

The Critique of Political Economy¹

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All of Marx's principal works carry the title or the subtitle "A Critique of Political Economy," starting with the posthumously published 1857-58 manuscripts of the *Grundrisse zu einer Kritik der Politischen Economie* (that is: *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*), followed by the book he published in 1859 under the title *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and crowned by his magisterial, even if unfinished, *Capital*, which has as its subtitle *A Critique of Political Economy*. Moreover, the extensive volumes of his *Theories of Surplus Value* also belong to the same complex of investigations. Thus, obviously, the critical settling of accounts with political economy occupied a central place in Marx's lifework.

There had to be a very good reason why Marx dedicated so many years of his life to the critical assessment of political economy. As he made it explicit in his 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, that was because he became convinced that "the anatomy of 'civil society' has to be sought in political economy."²

Understandably, he contrasted in the most outspoken terms "classical political economy" with "vulgar economy," saying that "by classical political economy, I understand that economy which, since the time of W. Petty, has investigated the *real relations of production* in bourgeois society, in contradistinction to vulgar economy, which deals with appearances only, ruminates without ceasing on the materials long since provided by scientific economy, and there seeks plausible explanations of the most obtrusive phenomena, for bourgeois daily use, but for the rest, confines itself to systematizing in *a pedantic way*, and proclaiming for everlasting

2 Marx, **A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy**, p. 20.

truths, the trite ideas held by the self-complacent bourgeoisie with regard to their own world, to them the *best of all possible worlds*.”³

However, the sharp treatment and rejection of “vulgar economy” is of a thoroughly secondary importance in this enterprise. The real target of the Marxian critique is *classical political economy*, precisely because in its time it has investigated—admittedly from capital's vantage point—the *real relations of production* in bourgeois society. The great practical socio-historical task is the radical supersession of the bourgeois order itself which involves, of course, the critical overcoming of those theories that embody genuine scientific discoveries revealing the nature of that social reproductive order, in contrast to their pedantic and shallow apologetic vulgarizations. That is the only way to learn from the historically known “anatomy of civil society” incorporated in the work of classical political economy. This means a learning process undertaken in order to be able to go beyond the “civil society” depicted in classical political economy, no matter how idealized the image presented by the great representatives of economic theory. For the idea of a *critical supersession* cannot be simplistically equated with the notion of a straightforward *negation* and *rejection*. A valid critique must incorporate also the *strong points*—i.e., the real achievements—of the scientific adversary in the dialectical sense of a “*preserving supersession*” and “*superseding preservation*.”

The defining characteristics of the “new historic form” advocated by Marx—labour's hegemonic alternative to the established mode of social metabolic reproduction—must be formulated in their own terms of reference. But such a process cannot take place in a historical vacuum. The important point of theoretical contact between the existing social order

3 Marx, **Capital**, vol. I, p. 81.

and the envisaged alternative society can only be classical political economy inasmuch as the latter genuinely contains the “anatomy of civil society.” For to our own days classical political economy continues to play a major role—both directly and through its apologetic vulgarizations—⁴ in the regulating processes of the capitalist order. The points of criticism spelled out by Marx, or by anybody else, in order to permanently supersede the representative theoretical generalizations formulated by the classical figures of political economy from capital's standpoint, acquire their validity only if the *raisons d'etre*—that is the objective structural determinations at the roots of the theories concerned—are highlighted in the sense of an “immanent critique.” That is to say, a critique which acknowledges also the special circumstances and historical motivations of the thinkers in question, and not only their class limitations as viewed from the qualitatively different standpoint and necessary distance of the envisaged “new historic form.”

