

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

MARX  
AND  
THE CRITIQUE OF EPISTEMOLOGY

by  
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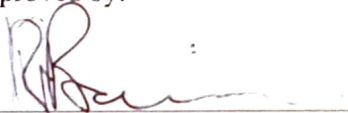
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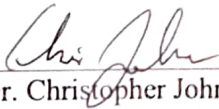


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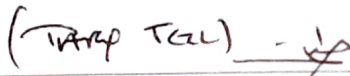


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# AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

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# ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Marc Joseph Choufany for Master of Arts  
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Title: Marx and the Critique of Epistemology

Marx's critique of epistemology consists in revealing the social conditions that presuppose epistemology. The problem of epistemology for Marx is the question of the objectivity of our thinking. But this question for him cannot be separated from the question of the nature and scope of social practice. The epistemological problem is based on a separation between the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge, and Marx unifies them by their common source, which is human productive activity. This source, the activity, is simultaneously mental and manual, subjective and objective, and it constantly changes the subject and the object. The subject knows the object by theorizing the unconscious activity and social relations that underlie its reality. Objective thinking grasps the social dimension of reality and does not abstract thinking from social production or practice. Marx's contribution to the problem of epistemology is presenting the social concrete dimension of the object, the subject, and the activity that unifies subject and object and surpasses skepticism. Following Hegel, we do not need a criterion of knowledge; we just observe and adjust the correspondence between theory and practice. For Hegel, objective reality is the externalized essence of man, which is self-consciousness, while for Marx, social reality is the externalized essence of man, which is the ensemble of social relations. This externalization happens through activity, which is an abstract cognitive activity for Hegel, while it is a concrete practical activity for Marx. Hegel considers this externalization as alienation when the subject fails to recognize himself in the object, while for Marx, alienation occurs only when the productive activity itself is objectified through wage labor. Hegel replaces the traditional separation between subject and object with their alienation considering that they have the same unifying source before their split, but Marx's alienation is a contradictory unity between subject and object. Overcoming alienation for Hegel is reunifying subject and object in absolute knowing, while for Marx, the starting point is the unity between humanity and nature, subject and object, and the task is to overcome an inversion of roles between subject and object whereby capital, a social object produced by man, subjugates human activity to itself and assumes the role of the social subject. Finally, Marx's critique of political economy consists in theorizing the social relations that underlie the capitalist social reality as a whole, which is grasping the essence of social reality as the alienated essence of man.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE CRITIQUE OF EPISTEMOLOGY

Marx's critique of epistemology uncovers the social conditions that underlie the epistemological inquiry. In this essay, I will clarify this critique by interpreting Marx's contribution to what I call "the problem of epistemology". The problem of epistemology is the question of the objectivity of our thinking which Marx argues about in the second of the *Theses on Feuerbach* as the following:

"The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question." (*Selected Writings* 171)

What does Marx mean by "practice"? Does "practice" solve the problem of epistemology? Many philosophers try to resolve the problem of epistemology by presenting a criterion of knowledge or a standard of truth that ensures the objective certainty of thinking and justifies its conformity and correspondence to external reality. For example, empiricists present sensible experience as the criterion, while rationalists defend reason or logic as the criterion. Kant, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, provides a general *a priori* criterion of knowledge, which is a criterion that is prior to knowledge and ensures the truth of knowledge. This criterion is the functioning of the twelve categories of understanding. However, Hegel argues that the act of specifying a criterion of knowledge is itself an act of knowing. Thus, the criterion must be immanent to the act of knowing and not external to it. The main difference between a criterion that is prior to knowledge and the immanent criterion is that while the former is already

fixed, the latter changes throughout the activity of knowing. Besides, Kant's criterion is applied to any object of knowledge, while Hegel's criterion is immanent to the knowledge of a specific object. When the immanent criterion fails, consciousness provides a new criterion, which is a process that culminates with "Absolute Knowing", which is the last section in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. So, absolute knowledge is the knowledge of what knowing is, which is a point that is reached by consciousness through its activity of knowing, and not prior to this activity as in Kant. While Kant's solution to the problem of epistemology that avoids skepticism is by providing an external or prior criterion of knowledge, Hegel's solution starts from the refutation of the need for such a criterion. I understand Marx's contribution to the problem of epistemology as being in line with Hegel's account of the criterion of knowledge. Thus, while Hegel's critique of Kant is that we must not abstract the knowledge of knowing from the activity of knowing, Marx's critique of Hegel is that we must not abstract the activity of knowing from human activity or practice. We can see that for Marx we don't need an external criterion of knowledge in his sentence from the second of the *Theses on Feuerbach*: "Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice" (*Selected Writings* 171). The relation between thinking and practice can be expressed in two ways: on the one hand, thinking is itself a cognitive practice, and on the other hand, thinking has an effectivity in practice. Thinking as a cognitive practice does not need a criterion of knowledge that is external to its practice, which is exactly Hegel's critique of Kant. Besides, the effect of internal thought on external reality is considered by Marx as a proof of the objectivity and the truth of thinking, which makes the effectivity of thought the criterion that is immanent



