

Introduction: Why Should We, and How Should We, Reclaim Marx?

Imagine that Karl Marx had sat down in 1847 and written, “A specter is haunting Europe, the specter of democracy.” Would *The Communist Manifesto* that he published in February 1848 read so very differently from the now classic text that has been said to have changed the world? Recall some of the ringing phrases from Marx’s description of the rise of the bourgeoisie and the capitalist world it created. He portrays the bourgeoisie as “revolutionary” because it has “put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations.” It has “stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored,” and “torn away from the family its sentimental veil.” Its great productive force, surpassing the pyramids, aqueducts, and cathedrals, has shown “what man’s activity can bring about.” In a famous sentence, Marx sums up his praise for this capitalist revolution: “All fixed, fast-frozen relations . . . are swept away, all new formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.”¹ Granted, this is not a description of democracy that can be found in political science textbooks; it is a tense portrait of social

relations that must seek constantly a stability that will always exceed their grasp. It represents a historically unprecedented form of human coexistence no longer based on the principles of unity, stability, and community but instead accentuating a dynamics of difference, uncertainty, and individualism. Such are the social relations of democracy, a mode of living that is as much a threat to any established order as Marx's communist revolution was supposed to have been.

The claim of this book is that, whatever his intentions, Marx did announce that the specter of democracy is haunting Europe. To justify that claim, I have to explain first of all why he—and those who later claimed his legacy—did not understand the radical implications of his work. That is why the first part of the book examines Marxism and the intellectuals. While it is true that Marx considered the working class to be the agent of the coming revolution, the theoretical basis of this assertion appealed to minds primed to receive it and eager to translate it immediately into their own practice. That is why it is tempting to identify the intellectual with Marxism, at least after fascism had discredited right-wing theorists (to the point that even Heidegger's French disciples tended to assimilate his thought to a leftist critique of capitalism). While it is not false, such a generalization reaches too wide. The first part of the book illustrates both the attractiveness of Marxism to intellectuals and the ways in which some of them learned how to use Marx not only to criticize Marxism but to recognize the radical implications of democracy. Particularly in the French case,² this could take place only after the historical uniqueness of another type of new social relations was recognized: the critique of totalitarianism (which is not just another tyranny) made clear the radical nature of democracy—which the emergence of totalitarianism shows to represent a challenge not only to the established order but to itself as well. Totalitarian ideology, after all, claims that it incarnates the true realization of democracy when in fact it is the attempt to overcome the creative instability characteristic of democratic social relations typical of modernity.

Why did Marx and his successors misunderstand his basic insight? The title of *The Communist Manifesto* suggests one reason. Marx's goal was to make manifest a reality that was maturing in the womb of capitalism; the communists were to be the midwives of history. Communism would put an end to a savage history of class

struggles that had divided humanity against itself. Because Marx was looking for a solution, he could not recognize that democracy posed to humankind new problems that could not be solved without putting an end to democracy itself. As if he intuited the threat posed by this new political form, Marx tried to anchor its reality in the economic relations of capitalism, which would produce its own proletarian “grave-diggers.” This project made some sense in the nineteenth century, when a growing urban working class challenged the justice of the new economic system. But the effects of twentieth-century totalitarianism make clear that the economy cannot be isolated and treated as if it were the determinant cause of social relations. The totalitarian seizure of power precedes its use of this power to impose its will on socioeconomic relations. This autonomous political intervention is not admitted by the totalitarian regime, which denies its own political nature by claiming to express only the necessities of a history whose interpretation it monopolizes. In this way, totalitarianism is the antithesis and negation of democracy, whose problematic achievements stand out more sharply in its light. As such, totalitarianism can be defined as an *antipolitics*.

This theoretical claim can be illustrated by two personal experiences.³ I went to Paris in 1966 to discover the radical political theory that I thought was missing in the United States. At my first Parisian demonstration against the Vietnam War, I was caught up in the speaker’s world historical perspective; immersed in the flow of his rhetoric, I was a moment late in registering my applause when I noticed that he too was applauding. This was no egoistic individual expressing mere opinion; his applause signified that his words came from elsewhere, from society or History even. The speaker (whose name I have long since forgotten) was making manifest a Rationality that, because it was shared by all humanity, could draw each individual out of alienated private life into a greater community. This meant that he did not have to take personal responsibility for a judgment that could be debated; he was deciphering History for an anonymous public that he did not need to convince rationally to accept its revelation. The speaker was not only a caricature of Hegel in the role of Secretary to the Absolute Spirit; such an attitude is what permits the totalitarian machine to function. The irony is that he thought he was refusing the arbitrary egoistic regime of the bourgeoisie when in fact he was delivering himself, powerless, to an even

more powerful arbitrary rule, that of a totalitarian society that takes itself as the Last Judgment of History.

This anecdote suggests that totalitarianism is not imposed by force on an innocent, democracy-loving population. A second experience, not long after that Parisian demonstration, illustrates the necessity to choose actively democratic politics. I became friendly with some dissident students in Prague in 1967, before the attempt to create from the top down a “Socialism with a Human Face” was crushed by the 1968 invasion by the Warsaw Pact. These students explained that they had gotten into trouble because they had organized a demonstration against the Vietnam war. I didn’t understand: wasn’t their government opposed the war? Yes, but *they* had organized the demonstration, not the government. Independent activity was a threat, autonomy a danger, and self-organized groups a menace. That is why the invasion of August 1968 was probably unnecessary; the party-state knew already that it could not risk abandoning its control.⁴ But the same reasons explain why, despite the repression imposed after 1968, many Czechs (and other East Central Europeans) refused to accept the *Gleichschaltung* that sought to eliminate all independent organization. The resistance that culminated in the revolutions of 1989 was a manifestation of the clash of democratic self-organization with totalitarian power. The defense of civil society against the omnipresent state demonstrated again the radical challenge that democracy poses to *any* established order. Indeed, when the old order fell in 1989, the civil societies that had united in solidarity against it found that their own divisions, which were set aside in the struggle against the totalitarian state, emerged nearly as soon as their victory was confirmed.⁵ Democracy is a challenge even to itself.

If democracy is indeed the specter haunting Europe, it clearly does not represent the kind of real force that Marx saw incarnated in the rising working class that capitalism was creating in ever greater numbers and equipping with an ever more powerful machinery of production. If democracy does not have the same kind of world historical role that Marx postulated for communism, what *is* democracy? What is its historical place? In what sense is it truly new? And how can its novelty be understood?

Although he is not directly treated in this book, Tocqueville provides a useful insight. At the outset of *Democracy in America*, he

insists that equality is the new principle that separates democracy from all preceding societies, which, in one or another manner, were based on a hierarchy assumed to be natural and immutable. Tocqueville calls this equality a “generative fact,” whose widely diverse effects he then follows in his still readable study. As opposed to Marx, Tocqueville does not treat equality simply as a material fact (or a goal to be realized). Its function can be called *symbolic*, and its results exist in the sphere of meaning.⁶ The idea of a symbolic institution of a society can be understood by comparison to attempts to describe the way political culture influences social relations. The symbolic is concerned with the philosophical creation of social meaning, whereas political culture is treated as a causal factor to be studied empirically in order to ensure that there exists a material or social foundation of meaning. The symbolic institution of meaning is the presupposition of political culture, which rearranges and adapts the symbolic to fit empirical conditions.⁷ This distinction permits an interpretation of the difference between traditional societies and modern democratic societies. Traditional societies are characterized by the fact that the symbolic institution that generates meaning (e.g., the gods) is assumed to be external to the society, which therefore cannot change it. They are societies without history, seeking only to reproduce themselves. Modern democratic societies have overcome such external sources of meaning, but this victory of enlightenment is ambiguous since it means they have to generate their own meanings from within themselves—and they can change these meanings or organize competition for such change. That is the task of democratic politics in a society that creates its own historical dynamic. It is also why “all that is solid melts into air.” But the quest for solid foundations in a modern society whose future must remain open is also the source of the antipolitical or totalitarian threat.

While the encounter of Marxism and the intellectuals in part 1 of this book concludes with the passage from the critique of totalitarianism to the politics of democracy, democracy is defined there only in the categories of political philosophy and illustrated by contrast to the varieties of antipolitics.⁸ Part 2 attempts to fill in the picture of democracy and to explain some of the difficulties in the practice of democratic politics. It develops the distinction between a *democratic republic* (toward which French politics has tended historically,

at least until some recent developments) and a *republican democracy* (which represents the historical form adopted but never theorized at the time of the American Revolution). This conceptual framework is not identical with the familiar characterization of the French Revolution as oriented to social transformation while the American Revolution remained (self-)limited to the political sphere.⁹ The difference between the symbolic and the empirically real suggests the need to look for a unifying principle in the experiences of both political societies. The French had to legitimate the overthrow of a political society unified by its monarchical institutions; to do so, they had to oppose a new unitary principle to the old order. This meant they could leave no place for particular organizations such as political parties, and the same unitary principle militated against judicial autonomy.¹⁰ Yet it is just this judicial autonomy and the development of a system of political parties whose competition is accepted as legitimate that characterize the practical results of the American Revolution. The French democratic republic assumes that society only acquires its true unity by being integrated within the republican state, whereas the American constitutional republic guarantees the autonomous self-management of individual and social relations.

The two contrasting political histories that were inaugurated by revolutionary breaks with traditional societies make clear that democracy is not defined by fixed institutional structures (such as elections, checks and balances, or judicial autonomy) but depends rather on the meaning that individual actors attach to their social relations. But the institution of meaning is not a one-time affair that lasts forever; it must be constantly renewed and always runs the risk of temporary failure and even self-destruction. That is why the chapter that intervenes between my presentations of the historical paths of French and American democratic politics (chapter 10) points to the ways in which the two histories tend to overlap, interrelate, and intersect. It shows also how these histories cast new light on the tired contemporary quarrels between liberals and communitarians, both of whom prove liable to the reproach of antipolitics. Similarly, the reconstruction of the political dimension of American history is followed by an attempt (chapter 12) to explain the emergence of a kind of political-religious fundamentalism that is at once contrary to the American vision of democracy and yet contained

within it as a latent possibility, just as the French democratic project came to be identified with the communism inaugurated in 1917. Once again, “all that is solid melts into air.” Democracy is not a solution (comparable to Marx’s communism); it poses problems not only to the established order but to itself. The French got it right with their quest for the unitary democratic republic (which is not quite identical with socialism), but so did the Americans with their discovery of the politics of republican democratic diversity (which is not quite identical with liberalism). The challenge is to hold on to the unity that animates the one without losing the diversity preserved by the other.

The return to Marx in part 3 is now prepared. It might seem that the demise in 1989 of so-called really existing socialism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union would permit a rediscovery of Marx as a political thinker unencumbered by the historical mistakes of those who claimed to be his heirs. If that were my intention, I could have gone directly to work, without the theoretical and historical preliminaries in the first two parts. But while there is much to criticize in present-day socioeconomic relations, I leave that criticism to others. My project instead is somewhat paradoxical—at least at first glance. Rather than directly recover a political Marx, I stress the importance of the philosophical Marx in order then to open the path to politics. The events of 1989 permit the rediscovery of a Marx who is first of all a philosopher. Although Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* seemed to return to the philosopher as well, his goal was more immediately practical: to undercut the self-certainties of the times. I want to show that *Marx’s inability to recognize the democratic political implications of his own analysis was due to his own philosophical rigor*. Marx tried mightily to radicalize Hegel by doing what I call (in chapter 13) philosophy by other means. Where Hegel appealed to reason, Marx appealed to the material world—but, like Hegel, he searched for the traces of reason incarnated in that world.¹¹ That is why he could not recognize the democratic political implications of analyses like those in *The Communist Manifesto*. The economy, class struggle, the proletariat: these realities were what Marx thought would realize philosophy and put an end to history. Once again, it would be too easy to criticize Marx retrospectively; it is more important to reconstruct the rigor of his search, to watch him revise his analyses from one work to the next, to articulate the unity of a life’s

work that didn't either shy away from the political arena or hide behind facile rhetoric.

The presentation of Marx in chapter 13 has another ambition. Just as the specter of democracy showed its radical potential as well as its self-destructive possibilities only against the backdrop of totalitarianism, so the political problems posed by modern democratic society can appear as problems but also as appeals to creative intervention only against the backdrop of Marx's systematic philosophical achievement.¹² As with the encounter of Marxism and the intellectuals, this philosophical project has to be reconstructed in order for political theory to be freed from its sway. It is not any more legitimate or useful to imagine simply that Marx was wrong (or stupid, or worse) than it is to assume that totalitarianism is imposed on an unwilling people by a foreign conqueror. It is more fruitful—and more consonant with Marx's own favorite method of immanent critique—to assume that there are reasons that Marx misunderstood himself and that these reasons must be understood before it becomes possible to right the errors. That is why the conclusion of the book returns to the beginning (to the question of Marx and philosophy) rather than proposing a new political project, as if humanity were only awaiting new marching orders to achieve its destiny. Democracy is not a natural condition of humankind; nor is it inscribed in the inevitable course of human history. Democracy cannot exist without democratic citizens, individuals conscious of the perils as well as the pleasures that it offers. In this sense—to paraphrase a slogan dear to Marxists¹³—*there can be no democratic practice without democratic theory*. An analysis of democracy that starts from a critical rereading of Marx not only transforms our understanding of Marx's theory but also calls our attention to the difficult dual status of democratic theory, which opens toward both politics and antipolitics.

The adventure and the danger opened by modern democracy lead me to conclude with a promissory note. I do not want to leave the impression that the theoretical arguments presented here have no immediate political implications. During the time that I was writing this, I also wrote more directly political articles, contributed shorter political commentary, and was often interviewed about current political developments. To have added that material to this book would have made it more complicated than it needs to be; it is better to reduce my thesis here to a clear and concise theoretical

presentation. However, modern technology provides a way to offer the reader access not only to these earlier political writings but also to my ongoing attempts to apply the understanding of democracy as radical and my critique of the various forms of antipolitics (including those that shocked the world on September 11, 2001)¹⁴ to current events. I will therefore post the earlier articles, as well as future contributions, on my Web site: *ms.cc.sunysb.edu/rhoward*.

It remains for me to thank all the usual people, who know what I owe them, but most of all Jennifer Crewe of Columbia University Press (and her two anonymous reviewers), who was convinced by the very rough and approximate set of materials that I presented as the first version of this project. She encouraged me (with a contract!) to continue, and, when I was in the midst of the far more vast rewriting than I had intended and was lost in my own systematic web, she unpacked the project, showed me the broad lines that were important, and made it possible to produce this work. The book would not exist without her help. Thanks also to Paul Berman for a final critical reading that got many things right.

It will be clear to the reader how much I owe to Claude Lefort and to the late Cornelius Castoriadis, whose absence I still feel. I also owe a debt to the people whom I have known in the context of the journal *Esprit*, above all to Olivier Mongin and Paul Thibaud. I regret that I cannot reprint here the chapter in *Defining the Political* in which I tried to explain (already in 1978!) the uniqueness of that journal, which had just begun its antitotalitarian, democratic turn. I should thank also Bernard Perret, who double-checked the reading of French economic theory that I propose in the appendix to chapter 9, "The Burden of French History." And there are also my German partners, particularly Sigrid Meuschel and Hermann Schwengel. But this book emerges from an international dialogue and debate, whose participants are too numerous to be listed individually. I have been fortunate since the earliest experiences (some of which I have described in this introduction) to share in the experience of something like an international new left. I hope that this volume will contribute to our collective project.

Thanks also go to those who forced me to write earlier versions of some of these chapters, all of which have been revised, extensively in most cases, for this volume.

“Marxism in the Postcommunist World” was a lecture at the annual summer school of the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences in June 1998. The theme was chosen by the students and faculty of the school. It was published in the Australian journal *Critical Horizons* 1, no. 1, in February 2000. A modified French version appeared in *Transeuropéennes* in the fall of 1999.

“Can French Intellectuals Escape Marxism?” was a talk organized by Lawrence D. Kritzman at Dartmouth College. A first version was published in *French Politics and Society* 16, no. 1 (winter 1998). A revised German version appeared in *Kommune* 16., no. 6 (1998). A French version appeared in *La Nouvelle Lettre internationale*, no. 1 (fall 1999).

“The Frankfurt School and the Transformation of Critical Theory into Cultural Theory” was published in an early version in *Cultural Horizons*; a revised German translation appeared in *Kommune* 18, no. 8 (2000).

“Habermas’s Reorientation of Critical Theory Toward Democratic Theory” presents ideas that I developed first in “Law and Political Culture,” *Cordozo Law Review* 17, nos. 4–5 (March 1996), and then in a shorter review of Habermas in *German Politics and Society* 15, no. 1 (spring 1997).

“The Anticommunist Marxism of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*” began life as a short contribution to Lawrence D. Kritzman, ed., *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century Thought*, forthcoming from Columbia University Press. It has been expanded and developed here.

“Claude Lefort’s Passage from Revolutionary Theory to Political Theory” combines an essay for *The Columbia History* with the *laudatio* for Claude Lefort on his receiving the Hannah Arendt Prize of the city of Bremen. It also adapts material from chapter 8.

“From Marx to Castoriadis, and from Castoriadis to Us” was presented in a French version at a conference organized in Paris in 1999 to commemorate Castoriadis’s death; it was reworked for a conference on Castoriadis organized by Andreas Kalyvas at Columbia University in December 2000. No version has been previously published.

“From the Critique of Totalitarianism to the Politics of Democracy” was part of a lecture given in Paris in June 1999 at the Institut des Hautes Etudes de la Magistrature to a group of French judges.

It was rewritten for publication in *La revue du Mauss*, no. 16 (2000). The English translation here has been extensively revised.

“The Burden of French History” began life as a lecture in German to a group of French and German businessmen in February 2001 at the Frankreich-Zentrum of the University of Freiburg. I have radically revised it in the meantime. A shorter English version appears under the title “From Republican Political Culture to Republican Democracy: The Benefits and Burdens of History” in *French Politics, Culture and Society* 10, no. 3 (fall 2001).

“Intersecting Trajectories of Republicanism in France and the United States” develops arguments presented earlier under the title “From the Politics of Will to a Politics of Judgment: Republicanism in the U.S. and France,” in *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, no. 4 (2000).

“Reading U.S. History as Political” was a lecture at the Collège International de Philosophie in 1987, which was published in the *Revue française de science politique* 38, no. 2 (April 1988). It is reprinted in *Pour une critique du jugement politique* (Paris: Cerf, 1998). An English translation of it serves the afterword to *The Birth of American Political Thought*. It has been radically revised and expanded (and retranslated) for the present volume.

“Fundamentalism and the American Exception” was a talk at a meeting in Paris on problems of fundamentalism organized by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the Fondation Jean-Jaurès. A short version appeared in *Fundamentalism and Social Democracy* (Bonn: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1996); an expanded version was published in *Etudes* in November 1996. A German variant appeared in *Kommune* 14, no. 11 (1996). The present version started with a translation from the French by Julie Sadoff, which I have expanded and adapted for this volume.

“Philosophy by Other Means?” was written for this volume. It is based on a much longer essay published in Alain Renaut’s five-volume *Histoire de la philosophie politique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1999). With the help of Eric Cavallo, that article was reworked; a somewhat different version appears in *Metaphilosophy* 32, no. 5 (October 2001): 463–501.