This is why it should not come as a surprise when we read Marx's generous comments on the classics of political economy, indicating at the same time also the reasons why they *had to adopt* a limited and problematical position. To quote him:

Political economy has indeed analysed, however incompletely, value and its magnitude, and has discovered what lies beneath these forms. But it has never once asked the question why labour is represented by the value of its product and labour time by the magnitude of that value. These formulae, which bear it stamped upon them in unmistakable letters that they belong to a state of society, in which the process of production has the mastery over man, instead of being controlled by him, such formulae appear to

4 It is enough to remember in this respect the reactionary use to which Hayek puts the work of Adam Smith in his crusading writings, like **The Road to Serfdom**.

the bourgeois intellect to be as much a *self-evident necessity imposed by Nature* as productive labour itself...

The insufficiency of Ricardo's analysis of the magnitude of value, and his analysis is by far the best, will appear from the 3rd and 4th books of this work. As regards value in general, it is the weak point of the classical school of political economy that it nowhere, expressly and with full consciousness, distinguishes between labour, as it appears in the value of a product and the same labour, as it appears in the use-value of that product...

It is one of the chief failings of classical economy that it has never succeeded, by means of its analysis of commodities, and, in particular, of their value, in discovering that form under which value becomes exchange-value. Even Adam Smith and Ricardo, the best representatives of the school, treat the form of value as a thing of no importance, as having no connection with the inherent nature of the commodities. The reason for this is not solely because their attention is entirely absorbed in the analysis of the magnitude of value. It lies deeper. The value-form of the product of labour is not only the most abstract, but is also the most universal form, taken by the product in bourgeois production, and stamps that production as a particular species of social production, and thereby—gives it its *special historical character*. If then we treat this mode of production as one *eternally fixed by Nature for every state of society*, we necessarily overlook that which is the *diferentia specifica of the value-form*, and consequently of the commodity form, and of its further developments, money-form, capital-form, &c. We consequently find that economists, who are thoroughly agreed as to labour-time being the measure of the magnitude of value, have the most strange and contradictory ideas of money, the perfected form of the general equivalent.⁵

5 Marx, **Capital**, vol. 1, pp. 80-81.

THIS TAKES US TO AN ISSUE of the greatest methodological importance. For through the critical examination of the way in which classical political economy deals with the money-form, Marx focuses attention on a methodologically frequent-and at the same time socially most revealing—*reversal* of the actual historical relationships involved. Such reversal inevitably transubstantiates in a reconciliatory way the real nature of the ongoing processes.

Attempting to elucidate an apparently most complicated problem Marx insists that “The difficulty lies, not in comprehending that money is a commodity, but in discovering how, why, and by what means a commodity becomes money.”⁶ To do so, it is not enough to point out the failures and insufficiencies of the explanations offered by classical political economy. It is also necessary to underline the objective socio-historical determinations underlying such failures. Accordingly, Marx makes it clear that “What appears to happen is, not that gold becomes money, in consequence of all other commodities expressing their values in it, but, on the contrary, that all other commodities universally express their values in gold, because it is money. The *intermediary steps* of the process vanish in the result and leave no trace behind... Hence the *magic of money*. In the form of society now under consideration, the behaviour of men in the social process of production is purely atomic. Hence, their relations to each other in production assume a material character independent of their control and conscious individual action. These facts manifest themselves at first by products as a general rule taking the form of commodities. We have seen how the progressive development of a society of commodity producers stamps one privileged commodity with the character of money. Hence, the

6 Ibid., p. 92.

riddle presented by money is but the riddle presented by commodities; only it now strikes us in its most *glaring form*.”⁷

What needs to be explained is thus the “magic of money” which assumes the form of the “riddle of money” inseparable from the “riddle of commodities” in generalized commodity production. But the solution of such riddles requires the adoption of the right method. The key issue here is the *“diferentia specifica of the value-form”* mentioned earlier. Since in accordance with the important methodological principle that “the key to the anatomy of the ape is the anatomy of human beings,”⁸ and not vice versa, i.e., that the highest form of development opens up the possibility of explaining the lower forms—within the historically most advanced and correspondingly many-sided socioeconomic framework of development it becomes possible to find answers to the indicated “riddles.” But they cannot be elucidated without a *fully comprehensive* historical analysis of human development which investigates the metabolic relationship between humankind and nature as well as among the individuals themselves, on their objective ground of determination. That is, in a way which is simultaneously *social ontological* and *comprehensively historical*. Which means an analysis of the *“diferentia specifica”* that constantly bears in mind the totality of socio-historical development leading to the most advanced phase through the demonstration of its *overall genesis*, while subsuming or incorporating in its explanatory results also the relevant defining characteristics of the earlier phases.

