source of self-contradiction in category (c) and the preceding categories are no longer contraries. Therefore dialectic has been completed but not finished because after this point, category (c) plays a role at the new level as

category (a) (Forster, 132). Category (c) is determined as a result, but also the beginning of a new role, becoming category (a) in a new level. Therefore it is both result and beginning and this pattern goes on.

As the concrete universal “possesses in its own self the moment of particularity and externality” it is “active and urge to repel itself from itself” (SL, 739). In that sense, The concrete universal has an inner purposiveness and its own end. It thus has a self-particularizing, self-constructive and self-determining character, which is also rational.

It [absolute universal] is rather the concrete, self-contained, and self-referring universality, which is the substance, intrinsic genus, or immanent idea of self-consciousness. It is a conception of free will as the universal, transcending its object, passing through and beyond its own specific character, and then becoming identical with itself.—This absolute universal is what is in general called the rational (ibid)

In short, according to Hegel, the abstract universal particularizes itself and returns into itself as the concrete universal. Dudley expresses that Hegel's system constitutes a single that “the self-determination of the initially abstract universal into a fully concrete one that explicitly contains all of the determinations inherent in indeterminacy” (Dudley, 32). Hegel spells out that philosophy has to do with concrete unity rather than empty absolute and abstract unity. According to Hegel, philosophy draws 'absolute truth' from the concrete and this concrete world including nature, life, Spirit is completely organic:

Philosophy certainly has to do with unity in general, it is not however, with abstract unity, mere identity, and the empty absolute, but with concrete unity (the notion), and that in its whole course it has to do with nothing else; - that each step in its advance is

a peculiar term or phase of this concrete unity, and that the deepest and last expression of unity is the unity of absolute mind itself. (PhM, 125)

He spells out that each separate thing in the whole is “merely the mirror of this Idea” and “the Idea exhibits itself in it as in something isolated, as a process in it, and thus it manifests this unity in itself” (LecRe,v2, 347)

## **2.5. Analytic Cognition and Synthetic Cognition**

In light of these concepts of the ‘concrete’ and the ‘abstract’ we can now examine more closely some details about Hegel’s method that have had an influence on Marx. Hegel defines in *Encyclopedia of Logic*, two different methods, the analytical and synthetic methods; but these methods do not stand in opposition; they complement each other. The “analytical procedure comes first” and then the synthetic method is second (EncL, 299). According to Hegel, the ‘task’ of the analytical method is “to elevate the given, empirically concrete material into the form of universal abstractions” (Ibid). Thanks to these abstractions, Notion begins to generate definitions in the synthetic method. In the analytical method, the material concrete as something given is “*being taken up* into conceptual determinations” and in this way, these materials constitute “*finite truth*” and remain “*external to Concept*” (Ibid, 296). However, the infinite truth contains “a goal that is only *in-itself*” and finite truth stands under the “guidance of the Concept”; therefore, “the determinations of the Concept constitute the inner thread of its progression”. (Ibid) Hegel clearly describes finite cognition in the following passage:

The finitude of cognition lies in the presupposition of a world that is found to be there already, and cognitive subject appears here as a *tabula rasa*. [...] Finite cognition does not yet know itself as the activity of the Concept which it is only in-itself but not for-itself. (EncL 296)

On the one hand, the analytical method consists in “dissolving the concrete that is given, isolating its distinctions and bestowing the form of *abstract universality* upon them.” (Ibid, 296) In addition, “it consists in leaving the concrete as *ground* and making a concrete universal –*the genus*, or force and law- stand out through abstraction from the particularities that seem to be inessential” (EncL, 296). On the other hand, the synthetic method, for Hegel, shows the “development of the moments of the Notion in the object” and it is the reverse of the analytic method as can be seen in the following passage:

Whilst the latter [analytic method] starts from the singular and advances to the universal, the former [synthetic method], on the contrary starts with the universal (as a *definition*), and advances, through particularization (in *division*), to the singular (in the *theorem*) (EncL, 297)

In *Science of Logic* also Hegel distinguishes cognition into two types, analytic cognition and synthetic cognition. While analytic cognition “proceeds from the known to the unknown”, synthetic cognition proceeds “from unknown to the known” (S.L., 786). However, he does not set these two types as distinct from each other or as opposed poles of cognition. Instead of this, according to Hegel, cognition always begins with analytic cognition: “it must be said that cognition, once it has begun, always proceeds from the known to the unknown” (Ibid, 787), but it should be noted that this cognition is of Spirit’s cognition. To continue their comparison, while analytic cognition is “apprehension of what is”, synthetic cognition is

“comprehension of what is”<sup>3</sup> (SL, 794). Analytic cognition starts from a concrete material on which “depends all distinction of content and progress to a further content” (SL, 789). On the other hand, synthetic cognition grasps ‘multiplicity of determination in their unity’ (SL, 794). Moreover, there is a transition point from analytic cognition to the synthetic one which requires a move “from abstract identity to the relation, or from being to reflection” (Ibid, 794) and thus, synthetic cognition arises as ‘second premises’.

The synthetic method is based on the progress from the universal to the particular. As we explained in section 2.2, Hegel argues that while it might appear more commonsensical to proceed from the particular to the universal, given his distinction between intuition and cognition (cognition has the Notion as its basis). He is able to assert that the starting point should be something simple and abstract.

Hegel sets the movement from the simple and abstract to the combined and concrete, spelling out that “everywhere the abstract must constitute the starting point and the element in which and from which spread the particularities and rich formations of the concrete” (SL, 803). Moreover, “subjectivity” has an important role in synthetic cognition, as said by Hegel in the following passage:

The necessity that cognition achieves through proof is the contrary of that which forms its starting point. In the latter, cognition had a given and contingent content; but at the conclusion of its movement, it knows that its content is necessary, and this necessity is mediated by subjective activity. Similarly, subjectivity was at first wholly

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<sup>3</sup>Literally difference between apprehension and comprehension is that ‘apprehension is a mode of consciousness wherein one is aware of something but cannot pass any judgment on it, while comprehension is a psychological state of mind wherein a person is aware of something, is able to think about it, and knows how to deal with it’.

abstract, a mere tabula rasa, whereas from now on it proves to be determining. (EncL, 301)

The movement includes both the Spirit's movement and cognizing it—firstly cognizing analytically what is given in abstract identity where the Spirit adds nothing to the given, then cognizing synthetically the movement in which it particularizes itself.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

In contrast to the dualistic conceptions of traditional and modern philosophy, Hegel argues that opposed elements constitute one entity in relation to each other and this entity is the result of dialectic movement as the unity of opposed elements. Hegel's fundamental principle of logic is the universality of contradiction. As Sayers points out that "contradictions exist in all things both in the realm of concepts and in the empirical world of things" and emphasizes this as the principle of the dialectic thought. (Sayers, 71) Hegel insists that the content of logic and philosophy is not only ideas but also actuality. Hegel clearly expresses this in the following passage:

It is equally important, on the other hand, that philosophy should be quite clear about the fact that its content is nothing other than the basic import that is originally produced and produces itself in the domain of the living spirit the content made into world, the outer and inner world of consciousness; in other world, the content of philosophy is actuality. (EncL, 28-29)

According to Hegel, dialectic is not only a logical pattern; it is also the real movement of spirit. Spirit concretely realizes and exemplifies itself in the world and

real dialectical movement is seen in the development of world history Hegel explicitly state in *Philosophy of History* as quoted in the following passage:

The principle of Development involves also the existence of a latent germ of being — a capacity or potentiality striving to realize itself. This formal conception finds actual existence in Spirit; which has the History of the World for its theatre, its possession, and the sphere of its realization. (PH, 70)

The ‘Absolute’ as living universal is central to Hegel’s thought, and rich concretion takes shape in it through the particular. In his philosophy, the term “absolute” signifies a unified and comprehensible whole that becomes conscious of itself when it reaches knowledge of itself. According to Hegel, the absolute, the abstract, the universal and the objective develop and gain determinacy through the concrete, the particular and the subjective. The sensible particular is a medium for the Spirit’s realization of itself, and it is modified and changed by the Spirit. The Spirit would be incomplete and abstract without particulars. Its activity and its self-exposition is seen in objective reality (Wood, 200-201) and it shows its exploration of itself in history because our mind is mediated by the historically experienced, lived and realized ‘concrete’ (Singh and Mohapatra, 5).

Therefore, the Spirit constitutes itself via two ways of cognizing these logical patterns that are equally important; analytic cognition and synthetic cognition. In analytic cognition, the concrete given is transformed into the abstract universal by the Spirit, and in the synthetic method, the abstract universal particularizes itself in the concrete. But this time, the concrete has been changed and determined by the Spirit’s dialectical movements and in the new concrete as a whole, the Spirit is able to know what is given and itself.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **MARX'S EPISTEMOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Throughout this thesis, I support the view that Marx's theory can claim to hold some truth about reality because it articulates a certain methodology that enables us to distinguish between "false theory/ideology" and "the scientific method". In this chapter, I will try to describe the correct methodology that constructs the real concrete in thought. For this purpose in the next section (3.2) I will begin by defining Marx's use of the term 'concrete'. Likewise, in section 3.3, I will explain various usages of the term 'abstract' including its meaning as ideology (3.3.2) as well as real abstractions such as labor and capital (3.3.3). The distinction between various usages of the term 'abstract' will lead us into the discussion of methodology that distinguishes between ideology and correct theory. The articulation of this method, in the next section (3.4), will also reveal that there is not a one-sided determination of theory by reality. I will conclude by arguing that even though the real concrete is the true starting point for observation and theory, the concrete for thought also determines the real concrete.