CHAPTER I

Marxism in the Postcommunist World

If we could agree on what “Marxism” is—or was—then the task of evaluating its possible future in the post-cold war world would be relatively simple and noncontroversial. But there is no agreed definition of Marxism. There used to be something more or less official called Marxism-Leninism, and, as opposed to it, there was something called Western Marxism, which had its roots in the Hegelian and Weberian rereading of Marx that was initiated by Georg Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), developed by the Frankfurt School’s program of critical theory, and thematized in Merleau-Ponty’s *Adventures of the Dialectic* (1955). There was also a related debate that peaked in the 1960s concerning the priority of the orientations of the young and the mature Marx, the humanist philosopher as opposed to the historical-materialist political economist. Although other distinctions and debates within the family could be introduced—for example, Austro-Marxism with its stress on the nationality question or Gramsci and his concern with culture and hegemony—it is best to begin from a simple dichotomy: on the one hand, there is the reading of Marx that can be generally put under the notion of historical materialism, and, on the other, there is a more

philosophical and dialectical interpretation. Since 1989 the first form of Marxism has been rendered obsolete by the demise of Communism; it wagered on history, and it lost its bet. But where does this leave the other variant of Marxism? Can it, or must it be able to, provide the historical orientation that began as the strength but was ultimately the weakness of the deterministic model offered by historical materialism?

Philosophical-dialectical Marxism can be characterized by two interconnected methodological assumptions. The first is the notion of immanent critique. Many commentators have noted that nearly everything Marx wrote, at all periods of his life, was titled or subtitled “a critique.” For example, Marx discovered the revolutionary potential of the proletariat in his critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*. Later, *Capital* did not propose a theory of socialism—that misreading may have been a factor in the ill-advised practice of those who came to power claiming to introduce socialism by applying categories used in Marx’s critique of capitalism to build what they hoped would be a different future¹—instead, *Capital* presents a critique of capitalist political economy whose radical implications were drawn by means of an immanent critique showing the rich potential created but not realized within that mode of production. This idea of immanent critique leads to the second methodological assumption. I just referred to capitalism as a “mode of production.” That, however, is the language of historical materialism. It would be more true to the philosophical-dialectical Marx to speak of forms of social relations. That is why *Capital* does not begin with an analysis of the process of production but with an analysis of the commodity form and its metamorphoses. I will return to *Capital* later. For the moment, I want to stress Marx’s method. Social relations are interpreted as the expression of practical relations among human beings. Although they don’t do it as they please, notes Marx in *The 18th Brumaire*, men do make their own history. The potential that the immanent critique uncovers is not of merely theoretical interest; it has practical applications and makes possible social change. This, rather than a politics of will or a voluntarism that ignores material constraints, is the implication of Marx’s demand, in the famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, that philosophers not restrict themselves to contemplating the world but seek instead to change it.

I propose to address the question of the place of Marxism in the postcommunist world in three steps. First, I consider some of the

temptations that have arisen in the West, where many creative left-oriented thinkers have attempted to find alternative variants of Marxism, all of them more or less adopting the orientation developed by Western Marxism that I have called here philosophical-dialectical. I title this first section “Replacing Marxism . . . with Marxism” because all these attempts fail to develop the kind of practical-historical orientation that was at least attempted by the now discredited historical-materialist kind of Marxism. The extreme implications of this approach come with Adorno’s negative dialectics and Marcuse’s existential Great Refusal in *One-Dimensional Man*.² Second, I propose a reconstruction of Marx’s work that takes into account the problems addressed by historical materialism. I call this section “Realizing Marxism . . . as Philosophy.” The Marx who emerges from this second step in the argument is a fascinating philosopher, but he remains a philosopher who, however self-critical, is unable to go beyond the mode of immanent critique to invest his philosophy in the historical world in which we live. Third, I attempt to sketch briefly a New Political Manifesto, suggesting that the “specter” haunting Marx’s Europe—and our own—was not the proletarian revolution that would finally put an end to a history of class struggle but the advent of democracy. If this intuition is plausible, it will suggest a way to reread Marx so that his contribution can be made fruitful in the contemporary world. The basic insight of the philosophical Marx was seen correctly by Lukács: Marx replaced the Hegelian idea of Spirit with the material proletariat understood as the subject-object of history—as a product of historical development that, because it is a subject and capable of autonomous action, can become the author of its own history. What I call the political, or democratic, Marx is neither so ambitious nor so Hegelian. To put it perhaps paradoxically, the political Marx seeks to maintain the conditions that make possible the immanent critique and practical engagement that characterized the philosophical Marx sketched in the second part of this discussion. Pace Leo Strauss, democracy is the condition of possibility of philosophy.

REPLACING MARXISM. . . WITH MARXISM

Marxism in the postcommunist world could be thought of as a theory happily rescued from the weight of a failed experiment. Many

Western leftists found themselves caught in contortions, attempting to put the blame on Stalin—often less for Stalinism and its totalitarian domestic misdeeds than for its abandonment of world revolution in favor of creating Socialism in One Country. That approach made it possible to remain an anticapitalist, to accept something like the historical vision of *The Communist Manifesto* (and perhaps even the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*) while jettisoning the baggage of the determinist breakdown theory attributed to *Capital*. Happy tomorrows could still be hoped for, while the exploitation of today could be condemned not for what it actually is but from a broader theoretical and historical perspective. It is, after all, quite satisfying to couch one's criticism in an all-encompassing theoretical system. From this point of view, one can predict that since capitalism, its crises, its inequalities, its exploitation and alienation remain with us, Marxism in the postcommunist world—at least in the West, which had no experience of what was euphemistically called really existing socialism—may find itself on a far more solid terrain than was the case in the years following if not the invasion of Hungary in 1956 at least those following the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the Brezhnev years of stagnation.

But the attempt to claim that the “essence” of Marxism was betrayed by its “appearing form” (to use the Hegelian language of Marx) does not explain why, 150 years after *The Communist Manifesto*, the revolution Marx was waiting for has not appeared. The essence of an essence is to appear, and if appearance betrays the essence, perhaps one has misunderstood the nature of that essence. It is no doubt true that the cold war was not so much won by capitalism as it was lost by the existing form of socialism.³ Meanwhile, capitalist crises recur, inequality increases glaringly, the third world remains marginalized. Capitalism has few grounds for satisfaction. And it is easy to find passages, chapters, articles, and books from Marx and Marxists to explain the miseries of the present. But what does that prove? If I appeal, for example, to “Wage Labor and Capital,” while you turn to the “Anti-Dühring” and someone else invokes Lenin’s “Imperialism,” while her friend prefers Hilferding’s “Finance Capital,” what has been gained? We have each adverted to holy text, but none of this explains the dynamics of the present. Each of our claims remains static, structural, and in the last resort antipolitical because it leaves no room for active intervention and no justi-

fication for action. At best, this kind of interpretation gives subjective satisfaction, encouraging the belief that one is on the right side of history, which, as Fidel Castro famously said at his 1953 trial after a failed revolt, eventually will absolve us and forgive our trespasses. Despite those who interpreted Marx as predicting a breakdown of capitalism (via the “law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall” in volume 3 of *Capital*), Marx was concerned with the dynamics of capitalism as a new type of social relations. For *The Communist Manifesto*, all history, after all, is a history of class struggle.

Still, there will be those who will hold on to their Marx. The first among them will be (or will remain) the Trotskyists.⁴ Despite the greatness of Trotsky’s phenomenology of the Russian Revolution, he remained a structural dogmatist.⁵ In a memorable phrase, he asserted that when the artillery man misses his target, he doesn’t blame the laws of physics. But is Marxism a theory like those of the natural sciences? Was the basically good and justifiable revolution of 1917 deformed, isolated, and forced into a Stalinist Thermidor? Doesn’t Trotsky violate his own Marxist dogma when he blames the person of Stalin for the debacle of Soviet Marxism? Nonetheless, there is something comforting in the Trotskyist position, which will continue to find adherents after 1989 because it unites the reassuring claims of a structural account of capitalism with a criticism of the supposed Stalinist deformation of the promise of 1917.

The problem with attempts to save Marxism from the demise of “really existing socialism” is that they cannot reply to the objection from Karl Popper: that it is nonfalsifiable. It remains as a horizon, a framework or narrative that can internalize contradictions as simply stages in a presumably necessary historical development. This is the case even of Rosa Luxemburg, the spontaneist, who insisted that “only the working class can make the word flesh.” This most militant of activists was content to have refuted Eduard Bernstein when she showed that his reformist socialism contradicted the text of Marx. Rosa Luxemburg, the theorist of the Mass Strike, whose final article from the ruins of a failed revolution affirmed that “revolution is the only kind of war in which the final victory can be built only on a series of defeats,” could be perhaps even more than Trotsky the model of a post-1989 Marxist. Defeat in the class struggle was for her only a stage in the learning process that would necessarily lead to the final goal. How can she be proven wrong?⁶

The criticism of nonfalsifiability leads to another critique of Marxism, represented in the West by the often impressive textual accounts of Robert Tucker and many others: that it is a new religion. In the hands of a critical historian such as Jacob Talmon, this becomes the reproach that Marx belongs to a long millenarian tradition. At its best, this becomes a positive philosophical claim in Ernst Bloch's *Prinzip Hoffnung*, a kind of wager that humanity cannot but constantly seek reconciliation with itself and with nature. It is not always clear what is Marxist in this honest and admirable utopian position. Marx, after all, claimed not to be a utopian (and his historical-materialist heirs took him literally). In the remarkable, and often neglected, third part of *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx tried to reconstruct the history of socialist utopias to show how they were logically and historically *aufgehoben*, united and made whole in his own position. If it is to be more than a pious wish, this kind of religious-utopian position—which, as such, will certainly remain present after 1989—has to show how the utopias that have come and gone over the 150 years since the *Manifesto* are part of a historical logic of the type that Marx presented in 1848. In this way, it would avoid the nonfalsifiability of the Luxemburgian “defeat as the basis of victory.” But then it becomes open to the reproach of being a totalizing historical metaphysics similar to the Young Hegelian theories whose overcoming—in *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology* of 1845/6—led Marx to formulate his “science.”

In this case, however, the renewed Marxism has to refute the objections of Habermas: that it is economist and determinist in its orientation and neglects the other domains of human social interaction. Habermas's *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968) showed clearly that the materialist philosophy of history that expects social (and human) transformation to follow directly from the material-technical advances of capitalism is one-sided. It is guided by a type of cognitive interest that stresses technological progress and necessarily neglects the spheres of social interaction and human self-liberation. Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) takes his argument beyond the model of the individual social actor to integrate the linguistic turn that points to the primacy of dialogical relations in the development of social rationality. But the upshot of Habermas's theory is that the Marxian project is simply the completion of the project of the Enlightenment. Thus, for example, his first

attempt to deal with soviet-type societies, in the wake of 1989, was entitled *The Catch-up Revolution*.⁷ Perhaps this saves the Marxist baby, but it subsumes it under a historical or idealist project that Marx explicitly claimed to overcome.

Marx's advance over Enlightenment theories was his insistence on class struggle and his recognition (e.g., in his critique of Proudhon in *The Poverty of Philosophy* [1847]) that history advances through contradictions and by means of negations. Marx's theory of the revolutionary proletariat was certainly the key to this theoretical insight. But today it is hard to recognize Marx's proletariat in our new world order. The polarization of two classes has not occurred (and Marx seemed to have recognized this in the incomplete chapter "Classes" that concludes the third volume of *Capital*). Even before 1989 many in the West sought to reconstitute the proletariat by other means. In France, Serge Mallet and André Gorz talked about a "new working class," while Italian theorists sought to reconstitute the "total worker" to whom the third volume of *Capital* refers somewhat vaguely. In the United States, attempts were made first to rediscover a "history of class struggle" that had been supposedly suppressed by the reigning ideological consensus among historians and social scientists. The idea was that if one could show that there had been constant struggles of workers against bosses, perhaps a defeated working class would gain self-confidence and undertake new struggles. Other Americans sought to broaden the notion of the proletariat, including in it blacks, minorities, women, homosexuals. When it became unclear how these strata (or status groups) could ally with one another, the turn to cultural studies was made: a cultural unity would replace the working class as the new proletariat.⁸ Somewhere, somehow, there needed to be an opposition, a negation to negate the negation. Alas, it remains to be discovered.

There are no doubt other strategies that could be invoked in the attempt to redeem Marxism by a better Marxism. So-called analytic philosophers have attempted to justify one or another aspect of the Marxian corpus, while the deconstructionists take a leaf from Jacques Derrida's rehabilitation of the (hard to recognize) "specter" of Marx. Others continue to hope that the struggle against globalization will produce the new agent of revolution. What is lacking in all these approaches is serious consideration of the philosophical theory by which Marx was led to his practical insights. It is this

philosophical project that permitted him to make the empirical and analytical discoveries that lost their critical thrust as they came to be part of the Marxist vulgate. Separated from the philosophical endeavor, these insights lose their immanent dynamic as well as their utopian horizon; they are reduced to mere criticism or to naive utopianism. The proletariat becomes merely labor-power, exploited by capitalists as the source of surplus-value; the philosophical critique becomes a positive statement to be studied for its own sake. Yet the philosophical Marx saw that this proletariat had achieved a certain measure of freedom (compared with the serf, for example); this liberty, however, is alienated and can become aware of itself only as economically exploited. If only the second part of this claim is stressed, the immanent historical dynamic of Marx's theory is replaced by static complaints of victimization, and the practical result is self-righteous commiseration. In the end, this leads to the replacement of autonomous praxis by the conscious intervention of the political party, completing the cycle that began with the rejection of Leninism by Western Marxism. To avoid this (unhappy) conclusion, Marx's philosophical project needs to be rethought.

REALIZING MARXISM . . . AS PHILOSOPHY

If Western Marxism seems to find itself driven to adopt political conclusions that clash with its original intentions, a consideration of Marx's own attempt to overcome the immanent limits of philosophy reveals a similar paradox. Marx was essentially a philosopher; this was his strength but also explains his political weakness. His entire work can be seen as the attempt to realize the task proposed in a note to his doctoral dissertation, which his editors have titled "The Becoming Philosophical of the World as the Becoming Worldly of Philosophy."⁹ Put simply—as it was for Marx at this point—the idea is that Hegel had elaborated a rational system that explained that the actual is rational and the rational is actual (as Hegel put it in the introduction to his *Philosophy of Right*) but that the actual German world of Marx's time was miserable, chaotic, and impoverished. It was necessary to show two things: that philosophy had to occupy itself with the world in order to realize itself (to actualize itself, in Hegelian language) and that the world had to become philosophical,

that is, rational, if this realization of philosophy were to occur. We can reconstruct briefly the steps in Marx's evolution in terms of this two-sided problem (whose two sides, philosophy and the world, themselves turned out to be dual by the time of Marx's "solution" to his dilemma in the economic critique in the *Grundrisse*).

There is first the critique of Bruno Bauer's proposed solution to the "Jewish question." Mere political emancipation does not suffice because, as seen in the contrast between the French and American Declarations of Rights and their reality, these rights become defenses of what has come since to be called possessive individualism. The reason for this inadequacy is that the societies that proclaimed these universal rights were still burdened by the legacy of feudalism; hence the universal rights in fact universalized a society based on inequality.¹⁰ There needed to be a change in the social relations in civil society. As a result, Marx's "Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," after showing how philosophy had to become worldly—coining now well known phrases such as "the critique of the weapons becomes the weapon of critique"—went on to discover the proletariat as "the nothing that can become everything," the "class that is not a class," which is thus the material basis of the world's becoming philosophical. (The proletariat is what Lukács and Western Marxism called the subject-object of history.) Two features of Marx's account need to be stressed. He insists that the proletariat is an "artificial formation" that differs from simply the poor or the oppressed, implying again that his immanent critique is concerned with dynamics, not statics. And he adds that there needs be a "lightning of thought" that strikes in this "naive soil of the people" to awaken its emancipatory possibilities. The first of these points suggests to Marx the need to turn to political economy; the second refers to what was later called class consciousness, which Marx analyzed first under the Hegelian category of "alienation."

The *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* can be seen as the development of these two insights. The first manuscript is Marx's initial attempt at understanding political economy. He wants to show how this "artificial formation" (the proletariat) comes into being and acquires legitimacy. Alienated labor is shown to be the basis of private property, which is in its turn the source of social division. The account is supplemented by the third manuscript, which develops what Marx calls "the greatness of Hegel's *Phenomenology*,"

namely, its insight into the creative role of labor. It thus appears that it is the labor process that produces in the proletariat the capacity to realize its own destiny—the equivalent of the “lightning of thought.” The broader philosophical project is evident throughout the text, for example, in the discussions of “generic being” and in the insistence that “the science of nature becomes the science of man while the science of man becomes the science of nature.” All these famous aphorisms are variants on the theme of alienation and its philosophical overcoming that will make the world philosophical. But this philosophical project now leads Marx beyond the realm of philosophy; he now has to do philosophy by other means.

Marx was not satisfied with the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, which remained unpublished. He and Engels then wrote *The German Ideology* (again unpublished). That massive tome develops, on the one hand, the philosophical-historical reasons that would explain the emergence and transcendence of capitalism. The problem with this theory, which is based on the primacy of material labor, is that the lightning of thought is replaced by a materialist assertion of historical necessity (which Marx would reaffirm in the preface to the 1859 *Toward a Critique of Political Economy*, a text that became canonical in the Leninist-Stalinist vulgate). On the other hand, *The German Ideology* contains other, more fruitful insights, for example, into the dialectic by which labor creates new needs that in turn create new types of labor on a progression that concretizes what Marx had called in 1844 “the greatness of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*.” But these insights disappear in the next canonical text: “Wage Labor and Capital” (1849), Marx’s first major economic analysis.

Before Marx could work out his own dogmatic philosophy of history, history intervened. *Class Struggles in France* (1850) attempts to explain the 1848 revolution and its failure. However remarkable some of Marx’s insights, what is striking is his attribution to the proletariat of a historical wisdom that prevents it—after the June days—from falsely intervening at the wrong historical moment. The proletariat remains present in the drama like the “specter” that Marx invoked at the outset of *The Communist Manifesto*. This is another case of Marx’s nonfalsifiable historical vision. He applied the insight from “On the Jewish Question” according to which a mere political revolution was insufficient in order to make sense of the unexpected revolution that broke out in 1848, but he could not predict what

would become the subject for analysis in his next major essay: the coup d'état of Louis Bonaparte in 1851, which put a final end to the hopes awakened in 1848. If *Class Struggles in France* denounced the illusion of politics, *The 18th Brumaire* (1852) was an account of the politics of illusion. Beneath the memorable rhetoric encapsulated in such phrases as “the first time is tragedy, the second time is farce” and “men make their history but they do not make it as they please” lay Marx’s assumption of a historical necessity that would impose itself come what may. The statue of Napoleon would fall with the next economic crisis, concluded Marx optimistically. The politics of illusion and the illusion of politics would be dissipated by sober reality of the kind Marx had depicted in *The Communist Manifesto* as dissolving “all that is holy” and leaving the proletariat at a (Hegelian) *hic rhodus, hic salta* that would finally make the world philosophical as philosophy become worldly.

The political conclusion that Marx seems to have drawn from these historical events was to intensify the economic study that gave rise to the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. But before integrating these economic analyses into the philosophical account, the third of Marx’s historical essays on French politics should be mentioned. The Paris Commune is often seen by Marxists as the “finally discovered form” in which the class struggle can be brought to its conclusion. But Marx’s argument is more ambiguous. It seems to be a praise of direct democracy. Yet Marx calls the Commune the “form” in which the class struggle can be fought out openly. This form—like that of the commodity that is analyzed at the outset of *Capital*, as I will suggest in a moment—could be interpreted from the perspective of a democratic politics. For Marx and the Marxists, however, it appeared to be a solution, not the condition of the possibility of a solution, because it seemed to represent the unity of philosophy and politics, reason and the world.

The same ambiguous relation between economic and political analyses is seen in Marx’s account of the second stage of mature communism described in the 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program*: Marx makes things too easy for himself when he claims that when the “springs” of wealth flow freely, the inequalities of bourgeois society will be overcome. He should have remembered his own account of the continual dialectical development of new needs in *The German Ideology*. Indeed, Marx ought to have known better since

in this same *Critique* he denounced Lassalle's so-called iron law of wages by comparing its political claims to those of a slave who, when his fellows have finally rebelled, writes that "slavery must be abolished because the provisioning of slaves in the slave system cannot exceed a certain low minimum." This reflection suggests the need to look more closely at what can be called the idealism of Marx, for it seems to be a denial of the causal primacy of material economic conditions.