In this sense Marx explains that “Money is a crystal formed of necessity in the course of the exchanges, whereby different products of

7 Ibid., pp. 92-3.

8 See Marx's Introduction to the **Grundrisse**.

labour are practically equated to one another and thus by practice converted into commodities.”⁹ The ground on which this conversion can take place is both social ontological and historical in a comprehensive sense, going well beyond the capitalistic phase of development both in relation to the past and with regard to the future. To quote Marx:

Objects in themselves are external to man, and consequently *alienable* by him. In order that this *alienation* may be reciprocal, it is only necessary for men, by a tacit understanding, to treat each other as private owners of those alienable objects, and by implication as independent individuals. But such a state of reciprocal independence has no existence in a primitive society based on property in common, whether such a society takes the form of a patriarchal family, an ancient Indian community, or a Peruvian Inca State. The exchange of commodities, therefore, first begins on the boundaries of such communities, at their points of contact with other *similar communities*, or with members of the latter. So soon, however, as products once become commodities in the external relations of a community, they also, by reaction, become so in its internal intercourse... In the course of time, therefore, some portion at least of the products of labour must be produced with a special view to exchange. From that moment the distinction becomes firmly established between the utility of an object for the purposes of consumption, and its utility for the purposes of exchange. Its use-value becomes distinguished from its exchange-value...

The necessity for a value-form grows with the increasing number and variety of the commodities exchanged. The problem and the means of solution arise simultaneously... *Nomad* races are the first to develop the *money-form*, because all their worldly goods consist of moveable objects and are therefore *directly alienable* and because their mode of life, by bringing them into contact with foreign communities, solicits the exchange of products.¹⁰

9 Marx, **Capital**, vol. 1, p. 86.

10 Ibid., pp. 87-8.

Thus it is necessary to understand the *historical depth* of these developments not only in order to grasp the proper nature and strength, together with the limitations, of the present form of ubiquitous generalized commodity production, but also the challenges for the future. For it is far too simplistic to envisage the institution of labour's hegemonic alternative to capital's social reproductive order by means of the political overthrow of the capitalist state. The latter is *reversible*, as painful historical evidence shows, and can only be a part of the transformative task. For the historic challenge consists in going *beyond capital* in the full sense of the term, embracing all dimensions of the complex emancipatory process, including its social ontological dimensions reaching a long way back into the past, as indicated above. Thus, both the proper understanding of the multi-dimensional characteristics of the established order (which through their actual historical unfolding turn that order into a genuine *organic system*) and the corresponding elaboration of the strategies required for its radical transformation (which must also envisage the alternative social metabolic order as an objectively sustainable *organic system*) can only be defined in a thoroughly historical sense.

However, what we are presented with in the tendentious conceptualizations of these processes conceived from capital's vantage point by even the greatest representatives of political economy, is an arbitrary abstraction from the "differentia specifica," i.e., the necessary and very specific objective determinations of the most developed form of *generalized commodity production* of the present. This is done for two-paradoxically complementary-reasons. First, in order to be able to project the generalized form of commodity production into the most remote past. And second, in order to draw a direct line of connection between the

archaic precapitalist forms and the present. In both ways the political economist conceptualizations succeed in *obliterating the historical character* of the complex developments which had actually led from the *sporadic* and *local* exchange of commodities to the historically given and, due to its ultimately explosive antagonistic contradictions necessarily transient, even if in a determinate period universally prevailing, capitalist form.