In discussing Marx's 'method', it is important to keep in mind that, according to many interpretations, Marx uses different methods in the *German Ideology* and the *Grundrisse*. For example, Philip J. Kain claims in his article "Marx's Dialectic Method":

In the *German Ideology* [...] he [Marx] totally denied that either the historical rise of the categories or their theoretical-methodological employment had any impact whatsoever on the development of the actual concrete [i.e. material conditions of production]. Indeed only the reverse was the case, the actual concrete determined not only the historical rise of the categories but even the role and significance they had in science. (Kain, 297)

In the *Grundrisse*, on the other hand, as Kain says "he [Marx] rejects a sheer empirical study of the given [...] The method requires the independent construction of a concrete for thought' (Kain, 298).

I believe that even in the *German Ideology* Marx's methodology is not as simple-minded as Kain claims. Even in the *German Ideology*, Marx explicitly points out that "circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstance" (GI. 165), and this sentence obviously shows that the real concrete's relation to law, morality, religion, consciousness etc. is not one-sidedly determined. Of course, intellectual wealth directly depends on material conditions (GI. 154, 163, 166, and 172), but human beings affect and even change the material conditions and the circumstances in so far as it is possible for them to do so within the boundaries of the restrictions set by these conditions. Material conditions and intellectual wealth affect each other: "The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness; is at firstly directly *interwoven* with the material activity and the material intercourse of men" (GI. 154 italics mine)

Yet, while it is not clear to what extent the methodology employed in and described in these two works (*German Ideology* and *Grundrisse*) are the same and to what extent they differ, it would be safe to say that Marx's ideas are not fully developed yet in the *German Ideology*. I think it is best to read *German Ideology* and *Grundrisse* in interaction with and as complementing each other while keeping in mind that there are two separate texts written at two different stages of Marx's life.

It should also be noted from the outset that Marx's epistemology cannot be handled in traditional epistemological terms. In their article "Marxist Epistemology: The Critique of Economic Determinism", Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff indicate that traditional epistemology operates as if there are two separate realms: "independent subjects seeking knowledge of independent objects" (Resnick and Wolf, 45). In contrast to traditional epistemology, Marx does not see theory and reality as belonging to two distinct spheres. Rather there is a "circular process" in the production of theory where "theory begins and ends with concretes [...] the concrete which determines theory is conceptualized as the 'concrete real' [the real concrete] and the concrete produced by thought is the 'thought-concrete' [concrete for thought]" (Resnick and Wolf, 43).

### **3.2. The Concrete in Marx**

A general definition of the term 'concrete' in Marx's usage can be made as "the organized and articulated concentration of many determinations and relations." (Kain, 295) Thus, for Marx, as for Hegel, the use of the word 'concrete' evokes an interrelated totality. In their article "Marxist Epistemology" Resnick and Wolf

distinguish between the application of Marx's conception of the concrete to reality and its application to theory, and name them, respectively, the "real concrete" and the "concrete for thought."

The real concrete consists of historically determined material relations and these relations do not only include the relationships among people, but also their relations to nature. Thus the real concrete comes into appearance as a natural and social totality, and "ensemble of social relations" (T.F. 6) "The concrete for thought", on the other hand, refers to the "world" as produced by conceptual thinking.

According to Marx, the 'concrete for thought' is constituted by "a reproduction of the [real] concrete by way of thought" (G, 101) and the development of the concrete for thought is dependent on the development of the real concrete. The real concrete takes shape as the concrete for thought through the attainment of 'abstractions in thought' as these abstractions become revealed through the development of the real concrete. In other words, according to Marx, what is known in and abstracted from the real concrete is conceptually (re)produced in the concrete for thought. However this view should not be confused with the traditional correspondence theory of truth. Rather, the method Marx is trying to expose here is more like Hegel's method where there is a *movement* towards a coincidence of theory and reality. This is the whole point of emphasizing that abstractions are developed through the real concrete and the concrete for thought in turn determines the real concrete. Thus, the concrete is not only the point of departure for real development but also a result for thought, i.e. 'concrete for thought', and the starting point for new observation and conception. "It is the cyclical unity of these two different concretes" and "the knowledge process that connects both concretes connects also the ceaseless transformation of both [...]"

(Resnick and Wolf, 45). Knowledge of the real concrete requires a process connecting the real concrete by abstraction in thought to the concrete for thought.

### **3.3. The Abstract in Marx**

The term ‘abstract’ or ‘abstraction’ has also different meanings in Marx’s philosophy. In *Dialectics of Dance*, Bertell Ollman describes Marx’s different usages of the term ‘abstract/abstraction’, and he identifies four different senses, each related to the others:

First and most important, it refers to the mental activity of subdividing the world into the mental constructs with which we think about it, [...] Second, it refers to the results of this process, the actual parts into which reality has been apportioned. That is to say, for Marx, as for Hegel before him, "abstraction" functions as a noun as well as a verb, the noun referring to what the verb has brought into being. In these senses, everyone can be said to abstract (verb) and to think with abstractions (noun). (Ollman, 61)

In other words, whether the term ‘abstraction’ refers to the act of abstracting or to the concepts that emerge as a result, the first two senses point to the function of abstraction in the epistemological construction of our conception of the world.

But Marx also uses "abstraction" in a third sense, where it refers to a suborder of particularly ill-fitting mental constructs. Whether because they are too narrow, take in too little, focus too exclusively on appearances, or are otherwise badly composed, these constructs do not allow an adequate grasp of their subject matter. (Ibid)

In this third sense, the term ‘abstraction’ has a negative connotation and is used to refer to what has commonly come to be known as ideology.

Finally, Marx uses the term "abstraction" in a fourth still different sense where it refers to a particular organization of elements in the real world; having to do with the functioning of capitalism.[...] Abstractions in this fourth sense exist in the world and not, as in the case with the other three, in the mind (Ibid, 62).

So finally this fourth sense refers to the role that abstraction plays in the construction of the world not only in the epistemological but also in the ontological sense.

As described in Ollman's first two definitions, in Marx's usage, what is abstract relates to conceptual thought and renders reality thinkable. It is associated with determining differences among particulars as well as identifying similarities between them, separating them from each other and defining particulars in accordance with differences and resemblances. Thus "the mental activities that we have collected and brought into focus as "abstraction" are more often associated with the processes of perception conception, defining, remembering, dreaming, reasoning, and even thinking" (Ollman, 61). In this sense, abstractions are derived from what is concrete by way of generalization and thus, abstraction is "the theoretical expression of [...] material relations", and this relation is expressed by ideas. (G, 164). On the other hand, the final definition, as Ollman states, refers abstraction to something existing in the real world such as labor, exchange value, etc.

Therefore, we can generally reduce abstractions into two types as well: thought abstractions and the real abstract. What is abstract is related to what is concrete. Abstraction in thought belongs to the same ontological status as the concrete for thought while the real abstract is located in the real concrete. Their interrelations concern us in the epistemological sense.

### 3.3.1. Abstraction in thought

Abstraction in thought allows inquiry to focus on specific characters of the object of knowledge (the concrete), and it is in light of such abstractions that the world is knowable and thinkable. Here we can observe a line of thought coming from Kant and going through Hegel to Marx: that, in trying to gain an understanding of the object, the subject actively constructs the object. Marx criticizes the traditional empiricists' position on history by stating that they "themselves [are] still abstract" and points out that their comprehension of history includes "a collection of dead facts" because according to him their approach does not posit facts as "active life-process". (GI. 155) Marx underlines this point in criticizing "crude" materialism and empiricism such as that of Feuerbach's. Moreover, in his objection to Feuerbach's "sensuous certainty" he expresses historical materialist claims by stating that the sensuous world is "the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations". (GI. 170)

The sensuous world is the product of industry and the result of historically preceding processes. In contrast to those who treat nature as a mere given, Marx, like Hegel, sees that nature is rarely merely "given" to human consciousness since it has been transformed through human activity throughout history. "Even the objects of the 'sensuous certainty' are only given him through social development, industry and commercial intercourse" (GI. 170). In this famous passage Marx uses the example of the cherry-tree. To 'a simple minded empiricist' like Feuerbach, a cherry may simply appear as an object of sensuous certainty. But Marx points out that this cherry can be understood only in a larger social and historical context: It was "only a few centuries ago transplanted by commerce into our zone, and therefore only by this action of a

definite society in a definite age has it become ‘sensuous certainty’ for Feuerbach”  
(GI. 170)

Again in the Thesis on Feuerbach, he writes:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism -that of Feuerbach included- is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of *contemplation*, but not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to materialism, was developed by idealism. (T.F 1)

Here Marx seems to be praising Hegel’s dialectic method (though certainly not idealism) over Feuerbach’s “contemplative materialism” (T.F. 9). By ‘contemplative materialism’ Marx means materialism that is formed through sensuousness and criticizes this conception of sensuousness as being too abstract. He wants to emphasize that sensuousness must be conceived that as “practical” (T.F. 5 and 8)

However, unlike Kant, and even unlike Hegel, Marx insists that ‘real premises’ are derived from real relations “from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination” (G, 149) He spells out that the reality of all the abstractions involved in empirical and materialistic theories is to be found in the “ensemble of the social relations”; in other words, the real concrete. (T.F. 6) For him, the truth of abstractions is ensured “only in so far as those relations [from which abstractions are derived] continue to exist” (*MEC.*) as real relations.