When one looks at the status of Marx's mature economic theory, it turns out to be not really economic at all. The labor theory of value makes sense only from a sociological standpoint—guided, however, by a philosophical quest. Why does volume 1 of *Capital* begin with the commodity form? After all, it was production that was central to the historical-materialist vision of *The German Ideology* and the work that followed it. The chapter in *Capital* that makes the transition from the analysis of the commodity form to an analysis of production contains the surprising comment that the exploitation of labor-power is not unjust (nor is it just: a class struggle will decide). This suggests that Marx is still operating in terms of immanent critique rather than seeking to formulate a positive science. Capitalist development is part of the process by which the world becomes more rational. As in *The German Ideology*, the proletarian selling his labor-power is freer than the serf. But how can he use that freedom? After extensive criticism of the capitalist abuse of the length and intensity of the working day to increase production of absolute surplus-value, Marx returns to the method of immanent critique in his explanation of what he calls relative surplus-value. He shows how cooperation, manufacture, and modern industry are increasingly productive stages of a mystifying alienation that gives the impression that capital's contribution justifies the benefits it draws from this advance in capitalist rationality. This inversion is simply a material form of the theological mystification that the young Marx had criticized in Bruno Bauer and the Young Hegelians. But the mystification here is real: capital is not just an alienating projection of the powers of man or an imagined deity; it is the reality of human alienation. The worker is reduced to a cog in a machine that, guided by the capitalist and applying science, increases productivity—in the words of the *Manifesto*—to "heights hitherto un-envisioned." Will there follow a

dialectical *Aufhebung* through which the proletariat will reclaim the fruits of its increasingly rationalized labor? Where will it come from? Volume 1 of *Capital* (which I have just summarized) gives no answer; it concludes with a criticism of “so-called primitive accumulation.” But why conclude with what, historically, was the starting point of capitalism? What happened to immanent critique? Why the discussion of the commodity form? Neither positive science nor historical analysis, *Capital* is Marx’s attempt to do philosophy by other means.

The transition from volume 1, whose subtitle is *The Immediate Production Process of Capital*, to volume 2’s account of the circulation of capital is explained in an unpublished manuscript entitled *The Results of the Immediate Production Process*. This missing link makes clear that Marx did not intend to explain economic production for its own sake; his concern is with the process of social reproduction. Marx’s theory is not reducible to economics as a science of production.¹¹ The commodity that emerges from the capitalist production process is formally different from the commodities that entered it: it is a social—and capitalist—commodity; it must circulate and find its buyer. How this occurs is traced in the (quite boring) second volume of *Capital*. More interesting is its consequence in the third volume, which treats the process as a whole, including competition among capitalists. Here, after some 375 pages, we find the infamous “law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.” But the presentation of this “law” is followed by another 500 pages that meander through landed and financial (or money) capital. What role do these play? Why does the third volume conclude with the incomplete chapter on classes? Why didn’t Marx simply stop with the falling rate of profit? What is revolutionary about *Capital*? The answer to the last question, which is the key to the others, is quite simply that it is philosophy that, for Marx, is revolutionary. This conclusion is suggested as well in the well-known pages of the *Grundrisse* that still seem to be prophetic today.

To make a long story as short as possible:¹² Marx predicts that the growth of the forces of production will reach a point at which production based on exchange-value breaks down of its own accord (because of the huge increases in productivity resulting from the application of science that make the contribution of human labor, which is the basis of exchange-value, minimal). At that point, the

reduction of necessary labor time will make possible the free development of the individual. The measure of wealth will no longer be labor time but disposable time. What is more, at this stage of productive development the product ceases to appear as the product of an individual worker; its social character becomes evident. And at that point the individual recognizes that the free time he now has available to him in the new capitalism is not his own but that which comes to him as a member of the collective social workforce. To put it in rigorous Hegelian-Marxist terms: Two commodities face one another, capital and labor. Each of them is in turn dual: each has a use-value and an exchange-value, and these come into contradiction with themselves. Capital can no longer function in terms of exchange-values, nor can it properly develop the use-value of the great productive forces it has created (since to do so would be to break out of the capitalist mode of production based on the constant increase of exchange-value). Labor on its side is no longer necessary as exchange-value, and yet as use-value, in the new and clearly socially interdependent forms of scientific production, its role is reduced asymptotically. There are thus contradictions on both sides, and so, as the English version of *Capital* has it, the “integument must be burst asunder”—or, in a more Germanic formulation, *Aufgehoben*.

For the philosopher, these pages are sheer pleasure. For the political thinker, either they describe one of those utopias whose eternal attractiveness—and ineffectiveness—I sketched earlier, or they are a sign that the visionary who could foretell trends of capitalist social (and not simply economic) development was at a loss as to what to do about these trends. Indeed, at another point in the *Grundrisse*, Marx criticizes Adam Smith for not understanding that labor must be made attractive at the same time that it cannot be “mere fun, mere amusement, as Fourier . . . conceives it.”

But enough of Marx philology. There is no need to discuss the harried question of whether Marx thought, ultimately, that freedom was to be found in work or beyond work: he thought both and couldn't make up his mind, even in the space of a single text. Let this stand as the final demonstration that Marx was and remained a philosopher and that this is indeed his virtue, so long as one doesn't try to make his philosophy into what it cannot be (despite the pleas of Adorno and the Frankfurt School): a politics.

POLITICIZING MARXISM

Marx was too good a philosopher. After 1989 he needs to be turned into a political thinker. This could start, as I suggested previously, from his analysis of the Paris Commune as the “finally discovered form in which the class struggle could be pursued to its end.” The first draft of *The Civil War in France* also contains the significant observation that all previous revolutions had only strengthened the state,¹³ although the published text concludes from this only the need to destroy the old state. This neglects the possibility that the state could be reused for other ends, as suggested by Marx’s claim that the Commune was the “form” in which class struggle could be fully developed. But rather than engage in more Marx philology, I want to propose a different approach to the question addressed here, beginning from the program developed in *The Communist Manifesto*.

At the time of the collapse of communism, I proposed that we had found ourselves finally freed from “two hundred years of error.”¹⁴ The year 1789 marked the advent of democracy as a political problem posed by the new social conditions created (or, in Marx’s eyes, consecrated) by the French Revolution. The institutionalization of the rights of man presupposed the destruction of the traditional cosmos in which each person had his and her place, in which society was conceived of as a structured organism, and where politics were not society’s concern (which is why Marx’s unpublished 1843 critique of Hegel’s theory of the state could mock the old regime as a “democracy of unfreedom” based on a “zoology”). Society did not then have the means to act on itself. The French Revolution inaugurated modern politics by creating the conditions for the possibility of democracy: the rights of the autonomous individual had to be coordinated with his coexistence with other individuals in a society that is able to determine for itself its vision of what political theory since Aristotle has called the “good life in the city.” But democracy is not a solution; it is a problem, inseparably philosophical and political. After 1989, when its reified opposition to communism no longer made it into an unquestionable value, its problematic nature could and should again become manifest.

In this context, I am struck by the absence of “communism” from

the central arguments that constitute the first, and most substantive, part of the *Manifesto*. Marx praises the revolutionary nature of capitalism—its revolutionizing of traditional society and constant revolutionizing of itself—and he stresses that it is at the same time producing its own grave diggers. The picture painted is similar to that in *Capital*, which of course is subtitled *A Critique of Political Economy* rather than something like “A Handbook for the Communist Future.” But this poses the questions: What then is the famous “specter” invoked in the prefatory remarks to the *Manifesto*? How will it become flesh? What are its politics? Or does it simply obey structural necessities in becoming what it must become?

The “communist” as a political actor enters the argument only in the second part of the *Manifesto*. He is said “to have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole” and not to form “a separate party opposed to other working class parties.” And of course communists, who represent universal justice, are also said not to “set up any [particular] sectarian principles of their own.” What distinguishes the communist is that he is an internationalist and—more important—he represents “the interests of the movement as a whole.” The ability to do this is not the result of “ideas or principles” but “merely express[es], in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle.” This claim is politically seductive because of its philosophical sophistication.

This philosophical argument seems to me to be dangerous. It would be reformulated later, in Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness*, as the idea of “ascribed class consciousness,” which became the basis of the “substitutionism” that justified Leninism and Stalinism (which claimed to act in the name of the “true” interests of the class, even when they acted against its immediate or conscious interests). Claude Lefort sees this communist militant as a new gestalt in political theory (although one might see him as a return of the idea of the “selfless servant” of Plato’s philosopher-king). The hubris of the communist is breathtaking. He becomes a kind of materialist version of the Hegelian Secretary to the World Spirit. What is troubling here is not the claim that theory can pierce beneath appearances to get to their structural foundations; that is the presupposition of any theoretical argument. I am bothered more by the fact that the resulting communist politics is based on a denial of itself as political, of its responsibility for its theoretical claims and practical aims. There is

no autonomous place for politics in this world historical theory; its goal is to transcend any particular politics . . . and to realize a philosophical project over the heads (or behind the backs) of the participants. Its justification lies in its claim to transcend their (alienated) self-consciousness in the name of the really real truth. It is politics as antipolitics.

The foundation of Marx's antipolitical politics had been laid already in the essay "On the Jewish Question," particularly in its critique of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. The achievements of the French Revolution were devalued by being placed under under the rubric "bourgeois"; the political problems posed by the advent of the individual as a bearer of rights (which could be expanded, since these rights now had no transcendent foundation as they did in the old order) were translated to the economic sphere, which quickly replaced the never further defined "civil society" that Marx thought for a moment he could take over and adapt from Hegel's earlier analysis of it. The path to historical materialism was opened.

But Marx's argument can be said, paradoxically, to be itself bourgeois, typical of two hundred years of bourgeois domination. After all, it is the capitalists (or bourgeois) who stress the primacy of the economy and for whom labor is the source of value. No Greek or Christian could have said such a thing. Moreover, the bourgeoisie has never been unequivocally democratic; all institutional advances in democracy have come as it makes forced concessions to social movements. What characterizes bourgeois politics is rather its constant attempt to deny the autonomy of politics—an autonomy that is the precondition of democracy. Thus the invisible hand of classical liberal economics is based on a structure identical to that of Marx's philosophical antipolitics. The free market is supposed to do in its unconscious way what the planned communist society will do consciously. Does the difference make a difference? In both cases, politics is rejected, and responsibility and judgment are subordinated to supposed impersonal necessity.¹⁵

Rereading *The Communist Manifesto*, one wonders why Marx didn't notice this. The reason is suggested in its often-neglected third part, which reconstructs and denounces the antipolitical implications of the various utopian socialisms current at the time. Although Marx reconstructs their appearance and the progress that each

represents—as stages leading to his own synthesis—he doesn't reflect on their antipolitical character. This neglect provides the occasion for reflecting on the issues that might be proposed by a New Political Manifesto that has become necessary now that 1989 has consigned Marx's philosophical vision to the world of utopia.

The first part of the *Manifesto* presented the self-revolutionizing, globally corrosive, yet creatively self-destructive capitalist production process and the forms of social relations that it at once produced and destroyed. But the *Manifesto* began with the promise to explain the “specter” that was threatening the established order in Europe. The philosophical-materialist interpretation of this claim implied that it was capitalism-as-dialectical, capitalism-as-pregnant-with-communism—rather than the particular or arbitrary political action of “the communists”—that is the self-negating principle of modern society. The problem with this interpretation is that it leaves no place for politics or political responsibility; it is antipolitical. “The” revolution is the antithesis of politics. Its supposed necessity is explained structurally, leaving no room for autonomous political agency.

Could one, however, accept Marx's philosophical insight into the need to make use of both critique and science without seeking their dialectical unity as he did? Instead of identifying the “specter” with capitalism-as-dialectical-self-overcoming-leading-to-the-communist-synthesis-of-the-world-as-philosophical-and-philosophy-as-worldly, why not analyze the social relations and political problems of democracy as what was—and is still—haunting Europe? The self-revolutionary nature of capitalism would be replaced by the emergence and—with Hannah Arendt—constant (possibility of the) reemergence of democratic demands.¹⁶ Unlike capitalism-as-dialectical, such a democracy is not a thing or subject that moves history, like Hegel's Spirit or Reason, according to an immanent logic particular to it. As I have noted, the rights that make democracy possible have no external guarantee or foundation; their existence cannot be justified philosophically. They depend on politics, which, as democratic and autonomous, both presupposes these rights and must reaffirm them constantly. This paradoxical circularity—as opposed to the dialectical unity sought by Marx's philosophy—means that members of even an incomplete democratic society do have something to lose beside “their chains.”¹⁷

The paradoxical political structure of democracy, whose forward march—but whose defeats and disappointments—would be cataloged in the first part of a New Political Manifesto, has implications for the style in which it would be written. This would affect the second stage of the argument. It would be self-critical and dialogical because it cannot repeat Marx's appeal to historical necessity but must accept responsibility for its judgments as its own.¹⁸ Hence the equivalent of Marx's "communist"—who never identifies himself as the author of the *Manifesto* but who seems rather to be a secretary taking dictation from History—would be the political critic who self-consciously assumes that most philosophical of rights: the right to be wrong, which is the precondition for thinking at all. This right to be wrong is of course not an invitation to error and categorically not a justification of error. But it does imply a certain caution about truth claims. Joining Marx's insight into the commodity form with Max Weber's more general analysis of the antinomic structure of modern rationality,¹⁹ the democratic critic cannot operate with the goal of producing a unified society in which the particularity of politics and personal interest is forever made impossible. That is the lesson of the revolutions of 1989. But what then is the foundation for a democratic critique?

The third part of a New Political Manifesto would part company with Marx's attempt to show that all previous doctrines lead toward and are contained in his theory. Instead, it would analyze the history of two hundred years of error—that is, of antipolitics—in the form of free markets, planned economies, nationalist identity politics or social-democratic technocracies, and legalistic codifications or appeals to judicial intervention to overcome political impasses. This analysis would not interpret these antipolitical choices as determined by an economic mode of production. It would follow, for example, suggestions from Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* but also numerous hints in Marx's *Grundrisse* to show how the different forms of antipolitics are in reality the results of implicit political choices, of actions (or omissions) that may not fall into the domain formally called "politics" but affect the relations of individuals to one another and to society as a whole.²⁰ This implies that political critique of social injustice—rather than economic criticism of exploitation—is the foundation of democratic politics. It does not mean that politics (even democratic politics) is an end in itself. A

New Political Manifesto would praise democracy as Tocqueville praised it, “not for what it is but for what it leads people to do [*ce qu’elle fait faire*].”²¹ In this way, political critique is not restricted to the sphere that political science defines as politics. Rather, it is concerned with the foundation of social relations themselves.²²

The New Political Manifesto would reject Marx’s goal of finally realizing the conquests inaugurated by the French Revolution by adding a social dimension to the merely formal political rights won in 1789. Democracy is not a set of formal institutions that must acquire a social content in order to be realized; that was Marx’s initial error when he first criticized democracy in “On the Jewish Question.” That path leads to the creation of what the former Soviet empire labeled “democratic republics.” The lesson of 1989 is that such democratic republics—as well as the dream of direct democracy—are simply another manifestation of the antipolitical attempt to avoid facing up to the challenge of modern democracy. Based on the protection of individual rights while seeking at the same time and for just that reason the common good, democracy is a problem, and democratic politics consists in maintaining that problem, not in solving it once and for all. Only under such conditions can the struggle against forms of injustice—which are not limited to the economic sphere—have hopes for success. Capitalism from this perspective is just another antipolitical form of politics; criticism of it is based not on the “chains” it imposes but rather on the responsible freedom it denies as its logic imposes itself.²³ But is such denunciation sufficient to delineate a politics, which was, after all, the achievement of the historical materialism deduced from *The Communist Manifesto*? It is that achievement, however, that is put into question by the revolutions of 1989.

Marx’s political philosophy was based on the immanent philosophical-dialectical critique of capitalist social relations. After the end of the totalitarian claim to realize democracy, it is an immanent critique of democracy, not of capitalism, that is now on the agenda. But that critique cannot make the philosophical-dialectical claim that Lukács, correctly, attributed to Marx, because the challenge of democracy is not based on the emergence of a new subject of world history. Democratic citizens must assume responsibility for their political choices, including the choice not to seek to make a revolution and—what comes down to the same thing—the choice not to

seek to realize democracy because that is, paradoxically, the only way in which democracy can be preserved. By abandoning the kind of totalizing philosophy that motivated Marx, the New Political Manifesto could salvage a part of the Marxian legacy by showing the need to make the transition from philosophy to politics and, from there, to rediscover the challenge of political philosophy.

Notes

Unless otherwise specified, all translations are mine.

INTRODUCTION

1. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, with an introduction by A. J. P. Taylor (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), pp. 82–83.

2. The role of the French intellectuals is important for my argument because, as is seen in part 2, French history illustrates one of the two basic types of democratic politics. When I turn to the work of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, it is to suggest one way in which a critical theory that starts from Marxist premises can lose sight of its original political goal (and become identified with a kind of cultural theory that, in the United States, is often identified as French). On the other hand, the recent work of Jürgen Habermas, representing the second generation, shows how those same concerns can develop toward a unique vision of what a chapter in his newest book (which I received too late to address in this text) calls a “democratic *Rechtsstaat*.” See Jürgen Habermas, *Zeit der Übergänge* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001).

3. Consistent with the theoretical goals of this book, I have eliminated most material that is either anecdotal or dated historically. The two experiences described here, as well as some brief introductory remarks to chapter 7’s discussion of Castoriadis, are the exceptions that, I hope, justify the rule.

4. Of course, the real reason for the invasion had nothing to do with defending true socialism against a heretical Third Way; the invasion was an expression of the so-called Brezhnev doctrine, which insisted that no state could leave the Soviet bloc—recognizing that if one were permitted to deviate from Moscow’s line, others would soon follow—as indeed they did in 1989.

5. See, for example, Marc Morjé Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

6. The concept of the symbolic institution of society is developed particularly by Claude Lefort. It is explained in detail in chap. 8, “From the Critique of Totalitarianism to the Politics of Democracy.” It should be noted that the distinction between symbolic and cultural meaning implies a distinction between the goals of political science and those of political theory. The political scientist assumes that he can stand above a given world and describe from without its structures and relations, as if meanings were always the same, never open to change. In this, the political scientist is making assumptions typical of a traditional rather than a modern democratic society.

7. Another way to explain this point is to distinguish between the political and politics. The political refers to the symbolic institution of meaning within which different issues gain (or lose) salience for practical politics. Transformations of the political make possible political change. How else can one understand the importance, for example, of feminism or the rights of various minorities (or indeed of rights themselves)? Issues that were not the concern of practical politics suddenly become fair game because of such changes.

8. I should stress that the category of antipolitics is not restricted to totalitarianism and that neither are the two identical. I have described elsewhere the history of what I call “two hundred years of error” that came to an end with the downfall of communism. The French Revolution of 1789 overthrew the old hierarchical and traditional society, liberating the individual and making possible democratic politics. But it produced as well conditions in which democracy became a threat to itself: individualism and the reign of private interest along with political instability and social inequality. For two centuries, appeals to an invisible hand, to a social plan—or to some variant of the two—competed in the *anti-political* quest for an end to democratic instability. See Dick Howard, “Rediscovering the Left,” *Praxis International* 10, nos. 3–4 (October 1990–January 1991): 193–204.

9. This is the picture painted most memorably by Hannah Arendt’s *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1963).

10. Chapter 9 suggests some reasons why, in contemporary conditions, these characteristics may be changing.

11. Many examples, from all periods of Marx’s work, are offered in

chapter 13. From his doctoral dissertation, when he called on “philosophy [to become] worldly as the world [becomes] philosophical,” to the eloquent insistence that “reason has always existed, but not always in a rational form,” published in a letter to Ruge in the issue of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in which he announced the proletariat as the agent of revolution, down to the very project of *Capital* as an immanent critique of political economy, Marx’s materialist rationalism is the red thread crossing through his work.