Thus, the characteristic political economist's theoretical images are formulated from capital's standpoint in the interest of eternalizing the bourgeois mode of production "as one *eternally fixed by Nature for every state of society.*" What disappears in this revealing way from the picture is the *all-important dimension of historical genesis* of the end result. Its obliteration opens the gates to the complete reversal of the actually unfolding antagonistic, but structurally entrenched, relationships. As a result so many things can be totally misrepresented in a self-servingly "timeless" reconciliatory fashion.

We have seen earlier that the actual historical origin of the property relations of the bourgeois economy—whereby the means of production are privately expropriated by the personifications of capital and kept permanently under their control—is grossly misrepresented in the categories of political economy as neutrally "*extra-economic,*" hence by definition exempted from all possible critique of capitalist economic exploitation. In reality, however, we are talking about an inherently historic process—i.e., the "evolutionary history of both capital and labour"—of which the most brutal forms of capital's so-called "*primitive accumulation,*" including the extermination of more than one hundred thousand "vagrants" and "vagabonds" in England alone, is an *integral* part. Besides, the *raison d'être* of the "extra-economic" origin of the exploitative process—

that is, the permanent *subjugation of labour* to a *separate commanding authority*—is fully reproduced and perpetuated under capitalism, even if in a different form. At the same time, the key issue of the violent change from the original unity of the working subject with the objective conditions of his labour to the capitalist modality in which he is *structurally separated* from those objective conditions—“a separation which is only fully completed in the relationship between wage-labour and capital”—is totally obliterated, enabling thereby both in political economy and in philosophy the conveniently false theorization of the *subject-object relationship* through which capital's usurpatory pseudo-subject can self-legitimizingly maintain its rule over labour, and of course over society as a whole, forever.

Thus, focusing attention on what really needs an explanation—i.e., in the just mentioned case the historical process of the *separation* of the means of production from living labour, and with regard to the earlier discussed mysterious “money-form” and “value-relation” the question of why the “riddle of money” is inseparable from the “riddle of commodities” in generalized commodity production—is very far from being an academic question. It goes to the heart of substantive social relations by putting into relief the vital methodological importance of their *historical dimension* and their constant violation by even the outstanding figures of political economy in the service of the *eternalization* of capital's social order.

THE FACT THAT A PRODUCTIVE ORDER constitutes an *organic system*, as capital's mode of social metabolic reproduction undoubtedly does, can not mean at all that it is exempted from the objective conditions and determinations of its own *historical genesis*, even if such genesis is not obvious at first sight, due to the mystifying overturning power of the actual

socioeconomic processes themselves, as well as to their tendentious ideological rationalizations in political economy and philosophy.

We can see this clearly explained in a methodologically most important passage from Marx's *Grundrisse*. Setting out from investigating the historical relationship between capital and landed property, this is how he defines the matter:

if the first form of industry, large-scale manufacture, already presupposes dissolution of landed property, then the latter is in turn conditioned by the subordinate development of capital in its primitive (medieval) forms which has taken place in the cities, and at the same time by the effect of the flowering of manufacture and trade in other countries (thus the influence of Holland on England in the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century). These countries themselves had already undergone the process, agriculture had been sacrificed to cattle-raising, and grain was obtained from countries which were left behind, such as Poland, etc., by import (Holland again).¹¹

After summarily sketching the historical background in this way, in order to clarify these matters in relation to England (which Marx considers “in this respect the model country for the other continental countries”),¹² he spells out his general methodological points as follows:

It must be kept in mind that the new forces of production and relations of production do not develop out of *nothing*, nor drop from the sky, nor from the womb of the self-positing Idea; but from within and in antithesis to the existing development of production and the inherited, traditional relations of property. While in the *completed* bourgeois system every economic relation *presupposes every other in its bourgeois economic form*, and