As a matter of fact, a deep analysis of the real concrete reveals that, both real and thought abstractions belong to the realm of the real concrete



### 3.3.2. Ideology

Although the concrete for thought belongs to the realm of the real concrete, there are abstractions in theory that are clearly distortions of reality according to Marx. Thus, before the explanation of how the concrete for thought is located in the real concrete, the distinction between ideology and ‘scientific theory’ is to be made clear. Therefore, in this section, where ideology resides in the concrete for thought will be examined in order to clearly understand Marx’s ‘scientific method’ and to distinguish the ‘wrong method’ from it. Certain passages in Marx’s writings, especially in *German Ideology* suggest that all ideas, including law, politics, religion, education, etc. even all production of theory belong in the realm of ideology. In that case, the concrete for thought appears to be in this realm as well. However, there are also other passages that indicate that he sees the ‘materialistic conception of history’ he is developing with Engels as “positive science” and keeps it separate from the ideologies he criticizes. (GI, 155)

In *German Ideology*, Marx presents the first and clearest account of what has come to be known as historical materialism which includes the famous “materialistic” thesis that the base determines the superstructure. As is well known, by ‘base’ Marx means “the material production of life” and by ‘superstructure’ is meant theory and ideology. Marx explicitly underlines his understanding of forms of consciousness as effects of material conditions in the *German Ideology*, and strongly opposes the view that consciousness as a pure concept determines life. Consciousness occurs as a result of the need and the relation of individuals to others, and this “relation” distinguishes the human being from other animals or things. According to him, consciousness is “from the very beginning a social product” and is dealing with “the

immediate sensuous environment” and other persons but, human being’s consciousness of nature firstly appears as that of “a completely alien [...] force”. (GI. 158) Furthermore, it is not “mere consciousness” and cannot be separated from material conditions and the real concrete because consciousness is always “their [living individuals] consciousness”. (GI. 154)

Marx’s methodology explains the formation of ideas from material practice, as opposed to the idealistic view that explains practice from the idea (GI 164). As he states in the *German Ideology*:

This method of approach is not devoid of premises. It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and rigidity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions. As soon as this active life-process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts as it is with the empiricists (themselves still abstract) or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealist. (GI. 155)

Furthermore, Marx defines history as “the succession of the separate generations,” and each generation living under certain material conditions handed down by all preceding generations continues “the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances” (G, 172). He continues:

This can be speculatively distorted so that later history is made the goal of earlier history. [...] while what is designated with the words "destiny," "goal," "germ," or "ideal" of earlier history is nothing more than an abstraction formed from later history, from the active influence which earlier history exercises on later history. (GI, 172)

According to Marx, morality, religion, metaphysics and corresponding forms of consciousness do not have an independent history because they take their conceptual

forms from the development of their material conditions and their intercourse with human being's thinking. Any conceptual form isolated from its material conditions is speculation, and for Marx, "where speculation ends-in real life- there real positive science begins" (GI. 155). We see here that Marx claims that what is doing is 'real science' as opposed to speculation (i.e., ideology)

For Marx, in accordance with their faculties, people create social relations in which they produce their means of life, and it is important to "understand that those who produce social relations in conformity with their material productivity also produce the *ideas, categories*, i.e. the ideal abstract expressions of those same social relations." (Ibid, 140). In other words, according to Marx, 'ideas' express material relations and he insists that "the correct theory must be made clear and developed within the concrete conditions and on the basis of the existing state of things." (Letter from Marx to Dagobert Oppenheim in Cologne)

In *German Ideology*, he critiques Young Hegelians as they had not tried to "inquire into the connection of German philosophy with German reality, the relation of their criticism to their own material surroundings" (GI, 149). He points out that current material relations directly deal with current ideas because:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of *material* production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. (GI, 172-173)

In *Grundrisse*, as in *German Ideology*, he warns philosophers against ascribing an independent status to ideas, spelling out that dominant relations in reality reflect themselves in dominant ideas: “this reign [reign of ideas] exercised by the relations [...] appears within the consciousness of individuals as the reign of ideas” (G, 165).

According to Marx, in ideology, the real concrete appears up-side down as ‘in a *camera obscura*’ both in the consciousness of men and in abstract theories. But, for Marx, “this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process” (GI, 154).

Marx opposes the speculative constructions of the real concrete in thought as the concrete for thought and clearly expresses this opposition many times in his books. Although the concrete for thought as ‘the products of human consciousness’ has an influence on the development of the real concrete, Marx’s theory strictly rejects ‘an independent existence’ of the concrete for thought and the view that accepts it as independent is an illusion (GI, 149). When criticizing the Young Hegelians in *German Ideology*, he states:

It is evident that the Young Hegelians have to fight only against these illusions of the consciousness. Since, according to their fantasy, the relationships of men, all their doings, their chains and their limitations are products of their consciousness, the Young Hegelians logically put to men the moral postulate of exchanging their present consciousness for human, critical or egoistic consciousness, and thus of removing their limitations. This demand to change consciousness amounts to a demand to interpret reality in another way, i.e., to recognize it by means of another interpretation. (Ibid)

This passage can be interpreted as stating that the concrete for thought constructed in accordance with our consciousness does not determine the real concrete on its own

and if we construct the real concrete in thought as different from that which it is in reality, it can not be changed. In that case, it would be just ‘fighting against phrases’, but there is in “no way combating the real existing world when they [Young Hegelians] are merely combating the phrases of this world” (Ibid). In another place, *Theories of Surplus Value*, when analyzing Samuel Bailey’s theory, Marx states that the only way for Bailey’s theory to solve the “contradiction between the general law and further developments in the concrete circumstances” is by “the discovery of the connecting links”, “not by directly subordinating and immediately adapting the concrete to the abstract”:

This moreover is to be brought about by *a verbal fiction*, by changing the correct names of things. (These are indeed “verbal disputes”, they are “verbal”, however, because real contradictions which are not resolved in a real way, are to be solved by phrases.) (SV)

Marx frequently emphasizes in the *German Ideology* that all abstractions should be placed in real life and history. This is one of the distinctive claims of the materialistic conception of history articulated in the *German Ideology*. According to Marx, abstractions arise from the “observation of the historical development of men” and it is false to ascribe any meaning to abstractions apart from reality or material conditions. “[v]iewed apart from real history, the abstractions have in themselves no value” (GI. 155).

Thus, again unlike Kant, Marx holds that the categories of thought are not eternal, but ‘historical and transitory products’ because they are dependent on and express real relations (social relations) and those real social relations are historical and transitory. Marx goes on to sarcastically state that when viewed in isolation from

people and their material activity, “*the abstraction, the category regarded as such, [...] is, of course, immortal, immutable, impassive. It is nothing but an entity of pure reason [...] [as] an admirable tautology!*” (Ibid, 140). In short, abstraction in thought can be verifiable in the real world and under concrete conditions because it is obtained from concrete conditions.

He emphasizes this point by criticizing Proudhon in the following passage from his letters to Pavel Vasilyevich Annenkov:

Mr Proudhon chiefly because he doesn't know history, fails to see that, in developing his productive faculties, i.e. in living, man develops certain inter-relations, and that the nature of these relations necessarily changes with the modification and the growth of the said productive faculties. He fails to see that *economic categories* are but *abstractions* of those real relations, that they are truths only in so far as those relations continue to exist. (MEC.)

As will be seen in the examples from economic categories such as labor and capital, abstractions have to be made from “actual social relations” (Ibid). But it should also be kept in mind that those relations themselves are “transitory and historical” (Ibid).

One example to the transitory and historical nature of social relations is given in Marx’s analysis of ‘property’ which helps us to understand the relation between real concrete and thought and their appearances in discussion of ideology. According to Marx, the notion of property, like all other notions, can not be conceptualized and handled outside the history of social relation.

In each historical epoch, property has developed differently and under a set of entirely different social relations. Thus to define bourgeois property is nothing else than to give an exposition of all the social relations of bourgeois production To try to give a

definition of property as of an independent relation, a category apart, an abstract and eternal idea, can be nothing but an illusion of metaphysics or jurisprudence (PP, 168)

For Marx, social and material relations have constituted themselves differently in each historical epoch and they are changeable. When discussing Marx's definition of property in *Marx's Theory of Ideology*, Bhikhu Parekh points out that "in some societies property implies absolute individual ownership; in some others the joint ownership by the individual and the community; in yet others it implies a right to use but not own an object; and so on" (Parekh, 3-4).

When abstractions are viewed apart from history, they tend to appear and be conceptualized as if they have permanence. They thus serve an ideological purpose in leading historically specific material relations and conditions of production (objective/material relations of dependency) to appear as if they are not changeable and permanent. Abstractions are thus "consolidated, nourished and inculcated by the ruling classes" and "individuals are ruled by abstractions" (G, 164-165).

### **3.3.3. Abstraction in the real world**

Having come this far, abstraction 'in thought' has been considered in epistemological terms, but now abstraction 'in the real world' will be evaluated as a social and historical phenomenon. In Ollman's definition, 'real abstraction' refers to a "particular organization of elements in the real world" and in "Real Abstractions of Capitalism," Demet Evrenosoğlu points out that in Marx's philosophy "abstraction is comprehended as a social, historical phenomenon rather than an epistemological notion" (Evrenosoğlu, 49). In this framework, this section will focus on abstractions in two ways: firstly, Marx's usage of the term 'real abstraction' will be clarified; and

secondly, practices of real abstraction will be shown to reveal the relation between the real concrete and thought abstractions.

For him, the bourgeoisie in the capitalist epoch has brought about the generality of production by uniting particular productions into a “totality” (G. 86). In Marx’s own words, after the “arising in the midst of the richest possible concrete development”, abstractions are not only “thinkable in a particular form;” they also exist in the real world. This means that abstractions are derived from reality or “the real concrete”-- that is, the “concentration of many determinations” and “unity of the diverse” (G. 101).