12. Need I stress that it is an achievement? This philosophical project is what separates Marx from even the most philosophical of his disciples—such as Lukács, whose *History and Class Consciousness* is no doubt the pinnacle of Marxist theorizing. The disciples had to reconstruct what they assumed to be a systematic philosophical project; Marx had to invent that project, through many false starts and misleading way stations, with no certainty that he would come to the end of the road.

13. See chapter 7 for Castoriadis’s development of the implications of the Marxist imperative: no revolutionary practice without revolutionary theory.

14. See Dick Howard, “Quand l’Amérique rejoint tragiquement le monde,” *Esprit* (October 2001): 8–14, published in German translation as “Krieg oder Politik?” *Kommune* 19, no. 10/01 (October 2001): 6–9.

I. MARXISM IN THE POSTCOMMUNIST WORLD

1. For example, the belabored and ultimately inconsistent schemata that Marx uses to explain the circulation of capital in volume 2 of *Capital* seem to have dictated the choice of massive investment in heavy industry at the expense of consumer goods. Of course, there were nonideological reasons for the Soviet choices, but most of these too imitated earlier capitalist models of economic development. Rosa Luxemburg had warned of this difficulty before the Bolshevik seizure of power. In her *Accumulation of Capital* (1913) and more strongly in her posthumous reply to her critics in the *Antikritik* (1921), she insists that Marx’s categories are not transhistorical; they apply only to the historically specific mode of production called capitalism.

2. The first sentence of Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics* explains that philosophy remains radical in a reified capitalist society precisely because it is theory, while Marcuse’s vision of a totally administered capitalist society leaves no place for any positive political agency that could be discovered by immanent critique; all that remains is the Great Refusal popularized in the 1960s in the old Frankfurt School adage: *Nicht mitmachen!* See chapter 3 for a further discussion of the Frankfurt School.

3. See John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Retbinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) for a summary of recently available materials from former Soviet archives.

4. See the article-petition published under the ironic title “Le spectre du trotskisme,” in *Le Monde*, June 21, 2001. The authors stress, “We were Trotskyists, some of us are still Trotskyists, and others could become Trotskyists.” The occasion for this intervention was the admission by French prime minister Lionel Jospin that he had remained a Trotskyist not only after he joined the Socialist Party but after he became its first secretary and indeed a minister in the government of François Mitterrand. He apparently left the “Lambertist” branch of the Fourth International only in 1987. For details, *Le Monde*, June 6, 2001, which headlines “The Political Secret of Lionel Jospin,” as well as see *Le Monde*, June 7, 2001, and the analysis of the varieties of French Trotskyism in *Le Monde*, June 13, 2001.

5. Trotsky’s ability to understand the dynamics of revolutionary action is clear in his accounts of both the 1905 and the 1917 revolutions, in which he was a leading actor. This is what I refer to as his phenomenology. On the other hand, his structural dogmatism resulted in an inability to put into question the role of the Bolshevik party in supposedly making the revolution. As a result, as Claude Lefort shows, he could never understand Stalinism as other than the product of Stalin’s petty personality. See Claude Lefort, “The Contradiction of Trotsky,” in *The Political Forms of Modern Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986). On Lefort, see chaps. 5, 6, and 8, below.

6. Rosa Luxemburg, *Selected Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Dick Howard (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 369. It was the recognition of Luxemburg’s contradictions after I had edited and translated this work that led me to the critical account that I presented in *The Marxian Legacy* (1977; 2d ed., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), whose first chapter deals with both the continued attractiveness of Luxemburg and these internal contradictions.

7. In *Die nachholende Revolution* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990). Habermas’s arguments are discussed in chapter 4, below. The idea that the West, or western democracies, have nothing to learn from Eastern European and Soviet experience implies that more than seventy years of history in that part of the world can be written off as simply an unfortunate accident. It implies as well that there is no relation between Western democracy and the development of totalitarianism. I will return to this point below—indeed it is a theme that runs throughout this book.

8. There are other grounds for the turn to cultural studies, as I suggest in chapter 3.

9. I develop this argument in more detail in chap. 13, “Philosophy by Other Means?”

10. It is a sign of the consistency of Marx's philosophical concerns that he made a similar point more than thirty years later, in *The Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875), this time with regard to the difference between equal rights under capitalist conditions and the future equality that would be brought by communism. But, as will be seen in chapter 13, his self-understanding had matured in these thirty years.

11. In this sense, Marx is proposing what I will call in the final part of this chapter a political theory. It is an account of how individuals relate to one another and to their society as a whole. This is not always, however, Marx's own self-understanding; it was emphatically not that of Engels, who edited the second and third volumes of *Capital*, which may not follow the logic that Marx would finally have found. On the other hand, the passages from the *Grundrisse* (the unpublished thousand-page manuscript written in 1857) that I cite can be interpreted in a more political light; they do reflect Marx's own systematic conception.

12. The passages to which I am referring are from notebook 8 of the *Grundrisse* (New York: Vintage, 1973), esp. pp. 699–712. More detail is presented in chapter 13, below.

13. In Karl Marx, *The First International and After* (London: Penguin, 1992).

14. See Dick Howard, "Rediscovering the Left," *Praxis International* 10, nos. 3–4 (October 1990–January 1991): 193–204.

15. The ideas of responsibility and judgment as well as the previous suggestion that when theory claims to pierce beneath appearances it assumes a risk point to a significant political problem for democracies: the right to be wrong is the precondition of democratic choice. There are of course different types of error and different ways to assert this right. Further discussion of this matter recurs throughout this book, as well as in my two studies of political judgment: *Political Judgments* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), and *Pour une critique du jugement politique* (Paris: Cerf, 1998).

16. Many have criticized Arendt for her faith in the emergence of revolutionary moments, particularly in *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1965). I will return to her analyses in the comparative discussion of the American and French Revolutions, and the democracies they created, in chapter 10.

17. This paradoxical circularity also means that democracy is necessarily incomplete. The attempt to realize democracy was the step that misled Marx and became one of the justifications of his totalitarian successors. The idea that the proletariat had only "its chains" to lose connects Marx to a pre-democratic political (or romantic) ethos.

18. One cannot even appeal to a weaker form of historical logic, such

as the social-democratic progression sketched by T. H. Marshall as the progress from civil rights to political rights and finally to social rights. See the recent reprint of Marshall's *Citizenship and Social Class* (London: Pluto, 1992).

19. As did Georg Lukács, and the Frankfurt School after him. But in both cases the philosophical quest led them to misunderstand its political implications.

20. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (1944; reprint, Boston: Beacon, 1957). As previously indicated, I am talking about politics in the classical sense, as the determination of the principles that govern a social order, that give meaning to the relations existing within it (for example, those of men and women, parents and children, the living and the dead), and that define in this way what the Greeks called a "political regime." Politics in this sense institutes a domain of symbolic meaning. Thus one might ask why the Greeks considered the *oikos* (household, or sphere of production) to be insignificant, leaving it to women and slaves, whereas modern capitalism privileges the economy as a domain of freedom (at least for some)?

21. *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Doubleday, Anchor, 1969), p. 243. Translation modified.

22. In this sense, as Castoriadis points out, political theory can be said to be "materialist" because it defines "what matters" (*ce qui matière*) in a given society at a particular moment. Castoriadis's wordplay is found in "La question de l'histoire du mouvement ouvrier," in *L'expérience du mouvement ouvrier* (Paris: UGE, 1974), 1:63. On Castoriadis, see chapter 7.

23. Recall the earlier citation from *The Critique of the Gotha Program*, which can be considered to be Marx's other or more mature *Manifesto*. Marx criticized Lassalle's economism by pointing to the slave who criticizes slavery because wages will never exceed a fixed minimum. That is economism, implies Marx; the issue is freedom, which is political.

2. CAN FRENCH INTELLECTUALS ESCAPE MARXISM?

1. When I label people "Communist," I am not referring to their programmatic or policy choices but rather to a more general political attitude that colors the way they give meaning to their world. Readers too often neglect the third section of the *Manifesto*, which describes "Socialist and Communist Literature" in a dialectical progression whose culmination is of course Marx's own position. This then leads to the short final section that describes the "Position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties." Communists are said not only to support "the attainment of the immediate aims . . . of the working class," but, more

CHAPTER 13

Philosophy by Other Means?

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AFTER 1989

Paradoxically, after 1989 Marx's political philosophy can be read not only as philosophical but also as political. If Marxism is not (in Sartre's famous phrase) the "unsurpassable horizon of our times," it remains a rigorous confrontation with modernity and a challenging attempt to understand its novelty.¹ This is because, despite Marx's intention to provide a theory *of* the revolutionary proletariat that would serve *for* the praxis of that world historical agent, he was and continued to be a philosopher; despite his critique(s) of idealism, Marx remained under its spell. Indeed, this philosophical intention ultimately vitiates his attempt to surpass philosophy by its own means in the practice of political revolution. For just this reason, a reevaluation of the critical potential of Marx's philosophical theory permits new insight into the way a certain form of economic liberalism has apparently triumphed by denying its own political nature. Its conception of the individual and of individual rights as natural givens rather than as dependent on the prior choice of a political framework is put into question when Marx's mature economic theory is read

with the eyes of philosophy. If this critical philosophical reformulation is not undertaken, Marx's economic theory unintentionally puts into question the philosophical premises that guided his analysis. It is these premises that must be reclaimed in order to make sense of Marx's potential contribution to our political self-understanding in the new contemporary world.

Marx's work in its entirety can be seen as an attempt to do philosophy by other means. Although his early passage from philosophy to political economy attempted to go beyond Hegel's claim that Reason or Spirit governs the course of world history, Hegel's historical vision remained the foundation of Marx's theory. The dialectical process in which a subject seeks to actualize itself in the world, finds that its manifestation or appearance is inadequate to its own essence, returns to itself enriched from the experience, and sets out once again to find a superior and more adequate actualization recurs in each of the phases of Marx's development. The 1843 discovery of the proletariat as the key to overcoming Hegel's "merely political" theory became the foundation of a new phase, in which Marx tried to articulate a materialist philosophy for which Revolution became the subject of political history. As in Hegel, two sides had always to be examined. A phenomenology that describes the appearing forms of the historical subject had to be joined to a logic that explains the necessity that underlies these appearances. But the account remained only theoretical; it was not adequate to the practical role that concerned Marx. The 1848 revolution in France forced Marx to confront the limitations of his theory. The successive political appearances that progressed from the political revolution of February, to the (failed) social revolution of June, and then to the stalemated republican compromise seemed to confirm Marx's phenomenological expectations. But the economic logic that he assumed would lead to the next stage proved inadequate. Confronted with Bonaparte's seizure of political power in 1851, Marx was forced to recognize another logic, that of politics. The coexistence of two logics forced Marx to expand his categorical framework.

The first volume of *Capital* completes this phase of Marx's work. Now the philosophical subject whose actualization he attempts to explain is the history of the relations of production, a history that is supposed to culminate in the overcoming of the contradictions inherent in capitalist social relations. But the history of economic

relations cannot be reduced to a quasi-mechanistic determinism; such a reduction ignores the social-normative dimension that the logic of Marx's systematic ambitions requires. It became clear that an adequate account of the development of the relations of production must supplement the phenomenological and logical moments of the analysis with an account of the genesis and normativity of the phenomena that are being analyzed. In this way, the critical dimension that was crucial to Marx's refashioned Hegelianism could be made explicit.

The categories of genesis and normativity were implicit in Marx's early attempts to go beyond the Hegelian paradigm. Genesis designates the practice by which something comes into being; normativity refers to the framework within which that phenomenon enters into legitimate and meaningful relations with other entities. An adequate account must not only describe the phenomena and their dialectical necessity; it must also show how that necessity is concretized historically in the form of normative demands that in turn impel the genesis of new phenomena. Although Marx at times abandons this categorical framework for a misguided economic reductionism, the categories of genesis and normativity can be used to explain the central role of the commodity form in all three volumes of *Capital*. From this perspective, *Capital's* subtitle—*A Critique of Political Economy*—acquires a contemporary relevance. Marx's trajectory is now seen to pass from a critique of the separation of the political sphere from its socioeconomic basis through a reductionist attempt to show that political economy represents “the anatomy of civil society”—and can be considered to be the realization of philosophy by other means—on to a critique of the separation of the economic from the political and a recognition of the proper place of the political. This trajectory permits a reinterpretation of the utopian revolutionary vision of the unpublished manuscript of 1857 known as the *Grundrisse*, showing that in fact the other means for realizing philosophy cannot replace the philosophical project. Realized philosophy, from this perspective, is neither the idealist nor the materialist end of philosophy. Realized philosophy is the renewal of the philosophical project.

Political philosophy after 1989 finds itself in an absurd situation where a humanity that has been defined historically by its quest to overcome the dictates of blind nature accepts as natural—and even

glorifies—a set of artificial and harmful restrictions on its freedom, denying the creative autonomy of its own reason and subordinating this autonomy to the dictates of market forces whose political premises it denies. Yet if there is one theme that Marx emphasized from the beginning to the end of his work, it is that humanity’s own production—be it the mechanisms of the market, the unintended consequences of social relations, or the science that has apparently subordinated nature to its own “one-dimensionality”—has become alien and must be reclaimed. This quest remains his most valuable and enduring legacy. By recapturing the sense of Marx’s original project, as philosophy and as political philosophy, it becomes possible to reclaim that legacy and to rejoin the historical project that took form when the Greeks discovered that philosophy and democratic politics implied one another mutually. Rereading Marx, taking seriously his philosophical attempt to do philosophy by other means, has contemporary political implications—although not those claimed by pre-1989 Marxists of whatever stripe.

FROM PHILOSOPHY TO POLITICAL ECONOMY

Realizing Hegel

Marx’s trajectory began, and concluded, in a conflictual embrace with Hegel. He joined with the Young Hegelians in opposing the heirs of the master. What distinguished the orthodoxy of Hegel’s heirs was their insistence that philosophy constitutes a system, a totality whose content is expressed in Hegel’s famous aphorism in the preface to his *Philosophy of Right*: “What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational.” Although he opposed the orthodox heirs, Marx’s earliest work did not abandon the systematic philosophical project. A note to his doctoral dissertation indicates his intent. Marx’s editors have accurately titled this note “The Becoming-Philosophical of the World as the Becoming-Worldly of Philosophy.”² The qualification “as” must be emphasized. The aphorism claims that the world will only become philosophical—that is, rational and autonomous—insofar as philosophy abandons its speculative separation from that world. This means that when the world has become philosophical, philosophy will thereby have become

worldly—that is, material and sensible. The aphorism is not simply philosophical; it is programmatic. Its systematic demand is that the world and philosophy, genesis and normativity, phenomenology and logic must be integrated in order for each to realize truly what it is yet only potentially.

Marx knew that it was not sufficient simply to will that the world become a better place. The foreword by the orthodox editor of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Eduard Gans, had denounced that sort of voluntarism as reflecting a merely subjective and thus arbitrary freedom; only systems can refute other systems, insisted Gans. Marx therefore had to make a double claim: (a) it had to be shown that philosophy as philosophy could realize itself only by becoming worldly—in other words, philosophy could be systematically complete and normatively necessary only through this turn to the world; and (b) it had to be demonstrated that the world as world could be stripped of its accidental immediacy to become rationally actual by becoming adequate to the demands of philosophy. Only this doubly systematic imperative explains how material conditions dependent on external forces could generate social relations that can achieve normative autonomy. Expressed in the metaphorical language of the will that Marx sometimes adopted, the world had to strive to become philosophical just as philosophy had to strive to become worldly. In contemporary philosophical terms, the genetic material moment has to be shown to be also normative, in the sense of being driven by a normative goal, and the normative philosophical moment must on its side be genetic, in the sense of impelling this transformation. This aphorism of the young Marx forms the kernel of his entire philosophical and political development.

The systematic imperative that Marx underlines from the outset of his work does not prevent him from claiming simultaneously that his theory is critical. When it became clear that political conditions in Prussia would prevent him from pursuing a university career, Marx became the editor of a newspaper in Cologne. The empirical reporting that he undertook in this capacity, as well as the need to defend his journal from reactionary enemies, led to his dissatisfaction with the rash and rhetorical criticism of many of his Young Hegelian friends. Criticism that stood outside of its object and applied to that object standards that could not be justified had to be rejected. In its place, Marx developed what can be called a theory of immanent critique. If

philosophy that had not become worldly was inadequate as philosophy and if a world that had not become philosophical was an unrealized world, then immanent critique of either was justified. It could expect to find within its object not only elements of inadequacy but also signs pointing toward the true realization of the object of immanent critique. Marx developed this notion of immanent critique first in his critique of Hegel and then in his critique of the social world of capitalism. Nearly all his writings were titled or subtitled *A Critique of . . .*, although it is only with *Capital*, as will be seen, that the concept was fully elaborated.

Criticizing Hegel

Marx's unpublished "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of the State" (1843) has two primary aims. The first is simply to refute claims for the autonomy of the political sphere; only then could philosophy's turn to the social world be justified by the systematic imperatives of philosophy as Marx understood it. This was a first step toward the quest for other means. The second aim of the critique is presented in a published essay of the same year, the "Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*." It argues that insofar as Hegel's theory is an accurate (phenomenological) reflection of actual German society, its refutation provides a "critique of the *oeuvres incomplètes*" of that society, which appears as a not-yet-rational world to which philosophy is shown to relate uncritically.³ This essay is also important because Marx develops in it a critical concept of democracy, whose apparent replacement by the self-realization of the revolutionary proletariat marks a turning point.

Marx criticizes Hegel's political idealism for its inversion of subject and object. "Hegel makes all the attributes of the contemporary European constitutional monarch into absolute self-determination of the *will*. He does not say that the will of the monarch is the final decision, but rather the final decision of the will is—the monarch" (OM, 6). Marx inverts this claim: the monarch "is sovereign in so far as he represents the unity of the people, and so he himself is just a representative. . . . The sovereignty of the people does not derive from him, but he from it." In this way, Marx can affirm that democracy is "the generic constitution. Monarchy is a species, and indeed a poor one. Democracy is content and form. Monarchy *should* be

form only, but it adulterates the content.” As content and form, democracy is thus philosophy made worldly and the world made philosophical; it “is the resolved mystery of all constitutions” (OM, 7). But the nature of this democracy is not explained further. To develop his analysis, Marx has to explain how democracy can be at once social and a human product and at the same time political and universally valid. Until Marx answers this question, his critique of the speculative nature of Hegel’s state is only normative; the genetic component has yet to be developed explicitly.

The modern individual described by Hegel’s theory is caught between the public and the private spheres, between bureaucratic and social imperatives. There is an opposition between the formal universality of the state and the material existence of the individual. To realize his nature as a citizen, man must abandon his civil life, withdrawing into his abstract universality bereft of any particular content. But Marx notes that this is historically a progress; it entails the abandonment of that medieval “democracy of unfreedom” (OM, 11) where the individual was defined and thus limited by membership in a particular estate. This transformation was brought about under the absolute monarchy that was accompanied by the triumph of the formal imperatives of the bureaucracy. What social differences remained were eliminated by the French Revolution, whose political egalitarianism considered distinctions among men to be purely social, private, and without consequences for political life. But this political life was now separated from civil society. When civil society has become private, social distinctions no longer have any universal or normative legitimation; they appear changeable, accidental, external to the individual, and in principle arbitrary. But this, interjects Marx in a note to himself, should be developed in the discussion of Hegel’s treatment of civil society (OM, 18). From the point of view of the state, and of democracy, what counts is that this emancipation from determination by his estate liberates the individual from the medieval “*animal history* of human kind, its zoology” (OM, 19–20). But this liberation turns into its opposite; “it separates man’s *objective* being from him, as something merely *external* and material. It does not consider the content of man to be his true actuality.” But, interjects Marx again, this too is left for the discussion of civil society (OM, 19–20).