11 Marx, **Grundrisse**, pp. 277-8.

12 Ibid., p. 277.

everything *posited* is thus also a *presupposition*, this is the case with *every organic system*. This organic system itself, *as a totality*, has its *presuppositions*, and its development to its totality consists precisely in *subordinating all elements of society to itself*, or in creating but of it the organs which it still lacks. *This is historically how it becomes a totality*. The process of becoming this totality forms a moment of its process, of its development.¹³

At the same time, in direct continuation of the lines just quoted, Marx brings into focus the socio-economically vital substantive relationship between capital and wage labour for understanding the overall historical process and the deliberate economic as well as political adjustments that must be made when the conditions of the newly unfolding developments so require in the interest of the expanding capital system. This is how he illustrates the problem with a particular historical example:

On the other hand, if within one society the modern relations of production, i.e. capital, are developed to its totality, and this society then seizes hold of a new territory, as e.g. the colonies, then it finds, or rather its representative, the capitalist, finds, that his capital ceases to be capital without wage labour, and that one of the presuppositions of the latter is not landed property in general, but modern landed property; landed property which, as capitalist rent, is expensive, and which, as such, excludes the direct use of the soil by the individuals. Hence Wakefield's theory of colonies, followed in practice by the English government in Australia. Landed property is here artificially made more expensive in order to transform the workers into wage workers, to make capital act as capital, and thus to make the new colony *productive*; to develop wealth in it, instead of using it, as in America, for the momentary deliverance of the wage labourers. Wakefield's theory is infinitely important for a correct understanding of modern landed property.¹⁴

13 Ibid., p. 278.

As we can see, capital's fully developed *organic system* cannot successfully maintain its necessary mode of self-expansory reproduction without a suitably profitable domination of wage labour under all circumstances, including the rather unusual setting of a unique form of colonial expansion in Australia. For the economic domination of labour always remains the vital *presupposition* of the system, including the conditions of generalized commodity production. Naturally, landed property must be turned into *capitalist agriculture* in order to fit in a proper way into capital's organic system, otherwise precisely the *organic character of that system* would be disrupted. The outcome is then, obviously, a question of the relation of forces under the prevailing circumstances. Given the historical dominance of generalized commodity production in England by the time when the need for instituting the conditions of capitalist agriculture arises in colonially occupied Australia, there can be no doubt as to the establishment of the necessary presupposition of profitable wage-labour, to be achieved through the subordination of all elements of society by capital to itself and thereby "creating the organs which it still lacks."

How exactly the presuppositions are created depends, of course, on the nature of the prevailing circumstances; obviously very different in the case of nineteenth century Australia from the *historical genesis* of the capital system in its entirety. In the present context it does not matter at all whether the establishment of the required presuppositions assumes the "gentle" form of political-economic adjustments recommended by Wakefield in nineteenth century Australia, under the fully developed

14 Ibid. Edward Gibbon Wakefield (1796-1862) is author of *A View of the Art of Colonization, with Present Reference to the British Empire*, London, 1849. He proposed that the government should reserve land in the colonies and put a higher price on it than prevailed in the open market.

conditions of generalized commodity production in the colonial “mother country,” or the extreme brutality and violence of capital's *primitive accumulation* powerfully analysed in Marx's *Capital*. But it is very important to bear in mind that the development of the *capital system* as a whole has a *historical depth* and a range of *social ontological metabolic determinations*—as clearly indicated by Marx himself in some of the passages quoted from *Capital* above—incomparably greater than the few centuries of its specific *capitalist phase*. Without understanding the nature of such determinations, some of which reach back thousands of years into the past, we cannot have a proper measure of capital's *organic system*, and especially not of the challenges that must be faced and overcome through the qualitatively different organic system of labour's necessary *hegemonic alternative* to the established mode of social metabolic reproduction. We shall have to return to this issue in the next section, concerned with the question of “Self-Critique as a Methodological Principle.” For the tragic failures and reversals of the past had much to do with the underlying problems.