to human practice. Hegel's criterion is immanent to the activity of knowing, while Marx's criterion is immanent to human practice or activity.

In this essay, I will elucidate the relevance of Marx's concept of practice to the problem of epistemology. I will present an interpretation of Marx in explaining the relation between knowledge and practice that is expressed in the second of the *Theses on Feuerbach*. As we shall see, the concept of objectivity for Marx is essentially related to the concept of externality, which makes the objectivity of thinking essentially related to what is external to the human being. Human activity relates the human being to the rest of the world, which makes the human being an objective being. Since the activity of knowing and thinking is a part of this relation between the human being and the external world, then the objectivity of thinking depends on this relation between humanity and the world. The effectivity of thinking is a part of the dialectic between humanity and the world: humanity changes the world according to its needs and produces a new human world or humanized nature, and this new world affects its practice of changing the world. Thus, thinking is objective when it is effective in the sense that it reflects the actual change that happens in the world.

As we shall see, Marx's epistemology is a social epistemology. Since the transcendental subject of knowledge, for Kant, is ahistorical and his forms of sensibility and understanding are static and unchanging, Hegel shows how the opposition of sensibility and understanding is overcome through the activity of subjective reason, which unfolds historically. While Hegel's critique of Kant's epistemology is that self-consciousness has a historical and social context that Kant did not consider, Marx's

critique of Hegel is that the subject of knowledge is a social sensuous<sup>1</sup> human being and not just an abstract self-consciousness or cognitive activity that has sociality. Thus, for Marx, consciousness must not be abstracted from social production and social relations of production. Suchting (20) argues that the mode of social production is a kind of structure of factors and relations between these factors. The first two factors constitute the means of production, which are the raw materials that pre-exist the production and the instruments that are used to transform these materials. Besides, the forces of production are defined as the means of production added to the labor power that transforms the raw materials using the instruments of production. In addition to these three factors, the mode of production is constituted by the plan according to which the production proceeds, and the product. The relations between these five factors of the mode of production are divided into social relations and technical relations. Suchting defines social relations as the “relations of control over the factors of production (and hence over the product) by agents of production” (20). To be more specific, the class relations of production are the social relations of production, for example, the complex of class relations between capitalists and the proletariat under capitalism. Besides, he defines technical relations as “relations between the factors generated by the social relations within the constraints of the natural objective necessities of the process of production itself” (20). As I understand, technical relations are the relations between products, for example, the exchangeability of products. Thus, Marx’s critique of Hegel is that consciousness must not be separated from the social human being, his social production, and the mode of production in a society, such as feudalism or capitalism.

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<sup>1</sup> The word “sensuous” does not mean just what is empirically perceptible, but everything that is spatiotemporal, including consciousness, social relations, etc. But the social forms anatomized by Marx—commodity, value, money, etc., are both sensuous and supersensuous.

Practice, for Marx, is the social productive activity that produces mentally and manually through a mode of social production.

In this second thesis cited above, what Marx describes as a “question of theory” and “scholastic question” is the separation between theory and practice, in contrast to a kind of unity between theory and practice that is hidden under the sentence “practical question”. The separation between theory and practice, which Marx argues against, presupposes a separation between thinking and being, subject and object, subjectivity and objectivity. This separation comes from the division between intellectual labor and manual labor and the honor that Greek philosophy gave to intellectual labor in comparison to manual labor<sup>2</sup>. Following Kant and Hegel, Marx attempts to surpass this separation without nullifying the achievements of thinking as in arts, philosophy, and science. I will argue that the concept of practice or activity in Marx allows us to surpass the separation between the subject and the object, and thus presents a new starting point for the epistemological relation between subject and object. This does not mean that there will be no dialectic between subject and object, but Marx surpasses the traditional separation between the subject and the object which governs traditional epistemology from Descartes to Kant. In Marx, there is a dialectic between productive activity and the social reality that is its product; under capitalism, the dialectic is between labor and capital where each one of them assumes the role of subject or object alternately depending on the context. Activity, as a source of the subject and the object, does not