Why did Marx never write his critique of Hegel’s theory of civil

society? The answer is suggested by his discussion of universal suffrage. Hegel's objection to democracy was that it has no form; the participation of all as equals is possible only through abstraction from all particular content (as Marx had noted). Instead, Hegel used the concrete material determinations of the estates (and guildlike corporations) to ensure that all interests found representation. Marx rejects this anachronism. He wants to draw out the positive potential as well as the critical implications of universal suffrage. Voting is said to permit civil society to raise itself to political existence, which is its true, because universal form of existence. Granted, this form of existence is an abstraction, but Marx sees it also as the dialectical transcendence of that abstraction. In voting, civil society makes its political existence into its true existence, and by this very gesture it makes its civil existence inessential. Separated from one another, the interdependent opposites dissolve. "The *reform of voting* is therefore, within the *abstract political state*, the demand for the *dissolution* of this state, but also the *dissolution of civil society*" (OM, 27). This dialectical conclusion fulfills the two systematic goals: (1) it explains the genesis of the democracy whose normative legitimation Marx had provided at the outset of his analysis; and (2) it is a critique of the separation of the political sphere from actual society that also—importantly—criticizes the basis of that separation as being due to the self-alienated structure of civil society itself. The conditions for philosophy's becoming worldly thus coincide with those needed for the world to become philosophical. The overcoming of the abstract political state shows the self-alienated character of its foundation in civil society. It remains to find within civil society the key to overcoming this self-alienation.

Democracy as the "resolved mystery of all constitutions" would soon be replaced in the third of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* by communism as the solution to "the riddle of history" (OM, 431). What is the relation of these two proposals? If Hegel's idealism was criticized for its uncritical accommodation to the existing world, for mystifying the real by embedding it in a normative system of rationality of which material reality is but an appearance, Marx will have to be able to show how the analysis of the existent world contains within itself a contradiction that explains why the world strives toward philosophy as philosophy opens itself to the world. Hegel's theory of the modern state pre-

sented the culmination and completion of his political theory; Marx's critique of Hegel's idealist program leads him to invert the path, moving from the political toward its material foundation. But what is at issue for Marx is more than simply a materialist inversion; Marx's claim is also historical. Hegel's theory explained the existent political structures of his time and showed why they were necessary to the progress of modernity over the Middle Ages, but the inconsistencies in the theory when confronted with modern social conditions implied that history had not yet ended and that the imperatives of philosophy remained to be realized. That is why Marx noted that the critique of the political illusion opens the path toward the analysis of civil society.

*Revolution Replaces Spirit as the Foundation
of the New Philosophy*

Marx's essay "On the Jewish Question" develops the implications of his critique of the "merely political" emancipation that seeks to replace monarchy with a republic. The French Revolution that overthrew monarchy and constituted a truly political state, independent of civil society, simultaneously dissolved civil society into a formless mass of egoistic individuals relating to one another only externally. Marx criticizes this merely "political revolution [that] dissolves civil life into its constituent elements without revolutionizing these elements and without subjecting them to critique" (OM, 49). As a result, the rights of man serve to consecrate a kind of egoistic individualism. The rights to equality, liberty, security, and property are victories over monarchy that serve only to protect man as an "isolated monad, withdrawn into himself"; they guarantee the right to exist as a "*limited* individual limited unto himself," whose freedom becomes "the right of private property" (OM, 45), whose "security" is guaranteed by a legal "equality" whose empty formality means that it protects the actual inequality existing in civil society (OM, 46). But Marx does not stop with this reductionist critique of the rights of man (which a conservative such as Edmund Burke or Marx's beloved Balzac could share).

Despite its call for material social change, "On the Jewish Question" also argues that the separation of political from social life makes true democracy impossible. To overcome this division, alienated,

egoistic individual life must be replaced by “generic being [*Gattungswesen*].” This critique is normative; it is a prefiguration of the analysis of alienation developed in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. But philosophy as normative must acquire a genetic efficacy, a power to impel transformative action and thus to become worldly. This has not yet been demonstrated. At best, Marx could claim to have shown how philosophy becomes worldly and why the world must (ideally) become philosophical; he has not shown that philosophy becomes worldly *as* the world becomes philosophical. This may explain why he does not return to his favorable evaluation of the advance of the modern state over the “democracy of unfreedom” to consider the positive aspects of the new rights won by the revolution. Instead, the “Introduction to a Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*” continues the systematic philosophical critique.

Marx now “declares war” on a world that is “beneath all critique” but remains “an object of the critique just as the criminal who is under the level of humanity is still the object of the executioner” (OM, 59). The occasion for this “war” is offered first by Marx’s normative critique of religious alienation, which he insists must be supplemented by a an “irreligious critique” whose ground is “man makes religion” (OM, 57). Critique is now “no longer an end in itself but simply a *means*” (OM, 59). Its task is suggested by the fact that religion appears also as an active protest against unhappiness (rather than passive alienation); this offers the genetic moment of the critique. As a means, critique “must make these petrified relations dance by singing before them their own tune” (OM, 60). This metaphorical definition of the critical task was given a more philosophical form in a letter that Marx published in the same issue of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. He insisted there that “reason has always existed, but not always in a rational form.”⁴ The genetic moment cannot be separated from its normative complement. This is clear in Marx’s critique of two “parties” seeking German liberation, each of which accomplishes the opposite of what it intends. The “practical party” demands the negation of philosophy and concentrates on the world. But “you cannot transcend [*Aufheben*] philosophy without actualizing it” (OM, 62). The “theoretical party” is equally one-sided, concentrating on the “critical struggle [against idealist philosophy]” without seeing that it too exists in the world. It

“thought that it could actualize philosophy without transcending it” (OM, 63). Once again, the world’s becoming philosophical must be understood as philosophy’s becoming worldly.

This context explains the philosophical role of the proletariat and Marx’s turn to political economy as the way to do philosophy by other means. Normatively, “the critique of religion ends with the doctrine that man is the highest being for man, hence, with the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a degraded, enslaved, contemptible being” (OM, 64). Genetically, “theory is only actualized in a people inasmuch as it is the actualization of their needs. . . . It is not sufficient that thought should seek its actualization; actuality must itself strive toward thought” (OM, 65). The two moments come together when “a particular class by virtue of its particular situation undertakes the universal emancipation of society” (OM, 67). This demands “the formation of a class with radical chains,” which is

a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, . . . of a sphere which has a universal character because of its universal suffering and which claims no particular right because no particular wrong but unqualified wrong is done to it; a sphere which can invoke no historical title but only a human one; a sphere, finally . . . which, in a word, is the complete loss of humanity and can only redeem itself through the complete redemption of humanity. This dissolution of society as a particular Estate is the proletariat. (OM, 69; italics omitted)

The key to this first formulation of the demand for proletarian revolution lies in the notion of the formation of such a class. The proletariat is not simply the poor; Marx insists that the poverty of the proletariat is “*artificially produced*” (ibid.). The demonstration of the logical necessity of this artificial production falls to political economy.

After introducing the proletariat as the genetic material basis for revolution, Marx turns to the normative moment necessary to his systematic account. “As philosophy finds in the proletariat its material weapons, so the proletariat finds in philosophy its spiritual weapons, and once the lightning of thought has struck in this naive soil of the people the Germans will complete their emancipation and

become men” (ibid.). Philosophy thus becomes worldly as the world becomes philosophical in the revolutionary proletariat. Marx repeats his systematic intention at the conclusion of his argument: “The head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart is the proletariat. Philosophy cannot be actualized without the transcendence [*Aufhebung*] of the proletariat; the proletariat cannot be transcended without the actualization of philosophy” (OM, 70). The philosophical problem, however, lies in Marx’s metaphorical appeal to the “lightning of thought” that is supposed to awaken the proletariat to its normative vocation. The metaphor refers to what came later to be called class consciousness. But the concept itself remains to be analyzed—normatively in the second of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and genetically in the third manuscript. The philosophical result of this systematic claim for the proletarian revolution is that *Revolution replaces Spirit as the subject whose process of appearance and self-recognition was the foundation of the Hegelian system.*

The first of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* uses long excerpts from classical political economy to demonstrate the “artificial” formation of the proletariat by capitalist economic relations. Political economy presupposes the existence of private property rather than analyzing critically its systematic political presupposition, which Marx shows to lie in alienated labor. By showing the mutual dependence of private property and alienated labor, Marx illustrates the genesis of internally contradictory socioeconomic property relations that are at war with their own premise and thus open to the weapon of immanent critique. But this first manuscript breaks off before drawing conclusions, and the second manuscript seems to recognize that the task could not be accomplished by genetic means alone. The presence of a contradiction does not mean necessarily that it will be overcome. Hence the second manuscript returns to the opposition between alienated labor and private property, proposing this time a normative account. At first, alienated labor and private property relate to one another positively; the action of each (unintentionally) improves the lot of the other. Capital’s search for greater profit increases social productivity, while labor’s demand for better wages and conditions forces capital to invent more efficient machines. This positive relation appears to make the interests of labor and capital identical, yet each also comes to recognize that

its relation to the other implies that it is dependent on something external to itself. Each then seeks to affirm its independence: capital becomes exploitative, while labor engages in industrial struggle. But both strategies are fatally flawed since the two *are* related to one another, and the pretense of acting independently works against what each nonetheless is. This leads to a third stage in which the two poles collide—and where Marx’s manuscript breaks off, unable to say more about the forms this normative collision would generate. Nonetheless, this normative account conceptualizes the “lightning of thought” that would make the proletariat conscious of its revolutionary destiny. It complements the genetic account of the first manuscript.

The third and longest of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* confirms Marx’s critical Hegelianism while proposing a method for doing philosophy by other means and justifying his passage from philosophy to political economy. Marx argues that the “greatness” of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is due to his having understood the positive, creative function of labor.⁵ Since Hegel was concerned only with mental labor, however, he neglected the negative side (the alienation) that prevents actual labor from realizing itself. Adopting other means, Marx proposes to actualize what Hegel did only in thought. “The entire so-called world history,” explains Marx, “is only the creation of man through human labor and the development of nature for man” (607). New needs are generated in this process; these needs become normative demands that spur the process forward. The panorama that emerges shows “how the history of industry . . . is the open book of man’s essential powers” (602). The relation that in the first manuscript entailed a contradiction between alienated labor and private property now becomes positive as society and its laboring subjects are enriched. The opposition between subject and object is overcome; “natural science will lose its abstract tendency and become the basis of human science” (604). This claim clarifies the result expected from the clash of opposites in the incomplete second manuscript. The concept of communism is presented as “the completed naturalism = humanism and . . . the completed humanism = naturalism,” and as such it is “the true resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man” (593 f.). With this communist solution in view, Marx has accomplished the passage from philosophy to political economy; philosophy has

become worldly in the new and modern science that reflects on a world that is, apparently, becoming philosophical.

The third manuscript provides a cautionary note before turning to the new means for doing philosophy. Communism “is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution” (593 f.). The phrase is familiar; Marx had used a similar formulation when describing democracy as “the resolved mystery of all constitutions” (OM, 7). Its reappearance here suggests that the first phase of Marx’s political theory has been completed; he has rid himself of the illusory separation of the political that vitiated Hegel’s theory of the modern state. The price to be paid for this philosophical liberation remains to be calculated. If the political economy with which Marx replaces philosophy becomes as separated from the other social relations as did the state in Hegel’s idealistic view of political life, the price may be too high. Marx will have to show that his new theoretical standpoint also makes room for the revolutionary democratic practice of politics that Marx had pointed to as “the modern French” alternative to Hegel’s merely political transformation (OM, 10). This need to make room for politics became clear with the outbreak of the 1848 revolutions.

FROM POLITICAL ECONOMY TO POLITICS

Economics and the Proletariat

An illustration of the normative dimension of Marx’s critique of the “artificial formation” of the proletariat is offered by the claim in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* that the opposition between the propertied and those who lack it is an “indifferent opposition,” whereas the clash of capital and labor presents a truly dialectical opposition that must develop toward a resolution (590). This distinction is justified by a dialectical sketch of the development of political economy as it becomes scientific. The mercantilists saw the objective essence of wealth in precious metals, becoming thereby “fetishists, Catholics.” Adam Smith—whom Marx’s new friend, Engels, had called “the Luther of political economy” (584–586)—made labor the essence of wealth, thus introducing a subjective dimension. This labor was abstract, free of all individual

qualities, and able thereby to overthrow earlier modes of production because it was universal whereas they were only particular and thus limited. This development culminated with Ricardo, whom his contemporaries accused of amoralism because he described the conflict of capital and labor openly. Those who followed Ricardo were forced to become apologists, for it was now evident that the reality behind the abstract labor that constitutes wealth was a negative principle, abstract man considered only in the formal universality of his being: the worker. The resulting figure recalls the form of alienation encountered in religious consciousness; like religion, political economy claims a normative universality that it cannot justify. Marx's critique has to find the immanent foundation of this alienation so that his own normative dialectical critique can be realized.

The theory of alienated labor provides the necessary genetic complement. Marx analyzes four aspects the worker's condition as wage laborer. (1) He is alienated from his product; the more he produces, the less he receives; the product in which he has invested his labor belongs to another, is external to him, and exercises a power over him—much as in religious alienation, where the more power is attributed to god, the less remains for man. (2) The worker is alienated from nature, which is necessary for the objectification of his labor and for the reproduction of his own life. Nature has become a commodity; the worker depends on the capitalist to provide him with it—to work on and to consume. As a result, he is alienated in the act of production; his labor does not belong to him, does not permit his self-affirmation, and constrains his freedom. (3) Since labor has become merely a means, the worker is reduced to the status of an animal; the consciousness and freedom specific to man are denied him. In this way, the worker is alienated from his own generic being; he is not free to become that which he is. It follows (4) that the worker is alienated from other men. Since the relation of man to man (and, in the third manuscript, to woman [592]) is the index of man's relation to himself, to his world, and to his own activity, alienation reaches here its pinnacle. The conclusion of this analysis of alienated labor is radical. Reformers like Proudhon who want to raise wages produce only better-paid slaves. Wage labor must be abolished. But this is a return to the normative standpoint; it explains that the system of capitalist relations must be overthrown, but it does not show how this can take place.⁶ Indeed, Marx's manuscript breaks off inconclusively

shortly after this argument is proposed. Before returning to the different path offered by the third manuscript, it is necessary to look at the economic grounds of Marx's political hope.

Marx's economic theory before 1848 did not build on the unity of philosophy and the proletariat, of normativity and genesis. The lectures presented in Brussels in 1847 that were revised and published as "Wage Labor and Capital" only in April 1849 began by claiming that the defeats of 1848 show that however remote a renewal of class struggle may appear, the political forms have been tried and found wanting; it is time to return to the economic logic that grounds bourgeois rule and proletarian slavery. Not all labor is wage labor, insists Marx, and neither is capital a suprahistorical reality. "A Negro is a Negro. He only becomes a slave in certain relations. A cotton-spinning jenny is a machine for spinning cotton. It becomes capital only in certain relations."⁷ Not every sum of commodities or exchange-values is capital. Capital comes to exist "by maintaining and multiplying itself as an independent social power, that is, as the power of a portion of society, by means of its exchange for direct, living labor. The existence of a class which possesses nothing but its capacity to labor is a necessary prerequisite of capital" (DM, 257). This means that capital is the domination of accumulated past labor over the direct living labor of the proletariat.

Marx does not draw from his argument any conclusions that bear on political strategy or suggest a course of political action. His concern is to establish the inevitable necessity that the proletariat overcome the socioeconomic relations in which it is confined. The expected economic crisis will be the catalyst for renewed class struggle, which Marx wants to show is vain if it is not total. In his 1847 polemic against Proudhon, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx draws the normative political implication of his economic analysis. The proletariat is "already a class over against capital, but not yet for itself." The genetic complement is said to be found "in the struggle" (DM, 214). But this voluntarism needs to be justified in its turn; the genetic political moment cannot stand alone. A reconciliation of the economic and the political perspectives was suggested in the third of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*: the insertion of the logic of the economy into a conception of history. The success of this approach depends on one difference between the analysis of alienated labor in 1844 and the simple economic

logic of “Wage Labor and Capital.” The alienation analyzed in 1844 and at the outset of “Wage Labor” presents a phenomenology of the abstract individual worker, whereas the economic logic of wage labor concerns labor as a social relation that—like the proletariat—is an “artificial formation.”

Economics and History

The communism described in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* is said to be the product of “the entire movement of history” (594, see also 618). The communist revolution—like Hegel’s Spirit—plays a teleological role; it is the realization of the revolutionary subject. Marx’s phenomenological premise is that “the entire so-called world history is only the creation of man through human labor and the development of nature for man” (607). Whereas “Wage Labor” stressed the negative effects of increasing industrialization, in 1844 Marx had insisted that “the history of industry and the present objective nature of industry is the open book of man’s essential powers, the sensibly present human psychology” (602). He criticized what he calls “crude” or “leveling” communism, whose notion of equality is based on a “return to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and wantless man who has not gone beyond private property nor even yet achieved it” (592). Communist man’s relation to his objects will no longer be a “one-sided” possession for use as a means to an externally given end; as in his earlier vision of democracy, Marx describes communist possession as “all-sided” (598). In this way, the “development [*Bildung*] of the five senses is the work of all past world history.” As a result, “the fully constituted society produces man in this entire wealth of his being, produces the rich, deep, and entirely sensitive man as its enduring actuality” (602). The antagonism of wage labor and capitalism must be overcome not by returning to a simpler past but by using critically the achievements of the present to transcend the conflict.

The objective development of capitalism prepares this communist future in which “in the place of the political and economic wealth and poverty steps the rich man and the rich human need” (605). But while capitalism prepares this possible future, it does not produce it merely by the logic of its own breakdown and demise. The “lightning of thought” has not been explained. Marx must show

concretely why communism is not merely a normative ideal to which reality must adapt but represents also the “entire movement of history” (594), which is its genetic complement. Only then will communism not be susceptible to the critique Marx levels against the idealism of “merely political” solutions. But because such ideals do play a role in history, he has also to explain what might be called the production of consciousness, showing how circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances. This is the task Marx takes up in *The German Ideology*.⁸ The production of consciousness and the production of capitalism are historically interdependent.

The subtitle of Marx’s account of the historical rise of capitalism is significant: *Natural [naturwüchsig] and Civilized Instruments of Production and Forms of Property* (GI, 65). “Civilized” production is the product of human activity—which, however, turns against its producers in the alienated form of capital. The workers who produce capital are subordinated to its dictates; their autonomy is reified by its imperatives. The proletariat can also truly “civilize” production, however, because it has no particular class interests that would prevent the generalization of the new productive forces. Marx’s critical analysis tries to show that in producing capitalism the proletariat has produced also the means of its own liberation. The philosophical anthropology that forms the framework of the analysis—tracing the successive phases of economic development that have led to capitalism and its “ideological” self-representation—articulates a dialectic that begins with production, passes through its objectification in a world where it is subject to determinations that were not intended by the conscious producers and become barriers to them, and finally ends with a negation of this externality in the communist revolution, whose abolition of (externally determined) labor liberates an autonomous and enriched humanity. The problem with this dialectical logic is suggested by Marx himself, however, when he asserts that revolution is necessary not only because it is the only way to overthrow the ruling class but also “because the class *overthrowing* it [the ruling class] can only succeed through a revolution in ridding itself of the muck [*Dreck*] of the ages and become thus capable of a new grounding of society” (GI, 70). This means that it is not simply the production of capitalist social relations that makes the proletariat capable of

inaugurating truly human history. The metaphorical “lightning of thought” remains to be explained.