The eternalizing orientation of political economy contradicted in every sense the important methodological principles enumerated by Marx in the *Grundrisse* quoted above. It treated its idealized socioeconomic and political order as if it “dropped from the sky or from the womb of the self-positing Idea.” It was not interested in the slightest in what went on before its arrival on the historical stage, let alone in what might come *after it*. The questions of “before” and “after” could not constitute any part of its explanatory framework, except in the form of arbitrary projections backwards and forwards, postulated on the basis of the proclaimed unchangeable “*natural*” character of the existent.

The circumstance that “in the *completed* bourgeois system every economic relation *presupposes every other in its bourgeois economic form*, and everything *posited* is thus also a *presupposition*” was considered even by the outstanding figures of political economy the amply sufficient ground for assuming the *eternal validity* of the historically established and now dominant operating principles of their reproductive order, ignoring the fact that the kind of circular relationship between what happens to be *posited* and what is already a *presupposition* in their order is characteristic of *all organic systems*, irrespective of the duration of their *life-span*; i.e., that the relationship of that kind cannot provide any guarantee whatsoever for the future. In this way the proud *eternalization* of the given order characteristic of their approach constituted at the same time an incorrigible *vicious circle*. In other words, it was equivalent to the circular apologetics of the structurally entrenched mode of social metabolic reproduction, oriented towards making disappear in the theoretical images conceived from capital's vantage point both the *historical genesis* of their system and the feasibility of its *historical supersession*.

To be sure, the circularity inseparable from the theoretical eternalization offered in political economy was by no means a pure invention of the thinkers concerned. It had its roots in the *perverse circularity* of the capital system itself in its objective constitution. That is to say, it corresponded to the fact that *commodity* is both the *presupposition* and the *product* of capital's development as a globally unfolding system of societal reproduction. In this sense, without understanding the precise nature of the capital system's objective circularity—through which living labour as *objectified* and *alienated labour* becomes capital and, as *personified capital* confronts as well as dominates Labour—there can be no

escape from the vicious circle of capital's expanded self-reproduction. For the power dominating labour is the circularly transformed power of social labour itself, assuming a "stunted/travestied form" and asserting itself in the mind-boggling "fetishistic situation when the *product is the proprietor of the producer*."¹⁵ In other words, "the 'social character', etc., of the worker's labour confronts him, both 'notionally' and 'in fact', as not only alien, but hostile and antagonistic, and as *objectified* and *personified* in capital."¹⁶

Thus, in order to be able to break out of the vicious circle of capital as the established mode of social metabolic reproduction, it is necessary to confront the fetishism of the system in its fully developed form · of generalized commodity production, as reflected in and systematically conceptualized by the major figures of political economy in their "anatomy of civil society."

In this sense, while it is understandable that the eternalizing circularity of political economy *reflected*, and in a reconciliatory way *conceptualized*, the perverse but objective circularity of the capital system itself, that is by no means the whole picture. If it was, in that case the "immanent critique" generously exercised by Marx—in full recognition of the objective ground of determinations and the remarkable scientific achievements of classical political economy—should not have been transformed, as indeed it *had to be*, into a *radical critique* of the theoretical images conceived from capital's vantage point.

The weighty reason why even the classics of political economy had to be subjected to a radical critique was that their conformity to the

15 Marx, **Economic Works: 1861-1864**, *In: Collected Works*, vol. 34, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1975, p. 109. Marx's emphases.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 429.

standpoint of capital necessarily carried with it not simply “overlooking” but, worse than that, ideologically rationalizing and justifying with devotion the innermost *antagonistic structural characteristics* of the established mode of social metabolic control. Thus when the best representatives of the classical school recognized and explicitly acknowledged some blatant contradiction—as, for instance, when Adam Smith condemned the fact that “the people who clothe the world are in rags themselves,” as we have seen above—such criticism, despite its to us obvious severity, remained an *isolated insight*, never putting into doubt the overall idealization of the capital system. Even Adam Smith could not see any contradiction whatsoever between the miserable conditions of life of the overwhelming majority of the people, in rags, while themselves clothing the world, and his own wholesome praise for capital's social reproductive order in its entirety as “*the natural system of perfect liberty and justice.*”¹⁷