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<sup>2</sup> “Hence we think that the master-workers in each craft are more honourable and know in a truer sense and are wiser than the manual workers, because they know the causes of the things that are done; [...] thus we view them as being wiser not in virtue of being able to act, but of having the theory for themselves and knowing the causes” (Aristotle, *Metaph.* A. 981a13-981b9). In this sentence, Aristotle uses the word ‘act’ to refer to manual activity. However, philosophers from Descartes to Hegel, or more generally philosophers who live in bourgeois society, conceive the subject as active because of his thinking that is socially honorable, while the object that is mostly taken as a perceptual object and a product of manual activity, is conceived as passive.

give an undifferentiated unity between them but gives the subject the possibility to grasp the object. The object of knowledge is related to the subject of knowledge by the activity of social production, and not only the activity of knowing or perceiving. Social production changes the objects of nature and creates new objects that require new skills and capacities for the social subject to deal with them. Thus, the social subject and the social object are respectively the producer and the product of the social production. Natural phenomena like oceans and forests are the raw material for human activity, which makes them change in the process of production. In this sense, activity is the source of these phenomena as objects. The activity of production is the source of change for the subject and the object and the main difference between human and animal activity. Thus, human activity differentiates man from the rest of nature and relates between them. The difference between human activity and animal activity is that the former is creative while the latter is biologically fixed, but the fact that both humans and animals are active makes a unity between man and the rest of nature. The separation between humanity and nature is when we reduce humanity to its consciousness or reason, which isolates humanity from nature that has no consciousness or reason. While traditional epistemology starts from the separation between humanity and nature, Marx presents a new starting point for epistemology, which is an ontological unity between humanity and nature. Marx's position defines productive activity as an objective relation between humanity and nature, where we can investigate the effectivity of thought and the dialectical activity between thinking and being. Moreover, on the one hand, human productive activity is compelled by nature, since humans must work on nature to survive. On the other hand, human productive activity acts on this natural

compulsion by changing nature and natural needs. In this sense Marx argues in the following passage that nature is man's inorganic body:

“The universality of man appears in practice precisely in the universality which makes all nature his inorganic body-both inasmuch as nature is (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the material, the object, and the instrument of his life activity. Nature is man's inorganic body-nature, that is, insofar as it is not itself human body.” (E. and P. Manuscripts 67)

Marx's position allows the subject to know the objects of social reality in theorizing the activity that underlies both the object of knowledge and the subject of knowledge. This is what he did in theorizing the economic activity in his critique of political economy as in *Capital*. Marx theorized the activity that produced capital, namely, he explained how labor is the source of value. “Capital is, therefore, not only a sum of material products; it is a sum of commodities, of exchange values, of social magnitudes” (*Selected Writings* 282). Capital is the social relations of production that are the precondition of money, value, and material products. The bourgeois political economy abstracts these material products and social magnitudes from the capitalist class relation, which is their precondition, analogously to the traditional epistemology that abstracts the subject, the object, and their relation from the social reality. Besides, when Marx uncovers the social relations and human activities that underlie a particular object, like a cherry tree<sup>3</sup>, he is building a knowledge of the essence of social reality, which is capital as social relations of production. The social relations that underlie the capitalist social reality are the class relations between owners of means of production as private property and owners of labor power. In other words, these are relations of

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<sup>3</sup> “The cherry-tree, like almost all fruit-trees, was, as is well known, only a few centuries ago transplanted by commerce into our zone, and therefore only by this action of a definite society in a definite age has it become "sensuous certainty" for Feuerbach.” (*The German Ideology* 45)