Economics and Philosophy

The importance of *The German Ideology* lies in its attempt to situate the capitalist economy in the context of a history that illustrates materially the progress of humanity toward its own emancipation. At times, Marx seems to think that an immanent critique of the historical process that produced capitalism could also point to the latent normative potential for transcending that social formation (at times on material-logical grounds, at others for anthropological-phenomenological reasons). Sometimes, his critique seems intended more to enlighten the potential revolutionary subject about its own situation, following the insistence in the 1843 “Exchange of Letters” that “consciousness is something it must acquire even if it does not want to.”⁹ On yet other occasions, Marx’s materialism becomes less a critique and more a positivist reductionism pointing to a mechanically functioning productivist logic of history. In each case, critique seeks to explain the passage to action, as social transformation or as political change. The account oscillates between two poles suggested by the distinction between a phenomenological and a logical account of the “lightning of thought”: in the former, the proletariat must see through the world of appearance and understand the logic of its situation; in the latter, the proletariat must become aware of its own practice and reappropriate consciously the production of its social life. In the one case, the world becomes philosophical; in the other, philosophy becomes worldly. The challenge is to unite the two poles.

Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845) provides another illustration of the ambiguity of his conception of philosophy following his discovery of the primacy of political economy. The second paragraph of the third thesis, which posed the question “who will educate the educator,” now describes “revolutionary practice” as “the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing.”¹⁰ In other words, “revolutionary practice” would on its own realize Marx’s demand that philosophy become worldly as the world becomes philosophical. This claim permits Marx to avoid the voluntarism that is apparently suggested by the famous eleventh thesis: that the philosophers have only understood the world

whereas the point is to change it. By contrast, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) brings together the strands followed to this point in a different manner. The critical reader is struck here by Marx's ability at once to sing a hymn to capitalist civilizing processes and to denounce their nefarious effects. The contradiction between the forces and relations of production develops while stripping the veils from past traditions and fixed relations. "All that is solid melts in the air" as capitalism continues its self-revolutionizing process.¹¹ In the end, the worker is brought face to face with his lot, which is made "manifest" by history itself. But the concept of alienated labor is not invoked to explain the next step. Instead, Marx introduces the activity of the Communists. They are not a separate party; they have no separate interests, and they do not seek to impose (as doctrinaires) their own sectarian ideas. To this practical universality corresponds the theoretical superiority that comes from their "clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement."¹² As the communists carry out the dictates of history, Marx has returned to the idealism of Hegel: *Revolution has replaced Spirit as the philosophical subject of history.*

FROM POLITICS BACK TO POLITICAL ECONOMY

The Phenomenology of Politics

The realization of the revolution as subject of history must unite the normative and genetic moments that guided Marx's analysis. The philosopher has the phenomenological task of following this subject's appearing forms in order to recognize and articulate the immanent logic of their manifestation. The French revolutions of 1848 provided a practical illustration, since the political revolution of February was followed by an attempted social revolution in June. That is why the introduction to *Class Struggles in France* (1850) asserts that a victory in February would have been in fact a defeat. It would have been that "merely political" revolution that Marx criticized in his youth. The apparent failure in June, by unifying the enemies of the proletariat, makes possible the emergence of a truly revolutionary party. While the demand for a "social republic" revealed the "secret of 19th century revolution," its neglect of class antago-

nisms was based on an illusion of *fraternité* that had to be destroyed.¹³ The “specter of communism” that Marx had recently invoked at the outset of *The Communist Manifesto* could become reality only if this phenomenological movement culminates in the self-consciousness of the proletariat.

But the proletariat is not alone on stage; Marx has to explain also the appearances and illusions of bourgeois politics. He now must treat the state as a “power” rather than criticize its impotence. This implies that society is not a homogeneous body needing only to be liberated from politics to realize its essential democratic nature; the economic critique that sought to actualize philosophy by other means needs a political supplement. But the status of the political in Marx’s analysis is ambiguous. The phenomenology of revolution that he describes in *Class Struggles* concludes with an affirmation of the priority of the logic of revolution, proclaiming “The Revolution is Dead, Long Live the Revolution” (CSF, 62). This is why the politics Marx describes is a politics of illusion. Succeeding classes come to power only to be caught between their claims to universality and the particularity of their own interests. The first victim of this illusion was the proletariat, whose decisive role in February led it to “lower the *red* flag before the tricolour” in the belief that the social republic could be achieved peacefully (CSF, 46). At the same time, however, the bourgeois republic showed itself for what it truly is: a state whose purpose is to perpetuate the rule of capital. By destroying the proletariat’s illusions, the defeat proves to be a victory. But this complicates the situation; there are now three moments in Marx’s phenomenology: the imperatives of the political sphere, the claims of particular interest, and the omnipresent logic of the “specter” that haunts the political stage. In the strategic maneuvering and the shifting class alliances that characterized the drama of 1848, the republic became the political form to which all parties had to appeal, despite their differing goals. It was the political form in which their contradictory interests could coexist. The imaginary republic denounced by the young Marx’s critique of Hegel’s state thus acquired political reality.

The republic is of course only a political form; the particular business of society continues on its own. Had the monarchist factions recognized their real interests rather than dreaming of political restoration, they would have seen that their old division as

representatives respectively of landed and financial interests no longer existed. Both benefited from the national debt, which the Party of Order continued to increase as it tried to defend the state against society. Although the manufacturers opposed this policy, their economic weakness at this stage of the development of French capitalism meant that they could have political influence only in alliance with the proletariat. But June had taught them the danger of this, and so they too were forced to support the Party of Order. The political situation appeared hopeless. Marx predicted stalemate, with the Party of Order and Bonaparte joining together against their common enemy, the people, “until the new economic situation has again reached the point where a new explosion blows all these squabbling parties with their constitutional republic sky-high” (CSF, 142). This economic crisis would produce the objective destruction of the illusion of the political that the phenomenological progression described by Marx had produced on the side of the revolutionary subject. The unity of the two moments would mean that revolution was not only possible; it could now become actual.

The Logic of Politics

Instead of the expected revolution based on economic developments, French politics took an unexpected turn with the coup d'état of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. Marx sought to explain this new turn in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852). He repeats many of the earlier arguments from *Class Struggles* but adds new elements to his theory of the political. The best known, presented in the preface to the second edition (1869), seems to appeal to economic reductionism, suggesting that a stalemate in the class struggle permits the rise to power of a mediocre individual like Bonaparte. The political can achieve an autonomous position, independent of the economic infrastructure, only in such exceptional conditions—whose very exceptionality seems to confirm the general validity of a reduction of the political to the economic. But Marx's systematic theoretical goals suggest a different reading. The theme of Revolution as the subject of history suggests the need to supplement the phenomenological critique of the illusion of the political presented in *Class Struggles* with a logical critique of political illusions. This goal explains the use

of theatrical metaphors in Marx's analysis; the political is the stage on which illusion must appear, and the failure to understand this symbolic element of politics dooms its practitioners. Understanding this political logic was the key to Bonaparte's seizure of power, just as failure to understand it doomed his opponents, leaving the field, Marx expected, to the revolutionary proletariat.¹⁴

The different logical foundations of bourgeois and proletarian revolution mean that each will be accompanied by different phenomenological appearances. "Bourgeois revolutions . . . storm quickly from success to success. They outdo each other in dramatic effects; men and things seem set in sparkling diamonds and each day's spirit is ecstatic. But they are short-lived; they soon reach their apogee." In contrast, continues Marx, proletarian revolutions "constantly engage in self-criticism, and in repeated interruptions of their own course. They return to what has apparently already been accomplished in order to begin the task again . . . ; they shrink back again and again before the indeterminate immensity of their own goals, until the situation is created in which . . . the conditions themselves cry out: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta*."¹⁵ This self-critical proletarian political project implies that no objective or economic determination ensures success. The political process is not simply superstructural or illusory, and the theatrical metaphors are more than simply metaphorical.

The need to understand the logic of politics resulted from the failed expectations to which the phenomenological account of *Class Struggles* gave rise. Marx had expected that the passage through the series of political appearances that followed the February revolution would be complemented by the intervention of economic crisis. This infrastructural logic that explains the succession of political forms was treated as separate from these political appearances. In contrast, *The 18th Brumaire* offers a logic of politics that is immanent to the political, so that Marx can conclude that "this parody of the empire was necessary to free the mass of the French nation from the burden of tradition and to bring out the antagonism between the state power and society in its pure form" (18th, 244). This does not mean that the economic is irrelevant, but it implies that its place has to be evaluated from within a political logic that must be accounted for in its own terms. The phenomenology of political illusion was presented from the participant perspective; its logic has now to be

analyzed from the standpoint of the observer. That external analyst, as was implicit in *Class Struggles*, is none other than the proletariat, that specter whose defeat in June meant that it “passed into the *background* of the revolutionary stage” (18th, 154).

After the inadequacy of an account focused on political illusions has become clear, Marx turns to a critique of the illusion of politics. The problem is to understand the relation of these two analyses. Marx notes the irony that, having deified the sword, the bourgeoisie came to be ruled by it; after destroying the revolutionary press, it has lost its own; after sending out spies and closing the popular clubs, it finds its salons are watched by the police. This may have protected its purse, but it cost it “the appearance of respectability” (18th, 235). Napoleon’s coup replaced the parliamentary force of words with force without words, destroying the illusion of politics. But Marx’s explanation does not appeal only to economic interest. “The opposition between the executive and the legislative expresses the opposition between the nation’s heteronomy and its autonomy” (18th, 236). The origin of this antipolitical executive power has to be explained. Its source is the triumph of the absolute monarchy over feudalism, a triumph that centralizes power in the state. The French Revolution took this centralization a step further, and the first Napoleon and then his restored successors perfected the system. The result is the kind of political alienation the young Marx had denounced abstractly in the Hegelian state. “Every *common* interest was immediately detached from society, opposed to it as a higher, *general* interest, torn away from the self-activity of the individual members of society, and made a subject for governmental activity” (18th, 237). Indeed, the parliamentary republic’s attempts to ward off the threat of revolution led it to further centralization. “All political upheavals have perfected this machine instead of smashing it,” concludes Marx (18th, 238). Bonaparte’s coup completes the separation of the state machine from society; the political illusion now has its proper logical foundation.

This analysis of the role of the absolute state and its successors in creating the conditions necessary for the rise of bourgeois relations of production is the crucial insight of *The 18th Brumaire*. Marx had previously assumed that the transition from feudalism to capitalism took place according to a sheer economic logic defined by the contradiction between the growing forces of production and the out-

dated relations of production. Now his analysis of the illusion of the political and of political illusions led him to abandon his previous theory of the subject of history on which that model was based. He had assumed that Revolution replaced Hegel's Spirit as the motor and telos of historical development. Now political experience had shown that it is not sufficient to trace the phenomenological process by which revolutionary appearances supersede one another until they come to coincide with their essence. The triumph of world capitalism (in which Bonaparte's new empire was an active participant) had defeated the bourgeois political revolution after the latter had defeated the social republic. Marx had to find a different subject. Not capital—which is only an appearance—but capitalist social relations, as reflected in the mirror of the commodity form, became the new standpoint from which to show how the actualization of philosophy as the making philosophical of the world can realize philosophy by other means.

The Capitalist Economy as Political Subject

Marx himself published only the first volume of *Capital* (1867), whose subtitle explained that it presented the “theory of the immediate production process.”¹⁶ This fact explains why Marxists often misunderstood the kind of theory that Marx was proposing—although the subtitle alerts the philosophical reader, since immediacy is only the first form of appearance and does not reveal the essence that makes it possible. The less alert reader would pay greater heed to the concern with economic production. Yet it is only after nearly 150 pages of logical analysis of the commodity form and a general description of capital's logic that chapter 6 proposes to leave the “Eden of the innate rights of man” that will bring a change “in the physiognomy of our *dramatis personae*.”¹⁷ The theatrical metaphor and the demand to leap to a new perspective are familiar from the political account of *The 18th Brumaire*. Their presence suggests that Marx has not changed his method but rather its object. The phenomenology of appearing forms and the logic that governs their necessary articulation are still present. The new theory of political economy will join together those moments, which had remained side by side as separate texts in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. The commodity form—uniting use-value and

exchange-value—becomes the basis of their unity. Its full development as realized capitalism is summarized at the end of volume 1 in chapter 25, “The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation.” But this “law” leads neither to socialism nor revolution; at most, it shows that capitalism produces increasing (relative) misery for an increasing part of the population. Perhaps to convince humane readers to reject such a system, the following chapter’s description of “original accumulation” demolishes the argument of apologists who claim that capitalism is something natural. But Marx’s stress on a systematic, philosophical, and immanently critical theory is more rigorous.

The economic theory of *Capital’s* first volume can be explained relatively simply, once one accepts the labor theory of value.¹⁸ Marx presupposes that capitalism functions fairly: all commodities are sold at their (exchange) value, which is determined by the amount of average socially necessary labor contained in each of them; this includes the labor necessary to produce all their components, raw materials, an aliquot value of machinery consumed, and the labor added. The trick, and the source of surplus-value, is that one commodity involved in the process of production is the worker, who is purchased as the commodity called “labor-power.” The worker’s exchange-value is determined, like any other commodity, by the amount of average socially necessary labor needed to reproduce him (and his family). But as opposed to other commodities, purchased for their use-value and consumed privately, the consumption of labor-power consists in putting it to work. And it can be put to work for a longer period of time than is necessary to reproduce it. The excess that results goes into the pocket of the capitalist, who has fairly purchased a commodity on the market and used it freely, as is his right.

This economic description is at first formal. It follows the appearance of capital as money goes through a cycle at the end of which more money emerges. In its immediacy, this appearance of profit making as dominating all social relations within capitalist society explains nothing. Just as the biologist cannot begin with the immediacy of the human body, so the political economist must find the “cell form” that permits the explanation of the phenomena that concern him. This cell form is the commodity. Commodities have not only use-values—which are inherently subjective, personal, and thus not comparable with one another—but also exchange-values, which,

as socially established, appear to define the economic sphere as objective and measurable. If a coat is regularly exchanged for a given amount of cloth, we assume that something equal is being exchanged on both sides, something shared by both commodities. It appears at first that this property shared by both commodities is money, but the value of money itself can change—for example, at the beginning of the capitalist era with the discovery of Latin American gold. This is where the labor theory of value enters. The labor incorporated in a commodity is average socially necessary labor; it is not the concrete labor of the particular tailor who produced the coat that is exchanged. *Capital* thus presents an economic theory of the social relations that engender this process.

The social production process of capitalism is based on a series of commodity exchanges. The capitalist appears immediately as a person having the money needed to buy means of production (machinery and raw materials, as well as the labor-power to work them). These means of production have to be available on a free market, which is not the case, for example, in the feudal “democracy of unfreedom.” Not only must restrictions on the use of land and its products be eliminated; guild rules that regulate production must be overcome. Most important, however, is the emergence of the free worker, whose freedom is due to his separation from the land and the community that formerly ensured his subsistence; this abstract freedom leaves him no choice but to sell his labor-power on the market. Marx’s reconstruction of the historical process by which these necessary commodities came onto the market can be left aside, but two implications should be stressed. First, capitalism is a historical creation rather than a natural development inherent in human social relations; second, for the theory as simply economic, it is the purchase of the commodity labor-power that permits the capitalist to realize surplus-value. *This historical specificity of capitalism is what makes the economic theory implicitly a political theory.* At the same time, one sees here how Marx presents his earlier theory of alienated labor in a new guise. The concrete and particular labor of any particular worker counts not for itself but only as the abstractly universal form of average or general socially necessary labor.

The political implications of the economic theory become clearer in “The Production of Relative Surplus-Value” in part 4. Capitalism now appears as more than a system for the production of surplus-value; it is

also a political relation that divides society into two opposed but mutually interdependent classes: those who own the means of production and those who must sell their labor-power in order to maintain their physical existence. The process begins with what Marx calls the “formal subsumption” of the worker under capitalism, at first through forms of simple cooperation in which formerly autonomous artisan producers are brought together to realize a single task. While each may work with the same tools and in the same manner as before, the result is still increased productivity of the whole. Since it was the investment by the capitalist that brought them together, it appears that capital is responsible for this benefit and that the additional (or “relative”) surplus-value that ensues rightfully belongs to the capitalist. This is of course only an appearance, since it is the joint labor of the workers that has produced the surplus, which has been alienated and is now found in the pocket of the capitalist. Nevertheless, workers as well as capitalists are taken in by the appearance, which is indeed a progress over the patriarchal, political, or religious forms of exploitation that existed previously insofar as labor, while still dependent, is nonetheless freed from external bonds imposed by force.

The political illusion grows in the next stages, when the capitalist first introduces a division of labor into the workshop and then, on the basis of this division of labor, begins to modify the production process itself. This leads to the development of what Marx calls “manufacture.” As the labor process is increasingly divided, the workers’ tools are modified, rendered more efficient, and adapted to new types of production. At this point, it also becomes possible for science to enter into an increasingly rationalized production process, which is adapted to its formal and mathematical reason. The use of science is also encouraged by the rationalized production process, which no longer depends on accidental human skills. Once again, the alienated illusion attributes the new gains to the “genius” of the capitalist or to his managerial skills. The contribution of the workers is neglected; they are paid simply for their labor-power—whose exchange-value decreases as work becomes simplified and the skilled are replaced by the unskilled or by women and children.

The division of labor and the advance of manufacturing production transform the workers’ formal subsumption under capital into a “real subsumption.” The worker cannot produce without selling his labor-power to the capitalist. The small artisan who seeks to

maintain the old ways that ensured his independence finds himself undersold by more efficient capitalist manufacture. And whereas the manufacturing worker still needs skill to work with the new and more adapted tools, a further shift occurs with the advance to “machinery and large scale industry.” The specificity of the machine lies in the fact that it has incorporated into itself the tools formerly used by the worker, such that the worker is transformed from the agent of production to simply a cog in the functioning of a machine that, increasingly, seems capable of running on its own. With this, the process of alienation is complete; the worker’s subjectivity as agent has been transferred to capital, which now appears in the form of gigantic, interconnected machinery running on its own.

It is difficult to see how this description of the complete alienation of the working class through its real subsumption under capital can justify Marx’s earlier argument that this class would become the agent of world historical transformation. The economic has replaced the political as the locus for a change that, however, the self-contained production process seems to exclude by its very (artificial) nature.¹⁹ Marx seems to be aware of the problem. In the penultimate chapter, “The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation,” Marx asserts that “the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation grows; but with it grows the revolt of the working class, a class constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and organized by the very mechanism of capitalist production.” The contradiction between capitalism’s monopoly and the relations of production to which it has given birth is revealed by this action. “The integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.” This “inevitable” revolution is justified in a final footnote, which is simply a self-citation from *The Communist Manifesto*. How could Marx simply return to the old standpoint, as if the theory of *Capital* changed nothing? Marxists, who took volume 1 to represent Marx’s final theoretical position, found here a simple theory of economic determinism. But even if philosophy becomes “worldly” with “the inexorability of a natural process,” it is not clear how this makes philosophical the economic world that Marx has described. Indeed, if it is only natural (*naturwüchsig*), then it is not rational or civilized. Perhaps this is why, in the paragraph preceding his final self-citation from *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx describes the “inexorable”

revolution in the Hegelian terminology according to which capitalism is a “first negation of individual private property” that will be in its turn negated to establish a superior form of property built “on the achievements of the capitalist era” (1:929). It remains to see what Marx might have meant by this new form of property.

FROM THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY TO THE DISCOVERY OF THE POLITICAL

Critique as Immanent

The persistence of Marx’s systematic theoretical goal in *Capital* is suggested by a letter he wrote to Ferdinand Lassalle in which he describes his economic theory as “a presentation of the system, and through the presentation a critique of that system.”²⁰ By starting from the commodity form as the unity of use- and exchange-value, Marx is able to present a phenomenology of capitalism, whose foundation is this commodity logic. In this way, he can show the necessary illusions into which the apologists of capitalism are led.²¹ The difficulty, however, is that this dialectic can slide into a kind of reductionist positivism that is typified by Marx’s frequent recourse to metaphors of revolutionary midwives lessening the birth pangs of a society pregnant with its own future. This positivism can also transform revolution into evolution, as when Marx cites favorably in the postface (1873) to the second edition of volume 1 a Russian reviewer’s comparison of his work to “the history of evolution in other branches of biology” (1:101). This neglects the role of consciousness, the realization of philosophy through the lightning of thought.