The major representatives of classical political economy had no motivation for a critical assessment of their established “*organic system.*” It was enough for them that it was organic and that it functioned as a successfully *expanding* mode of controlling societal reproduction. The fact that the dynamic self-expansionary historical tendency of the capital system, based on the necessary structural subjugation of labour, was dense with ultimately explosive *antagonistic contradictions*, could not carry any weight for them. For their interpretation of the given *organic system—*which they equated with the *perfect natural order*—was incompatible with an adequate *historical* conception. This is why even a great philosophical genius, Hegel, who identified himself with capital's standpoint of political economy, had to terminate history in the *present*: by postulating colonially

17 Adam Smith, **The Wealth of Nations**, p. 273.

dominant Europe as “absolutely the end of history” in his own version of the perfect “*organic system*,” corresponding to the historically objectified, and fully realized, *eternal present* of the Absolute Idea.

The only way to formulate a genuine historical theory in Marx's age, under the motivating impact of mid-nineteenth century socioeconomic turmoil as well as major political upheavals, was by radically questioning the objective circularity of capital's *antagonistic organic system*, together with its reconciliatory conceptualizations. To be able to do that in methodologically viable terms the *standpoint of analysis* had to be shifted from the *anti-historical* vantage point of capital's organic system—a system absolutely inconceivable without the permanent subjugation and exploitative structural domination of labour—to that of labour's hegemonic alternative as a *historically open-ended organic system*.

Only those could engage in the radical critique of both the established order itself and of its reconciliatory conceptualizations who had a real insight into the nature of the dramatically unfolding socioeconomic and political developments—punctuated by revolutionary explosions due to the intensifying crises at a much more advanced stage of historical confrontations than the age of Adam Smith—and who with that insight also had a major legitimate interest not in advocating the traditional accommodatory adjustments, in tune with the standpoint of political economy, but in envisaging an *alternative* social order *beyond the incurable adversariality* of the capital system's exploitative class relations.

The fact that Marx (and his comrade in arms Engels) shared with the classics of political economy the bourgeoisie as their social background could not constitute any hindrance in this respect. On the contrary. It could only underline the new historical ground and the urgency of the change

required in the strategic standpoint of orientation. For the increasing destructiveness of capital's mode of social metabolic control threatened with devastation the whole of society, including those who for the time being enjoyed its privileges. The perverse destructive logic of an all-embracing social organic system, bent on ultimately destroying nature itself as the necessary ground of human existence, implicates not only *some* of its parts but *all* of them, and thereby the system itself as a whole. Marx was acutely aware of that.

Naturally, also the envisaged alternative, in order to be historically sustainable, had to be an organic system. For a firmly established organic system of societal reproduction, developed and globally extended in all of its social ontological and historical dimensions over many centuries, could only be superseded by another organic system. At the same time, the unavoidable implication of demonstrating the genesis of capital's mode of societal control through the Marxian critique, accomplished by forcefully putting into relief the necessary historical determinations of *any* organic system of *social reproduction*, was that the same considerations had to apply to the envisaged alternative order of the "new historic form," and indeed with a major enhancement in historical consistency extending over all of its dimensions. That is to say, the alternative social metabolic order had to be conceived and instituted through enduring social practice as a *substantively equitable organic system* capable of critically examining and altering not only its more limited everyday reproductive processes, but also its most fundamental *presuppositions*, whenever the course of actual historical development would call for it.

The radical critique of political economy, in conjunction with the elaboration of the vital orienting principles of a *self-critique* free from the

vitiating prejudgement of vested interests, was a necessary part of such an undertaking.