privatization of means of production and commodification of labor power as a source of commodity production. The essence of social reality is grasped when we consciously theorize what is unconsciously made by human productive activity that produces the objects of reality. This essence is constituted by social relations, the relations of production of the objects of reality, that is the forms of social interdependence that are centered around the human activity of social reproduction and that produce the social context where the activity is made. These social relations determine the activity and thus the change that happens to the subject and the object; however, this activity shapes the social relations. For Marx, man is a social being, human activity is a social activity, and knowing is a part of the same human activity that produces the object of knowledge. This makes it possible for the subject to know the social object because it is the product of his own activity<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, theory, as a product of knowing and theorizing activity, is not separated from this activity or practice. Thus, knowledge, as a product of the human activity that includes knowing as an activity, is not separated from the object of knowledge that is a product of the same human activity. Both knowledge and the object of knowledge are mediated by the social relations of productive activity. Thus, when the same activity produces knowledge and the object of knowledge, they are not separated. The essence of social reality is the externalized essence of man, which is the ensemble of social relations<sup>5</sup>, through human activity. As we shall see, Hegel replaces the separation between subject and object with this externalization which he thinks of as alienation. But for Marx, this externalization is not problematic, it is an

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<sup>4</sup> Non-man-made objects that play the role of raw material for human activity are changed in the process of this activity. The social relations that underlie this change are what is grasped by the subject.

<sup>5</sup> Marx defines the human essence in the sixth of the *Theses on Feuerbach* as the ensemble of social relations: “the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations” (*Selected Writings* 172).

alienation only under capitalism where we have a contradictory unity between subject and object. This contradiction is that capital, as the alienated ensemble of social relations, is treated as a subject that directs the human productive activity to the accumulation of capital, and thus the subject of production is treated as an object through wage labor. Thus, grasping the essence of the capitalist social reality is grasping the alienated essence of man.

Finally, I will argue that Marx's epistemology is essential for his work in political economy and his concentration on the capitalist social reality. Marx focuses on the economic activity in his work, even though human productive activity is more than economic, because under capitalism every productive activity is forced to be economic. This is because the end of socially mediated human activity, by capitalist social relations, is to serve capital rather than humanity. Capitalist social forms like value and money mediate human productive activity, which includes knowledge, by making this activity the source of the process of commodification and objectification i.e., turning everything, including social relations, into objects and commodities<sup>6</sup>. To overcome capitalism is to free our human activity from the domination of this social system that limits our activity to an economic one. This system mediates our activity that determines our consciousness as he argues in *The German Ideology*<sup>7</sup>, this is why the transformation of knowledge presupposes the transformation of social reality. Marx

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<sup>6</sup> "As emphasised above, the worker, too, must present himself as the 'owner' of his labour-power, as if it were a commodity. His specific situation is defined by the fact that his labour-power is his only possession. His fate is typical of society as a whole in that this self-objectification, this transformation of a human function into a commodity reveals in all its starkness the dehumanised and dehumanising function of the commodity relation." (Lukacs 92)

<sup>7</sup> "[...] men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking. It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness. For the first manner of approach the starting-point is consciousness taken as the living individual; for the second manner of approach, which conforms to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as their consciousness." (42-3)

argues that if we abstract the individual from society, and we abstract consciousness from this individual and we leave aside his sensuous social reality, we will see that consciousness determines his life and his activity. But if we do not perform these abstractions and we see man as a social being, we could see how his life, including his activity, affects his consciousness. For example, even our knowledge of a specific tree or a chair comes from social relations of production that made chairs and cultivated this kind of tree; chairs and trees are socially defined according to their usefulness to society<sup>8</sup>. Thus, grasping the essence of social reality does not change this reality, but it allows us to reach a certain maturity and gives people the ability to change.

In the preface of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx summarizes the core of his materialism and argues that the change of social reality depends on the maturity of material conditions, and not on the consciousness of these conditions: “new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions for their existence have matured in the womb of the old society” (12). Moreover, the change of reality that comes in a revolutionary practice, which begins with the change of our mode of production or the way of activity, is also related to epistemology as Marx claims in the third of the *Theses on Feuerbach*; “The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice” (*Selected Writings* 172). This means that to understand social reality we must transform it so that our self-transformation coincides with the transformation of this reality.