If capitalism is an economic process whose development ultimately makes obsolete its own presuppositions at the same time that it produces the conditions for new and truly human relations, it must be a theory of social relations that only appear to be economic. The opening theme of *The Communist Manifesto* has not been abandoned: all history is a history of class struggle. The economic development described in volume 1 as if it were simply the evolution of alienated labor determined by the logic of commodity relations does not function on its own. The process that led to the “real subsumption” of labor was the result of struggles by workers to better their wages and

conditions, to which Marx devotes over eighty pages in chapter 10, “The Working Day.” The relative success of such struggles is one of the factors driving capitalism constantly to modernize work conditions in order to ensure the subordination of the workers while producing relative surplus-value. Those who doubt the revolutionary potential of the proletariat make the same errors as the apologists for capitalism who look only at the side of exchange-value. They do not recognize the “civilizing” element of capitalism as doubly conflictual, producing advances in the forces of production but also inciting progress on the side of the workers. Marx’s immanent dialectic avoids such one-sided reductionism; his recognition of the doubly “civilizing” aspect of capitalism escapes the temptation to idealize or romanticize precapitalist conditions as is often done by reactionary critics of capitalism.

The immanent critique of the commodity form and of the social relations that it presupposes and reproduces explains why Marx considered his theory both a presentation of the immanent logic of capitalism and a critique of that logic. The place of immanent critique is clear in a passage from the *Grundrisse* that introduces the notion of alienated labor into the economic theory in a way that is only implicit in *Capital*:

The recognition [*Erkennung*] of the products as its own, and the judgement that its separation from the conditions of its own realization is improper—forcibly imposed—is an enormous [advance in] awareness [*Bewusstsein*] that is itself the product of the mode of production resting on capital and as much the knell of its doom as, with the slave’s awareness that he *cannot be the property of another*, with his consciousness of himself as a person, the existence of slavery becomes a merely artificial, vegetative existence, and ceases to be able to prevail as the basis of production.²²

It is not economic exploitation but the alienation of the human from what he can become—in the case of developed capitalism, what he has become in an alienated manner through its conflictual “civilizing” process—that makes possible and necessary the overthrow of capitalism.

The immanent critique thus restates Marx’s philosophical problem

while making it possible to avoid dead ends, which, unfortunately, are also present in his text. Immanent critique does not only or principally condemn capitalism in its own productivist terms—stressing capitalism’s inefficiencies, the costs resulting from its need to hire overseers in order to discipline rebellious workers, or its indifference to the ecological results of production oriented only to exchange-value. It does not only or principally denounce capitalist exploitation and the immiseration of the working class but starts from the assumption of a fairly functioning capitalist system in order to develop its critique. It is not only or principally moral or rhetorical criticism that hopes to awaken sympathetic souls to the good cause. It is not only or principally a theory of crises whose result is the destruction and devaluation of productive capacities and workers’ lives. It is not even only or principally a critique of the domination of the commodity form and the subsumption of all spheres of life to the domination of that form’s logic. Rather, critique as immanent seeks to reveal what capitalism’s “civilizing” function has also created: the socialized worker, a use-value that is abusively reduced to an exchange-value, and the possibility of using science to escape the curse of mere physical labor.²³ In this, the project of *Capital* is not different from the task that Marx set himself in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. The difference lies in the nature of the political project that emerges from *Capital* once we go beyond “the immediate production process” and look at the reproduction of capitalism as a system of social relations. It will be clear that Marx does not reduce the political to the logic of the economy. His arguments make plain that understanding capitalist economic relations presupposes a theory of the political. It is capitalism’s inability to understand its own political presuppositions that ultimately condemns it.

Capitalism as Political

Volume 2 of *Capital* analyzes the circulation process through which capitalist relations are reproduced. The account traces the metamorphoses through which a produced commodity finds a buyer, who acquires its use-value by paying the equivalent of its exchange-value; the money thus acquired must find on the market the machinery, raw materials, and labor-power necessary to begin the production process whose result will put the capitalist in posses-

sion of a new commodity, which will in its turn trace the same cycle. The importance of this analysis for political theory is suggested by an unpublished chapter, “The Results of the Immediate Production Process,” which explains the transition to volume 2. As often in his manuscripts, when he is groping for the proper formulation of his questions, Marx has recourse to Hegelian language. While the immediate production process began with money and commodities as preconditions, at the end of the cycle these have now been, as Hegel would say, “posited” as capital. This means that the nature of the ingredients in production has changed because they exist in a different set of social relations. The use-value that was put to work by the capitalist is now relevant only as the exchange-value of the commodity. This means that the work of the worker is only apparently the production of a product, since what counts as reality in capitalism is the valorization (*Verwertung*) of the means of production. The “real subsumption” of the worker under capital has now become inscribed in the process of capitalist reproduction. The domination of past labor over the present, the subordination of living labor to objectified value, the inversion of producer and the object produced that were first seen in religious alienation are now part of the process of capital’s self-realization.²⁴ Capital is value existing for itself and maintaining itself. “In the labor-process looked at purely for itself the worker utilizes the means of production. In the labor process regarded also as a capitalist process of production, the means of production utilize the worker. . . . The labor process is the *self-valorization process* of objectified labor [i.e., of capital] through the agency of living labor” (R, 1008). What was in itself or potentially capitalism at the outset of the process has now become for itself or actual because it now reproduces (or posits, in Hegel’s language) its own conditions of existence as capitalist.

This self-positing of capitalist relations and their reproduction transforms the economic process of immediate production into a political process of social reproduction. For itself, capital is simply self-valuating value whose purest and most absurd form is described in the third volume of *Capital* as interest-bearing capital—money that immediately produces more money, as if no social mediations were necessary. Capitalism takes itself to be the universal mode of productive relations, but its inability to recognize its own preconditions makes it only a particular, historically situated mode of human

production. Thus, even though it is in a particular business, each capital takes itself as an end in itself. The resulting competition at first has positive effects: it stimulates the development of the forces of production, the increasing application and development of science, and the creation of a more versatile socialized worker. But these benefits concern the use-value of capitalism (and of competition), whereas the capitalist—capital personified and possessing a will—is concerned with exchange-value. The paradox that emerges is that capital as self-reproducing value posits itself as particular in the person of each capitalist and yet also posits the general social relations that permit it to reproduce itself. As posited, capitalist social relations entail a political dimension, but, as particular, none of the competing capitals can take this dimension into account in running their particular businesses. This explains why, in *The 18th Brumaire*, the bourgeoisie was seen to be willing to abandon its political power in order to preserve its economic interests.

This political dimension of capitalism is not developed in the posthumously published volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital*. Instead, an economic demonstration of the “law of the tendential fall in the rate of profit” is often taken to imply that Marx predicted the necessity of a breakdown (*Zusammenbruch*) of capitalism. Yet his next chapter presents six “counteracting factors” that could limit the law’s effects. Among these factors are a more intense exploitation of labor, the reduction of wages below their value, and the presence of a relative surplus population—but not the effects of class struggle. Granted, the further “development of the law’s internal contradictions” asserts that “the true barrier to capitalist production is capital itself” (3:358). But this lapidary phrase need not be read as demonstrating an economic contradiction. Although the rate of profit may fall, profit can still be made, surplus-value extracted. The problem lies in the realization (*Verwertung*) of this surplus-value or profit, and that depends on the sphere of circulation, where capitalist social relations have to be reproduced. The two spheres exist, notes Marx, independently in time, in space, and in theory.²⁵ As the rate of profit falls, the drive for accumulation by each competing capitalist continues; the market must be expanded constantly, following “a natural law independent of the producers and ever more uncontrollable. The internal contradiction seeks resolution by extending the external field of production. But the more productivity develops, the more it

comes into conflict with the narrow basis on which the relations of consumption rest." And, adds Marx, "it is in no way a contradiction, on this contradictory basis, that excess capital coexists with a growing surplus population" (3:353). The contradiction may be occasioned by the dominance of the particular mode of capitalist production, but its effects are felt at the level of human social reproduction whose political implications are not developed in these posthumous volumes.

The attribution to Marx of a theory of necessary economic breakdown also leaves open the question of why volume 3 continues for more than six hundred pages after the formulation of the "law" that is supposed to foretell capitalism's demise. What is the status of these considerations of commercial capital, interest-bearing capital, and the forms of rent on land? A purely economic interpretation is possible. It would show that, from the standpoint of the logic of capital, these phenomena are remnants of an earlier period that have become barriers in the present advanced conditions. But such a criticism of capitalism's irrationality remains on capital's own, economic terrain. It is productivist in its logic and leaves no place for conscious political intervention. And it neglects the earlier explanation of the "absurdity" of interest-bearing capital that forgets that money doesn't beget money without intervening social relations that explain this appearance.

The final part of volume 3, "The Revenues and Their Sources," opens the space for a more political interpretation. Marx criticizes the "Trinity Formula" for its ahistorical reification that identifies each of the factors of production (land, capital, and labor) with its owner, claiming thereby to explain the source of the revenues of each. His explanation of the origin of this "bewitched and distorted world" in the capitalist relations of production is familiar. At first, with the struggle to limit the working day, the proletariat knows immediately that it is being exploited. But with the development of relative surplus-value, the "growth of the forces of social labor . . . appear[s] in the immediate labor process as shifted from labor to capital. Capital thereby already becomes a very mystical being" (3:966). Then, in the sphere of circulation, the conditions of production are left behind; it now appears that surplus-value is not simply realized but actually produced in circulation. Volume 2 unveiled the actuality behind this appearance, but it neglected the effects of

competition; this explains why capitalism's true nature remains veiled for its agents. When competition was introduced in volume 3, its lawful results (in the form of the technical calculations of real prices and the average rate of profit) were engendered only behind the backs of the individual agents. The mystification reappears at a still deeper level "as the capital fetish, value creating value, so it now presents itself once again in the figure of interest-bearing capital as its most estranged and peculiar form." Finally, a part of surplus-value appears to be completely asocial, bound "rather with a natural element, the earth, [and now] the form of mutual alienation and ossification of the various portions of surplus-value is complete" (3:968). The attribution of revenues to land, labor, and capital "completes the mystification . . . the reification of social relations." Thus "it is also quite natural . . . that the actual agents of production themselves feel completely at home in these estranged and irrational forms of capital . . . for these are precisely the configuration of appearance in which they move, and with which they are daily involved" (3:969). An immanent critique that demystifies this consciousness does not, however, show the possibility of overcoming the social relations that gave rise to it. The question of political agency, or the role of class struggle, remains open.

The domination of capital over labor is "essentially different from authority on the basis of production with slaves or serfs." A theory of domination is of course a political theory, based on the notion of authority. Thus capital's authority and legitimacy depend on the social relations of production that create the illusion that it is capital that produces the constant amelioration of the productive apparatus; the capitalists acquire this authority as "personifications of the conditions of labor vis-à-vis labor itself, not . . . as political or theocratic rulers." But the competition among the many capitals means that "the most complete anarchy reigns among the bearers of this authority" (3:1021). Each particular capitalist imagines himself to be autonomous, thinking that he could reproduce his relations of production on his own. Yet his profit is the result of a historically specific process of social distribution. But, cautions Marx, to criticize only the relations of distribution is "still timid and restrained" and does not see that these relations correspond to a particular form of production (3:1023). Valid change will come only through crisis, which is now defined as "the contradiction and antithesis between,

on the one hand, the relations of distribution, hence also the specific historical form of relations of production corresponding to them, and on the other hand, the productive forces, productivity, *and the development of its agents*" (3:1024; my emphasis). Clarification of the last clause might be expected from the next, and final, chapter of volume 3, which presents Marx's theory of "classes." However, the manuscript breaks off before that theory is developed.

This attempt to clarify the place of the political in the economic theory of *Capital* permits an interpretation of what Marx's theory of classes may have intended, despite the fact that the actual manuscript seems to fall into a kind of descriptive sociology for which Marx is unable to find a unifying thread. By becoming a commodity, the productive worker is involved in the paradoxical structure of alienation through which capitalism develops its "civilizing" process. In principle, this productive worker has become "all-sided" and "rich in needs" in the same way that capital has done so.²⁶ Considered from the standpoint of use-value, he has retained and developed his own human needs. It is this that makes him in principle a political agent, capable of transforming not only the relations of distribution but also those of production. Considered as human, rather than as a commodity or as exchange-value, he sees what the capitalist, caught in his illusions and a prisoner of competition, is unable to see: that capital "is the existence of social labor . . . but this existence as itself existing independently opposite its real moments—hence itself a *particular* existence apart from them" (Gr, 471). The imperative of the class struggle is to overcome this particularity that claims falsely to be the natural, and thus universal, mode of human productive relations.

Politics and Class Struggle

The place of the political in Marx's economic theory apparently inverts the relation between the political and the social that he had criticized in Hegel's theory of the state. Rather than consider the political as the locus of change, he suggests that the domination of capital means that the economic has become both the locus and the agent of change. From this perspective, Marx's later work would be a critique of the economic illusion that parallels his early critique of the political illusion. This does not contradict the assertion that the

agency of change lies in the developed human capacities of the working class considered not in its alienated existence as wage labor but from the perspective of its noncapitalist humanity. The challenge is to establish the proper relation between these two aspects of Marx's theory of the political. Marx never developed this theory, but two essays from the 1870s suggest what he might have been able to draw together from the questions that had animated his philosophical project. The first, *The Civil War in France* (1871), develops further his phenomenological analysis of politics in the land of the political illusion. The second, *The Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875), contains Marx's most general statement on the political process that would make it possible to move beyond the logic of economic capitalism. Taken together, these essays are a reprise of the phenomenological and logical moments of Marx's analysis.

The Civil War in France was presented to a meeting of the General Council of the First International on May 30, 1871, two days after the repression of the Paris Commune. Marx insisted that the salvation of France depended on the proletariat, whose regeneration is "impossible without the revolutionary overthrow of the political and social conditions that had engendered the Second Empire."²⁷ The political tool for that overthrow had been discovered by the Communards themselves. Marx's description of the Commune presents it as the complete negation of existent political institutions. A new political form was necessary because "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes" (CWE, 206). It appears at first that Marx sees the positive "working" existence of the Commune as a form of direct democracy. It suppressed the standing army and made public officials responsible and revocable, with short terms of office paid at workers' wages. It eliminated the separation of executive and legislative functions, in effect uniting particularity with universality. The church was disestablished, and its role in education—which would now be free for all—was eliminated. The judiciary was made elective and revocable, and thus "divested of that sham independence which had but served to mask their abject subservience to all succeeding governments." Decentralization was achieved by the imperative mandate to ensure that "universal suffrage was to serve the people, constituted in communes, as individual suffrage serves every other employer in the search for the workmen and managers

of his business" (CWF, 210). This sudden reduction of politics to business gives pause; it recalls a terrible phrase that Lenin adopted from Engels: the government over men is replaced by the administration of things.²⁸ The administration of things and the process of reification by which exchange-value comes to dominate capitalist relations are uncomfortably close to one another. The fact that Marx does not notice this difficulty suggests the need to look more closely at the political innovations of the revolutionary Commune.

Marx's description of the "true secret" of the Commune is ambiguous. On the one hand, it is "essentially a working-class government, the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class," while, on the other hand, it is "the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor" (CWF, 212). The first clause implies that Marx saw the Commune as the realization of direct democracy; the second suggests that the role of this political form is to permit the (phenomenological) class struggle to develop to its full dimension, to recognize itself for what it truly is, to free itself from the mystifications of capitalist alienation. The two clauses need not be contradictory, as long as the capacity for direct democracy proposed by the first clause is not assumed to be already prepared under capitalism and simply waiting to be liberated by the revolutionary midwives. A democratic government that makes possible the struggle to realize the economic emancipation of labor can permit a process of political learning through which the working class becomes conscious of its own human potentiality.

This political interpretation of Marx's argument recalls his insistence in *The German Ideology* that class struggle is needed to eliminate "the muck [Dreck] of the ages" (GI, 70). In this sense, "the great social measure of the Commune was its own working existence" (CWF, 217), which "did not pretend to infallibility, the invariable attribute of all governments of the old stamp. It published its doings and sayings, it initiated the people into its shortcomings" (CWF, 219). This fits the picture of the Commune as a political form that permits the working class to learn to understand its capacities in the process of realizing its own potential. This interpretation is confirmed when Marx insists that the working class has "no ready-made utopias to introduce *par décret du peuple*. They know that in order to work out their own emancipation and along with it that

higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economic agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men.” But the next sentence flatly contradicts this political interpretation when it asserts that the workers “have no ideals to realize, but [need only] to set free the elements of the new society with which the old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant” (CWF, 213). The creative potential of the political sphere is denied by such democratic bravado.

The concluding section of *The Civil War in France* does little to clarify the ambiguous relation among direct democracy, economic determinism, and the invention of the “political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labor.” Although there are passages that lend credence to the deterministic viewpoint, the political interpretation is not excluded. The Commune is said to be the political form “at last discovered,” just as democracy and then the proletariat were identified by Marx’s earlier writings as solutions to the “riddle of history.” As usual, Marx’s first draft uses more Hegelian language. Its reconstruction of the development of political centralization underlines the state’s “supernaturalist sway over real society” (CWF, 247). The Commune’s revolution against “this supernaturalist abortion of society” (CWF, 249) and against the alienation that makes “administration and political governing . . . mysteries, transcendent functions only to be trusted to the hands of a trained caste . . . absorbing the intelligence of the masses and turning them against themselves” (CWF, 251) is “the *political form of the social emancipation* . . . of labor” (CWF, 252; Marx’s emphasis). Now, however, Marx does not appeal to direct democracy as realizing social emancipation: the Commune “is *not* the social movement of the working class and therefore of a general regeneration of mankind, but the organized means of action. The Commune does *not* do away with class struggles . . . but affords the rational medium in which that class struggle can run through its different phases in the most rational and humane way” (CWF, 252; my emphasis). Granted, other phrases in the draft are more economic, and a few also point toward direct democracy as a solution. Philology cannot solve the systematic problem. If the Commune is the discovery of “the political form of social emancipation,” *The Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875) should help understand what Marx means by this affirmation.

Marx develops the political importance of the economic distinction between use-value and exchange-value, between labor in capitalist society and human labor, in his critique of the theories of Ferdinand Lassalle that had been incorporated in the draft program of a unified German Workers Party. The apparently self-evident assertion that because labor is the source of all wealth and culture and since it can be performed only in and through society, all members of society have a right to all its products is only true—Marx admonishes—in capitalism. If there were cooperative ownership of the means of production, then labor would no longer be the measure of the value of what is produced, and relations of distribution would not be governed by commodity exchange. The error is not only a matter for theory; the program's proposals do not deal with communist society "as it has developed on its own foundations"—as it has posited itself and as it reproduces itself through a dialectical process of class struggle and overcoming of opposition—but are applied to a society that still bears the "birth marks" of capitalism.²⁹ As a result, equality seems to demand that each individual receive from society the equivalent of what he has contributed in terms of labor time. But this is still a capitalist form of equality that treats the individual as a worker, as exchange-value, and neglects all other aspects of his work and life needs. Even though there is no class inequality, since all are workers, this formal equality based on the treatment of individuals as wage laborers legitimates real inequalities that are rooted in other dimensions of social relations. At the same time, it neglects that which is unique to the individual as a human person independent of the commodity market.