As a rule, the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete development, where one thing appears as common to many, to all. Then it ceases to be thinkable in a particular form alone. On the other side, this abstraction of labour as such is not merely the mental product of a concrete totality of labours. (G, 104)

In order to clarify the meaning of the term ‘abstract’ in the real world, it may be best to begin with this example: the analysis of labor in Marx’s theory. For Marx, ‘labor as such’ belongs to a specific form of society in which individuals produce specific kinds of products. In this sense “labor in general” is a conception and abstraction but it has to be viewed in its real, concrete and historical appearance. But, labor, as “free” wage labor, fully appears as an abstraction in capitalist society. Marx, somewhat ironically, uses the expression “free labor” to indicate the separation (abstraction) of labor as such from its specific forms of appearance. With the fact that the bourgeoisie in the capitalist epoch has brought about the generality of production by uniting particular productions into a “totality”, specific forms of labor have gained



generality and become “indifferent” to the various modes and contexts in which they exist. While labor in general “presupposes a very developed totality of real kinds of labour,” in the capitalist system where “free labor” makes its appearance in the market “no single one is any longer predominant” (G, 104). Indifference toward qualitative differences among different kinds of labor is strictly linked to a form of society “in which individuals can with ease transfer from one labour to another, and where the specific kind is a matter of chance for them, hence of indifference.” (G, 104). “[n]ot only the category, labour, but labour in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form” (G, 104).

Thus, labor as a real abstraction is a historical production and it presupposes preceding relations. According to Marx, bourgeois society is “the most developed and the most complex historic organization of” production, and older modes of production remain alive in bourgeois society and previous social formations appear in it (G 105). Marx again warns us about the validity of abstraction:

This example of labour shows strikingly how even the most abstract categories, despite their validity—precisely because of their abstractness—for all epochs, are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves likewise a product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations. (G, 105)

Capital is another real abstraction when it is separated from its connection to land or specific means of production and becomes as easily invested in this or that. Abstract labor as something real has concrete relations to abstract capital as something real.

Thus, labor and capital as real abstractions have become categories of modern society, not only in thought but in reality or the real concrete:

Here, [...] for the first time, the point of departure of modern economics, namely the abstraction of the category 'labour', 'labour as such', labour pure and simple, becomes true in practice. The simplest abstraction, then, which modern economics places at the head of its discussions, and which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society (G, 105)

As can be seen here, abstractions both facilitate the understanding of reality in terms of conceptual thought (as a human's mental construction of reality) and exist in the real world as in the example of the wealth creating activity of labor.

If abstract labor were only understood as a simply a mental reconstruction of the concrete, the role of abstract labor in capital society could be overlooked (Evrenosoğlu, 50) In fact, however, abstract labor as something real does not simply have a meaning as “concrete labor *in general*”; it expresses a “something real” in capitalism.

Now, a deeper analysis of Marx's labor theory can make it easier to understand how thought abstractions turn into abstractions in the real world and can thus determine the course of its development. Marx writes in a letter to Engels that *Capital's* ‘best point’ is to show the “*two-fold character of labour* according to whether it is expressed in use-value or exchange-value which is brought out in the very *First Chapter*” and “this is fundamental to all understanding of the **facts**” (MECW V. 42, 407).

Abstract labor is a controversial issue that has been argued since The Second International (1889-1916). In *Time, Labor and Social Domination*, Moishe Postone expresses that Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Rudolf Hilferding, and Paul Sweezy understood abstract labor to be a mental construct corresponding to labor in general. However, Lucio Colletti, Georg Lukacs, Isaak Rubin, Bertell Ollman, and Derek Sayer “consider value and abstract labor to be historically specific categories and regard Marx's analysis as concerned with the forms of social relations and of domination that characterize capitalism” (Postone, 146-147).

According to Marx, labor has a “double character” as abstract labor and concrete labor. Concrete labor, on the one hand, refers to a specific form of laboring activity in which humans interact with nature in all societies. Abstract labor, on the other hand, refers to labor isolated from individuals and which produces value in the capitalist system.

In the first chapter of *Capital*, “The Commodity”, Marx presents an exposition of the ‘two-fold character of labor’ embodied in commodities, which also have a dual character as use-value and exchange value. Concrete, useful labor is labor “whose utility is represented by the use-value of its product” and “its product is a use-value” (CvI, 132). The use-value appears in an act of exchange of the different commodities in order satisfy particular needs. In this act, one commodity’s use-value differs from another’s; in addition, each different commodity is produced by a qualitatively different activity. However, when viewed in isolation from their specific forms, productive activities appear to be ‘expenditure of human labour-power’. In Marx words:

Tailoring and weaving, although they are qualitatively different productive activities, are both a productive expenditure of human brains, muscles, nerves, hands etc., and in this sense both human labour. They are merely two different forms of the expenditure of human labour-power. (Ibid, 134)

Differences among productive activities are ‘an attribute of labor in its concrete useful form’, but they do not have an effect on the representation of labor as value because in this representation the concrete useful form of labor is abstracted from it. Abstract labor as the equalization *in thought* of qualitatively different kinds of concrete labor brings about *in reality* the possibility of exchanging different kinds of products; “different products of labour are, **in fact**, equated with each other, and thus converted into commodities” (Ibid, 181. bold mine).

According to Marx, all commodities, having exchange value constituted by abstract labor, are expressed and symbolized in money and the ratio of equivalence of a commodity with money is a precondition for transposition into money. This ratio, which is expressed in price, is determined by the socially expended amount of labor time that is abstract labor. Money represents here ‘general objectification of labor time’ and clearly in Marx’s own words: “money is labour time in the form of a general object, or the objectification of general labour time, labour time as a general commodity” (G, 168).

For this reason, the same labor expended in the same length of time “always yields the same amount of value, independently of any variations in productivity” (Ibid, 137). Thus, Marx explains labor’s abstract character that ‘forms value of commodities’ (i.e., abstract labor as something in reality) and its concrete character that ‘produces use-value’ (i.e., concrete labor) in the following passages:

On the one hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power, in the physiological sense, and it is in this quality of being equal, or abstract, human labour that it forms the value of commodities. On the other hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power in a particular form and with a definite aim, and it is in this quality of being concrete useful labour that it produces use-values. (Ibid, 137)

While labor which creates exchange values is abstract, universal and homogeneous, labor which produces use values is concrete and special and is made up of an endless variety of kinds of labor according to the way in which and the material to which it is applied (CCPE, 33)

If we consider the above passages only, ‘abstract labor’ can be defined as a mental construction arrived at by singling out what all various kinds of labor have in common ‘in the physiological sense’ (abstract in thought). However, on the one side, abstract labor (in thought) is a mental generalization that makes it possible to grasp (firstly) qualitatively different productive activities as an equal activity and (secondly) what is common to all. On the other side, abstract labor (in reality) is a real force that constitutes the value of commodities.

Marx spells out that by equating their different products in exchange as values, people equate their ‘different kinds of labor’ and “they do this without being aware of it” (Ibid, 167). . According to Marx, commodities’ “objective character as values is [...] purely social” and expresses a “social substance” (C.vI, 138-139). A certain social phenomenon (division of labor) appears in the capitalist system in a certain form (exchange value). Marx stresses that the value-form of the product of labor is ‘most abstract’ and it is the “most general form of the bourgeois mode of production”. But it should not be forgotten that a particular kind of social production, this value form, has a historical and transitory character. (Ibid, 174n34). Abstract

labor (in reality) creating value must be considered a social and historical phenomenon as well.

The commodity-form both represents and conceals the socially determined abstract labor. Marx stresses the social character of the commodity that emerges from the exchange process in the following passage:

As values, commodities are *social* magnitudes, that is to say, something absolutely different from their “properties” as “things”. As values, they constitute only relations of men in their productive activity. [...] In actual fact, the concept “value” presupposes “exchanges” of the products. Where labour is communal, the relations of men in their social production do not manifest themselves as “values” of “things”. Exchange of products as commodities is a method of exchanging labour, the dependence of the labour of each upon the labour of the others a certain mode of social labour or social production. [...] social labour based on private exchange, in which things are defined not as independent entities, but as mere expressions of social production. (SV)

Marx argues that the value of a commodity is not determined by individually expended labor power; rather it is determined by the expenditure of ‘identical human power’, ‘average unit of labor power’ or ‘socially necessary’ labor. He explains socially necessary labor that is ‘required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production that are considered normal for a given society, with its state of technological development and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labour prevalent in that society. (C.vI, 129) With the standardized and averaged labor, individuals are compelled to increase labor skill or labor time:

The real value of a commodity, however, is not its individual, but its social value ; that is to say, its value is not measured by the labour-time that the article costs the producer in each individual case, but by the labour-time socially required for its production. (C.vI, 434)

In *From Rousseau to Lenin*, Lucio Colletti signifies that in the process of exchange, people have to equalize their products by way of abstraction from differences among various labors although their labor powers and capacities, in fact, are unequal. (Colletti, 84). He asserts that by equalization of labor powers (in thought), “they [individuals] are treated as abstract or separate from the real empirical individuals to whom they belong” and “they are regarded as a ‘force’ or entity ‘in itself’” hence abstract labor is “*alienated* labour, labour separated or estranged with respect to man himself” (Colletti, 84).

According to Colletti, in commodity production abstract labor is not only calculated as something distinct from individual concrete labor; it also “acquires a distinct and independent existence” (Colletti, 85n94).

[S]elf-abstraction of labour from the concrete laboring subject, this acquisition by it of independence from man, culminates in the form of the modern wage-labour. The inversion whereby labour no longer appears as a manifestation of man but man as manifestation of labour assumes here a real and palpable existence. (Colletti, 85n94)

Abstracting labor from human’s concrete labor in commodity production has not come to pass only in the mind. Human’s physical and mental energies have been transformed into “a separate essence;” in other words, they have turned into an ‘independent subject’. Postone also agrees with Colletti on this point and claims that abstract labor (as something real) brings out a historically new form of social compulsion in which individuals produce and exchange commodities in order to maintain their life. The locus of abstract labor as a dominating force is the “pervasive structuring social forms of capitalist society that are constituted by determinate forms of social practice” (Postone, 159).