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<sup>8</sup> “Even the objects of the simplest “sensuous certainty” are only given him [Feuerbach] through social development, industry and commercial intercourse. The cherry-tree, like almost all fruit-trees, was, as is well known, only a few centuries ago transplanted by commerce into our zone, and therefore only by this action of a definite society in a definite age has it become “sensuous certainty” for Feuerbach.” (*The German Ideology* 45)



## 1.1. Subjectivity and Activity

On the one hand, the positive role of subjectivity in building objective knowledge is introduced by Kant. The subjectivity of the subject of knowledge for Kant is universal when the subject correctly uses the categories of understanding. The synthetic production of judgments in combining sensible intuitions with the concepts of understanding is itself objective; it does not depend on the subject that is doing this activity, meaning that it does not differ from one subject to another. On the other hand, the idea of knowledge as an active production and not just passive reception is also introduced by Kant. Reason is active; it produces objective judgments synthetically and not analytically. Reason does not receive sensible data passively; it unifies them through the synthetic combination of the forms of sensibility and the categories of understanding.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant argues that the subject receives empirical data in his forms of sensibility or intuition, namely space and time, then produces the object as a phenomenon through his twelve categories of understanding. “Appearances, to the extent that as objects they are thought in accordance with the unity of the categories, are called phenomena” (A 249). The given sensible data are rooted in the thing-in-itself or the noumenon, which is the essence of the object or the object as it is independently of the subject’s experience of it. This essence is unknowable, according to Kant, but reason unifies the experience of the subject through three regulative Ideas, which are God, the World, and the Self. These are regulative Ideas, i.e. conditions for the rational unification of experience, but they are not noumenal objects for Kant, which means that they are not objects of knowledge. Reason unifies the judgments of the understanding and infers these three ideas as conditions for the cognitive unity and

coherence of possible experience. Thus, the subject is actively constituting his experience, which makes it subjective. But this activity of the subject is objective because it does not depend on the subject: The activity of thinking has rules, otherwise, in breaking these rules, the subject is not thinking. These rules are the twelve fundamental categories of understanding, which are the rules of judging. Thus, every thinker is objectively judging according to these rules. For example, causality is a category of understanding that judges successive phenomena to be cause and effect. If the subject breaks this rule, he is not building objective knowledge.

Following Kant, Hegel also states that reason is active, and that subjectivity plays a positive role in building objective knowledge. Hegel considers subjectivity and objectivity in a dialectical path to return to the same source or have the same substance. The substance becomes a subject, “[...] everything hangs on grasping and expressing the true not just as substance but just as much as subject” (*The Phenomenology of Spirit* 18<sup>9</sup>), and it is the substance as a subject that re-appropriates the object by knowing it as its product. In other words, subjectivity externalizes itself to take back objectivity to its source. Hegel here describes knowledge as a dynamic process relating between the subject and the object. Cognitive activity is the process of *Geist*, which is Spirit or Mind. The process of externalization and objectification is the activity of *Geist* as the Subject of history. It is the activity of reunifying subjectivity and objectivity, the subject and the object, culminating in what Hegel calls ‘absolute knowing’.

In the introduction of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel argues that consciousness grasps the object as it appears to it and presents a series of concepts for this object in a dialectical way. The concept represents the essence of the object and the

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<sup>9</sup> For this book of Hegel, I will use the number of the section, not the page.

criterion of knowing the object. Both the concept and the object are within consciousness, thus the dialectic between the concept and the object is an activity of consciousness, which is the activity of knowing. The phenomenology is the description of the activity of knowing, which begins with consciousness and presents a new concept throughout the phases of *The Phenomenology of Spirit: Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, Reason, Spirit, Religion, and Absolute Knowing*<sup>10</sup>. Hegel describes the final phase where consciousness grasps its own essence and thus the subject has the ability to know everything, consciousness “will reach a point where it sets aside its semblance of being burdened with what is alien to it, which only is for it and is as other; a point where the appearance becomes equal to the essence” (*The Phenomenology of Spirit* 62).

This dialectical activity of the subject in grasping the essence of the object is objective because it reaches a point, at the end of the *Logic* in the *Encyclopedia*, where the unity of subject and object is fully developed. The unity of the Absolute Knowing lacks concrete determinations, it is a potential unity in comparison with the actual unity in the Absolute Idea. The Idea is the self-knowing truth or being, a differentiated unity between subject and object that has all possible concrete determinations of subjectivity and objectivity. After *Logic*, there is a transition to the philosophy of nature in Hegel, which according to Marx is nothing but a confirmation of what is reached in *Logic*. “Nature is only the form of the Idea’s other-being” (*E. and P. Manuscripts* 146), where “other-being” means the object. This confirmation, for Hegel, means that the dialectical activity between subjectivity and objectivity confirms the external reality, which is reality as external to self-consciousness.