Marx's vision of real equality is well known: in the advanced phase of communism, when the antithesis between intellectual and physical labor is overcome and "when labor is no longer just a means of keeping alive, but has become a vital need, when the all-round development of individuals has also increased their productive powers and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can society cross the narrow horizon of bourgeois right and inscribe on its banner: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" (Gotha, 347). Marx's adoption of this slogan of the utopian followers of Saint-Simon and Fourier is surprising, and his affirmation that freedom is achieved within the labor process challenges the vision of *Capital* that sees science as making

possible forms of freedom outside labor. More important, the solution of the political problem of equality by the leap beyond social scarcity is philosophically a petition of principle. Marx's earlier argument, in *The German Ideology*, that historical progress is accompanied by the production of new needs should have alerted him to the problem. Perhaps this utopianism is explained by the suggestion in *Capital* that the worker as human—not as exchange-value—develops new, “civilized” capacities. But another passage from *The Critique of the Gotha Program* stresses the value of political autonomy in a way that recalls the earlier critique of Proudhon, which was repeated in the *Grundrisse* (Gr, 463). “It is as if,” Marx writes, “among slaves who have finally got behind the secret of slavery and broken out in rebellion, one slave, still the prisoner of obsolete ideas, were to write in the program of the rebellion ‘slavery must be abolished because the provisioning of slaves in the slave system cannot exceed a certain low minimum’ ” (Gotha, 352). Again, this insight is left undeveloped.

The Critique of the Gotha Program was written for strategic reasons by a political revolutionary. But class struggle also played a role for Marx as political philosopher. His mature economic theory analyzes the conditions in which that “artificial” revolutionary proletariat whose historical role was discovered in 1843 is formed, but the other necessary moment, designated by the metaphor of the “lightning of thought,” is still not explained. Marx's critique of capitalism's creation of a world regulated by the logic of exchange-value could no longer assume, after the experiences of 1848 and 1851, that Revolution is the subject of history. The subject of history whose logical appearances are analyzed in *Capital* is capitalist social relations reified in the commodity, whose use-value as laboring humanity remains a silent spectator to the “civilizing” development of the capitalist economy, just as the proletariat was the absent presence haunting the political illusions whose logic was traced in *The 18th Brumaire*. The realization of Marx's systematic philosophical project demands that this other moment become “for itself,” consciously and actually, what capitalism has made it potentially. The logic of the commodity form developed in *Capital* is only the appearance of a deeper reality, which is the class struggle between labor and capital. What happens if this appearance is transcended? *The Critique of the Gotha Program* gave only a negative answer: the reign of real equality will not be inaugurated immediately; individual difference will

remain—and the place of politics as the conscious regulation of social relations will persist, along with the need to continue to do philosophy in order to understand, justify, and critique the choices and judgments that have to be made.

PHILOSOPHY BY OTHER MEANS

If Marx's mature theory of capitalism represents philosophy as worldly, it remains incomplete without its complementary moment. That representation of the world as philosophical reappears explicitly at different points in the *Grundrisse*. Although the distribution of life chances in a given society appears to be the result of historical accident, the fact that all societies must reproduce themselves means that relations of production are the foundations on which other relations are built. But this does not make them causally or materially determinant; they express a relation that, while it may appear as a unitary force, is nonetheless itself the result of social interaction. Societies must reproduce the social relations that make them the specific societies they are. This framework permits the reintroduction of the categories of genesis (in the form of the reproduction process) and normativity (in the form of the relations that get reproduced). Neither can exist in isolation. Thus Marx criticizes Smith and Ricardo for presupposing that the individual is the agent of production rather than recognizing that, before the eighteenth century, the community was the subject and the individual only its appearing form (Gr, 84). Private interest as the apparent basis of social relations emerges only with the dissolution of communal societies; it then, with the development of the money form, becomes the abstract bond uniting society. The private individual and the monetary bond are historical products "whose universality produces not only the alienation of the individual from himself and from others, but also the universality and the comprehensiveness of his relations and capacities" (Gr, 162). This contradictory unity must, again, undergo "dissolution."

Once again, a solution is first offered in the claim that, stripped of its bourgeois form, wealth is only "the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc., created through universal exchange . . . the absolute working out of his creative

potentialities, with no presuppositions other than the previous historic development” (Gr, 488). But this resolution lacks mediation. The genesis of the primacy of the relations of production must be explained and its normative status clarified. Property, which was originally simply the expression of man’s relation to nature as the objective form of his subjective existence, undergoes a *political* development that must be explained. Property, in other words, is not a natural given; property is posited in a political process. Marx reconstructs the process by which communal and collective forms of ownership typical of earlier societies gradually break down and the individual is liberated. The result of this process (whose details can be left aside here) is that the individual appears as that “free” worker who brings himself to the market as labor-power, the only commodity he owns. At this point, Marx forgets that the formally free worker is nonetheless in a different situation from the slave or serf. Instead of asking what can be done with this freedom, Marx transforms the political process into an economic logic whose “dissolution” he tries to interpret in economic terms. But the systematic nature of his construction, which satisfies the philosophical imperative posed at the outset of his path, suggests that the argument cannot be simply economic.

To be complete, the account of the necessary dissolution of capitalism must have four distinct moments corresponding to the genetic and normative expressions of use-value and exchange-value. From the side of capital, the demonstration must show that (1) capital develops use-values whose realization is blocked by its one-sided stress on exchange-value; and that (2) even on its own terms it produces economic crises caused by the pressure of competition that drives it to expand beyond its own limits. This dual contradiction must be accompanied on the side of labor by the demonstration that (3) within the alienation of capitalist production, “civilizing” processes produce a new wealth of needs and capacities that form the basis of a new form of social relations; and that (4) the labor theory of value is made obsolete by economic development itself such that alienated labor can no longer reproduce capitalist social relations. Enough has been said about the economic problems in capitalism’s self-realization; while it will not break down on its own, the crises that plague its process of reproduction cannot be denied. The other three moments are developed in a brief but lucid—even prophetic—

account of fully realized capitalism at the beginning of notebook 7 of the *Grundrisse*. While its arguments explain Marx's expectation in *The Critique of the Gotha Program* that, in the second phase of communism, the "springs" of wealth will flow freely, they also suggest the need to reconstruct a normative notion of the political that can replace capitalism's apparent reduction of that domain to the economic sphere.

The complete development of capital takes the form of modern industry based on machinery. In these conditions, it is not the "direct skillfulness" of the worker but "the technological application of science" that is the crucial productive force. At first, this appears to produce a "monstrous disproportion between the labor time applied and [the value of] its product." And "the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator of the production process itself," inserting "the process of nature, transformed into an industrial process, as a means between himself and inorganic nature, mastering it." From the standpoint of exchange-value, the worker simply stands at the side of the process; he is present "by virtue of his presence as a social body" (Gr, 699). But this is where the process inverts itself. "It is, in a word, the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth." And, Marx continues, "*the theft of alien labor time on which present wealth is based* is a miserable foundation in the face of this new one" (Gr, 705; Marx's emphasis). This account goes beyond the abstract individualist view of alienated labor formulated in 1844. Its economic premises have systematic philosophical consequences.

Beginning from the side of labor, the development of productivity by the application of science that makes nature work for man means that labor time ceases to be the measure of value. Production based on exchange-value breaks down of its own accord. The growth of the power of social production increases the disposable time available to society, which at first falls to the capitalists and their class. But as this disposable time grows, it becomes clear that "real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. *The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labor time, but rather disposable time*" (my emphasis). Capitalism thus contains a "moving contradiction" (Gr, 708) that leads it to reduce labor time to a minimum even while postulating labor time as the measure and source of wealth.

On the other hand, since work has become supervisory and regulatory, the worker recognizes that “the product ceases to be the product of isolated direct labor; rather it is the combination of social activity that appears as the producer” (Gr, 709). Individual labor has now become “civilized” as social labor—as producing not exchange-value but use-value. In addition, “free time—which is both idle time and time for higher activity—has naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject, and he then enters into the direct production process as this different subject” (Gr, 712).

As for capital, it seeks to limit the new human possibilities in accord with its own concept of wealth. Even if it succeeds, this will only lead to surplus production that cannot be sold, and necessary labor will be interrupted because the surplus labor already produced cannot be realized as capital.

On the other hand, capitalism’s normative orientation to exchange-value may slow the development of new productive techniques because it refuses to admit the priority of “the free development of individualities” rather than “the reduction of necessary labor time so as to posit surplus labor”; as a result, it does not see that “the general reduction of the necessary labor of society to a minimum . . . then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them” (Gr, 706).

The four moments necessary to the transcendence of capitalism on its own basis are now present. What does this apparently economic account tell us about Marx’s final vision?

The communist “world as philosophical” portrayed in *The Critique of the Gotha Program* was based on a postscarcity utopia whose economic possibility has now been made concrete. What will follow this self-dissolution of capitalism? Earlier in the *Grundrisse*, Marx criticized Adam Smith’s conception of work as a curse and of tranquillity as happiness. “It seems quite far from Smith’s mind that the individual, ‘in his normal state of health, strength, activity, skill, facility,’ also needs a normal portion of work, and of the suspension of tranquillity.” Smith doesn’t see what Marx had called in 1844 “the greatness of Hegel’s phenomenology”: that overcoming obstacles is a liberating activity and that external aims are “stripped of the semblance of merely external natural urgencies, and become posited as aims which the individual himself posits—hence as self-realization,

objectification of the subject, hence real freedom, whose action is, precisely, labor.” Marx’s alternative vision is heroic but troubling. It implies that “labor which has not yet created the subjective and objective conditions for itself . . . in which labor becomes attractive work, the individual’s self-realization,” is unfree. Freedom is not “mere fun, mere amusement, as Fourier . . . conceives it.” Truly free work, such as musical composition, is “at the same time precisely the most damned seriousness” (Gr, 611). Material productive work becomes free only “when its social character is posited,” made explicit, and reproduced consciously and “when it is of a scientific and at the same time general character, not merely human exertion as a specifically harnessed natural force, but exertion as subject, which appears in the production process not in a merely natural, spontaneous form, but as an activity regulating all the forces of nature” (Gr, 612). This return to the vision of the third of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* is inconsistent with Marx’s systematic critique of capitalism, which was based ultimately on capitalism’s necessary failure to recognize itself as political because of the blinding effect of competition that makes each capitalist universalize his particular interest. Marx’s postcapitalist “world as philosophical” appears to make a virtue out of that necessity, returning to the Young Hegelian premises from which he began. His goal seems in effect to be a direct or transparent democracy with no place for individual difference or particularity.

The source of the difficulty can be traced back to Marx’s critique of the political illusion and the illusion of politics. The systematic argument for the dissolution of capitalism began from two mutually interdependent poles, capital and labor, each of which was itself marked by the duality of the commodity form. The use-value of capital produced conditions in which the basis of its existence as exchange-value (the labor theory of value) was negated; on the other hand, its orientation to exchange-value led to cyclical economic crises that threaten its social reproduction. Meanwhile, the exchange-value of labor-power was negated by the new working conditions (automated machinery, science) that at the same time created the free time and social working conditions in which human values replaced exchange-values as defining the condition of the worker. A similar dual contradiction of mutually interdependent poles and their self-dissolution can be seen retrospectively in the

analyses of *Class Struggles in France* and *The 18th Brumaire* that led Marx to return to the study of political economy. The political state and the society were related in terms of political illusions and the illusion of politics; politics could not achieve the social revolution that was claimed to be nonetheless inevitable. But Marx did return to politics, both in *The Civil War in France* and in *The Critique of the Gotha Program*. Insofar as the Commune was not a direct democratic solution but rather provided only the framework in which class struggle could be waged, politics retained its autonomy. And insofar as *The Critique of the Gotha Program* admitted that even in a post-capitalist society individuals will not be all equal and problems of social distribution will remain, the political retains a normative role that provides the framework in which social relations can be generated and reproduced consciously.

Marx never thematized the place of the political in his mature theory. The present reconstruction of his path suggests that he passed from a critique of the separation of the political from society, to a social analysis that reduced the autonomy of the political, on to a political economic theory that replaced the political, and finally to a recognition that the absence of the political from the capitalist economy condemned that mode of social relations because it is unable to recognize its own presuppositions and therefore its own limits. The source of this uncertain quest for political understanding lies in the systematic project that has been shown to motivate Marx's theory. The philosophical moments of genesis and normativity and the methodological moments of phenomenology and logic are invoked in order to demonstrate the world's becoming philosophical *as* philosophy's becoming worldly. But this philosophical synthesis cannot be achieved; it is an idealism that ultimately denies to both philosophy and the world the autonomy that Marx's systematic quest shows each of them to need in order to play its critical role. The phenomenological cannot become identical to the logical; genesis and normativity must remain distinct if each is to retain its critical potential. But, as Marx saw in the second of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, these two moments cannot remain indifferent to one another. For them to find an adequate relation, the *political* (which need not be identical with the state, as *Capital* makes clear) has to provide their shared ground and mediate between them. As a result,

both moments are in a perpetual competition for the power to define the political.

This critical theory of politics is the result of a rereading of Marx's theoretical trajectory. Just as the problematic nature of democratic politics could only become clear after the experience of its radical negation—in the guise of a claim to be the realization of true democracy—by what can be called totalitarian idealism,³⁰ so too Marx's systematic and rigorous pursuit of an idealistic philosophy by other means was needed in order to recognize the political force of critical theory. This realization has a practical consequence as well, insofar as it permits recognition and critique of another form of idealism: the one confronting the post-1989 world that wants to replace political choice by submission to the “natural necessity” of the market. The economy is not neutral; social relations are not natural but historically produced; and whatever our vision of the good society, its justification can be in the end only political. As a “critique of political economy,” *Capital* is not a guidebook to running a society; it is the demonstration of the political presuppositions that underlie economic choices. Marx does not and cannot provide a philosophical legitimation for political choices. What he does do is to demonstrate that the failure to think politically brings with it a form of alienation that, as in the logic of *Capital*, leaves the citizen in thrall to a society that, like it or not, is the product of his own activity.

democracy is suggested in my essay “Individu et société,” in *Philosopher 2* (Paris: Fayard, 2000).

13. PHILOSOPHY BY OTHER MEANS?

1. It should be noted that Sartre made this claim in the essay “Marxism and Existentialism,” which appeared as a hundred-page introduction to the incomplete but still fascinating *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), in which he attempted to offer a philosophical foundation to Marxist theory (p. 29). The remark follows a denunciation of the stagnation of Marxist theory, which Sartre hoped to renew. A discussion of Sartre’s theory appears in Dick Howard, *The Marxian Legacy* (1977; rev. ed., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

2. “Das philosophisch-werden der Welt als weltlich-werden der Philosophie,” in *Frühe Schriften I* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1962), p. 70.

3. Citations from Joseph O’Malley’s edition of Marx’s *Early Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) are given in parenthesis as OM, followed by a page number, here OM, 62. I have occasionally modified the translation but have always given the English source in OM.

4. The 1843 “Exchange of Letters” among Marx, Ruge, Bakunin, and Feuerbach is cited here from the *Frühe Schriften I*, p. 448. Two other passages from the exchange should be noted. “We do not,” writes Marx, “face the world in a doctrinaire fashion, declaring, ‘Here is the truth, kneel here.’ We merely show the world why it actually struggles; and consciousness is something the world must acquire even if it does not want to.” And, at the end of the letter, Marx notes that “mankind does not begin any *new* work but completes its old work consciously” (449, 450).

5. The *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* are quoted in my translation from the Cotta edition cited in n. 3, above; parentheses indicate the page numbers, here 645.

6. The critique directed here at Proudhon was a constant concern for Marx, whose goal was not simply to better the material conditions of “wage slaves.” The political implications of this critique emerge in Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Program*, which I discuss under “The Capitalist Economy as Political Subject,” below.

7. Citations from “Wage Labor and Capital” are from David McLellan, ed., *Karl Marx: Selected Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), indicated by DM and a page number, here DM, 256.

8. Citations from this text are translated from the German, published in volume 3 of the *Marx-Engels-Werke* (East Berlin: Dietz, 1962), and are indicated in the text by GI followed by a page number, here GI, 35.

9. *Frühe Schriften I*, p. 449.

10. *Marx-Engels-Werke*, 3:6.

11. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, with an introduction by A. J. P. Taylor (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), pp. 82–83.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

13. Citations from the English translation in *Political Writings*, vol. 2 (New York: Penguin, 1992), are indicated in the text as CSF, followed by the page, in this case 47.

14. Ironically, the concept of Bonapartism was adopted by the Fourth International (the Trotskyists) to offer a “materialist” explanation of Stalin’s rise to power.

15. Citations from the English translation in *Political Writings*, vol. 2, are indicated in the text by 18th followed by the page, in this case 150.

16. *Capital* as a whole was subtitled *A Critique of Political Economy*. Each volume had its own subtitle in Marx’s overarching conception. Encouraged by the economic crisis of 1857, Marx wrote a draft of his entire theory in 1857; this manuscript, which became widely available only in 1953, under the title *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, supports the interpretation of Marx’s economic theory as a whole that will be offered here. The failure of the crisis of 1857 to lead to revolutionary action may explain why the preface to the 1859 publication of *Toward a Critique of Political Economy* returns to the more determinist and reductionist theory that Marx and Engels had developed in *The German Ideology*.

17. Citations from the Penguin edition (London, 1967) are indicated in the text by volume and page number, here 1:280.

18. One need not treat that theory as the metaphysical claim that there is a kind of substance called labor that enters into the composition of each commodity; the theory can be understood instead as a critical theory of social relations. For a critique of the labor theory of value, see chapter 7’s discussion of Cornelius Castoriadis, above.

19. It is only in volume 3 that Marx tries to show that a “law of the tendency of the rate of surplus-value to fall” interferes with capitalism’s smooth reproduction process. This is because it is only in that volume that he introduces the competition among the capitalists that blinds them to the need to maintain the social formation on which their profits are based. That is when the “artificial” domination by the economic takes on a different connotation, that of being historically specific and thus transitory.

20. The phrase is found in a letter of February 22, 1858 (“Es ist zugleich eine Darstellung des Systems und durch die Darstellung eine Kritik desselben”). I first encountered it in Roman Rosdolsky’s pathbreaking study of the *Grundrisse*, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Marx’schen “Kapital”* (Frankfurt:

Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), p. 18n. On Marx's relation to Lassalle, see the discussion of *The Critique of the Gotha Program* in the section "Politics and Class Struggle," later in this chapter.

21. This systematic intent is evident in the amount of space Marx devotes to explaining not just that but how and why the economists were led to err. The fourth volume of *Capital, Theories of Surplus-Value*, is essential to Marx's project: his systematic demonstration is complete only if he can show the necessity of these illusions.

22. Citations from the Vintage edition (New York, 1973) are indicated as Gr, followed by a page number, here, Gr, 463. The reader will recall the earlier critique of Proudhon's politics as simply making for better-paid slaves. The same notion returns below in the critique of Lassalle in *The Critique of the Gotha Program*.

23. This latter point is subject to debate. Sometimes Marx seems to think that truly human relations lie outside the sphere of production, as in the Greek understanding of democratic citizenship; sometimes he is tempted by the romantic German model of self-fulfillment through the labor process. I will return below to his vision of human fulfillment as it is presented in the *Grundrisse*.

24. The manuscript of this chapter was first published in Russian and German in Moscow in 1933; it became accessible in the West in the late 1960s. Citations are from the English translation, printed as an appendix to the first volume of *Capital*, indicated as R followed by a page number, here R, 990.

25. This thesis, stated in the first part of chapter 15's discussion of the "internal contradictions" of the law, is not consistently maintained. The other claim is that relations of production determine relations of distribution. In fact, both theses can be maintained if care is taken to distinguish capitalist relations of production based on exchange-value from social relations based on human or use-values.

26. *Frühe Schriften I*, 598.

27. Citations from the English translation in the Penguin edition, *Political Writings*, vol. 3, are given in the text as CWF followed by a page number, here CWF, 200.

28. Engels's phrase is cited by Lenin in "State and Revolution," in *Selected Works* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1960), 2:314.

29. Citations from the English translation in *Political Writings*, vol. 3, are indicated as Gotha followed by a page number, here Gotha, 346–347.

30. See the arguments developed particularly in chapter 9, above. This reconstruction of Marx's project helps explain also the attraction-repulsion of critical intellectuals to Marxism that was illustrated throughout the first part of this book.