While labor power represented in abstract labor has ignored real differences among individuals and emerged as something independent, it no longer mediates between individuals in commodity production (Colletti, 86-87). In short, Value constituted by abstract labor has become an independent force in commodity production and it dominates individuals. Abstract labor as the substance of value turns into an active principle in capitalist society by making necessary the equalization of the heterogenous labor of different individuals into an average in order to be measurable. Evrenosoğlu makes this point:

This form compels concrete activities performed by concrete individuals to produce in accordance with this average, which is the crux of the connection between labor and the creation of value. Hence abstract labor is experienced in its effectiveness by imposing itself as a real force to produce in accordance with a certain rate of speed and intensity.” (Evrenosoğlu, 51)

According to Marx, indifference to individuals’ labor constitutes a certain kind of dependency. The social connection of individuals expressed in exchange value is the basis of this dependency. In *Marx’s Social Ontology*, Carol C. Gould emphasizes that in an exchange process individuals are free in order to relate to each other by the way of “abstract medium of exchange” and equivalent value of products is an “abstraction from the particular concrete form of use value” (Gould, 17). However, the value constituted by abstract labor or labor power has to be expressed in a symbolic form: ‘money’. Marx clearly expresses necessity of symbolic form of value by stating that “this abstraction will do for comparing commodities; but in actual exchange this abstraction in turn must be objectified, must be symbolized, realized in a symbol” (G, 143-144) and again, he emphasizes in the following passage:



Every moment, incalculating, accounting etc., that we transform commodities into value symbols, we fix them as mere exchange values, making abstraction from the matter they are composed of and all their natural qualities. On paper, in the head, this metamorphosis proceeds by means of mere abstraction; but in the real exchange process a real *mediation* is required, a means to accomplish this abstraction.” (G, 142)

In the system of commodity production, labor seems to be not a coordinated social relation between individuals but, the subordination of individual relations “to relations which subsist independently of them and which arise out of collisions between mutually indifferent individuals” (G, 157). As Postone points out social relations in capitalism are not overt interpersonal relations but a “quasi-independent set of structures that are opposed to individuals” in the frame of objective dependency. (Postone, 125)

### **3.3.3.1. Practices in real abstraction**

Until now, we have tried to clarify the term ‘abstraction’ as something real in Marx’s labor theory. In this inquiry, we can see that abstract labor is not merely conceptual thought (abstract in thought) but something real that characterizes social development in different historical forms (abstract in the real world). And now, it is turn to come to that process which indicates practices of real abstraction— i.e., the relation between the real concrete and thought.

We have already seen that hegemony, set by the ruling class in accordance with material relationships, is exerted not only in the material realm but also in the political, intellectual, and cultural realms at a given epoch. For Marx, the ruling class intends to maintain current material relations in order to maintain ruling. Because of

this, it tries to present current material relations as permanent and dominant ideas as ‘eternal law’.

For example, according to Marx’s value theory, abstract value also appears as something real. Thanks to this abstraction, capital achieves existence in modern epoch:

value [...] is possible only as such an abstraction, as soon as money is posited; [...] circulation of money in turn leads to capital, hence can be fully developed only on the foundation of capital, just as, generally, only on this foundation can circulation seize hold of all moments of production. This development, therefore, not only makes visible the historic character of forms, such as capital, which belong to a specific epoch of history; but also, [in its course] categories such as value, which appear as purely abstract, show the historic foundation from which they are abstracted. (G, 776)

The concept of value, as can be seen above, exactly belongs to modern economy and economic categories that are common to all epochs (such as money) indicate “the historic modifications which they undergo” (Ibid). It is also the ‘most abstract expression’ of capital and production and hence the ‘secret’ of production in the capitalist epoch is revealed in it. For Marx, political economists exert the concept of value as if it belongs to all epochs in exactly the same way in which they conceptualize it. In so doing, they not only cut off economic categories from their real historical and concrete development and render them too abstract, but they also serve the ruling class from an ideological standpoint by demonstrating the concept of value as eternal.

However this is not to say that all ideas in a certain epoch expressing material relations are dominated by the ruling class. Some ideas that aim to destroy these dominating material relations also exist, and these ideas are called by Marx

‘revolutionary ideas’: “the existence of revolutionary ideas in a particular period presupposes the existence of a revolutionary class” (GI, 173). As can be understood in Marx’s sentence, an idea, even if it is revolutionary must arise out of current material conditions. In other words, the ideas aiming to change material relations must be founded and derived from the same concrete relations in order to constitute new concrete relations.

According to Marx, general ideas expressing concrete material relations should be designed to conceptualize specific concrete social relations or experiences. (Parekh, 3)

We can elaborate this point by looking at a discussion by Marx in *Grundrisse* where he describes three historical social forms. The first form is the ‘relation of personal dependency’ in which individuals are imprisoned within a certain definition of themselves, such as ‘feudal lord and vassal’, ‘landlord and serf’, etc. The second form (capitalism) is ‘personal independency’ which is grounded on an ‘objective dependency.’ Finally, the third form (communism) is ‘free individuality’ “based on the universal development of individuals and their subordination of their communal, [and] social productivity” (G, 158). In the first historical form, which implies the pre-capitalist form, personal dependency is obviously visible but emerging with exchange value as an abstract relation among individuals. This first form constituted a new form of dependency in the second form (capitalism), called by him “objective dependency’.

In the second form, individuals seem to be independent but this independency, for Marx, is ‘merely illusion’. The objective dependency relation in the second form

appears as an ‘antithesis’ of first form, personal dependency. While in the first form personal dependency can be clearly seen, in the second form, this personal dependency as an objective dependency is concealed by abstractions. This is where abstractions begin to function as ideology: “These objective dependency relations also appear [...] in such a way that individuals are now ruled by abstractions, whereas earlier they depended on one another” (G, 164). Here, the “system of universal relation is formed for the first time.” (Ibid) but at this point this relation of dependency appears as an alien force... What constitutes the relation of objective dependency is “nothing more than social relations which have become independent and now enter into opposition to the seemingly independent individuals; i.e. the reciprocal relations of production separated from and autonomous of individuals” (G, 164).

In the second historical form, which implies capitalism, the individual’s labor power is separated from the individual himself or herself by means of abstraction. That is, individuals’ labor power seems to be outside of themselves, and the dependency relation no longer appears as personal dependency whereas it appears as an objective dependency because of abstraction. The process of exchange does not show up as a relationship between individuals, but rather, individuals produce for the sake of exchange in order to maintain their life in the domination of labor by capital. Thus, as the small proprietor or serf in the pre-capitalist form becomes free worker in the capitalist form, individuals’ labor powers becomes productive force of capital:

The worker becomes (objectively) dependent not on an individual, since the particular person to whom the worker sells his or her labor is indifferent, but rather on the system of capital. The worker must sell the only property he or she has, namely, his or

her capacity to work, in order to gain the means of subsistence. This act of selling the capacity to work is an exchange. (Gould, 17)

Summarily, in the first historical form, pre-capitalist form, individuals are restricted by other individuals, but in the second historical form, the capitalist form, this restriction is “developed into an objective restriction of the individuals by relations independent of him and sufficient unto themselves” (G, 164). According to Marx, it is impossible for ‘individuals of a class’ to overcome external relations without destroying these relations all together. An individual may change their standing in these relations but individuals as a class cannot because “their mere existence expresses subordination, the necessary subordination of the mass of individuals” (Ibid). For Marx, this subordination, expressed in objective dependency is ensured by abstractions.

### **3.4. Method**

As said previously, Marx’s theory, as ‘scientific method’, begins with the real concrete and, ends with the concrete for thought. In examining Marx’s method, I will try to show what his premises consist of, how these premises are obtained and conceptualized in thought and finally how the results that come from these processes are arranged and ordered in order to construct the real concrete in thought as concrete for thought.

In the *German Ideology*, Marx points out that his method of defining reality as the material life-process is in “empirically verifiable” premises which are restricted to the real concrete and what is “material” (as opposed to starting from imagined or

mystified premises to arrive at life) “ascends from earth to heaven”, as can be seen following passage:

We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. (GI. 154-155)

Marx uses the term ‘empirical’ in order to emphasize observable/perceptible or existing things or processes in history. He usually exercises this term with other terms such as ‘data’, ‘existence’, ‘fact’, ‘condition’ and ‘actuality’ etc. (GI. 157, 163, 170, 175) Empirical observation, for him, must be without “any mystification and speculation” and present “the connection of the social and political structure with production” (GI. 154). He thus presents the famous thesis of the *German Ideology* that all ideas, all production of theory (including law, politics, education etc.) belong to the realm of ideology. This realm is claimed to be determined by relations of production: “the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly *interwoven* with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life” (GI 154 italics mine).

We thus see that here Marx might appear to be an empiricist-materialist. He emphasizes in several places that he is operating with a certain methodology which takes “real living individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live” as his starting point, and explicitly claims that “these premises can be verified in a purely empirical way”. (GI. 149, 155) He thus proceeds to spell out empirical facts about these living individuals such as the physical constitution of

men, their relation to nature, and building on these, their production of their means of subsistence. It seems like he attempts to establish the historical materialist picture he presents through step by step building on the first premise that “man must be in a position to live” which involves “before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things” (GI. 156). He thus states that “the first historical act is [...] the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself”. Having pointed out that men’s unique way of satisfying his needs “leads to new needs” (GI. 150,156) and gets history going, as a third step, he mentions family and reproduction. Similarly, the fourth step is claimed to be derived from the previous ones: that this production and reproduction of life generates social relationships (of cooperation, division of labour) of men to one another in addition to their relation to nature (GI. 157). The fifth step is the arising of language and consciousness (GI. 158).

We can immediately raise here the question of whether it is possible for Marx to follow the empirical methodology articulated above to justify this claim. The historical dimension of Marx’s epistemology makes it untenable to stick to a purely empirical method since it involves making generalizations across different stages of history and such generalizations can not be empirically proved. To be able to make such generalizations abstractions have to be made from actual social relations. While Marx clearly underlines importance of abstractions, he also insists that “the correct theory must be made clear and developed within the concrete conditions [real concrete] and on the basis of the existing state of things” (Letter from Marx to Dagobert Oppenheim in Cologne).