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<sup>10</sup> “‘Consciousness’, ‘Self-consciousness’ and ‘Reason’ are the basic divisions of individual experience, and ‘Spirit’, ‘Religion’ and ‘Absolute Knowledge’ are the basic divisions of social experience.” (Norman 24)

Therefore, we can see that in Kant and Hegel, objectivity is built on a subjective basis; it stems from the activity of the subject which is essentially cognitive and rational. In Kant, this activity itself is objective because the synthetic judgment of the understanding is an objective activity. In Hegel, the dialectical activity of self-consciousness is a dialectic between subjectivity and objectivity that reaches the unity between thinking and being. We shall see later, how Marx is influenced by Kant and Hegel with the concept of activity, the role of subjectivity, and its relation to objectivity.

## **1.2. The Mediation Between Humanity and Nature**

“Where idealist social ontologies try to purge social categories of the natural, and biological reductionists evacuate the social mediations, the strength of Marx's category of ‘productive activity’ lies precisely in its double determination as the linking element between the human and the natural [...].” (Arthur 12)

Marx does not consider man as a mere part of nature who has an immediate relation with nature, but he also does not think that the mediation between man and nature is reason or anything purely spiritual. He writes in the manuscripts that “man is not merely a natural being: he is a human natural being. That is to say, he is a being for himself” (136). The fact that man makes changes in nature and in himself in a different way than animals, makes him more than a part of nature. Human activity differs from animal activity in that it creates new objects and new human capacities; it is not biologically fixed as animal activity. Marx points out the role of consciousness that allows humans to be creative in their productive activity when he states that humans consciously imagine the end of their work from the beginning<sup>11</sup>. Human activity is

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<sup>11</sup> “A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees

creative and not biologically fixed in comparison with animal activity: it changes the objects in new ways, creates new objects, and new capacities and skills for man.

Therefore, even though man is a part of nature, he needs a mediation between himself and the rest of the world, which is a relation between two different entities. The mediation between man and nature, the essential relation between them, is the human productive activity. Man and nature are not in a total unity, nor in total separation, which means that the subject and the object are in a middle position between unity and separation. Although man is a part of nature, he can be a separated or isolated part that has the mediation of reason that relates him to the rest of the world. Idealism reduces man to his consciousness or states that the essence of man is his consciousness or reason, and thus isolates him from the rest of the world that has no consciousness or reason. In this case, the mediation between man and the rest of the world is the activity of his reason. The problem with this mediation is that it is based on the separation between man and the rest of the world and that it is more related to the subject than the object. It reduces man to his reason, the object to an object of consciousness, and abstracts the activity of knowing from human activity as a whole. In contrast, Marx's mediation, which is productive activity, is not based on the idealist separation or isolation of man from the rest of the world, and it is equally related to the subject and the object. Human activity is a source of change for both the subject and the object; where the subject is the real concrete human being that has consciousness, and the object is the real concrete object, which includes the objects of social reality like value and money. This mediation is not an abstraction: it does not reduce activity to an activity of reason or an empirical activity of perception, and it does not abstract man

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is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality." (*Selected Writings* 493)

from his materiality nor reduce him to his consciousness or sensibility. The idealist mediation is an abstraction, and this makes it a mediation between two separated entities because it abstracts the subject and the object from reality, which includes social reality. In contrast, Marx's mediation is not an abstraction, and this makes it a mediation between two different entities in their unity because it takes the real subject and object and the activity as a whole, which encompasses the activity of knowing and perceiving. Thus, human activity differs man from nature and is itself the mediation between man and nature that unifies them.

The unity between human beings and nature, for Marx, is the similarity between humans and animals in their activity, and the common source of change for both humans and nature, which is productive activity. Humans, animals, and insects produce and act on the objects of nature according to their needs of subsistence. This is the main relation between these living beings and the rest of nature, and it confirms that they are an active part of nature. Besides, human activity, being different from animal and insect activity in its creativity, changes nature in new ways and creates new objects like chairs and tables, computers and televisions. This creativity produces new human skills and capacities that correspond to these new objects. Animals and insects do not produce new objects and do not earn new skills and capacities. On the one hand, this difference between human productivity and animal productivity makes them two different beings, and thus makes humanity and nature two different entities. But on the other hand, it provides a source of creative change for both humanity and nature. So, the actuality of nature and humanity presupposes a historical and social relation between them through productive activity. Thus, man being a part of nature or unified with nature means that he is a part of the changing nature: humanity changes with the nature that it acts on. The

separation between man and nature is an abstraction of man from this constant change. If we reduce man to his consciousness, then the change that happens to him as a part of nature is not taken into consideration. The human capacities and the skills that change along with the change of nature involve a change in the level of consciousness because consciousness is a human capacity. As we shall see in the next chapter, for Marx, the mode of social production shapes our mental capacities and affects our forms of consciousness. Thus, the separation between man and nature is an abstraction of man as self-consciousness from the social reality and an abstraction of the activity of knowing from the activity of social production.

When the starting point is the separation between subject and object, we have three possibilities: idealist unity, materialist unity, and dualism. The first position is the idealist unity that reduces everything to thought, mind, or reason; reality is nothing but an idea. The second position, which is the materialist unity, is the reduction of everything to matter; thinking is merely a brain activity and all that exists is matter, which is something perceptible. The third position is the mind-matter dualism where reality has two fundamental entities, thought and matter. However, when the starting point is a kind of unity between two different entities, which are the subject and the object, we have two positions: the idealist unity in-difference, which is represented by Hegel, and the materialist unity in-difference, which is represented by Marx. In what follows, I will compare these two positions.

Hegel's idealism is not based on the separation between subject and object. Rather, there is no subject without an object and there is no object without a subject; they are dialectically related to each other. In Hegel's idealism, the object is nothing but the externalized essence of Spirit, which is self-consciousness. The object is the

alienated essence of man, and thus Hegel replaces the concept of separation with the concept of alienation. The difference between alienation and separation is that alienation presupposes a unity and then a kind of split, which is in Hegel the externalization of the subject in the object. According to Marx's critique of Hegel in the *Manuscripts*, after the unity between subject and object is achieved in the Absolute Idea at the end of the *Logic*, Hegel makes a transition to natural philosophy by abolishing the mediation and thus the relation between man and nature becomes direct and intuitive: "The abstract idea, which without mediation becomes intuiting, is indeed nothing else but abstract thinking that gives itself up and resolves on intuition" (*E. and P. Manuscripts* 144). But this transition is nothing but a confirmation of the abstract thought, and thus it is not a transition to nature as such, but only a transition to nature as externalized abstract thought. Thus, Hegel's alienation is the externalization of the object from the subject, and abolishing this alienation is confirming the abstract unity between subject and object. Hegel's mediation is a mediation between the subject and the alienated object; the mediation is the abstract mental activity of self-consciousness that dialectically makes the negation through the externalization of the subject in the object and then negates this negation through the abolishment of itself as mediation, and thus abolishes alienation. Marx's critique of Hegel, as we shall see in the next chapter, is that this whole process is abstract: the subject is abstract because man<sup>12</sup> is reduced to

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<sup>12</sup> "Man, that is to say, is regarded as a non-objective, spiritual being. [...] Man is equated with self. The self, however, is only the abstractly conceived man-man created by abstraction" (*E. and P. Manuscripts* 132).



self-consciousness, the object<sup>13</sup> is abstract because it is only externalized self-consciousness, and human activity<sup>14</sup> is reduced to abstract mental activity.

For Hegel, alienation is the externalization of the essence of man, which is self-consciousness; it is an externalization of subjectivity in the objectivity of the world through the Hegelian abstract activity. “Objectivity as such is regarded as an estranged human relationship which does not correspond to the essence of man, to self-consciousness” (Marx, *E. and P. Manuscripts* 132). Objectivity comes from the relation between self-consciousness and what is external to it due to the activity of externalization of self-consciousness. By way of contrast, for Marx, the essence of man is the ensemble of social relations as stated in the sixth of the *Theses on Feuerbach*. Thus, Marx’s alienation is the objectification of the externalization of this essence through human activity as a whole, which is not reduced to mental activity. Nature is not the externalized essence of man for Marx, but social reality is the externalized essence of man, which includes the social reality of natural objects such as a cherry tree<sup>15</sup>. Human activity presupposes the existence of nature, but then it shapes and changes this nature; this is how the relation between man and nature is socially mediated.

Activity is a social relation between the social concrete subject and the social concrete object; thus, it is a part of the essence of man. This relation, the social activity, externalizes the human capacities and powers in the products of the human activity. Since these products are objects, this externalization is an objectification of the essence

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<sup>13</sup> “The main point is that the object of consciousness is nothing else but self-consciousness, or that the object is only objectified self-consciousness - self-consciousness as object.” (E. and P. Manuscripts, 132).

<sup>14</sup> “The only labour which Hegel knows and recognises is abstractly mental labour” (*E. and P. Manuscripts* 131).