Further, he emphasizes that the real concrete must be comprehended not as “the chaotic conception of a whole” but as “a rich totality of many determinations and relations” (G. 100). In that case, there remains the question about what the method is that facilitates the proper comprehension of the real concrete. The question is, in other words, how to construct the real concrete in thought as a concrete for thought.

In order to arrive at the correct theory, abstractions have to grasp the specific characteristics that distinguish their subject-matter. In order to do this, that subject-matter has to be taken in all its interrelatedness in various forms or modes of material conditions in which it has developed as such. Marx elucidates this point in the following example:

*Capital in general*, as distinct from the particular capitals, does indeed appear (1) *only as an abstraction*; not an arbitrary abstraction, but an abstraction which grasps the specific characteristics which distinguish capital from all other forms of wealth -- or modes in which (social) production develops. These are the aspects common to every capital as such, or which make every specific sum of values into capital. And the distinctions within this abstraction are likewise abstract particularities which characterize every kind of capital, in that it is their position [*Position*] or negation [*Negation*] (e.g. fixed capital or circulating capital) (G,449)

In *Grundrisse*, Marx clearly emphasizes the importance of abstractions and categories, which facilitate our understanding of reality by assigning common elements in a multiplicity of particulars, as spelled out by him in the following passage:

*Production in general* is an abstraction, but a rational abstraction in so far as it really brings out and fixes the common element and thus saves us repetition. Still this general category, this common element sifted out by comparison, is itself segmented many times over and splits into different determinations. (G. 85)



Putting ‘production in general’ in italics in the above passage, Marx focuses our attention on the ‘generality’ of abstraction of production, but he warns us “if there is no production in general, then there is also no general production” (G. 86). That is, the truth of abstraction depends on reality.

This is how concepts attain their truth in relationship to the conditions from which they are abstracted.” (Paulocci, 151). Conceptualization plays an important role here. As Paulocci states, observation involves conceptualization and abstraction along with data collection: “what is empirically observed, the result of many determinations, must be abstracted into thought and conceptualized in a way commensurate with their essential characteristics” (Paulocci, 157).

Marx answers the question of how to decide what to abstract and what not to abstract from the whole, spelling out that “the elements which are not general and common, must be separated out from the determinations valid for production as such, so that in their unity [...] their essential difference is not forgotten” (G. 85) However, in his method, something abstracted out of the whole is not separated from its relations to others and the whole.

To go back to the example of property, if we want to comprehend property as the real concrete, abstractions (in thought) made from the real concrete should conceptualize the social relations involved in property, which are differently developed in different societies and in different epochs. That is, theory should be context-sensitive. In *Grundrisse*, Marx similarly emphasizes this in the notion of production by stating that “whenever we speak of production, then, what is meant is always production at a definite stage of social development – production by social individuals” (G, 85). For

him, in order to define 'production at all', the process of its historic development in its different relations in different societies must be taken into account. Besides this, however, he points out that "all epoch of production have certain common traits, common characteristics" and while some determinations of production belong to all epoch, some others determinations of productions can be only seen a few or definite epoch (Ibid). It is of critical importance to define the term production so that determinations common to all epochs are separated from determinations that are not common to all and belong to a definite epoch. The essential differences of these determinations must not be forgotten and the failure of modern economists "who demonstrate the eternity and harmoniousness of the existing social relations lies in this forgetting" (Ibid). Hence, this forgetting, for him, serves to an ideological purpose.

Marx gives examples of 'instrument of production' and "storing up it" to clarify what common determinations of production belong to all epochs and what specific determinations to a definite epoch. Production is possible on conditions that there is instrument of production "even if this instrument is only the hand" and that productions is stored up and includes past labor "even if it is only the facility gathered together and concentrated in the hand of the savage by repeated practice" (Ibid, 85-86). For him, production is not thinkable without these determinations. To continue with the same examples, capital is also an instrument and objectified past labor in modern bourgeois production. If we did not take into consideration the specific determinations of production in a definite epoch, capital would be 'external law', as said by Marx in the following passage:

Capital is, among other things, also an instrument of production, also objectified, past labour. Therefore capital is a general, eternal relation of nature; that is, if I leave out just the specific quality which alone makes 'instrument of production' and 'stored-up labour' into capital. (Ibid, 86)

Therefore, in order to inquire into production in concrete reality, it must be kept in mind that production is always a 'particular branch' of it. In other words, we must not lose sight of "the relation of the general characteristics of production at a given stage of social development to the particular forms of production" (Ibid). Even if we find common characteristics of production that is shared by all social and historical developments, they are not enough for finding a universally common definition of production. It is vital to comprehend that distinctive concrete forms of production such as agriculture, cattle-raising, manufactures etc, be questioned. Because the validity of the alleged common characteristics of production depends on concrete historical analyses of the specific forms of production. (Parekh, 4)

Another problem that Marx's methodology has to address involves the starting point. Marx's 'concrete' is both 'the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception' (the real concrete), and a product of 'the working-up of observation and conception into concepts' (the concrete for thought).

In *Grundrisse*, to explain how the concrete for thought arises from the real concrete, Marx describes two different methods. One is beginning with what Marx calls the "imagined concrete" and "a chaotic conception of whole" and proceeding from there to simpler abstractions. The other method is starting from abstractions and making sense of the totality not as a chaotic "whole" but as a more systematic "unity of the

diverse” in light of the abstractions produced in thought. Marx says that it is the second method that is “the scientific method”.

However the given abstractions produced by thought include ideologies that are distortions of reality. For Marx, as for Hegel, there is an interdependent relation between the development of the real concrete and the concrete for thought. However, this interdependence makes it very difficult to decide on the proper starting point. Observation begins with the real concrete (e.g., observing the movement of capital in this society) but observation of the real concrete will already be “theory-laden” at any particular stage in history. Further, it is not only the real concrete that is taken as material for theory construction; one also has to and does inevitably take into account other existing theories as well (e.g., Adam Smith. Ricardo’s theory of value, labor etc.). And again one should note that these theories are also part of the real concrete as well.

The problem with the starting point thus seems to be twofold. (1) On the one hand, Marx insists that we should start not from the concept but from the real concrete. On the other hand, he says that starting from simpler abstractions is the scientific method. (2) In ideology, as we said before, people’s ‘physical life-process’ appears ‘upside-down’. This appearance is located in the real concrete, and has to be tackled as part of the real concrete when trying to form a methodology. because of the intermingling of ideologies in to the real concrete we can not assume that what we have before us in the present is “real”; it is merely a form of appearance and this form should be deciphered to “reveal the hidden kernel”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> I want to express here thanks to Barış Yıldırım because of his contributions.

I believe that this apparent problem can be solved by observing that Marx's methodology consists of two steps. The first step begins from appearances and proceeds to identify the abstractions in them. The second step is theory construction where the essential relations in these abstractions are discovered. If we, for example, speak of the capitalist production process, science is to resolve "the visible external movement into the internal actual movement":

[T]he analysis of the real, inner connections of the capitalist production process is a very intricate thing and a work of great detail ; it is one of the tasks of science to reduce the visible and merely apparent movement to the actual inner movement. Accordingly, it will be completely self-evident that, in the heads of the agents of capitalist production and circulation, ideas must necessarily form about the laws of production that diverge completely from these laws and are merely the expression in consciousness of the apparent movement. (C v3, 428)

As said before, Marx asserts—along with Hegel—that "the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is the only way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind" and he defines that method as 'scientific' (G, 101). Even though Marx agrees with Hegel on this point, he opposes Hegel's conception of the world as "a product of concepts which thinks and generates itself". (G. 101).

In this way Hegel fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself, whereas the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind. But this is by no means the process by which the concrete itself comes into being (G. 101).

According to Marx, "abstract determination" in his method brings about "a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought" (G. 101). In *Marx's Scientific*

*Dialectic*, Paul Paolucci makes this point: “when relations are abstracted out of a whole, their most essential elements are conceptually reconfigured in the mind according to their important historical and structural interrelationships.” (Paolucci, 151). Thus, abstractions “facilitate the arrangement of historical material, to indicate the sequence of its separate strata.” However, this process involves serious methodological difficulties and questions as indicated by Marx’s warning: “our difficulties begin only when we set about the observation and the arrangement – the real depiction -- of our historical material, whether of a past epoch or of the present” (GI,155).

“To that extent the path of abstract thought, rising from the simple to combined, would correspond to real historical process” (G. 102). Marx points out that the abstract simpler categories do not necessarily “have an independent historical or natural existence predating the more concrete ones” (G. 102). It can be the case that the simpler category can achieve “its intensive and extensive development” in a more developed and complex form of society (G. 103) but it can also be the case that the simple categories appear in a “less developed whole” For example, money existed historically before capital, banks, wage labour, etc. existed (G. 102). But, for Marx, a “more developed whole” (that is, a stage in which differentiations and their interrelations appear in clearer lines) is expressed by a “more concrete category.” “The most abstract definitions, when more carefully examined, always point to a further definite concrete historical basis [...] since they have been abstracted from it in this particular form)” (The Letter from Marx to Engels, 2 April 1958).

In order to say this, however, Marx has to rely on another observation that the more concrete historical relations compose simpler categories. Because the development of

abstractions is dependent on the development of the real concrete, there is in Marx, as in Hegel, something slightly retrospective in his method. He mentions that “the latest form [of society] regards the previous ones as steps leading up to itself” (G. 106). Thus, for example, it is only thanks to the point of development that bourgeois society has reached that we can understand and criticize previous cultures. In this process, the abstract category becomes “the key” to understanding the earlier development of the thing, and for this reason categories of bourgeois society allow forming an opinion about previous social structures (G. 105). However, bourgeois society is *only a clue* for observation since it is in a contradictory form of development.

Like the forms of consciousness in Hegel, the abstraction of a certain historical epoch can attain a certain measure of truth only when the epoch that produces those abstractions reaches a level of completeness where it discovers a contradiction in itself and is thus able to criticize itself: “bourgeois economics arrived at an understanding of feudal, ancient, oriental economics only after the self criticism of bourgeois society had begun” (G. 106). Marx clearly spells out the retrospective nature of this type of self-understanding (starting from present and looking backward) in the following passage:

In the first place, I do not start out from ‘concepts,’ hence I do not start out from ‘the concept of value,’ and I do not have ‘to divide’ these in anyway. What I start out from is the simplest social form in which the labour product is presented **in contemporary** society, and this is the ‘*commodity*.’ I analyze it, and right from the beginning, in the *form in which it appears*. (NAW, 241, italics original, bolds mine)

Another example given by Marx shows the importance of self criticism for the concrete for thought to have an effect on the real concrete: “the Christian religion was able to be of assistance in reaching an objective understanding of earlier mythologies only when its own self-criticism had been accomplished to a certain degree” (G, 106). However, he points out that a certain form of society is only “rarely and only under quite specific conditions able to criticize itself” (G. 106).

### **3.5. Political Epistemology**

Marx posits a certain methodology in order to answer both what the real concrete is and how it will be changed. The points where the interaction between concrete for thought and the real concrete reveal a contradiction in the real concrete are the points where concrete for thought can determine the real concrete.

If we closely examine Marx’s writing we see that from the beginning with his young days to the end of his life, he had engaged with these questions and in them. In his letter to Arnold Ruge in September 1843, he states that “for even though the question ‘where from?’ presents no problems, the question ‘where to?’ is a rich source of confusion.” (EW, 206).

It makes sense for Marx to ask this second question of what direction the real concrete will be changed in since he lived in the epoch when capitalism was on the rise and the social structure was changing. Of course, changing always exists for Marx, but changes were quite fast in the period when he lived, and philosophers, scientists and economists were trying to understand these changes. And of course, almost all philosophers accept changes but some of these, i.e. idealists, seek for one



thing that is the source of all changes. In these circumstances, Marx asks this question because for him “internal obstacles seem greater than external difficulties” (Ibid). I think that ‘internal obstacles’ as he said refer to ideology. In ideological standpoint, dominated by ruling class., it seems to be that there was something eternal and permanent in the real concrete and because of this, the question is a ‘rich source of confusion’.

If we define ‘political epistemology’ as setting the criteria of truth which plays a role as it constructs the real concrete by abstraction in thought as the concrete for thought and presupposes that constructed concrete will serve to change real concrete, Marx’s epistemology is definitely political epistemology. Pushing him to examine the real concrete is ‘the point’ that is ‘to change the world’ and this point separates him from prior philosophies in which “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways” (T.F. 11). He spells out his epistemology dealing with politics in the following passage:

Nothing prevents us, therefore, from lining our criticism with a criticism of politics, from taking sides in politics, i.e., from entering into real struggles and identifying ourselves with them. This does not mean that we shall confront the world with new doctrinaire principles and proclaim: Here is the truth, on your knees before it! It means that we shall develop for the world new principles from the existing principles of the world. We shall not say: Abandon your struggles, they are mere folly; let us provide you with true campaign-slogans. Instead, we shall simply show the world why it is struggling, and consciousness of this is a thing it must acquire whether it wish or not. (EW, 208-209)

As seen in his famous thesis (T.F, 11) and the above passage, Marx does not separate the realm of theory from practice, even if this theory is false. But he tries to find the correct ‘scientific theory’ in order to change world. However, for him, constructing

‘scientific theory’ is not enough to change world. He clearly expresses the conditions for theory to take effect by stating that “theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses” (EW, 251). But in order to grip the masses, theory has to show ‘*ad hominem*’, the masses’ reversed life, and in order show this, it must become ‘radical’. He also emphasizes the importance of practice, as can be seen in his critiques of Feuerbach in the following passage:

[Feuerbach] regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-judaical manifestation. Hence he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary," of practical critical, activity. (GI, 143)

### **3.6. Conclusion**

Finally, in end of this chapter, we can see obviously the relationship between the concrete for thought and the real concrete. To sum up this relationship, there is a circular process where the real concrete determines the concrete for thought and the concrete for thought determines the real concrete. According to Marx, his dialectic method sets limitation between the real concrete and concrete for thought and it “does not do away with the concrete difference” (CCPE, 309). The discussion of ideology becomes relevant here. Marx uses the term ‘ideology’ both to refer to theories that are not based on the real concrete and are hence speculative, and to distortions of the real concrete and real relations that serve the ruling class in maintaining its hegemony. We see here and especially in the discussion of the real abstract how theory, even if it is ideological, can influence the real concrete. Real abstractions such as labor and capital function as real forces in the real concrete.

Marx claims that it is possible to formulate a radical theory that can likewise change the real concrete. The correct method to comprehend this circular process and make knowledge arises here as beginning with abstraction made from real concrete and conceptualizing real concrete by abstracting it in thought and reproducing the real concrete by way of thought. This method facilitates a correction of ‘the reversed appearance’ of the real concrete or seeing ‘the ensemble of social relations’ or ‘the unity of the diverse’ in ‘the chaotic whole’. Carrying this dialectic movement to level of knowledge also serves to attempt for changing the world.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter (chapter three), I have tried to uncover a certain methodology in Marx's writings by focusing on his use of the terms 'abstract' and 'concrete'. In light of chapter two we can see that the negative and positive connotations that Marx attributes to the term 'abstract' as well as his conception of 'the concrete' show that, throughout his life Marx has remained "the pupil of that mighty thinker [Hegel]" (C.vI, 20). Marx owes much to Hegel's philosophy in constituting his theory as evidenced by his expression that Hegel's system of logic is of great service to him and his declaration of himself to be. However, Marx also criticizes Hegel by stating that Hegel's dialectic stands on its head, and it must be "inverted".

In this chapter, I endeavor to sum up the main points of Marx's complicated relation to Hegel which we have been clarifying in the previous chapters in terms of Hegel's influence on him and his critiques of Hegel. In light of this examination I contend that the influence of Hegel on Marx continues throughout his life and that Marx's epistemology is Hegelian as opposed to some claims that he completely cut himself off from Hegelian influence.

Marx states in the letter to his father in November 1837 that he found something to disturb him in Hegel's philosophy, as evidently seen in the following passage:

I had read fragments of Hegel's philosophy, the grotesque craggy melody of which did not appeal to me. Once more I wanted to dive into the sea, but with the definite intention of establishing that the nature of the mind is just as necessary, concrete and firmly based as the nature of the body. My aim was no longer to practise tricks of swordsmanship, but to bring genuine pearls into the light of day. (MER, 7)

On the other hand, in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* Engels writes, after Marx's death, what Marx takes to Hegel's philosophy,

The great basic thought that the world is not to be comprehended as a complex of ready-made things, but as a complex of processes, in which the things apparently stable no less than their mind images in our heads, the concepts, go through an uninterrupted change of coming into being and passing away.

According to Marx, the dialectical structure of the world is based on empirical grounds in the nature of material reality, and is not metaphysical as said by Hegel. It is not Spirit's realization through time. For him, Hegel's dialectics includes mystification and he is in opposition to "the mystifying side of Hegelian dialectics". Hegel transformed the process of thinking which is in fact the "life-process of the human brain" into an independent subject called "the idea", and in Hegel system "real world is only external, phenomenal for of the 'the Idea'" (C.vI, 19). So Marx explicitly states that "my dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite", and this means that "the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought" (Ibid, 19). Despite Hegel's mystification of the dialectic, Hegel, for Marx, is the first

to present dialectic's general form, but "with him [Hegel] it [dialectic] is standing on its head" and "it [dialectic] must be turned right side up again" (Ibid, 20). In short, Hegel's dialectic makes ideas separate from material conditions and treats them as if they are an independent subject, and Marx's objection is emphasized by a sentence that there is no independent idea or concept apart from material condition.

Even though Hegel's philosophy and his dialectical method in general have been presented in the second chapter, generally reminding it will stand us in good stead. Hegel defines reality as being organically and developmentally structured and based on purely metaphysical grounds. Reality is not captured by empirical observations, but by the necessary movement of thought produced by the philosopher's own minds, and the dialectical structure of thinking is comprehended by reason (Wood, 215-216). The Spirit realizes and externalizes itself in and through time, and the movement of passing through this externalization of itself in nature is in order to understand history in the concept because it is apprehended in history in which it returns to itself and grasps itself. (Tucker, 29)

After this general picture, it is necessary for seeing Marx's relation to Hegel to give some details about Hegel's methodology. According to Hegel, the universal as the first and simple moment of the Notion particularizes itself and becomes a concrete particular that is 'subsequent to the universal'. The particular is a mediated moment of the universal, which is concrete but presupposes the abstract universal (SL, 801-802). The movement that begins with the abstract and ends with the concrete constitutes synthetic cognition.

Synthetic cognition, for Hegel, ‘proceeds from the unknown to the known’. In other words, without mediation, the Spirit’s knowledge of itself and nature remains ‘abstract’. For this reason, the Spirit urges itself to become concrete and particular. In its particularization as a movement throughout history, it is able to know itself as well as the given concrete. In this context, synthetic cognition is grounded in analytic cognition although it is the reverse of analytic cognition. Analytical cognition consists in ‘dissolving the given concrete’, ‘isolating its distinctions’ and separating particulars’ qualities than ‘seem to be inessential’. And hence, the task of this analytic method is ‘to elevate’ the given concrete ‘into the form of universal abstraction’; in other words, it ‘proceeds from the known to the unknown.’ Thanks to analytic cognition, the Spirit is able to cognize both itself and given concrete as ‘an abstract universality’. However, in analytical cognition, what is given— regardless of whether it is concrete material or itself—is still standing over and against the Spirit because by this analytical method the Spirit just apprehends it and achieves ‘finite truth’. And now Spirit must prove or confirm that truth but to do so, it must change the given concrete. Thus, while it is mediating itself, it constitutes a new concrete by particularizing its abstract universal form. In the concrete that results from this movement as a whole, the Spirit achieves ‘infinite’ or ‘absolute’ truth. And this time, the given concrete does not stand over and against the Spirit, but as the concrete constituted by it and the Spirit has attained unity. This time too, it does not only apprehend the concrete but also comprehends it.

In order to see the similarities and differences between Marx and Hegel, we have to understand how the terms ‘abstract’ and ‘concrete’, which have different meanings in their philosophies separately, interact. In Hegel’s philosophy ‘abstractness’ refers to

‘one-sidedness,’ ‘lack of content’ and ‘lack of mediation.’ In addition to these, its *ontological meaning* is the Spirit’s simple relation to itself--I i.e., the Spirit carries absolute mediation in abstract (in other words, it intrinsically carries the turning into the concrete by mediation) but it is not mediated yet. And its *epistemological meaning* is that what is abstracted from the concrete leads us to the abstract universal or Spirit, and by abstraction we treat a thing as if it were external to the concrete because we omit ‘properties of the concrete’ although the concrete constitutes its content. On the other hand, while the term ‘concrete’ in Hegel’s philosophy *ontologically* refers to a state in which there is ‘many-sidedness’ and ‘completed mediation of Spirit’ or refers to the ‘whole’ as a result of dialectic movement, it *epistemologically* represents the comprehensive side of Spirit. Thus, the concrete can be understood as “the Spirit plus its setting.” (Hibben, 12)

In Marx’s philosophy, on the one hand, the term abstract<sup>5</sup> firstly relates to conceptual thought that makes the connection between the real concrete and the concrete for thought. In this sense, by way of abstraction made from the real concrete, we present differences and similarities among particulars and define the particulars in accordance with differences and resemblances. And these kinds of abstractions must refer to the real concrete or be derived from the real concrete. Secondly, abstraction refers to something in reality, which is historically and socially determined and appears in a social relation such as abstract labor. On the other hand, the term concrete similarly refers to two things: the first is ‘the real concrete’ in which all historically determined social relations and material conditions are included, and the second is ‘the concrete for thought’ which refers to reproduction of the real concrete

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<sup>5</sup>Even though it has many meanings in his usage as said previous chapter, here we will consider the two meanings which he uses in his method



in thought by means of abstraction. Shortly, it consists of material conditions plus humans setting on these conditions.

If we generally look at the two paragraphs above, we can see the similarities between Hegel's and Marx's conceptions of the 'concrete'. In Hegel, the concrete as the whole consists of the Spirit's action on the material world, including the Spirit itself and thus it is the result of dialectic movement. In Marx, the real concrete as a whole, like Hegel, consists of the material world and human's actions with regard to both the material world and themselves, and thus it is a result of dialectic movement.

However, the differences between Hegel and Marx lie in the meanings of the term 'abstract' in their philosophies, separately. In one sense, the meaning of 'abstract' in Marx's usage is completely different from Hegel's, but in another sense, it is similar. It is completely different from Hegel's just because Hegel's abstract refers to Spirit's movements on nature. In contrast to Hegel, Marx's abstract does not refer to something external to humans' conducts. Hegel's abstract consists of ontologically Spirit's self realizations and epistemologically has a meaning as Spirit's inherent movement i.e., Spirit in itself. However, in Marx, the abstract is epistemologically a means to know nature and humans actions towards themselves and each other, and unlike Hegel, it does not obtain its meaning from the subject-matter's inherent activity.

However, from an ontological standpoint, we can see the similarity between Marx and Hegel, but it should be kept in the mind that this similarity is always with 'essential differences'.

Let us briefly recall Marx's methodology in order to see the similarity between Marx and Hegel. In *Grundrisse*, Marx explains how the concrete and the abstract interact by describing two different methods. The first is beginning with what Marx calls the "imagined concrete" and "a chaotic conception of whole" and proceeding from there to simpler abstractions. The second method is starting from abstractions and making sense of the totality not as a chaotic "whole" but as a more systematic "unity of the diverse" in light of the abstractions produced in thought. Marx says that second method is "the scientific method".

Marx agrees with Hegel on the method of proceeding from the abstract to the concrete or from the simple to the combined, stating that "the path of abstract thought, rising from the simple to the combined, would correspond to the real historical process" (G, 102). But this is not to be the same with Hegel's method in which the Spirit's movement begins with an abstract form and ends with a concrete form although there is similarity. In this method, as stated by Marx, Hegel "fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself". But on the other hand, Marx grants that this way is "only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind" (G., 101).

When Marx asserts that "the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind" and defines that method as 'scientific' (G, 101), he is obviously under the influence of Hegel's logic. Marx's 'scientific method', 'ascending from the abstract to concrete', corresponds with Hegel's synthetic method, which moves from the universal to particular, and 'grasps the multiplicity of

determinations in their unity’, and the first path which Marx defined as the wrong method corresponds with Hegel’s analytic method as well.

Moreover, he gives Hegel as an example, saying that “Hegel [...] correctly begins the *Philosophy of Right* with possession, this being the subject’s simplest juridical relation” (G, 102). In *Hegel’s Freedom of Idea*, Alan Patten emphasizes that “the development from the abstract sphere of property and contract to concrete sphere of the state” in *Philosophy of Right* is ‘an immanent progression and production of its [...] own determinations’ (Patten, 178, PR, 59). According to Hegel, this movement is not only then “particularizations of the universal but also *produces* them” (PR, 60; *italic’s mine*).

According to both Marx and Hegel, the concrete given is the starting point for thought. In Hegel, the concrete given is apprehended by Spirit itself as abstract universal, as a first act. Then Spirit passes into act to comprehend both the given concrete and itself, and this movement—apprehending and comprehending- goes on in accordance with Spirit’s particularizations. Thus the concrete given, both in Hegel and Marx, has been historically constructed by previous actions—while this action in Hegel is obviously the Spirit act on nature, in Marx it is social human activity on both nature and themselves. Thought processes in Hegel refer to an independent subject, i.e., Spirit, and have priority over the concrete given, whereas in Marx they are not something independent or transcendent, but a result of previous human social experiences. However, Marx does not simply oppose universality or equalization of some entity in order to know the world but rather, he defends that what is universal is abstraction from what is “historically constituted with the development and consolidation of [...] determined form of social relations” (Postpone, 162)

The world, or in Marx's terms, the 'real concrete' is not made up of the abstract universal's (Spirit) particularizations as said by Hegel, but it is made up of various particular forms of social relations. Marx does not cut off these particulars from each other but argues that there are certain relations among them in which productive activity is the dominant relation, and a certain form of productive activity presupposes the preceding ones. Thus, a movement from the universal to the particular or from the abstract to the concrete, for Marx, is 'only way' to understand real concrete. But, Marx strictly says that this movement is only in thought, not in reality. In other words, there is no ontological process of particularizations but epistemological process of universalizing in thought

Nevertheless, we can claim that Marx's political epistemology refers to ontological particularizations that are similar to Hegel's. To recall Marx's method, he constructs a political epistemology in which method plays a role. this role is consists of two types of activities. In the last analysis, we can speak in Hegelian terms, and liken these two activities to first analytically 'cognizing' the real concrete, and secondly, synthetically comprehending it. In other words, 'cognizing' the real concrete historically and socially is determined in the circular movement from the real concrete to the concrete for thought and from the concrete for thought to the real concrete, and so on is the first activity, but it should be noted that this movement is not merely given. If we shortly state this first role; it is 'cognizing' that is 'proceeding from the known to the unknown'. Thus, in his political epistemology, he analyses real concrete that is historically constructed by preceding generations and carries some characteristic of them in order to grasp its real movement by making abstractions and general categories and laws are drawn off in this way.

Secondly, ‘synthetically cognizing’ the real concrete is by the reconstruction of the real concrete by way of abstractions in thought as the concrete for thought, and in this kind of cognition, Marx sets an aim to ‘change’ the real concrete. In other words; it is cognizing the real concrete ‘proceeding from ‘the unknown to the known’. In the same example, Marx spells out his aim that is to destroy the class system. But this time, “Man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice” (T.F., 2). Because the abstract form of both Marx’s theory and Hegel’s Spirit is empty without the concrete, for Marx, theory gains its truth in practice, just like the Spirit in Hegel’s philosophy that confirms its truth in the concrete by realizing itself. If we briefly state Marx’s political epistemology in Hegelian terms, we firstly ‘apprehend of what is’ and then we ‘comprehend of what is’<sup>6</sup>.

I think that Marx uses these concepts in his political epistemology saying that “the theoretical mind, once liberated in itself, turns into practical energy” (MER, 9). According to Marx, the idealistic view of philosophy explains “the particular reality by the essence” and “the individual existence by the Idea” (Ibid). Philosophical systems reduce the real world to ‘abstract totality’ and this abstractness constitutes a contradiction to the real world. Thus the philosophers are chained in this totality that is created by them wherein the practice of philosophy remains theoretical. To overcome this contradiction, philosophy should liberate itself from itself and turn to

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<sup>6</sup> We know that in Hegel’s philosophy distinction between ‘apprehension’ and ‘comprehension’ lies in the point that while the verb ‘to apprehend’ refers to consciousness’ awareness of something, the verb ‘to comprehend’ refers, besides apprehending, to consciousness’s ability of thinking on and knowing its object. But this time thinking comes through to us knowing the object by changing or modifying it as well as knowing the subject itself.

real practice, and this turning facilitates the world to 'become philosophical', and also philosophy 'becomes worldly' (Ibid, 10)

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