<sup>15</sup> Marx’s example of the cherry tree can be found in *The German Ideology* (45).

of man. However, according to Marx, this objectification is essential to our human existence because it comes from human activity, but when this activity is objectified through wage labor, then it becomes problematic. The objectification of activity as such is specific to capitalism through wage labor because it is a commodification of labor power, and thus the essence of man is alienated in commodity relations and capital. Capital is the dead labor that dominates living labor. The living human being is the source of labor or productive activity since he or she is the producer. Under capitalism, this activity is objectified when labor power is commodified, this objectified activity is dead labor and not living labor. Commodities are dead labor produced by living labor; the living labor is the labor of the living human being: "Living labour is subsumed under objectified labour, which acts independently" (Marx, *Selected Writings* 410). Therefore, Capital is objectified labor, or dead labor, which subordinates living labor for its own accumulation<sup>16</sup>. Alienation, for Marx, is the externalization of the human essence through an objectified activity, which is wage labor. The alienated social reality, as a product of the alienated labor, mediates our activity and directs it to serve capital accumulation. To sum up, Marx materialized Hegel's mediation as human productive activity and points out that this mediation does not need abolishment, and then argues that there is a second-order mediation that must be abolished. This is what we must now explain.

Under capitalism, man alienates the mediation itself, or precisely, he mediates the first-order mediation, which is human activity, by a second-order mediation, which is the system of private property or capitalism (Arthur 15). This means that human

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<sup>16</sup> "The domination of the capitalist over the worker is thus the domination of the thing over man, of dead labour over living labour, of the product over the producer; for the commodities which become the means of domination (in fact only over the worker) are themselves merely the results of the productive process, its products." (Marx, *Selected Writings* 584)

activity is mediated by capitalist social forms like money, value, private property, and capital, which are interrelated and interdependent. For Marx, we must overcome the mediated mediation, which is the second-order mediation, and not the first-order mediation itself, which is the human productive activity (Arthur 16). Thus, there is a “contradictory unity” (Arthur 117) between the subject and the object under capitalism which we must overcome, but this is not a separation between the subject and the object. The contradictory unity does not imply a separation between thinking and being, the ideal and the real. Neither the first-order nor the second-order mediations are mediations between two separate entities. First, human productive activity is a mediation between man and the externalized social reality. Second, the capitalist social reality is the alienated essence of man, and not just externalized, due to the mediation of the first-order mediation. Thus, we do not have a separation between subject and object in these two cases. The contradiction between subject and object that we have under capitalism is an inversion of roles between them, which is fetishism. The subject treats himself as an object by commodifying his labor power by selling it through wage labor, and capital, which is the objectified essence of man or the alienated ensemble of social relations, is treated as a subject. Capital as a subject mediates human activity by directing it toward its accumulation and reinforces the capitalist mode of production through wage labor. This relation between capital and wage labor does not mean that wage labor is an external category of capitalism. Wage labor is an integral component part of capitalism that is fortified and strengthened through its relation to capital. The contradiction between subject and object can be seen as a contradiction between labor and capital, where labor is the human productive activity that is alienated under capitalism. Labor represents social individuals or the original collective social subject

that treats himself as an object, and capital represents the commodities or the original object that is treated as a subject. Capital is not a collection of commodities, capital is the social relations that involve relations between social classes. These classes differ in their relation to commodity production by owning the means of production or by selling their labor power as a primary commodity that produces the other commodities. In other words, labor is a subject as a producer of capital and an object as a commodified labor, while capital is an object as a product of labor and a subject as an alienated ensemble of social relations that mediates and directs labor.

### **1.3. Kant and Hegel's solutions**

Marx is influenced by the activity of reason in Kant, which is a production of the object by the subject, and by the Hegelian dialectic and the supersession of alienation as a method. Thus, in order to understand Marx's contribution to the problem of epistemology, we must contrast it with Kant's and Hegel's solutions. In Kant's solution to the problem of epistemology, the subject does the whole activity of producing the object and reaching unity with it. In contrast to Kant's universal subjectivity, Hegel's subject is social as a social collective self-consciousness. Hegel makes the object more active than in Kant as a pole of the dialectic facing the subject, which means that the unity between subject and object does not come from the subject but from the relation between the subject and the object. This relation between subject and object is the dialectical activity of consciousness that happens within consciousness between the concept and the object. The Hegelian unity, as a supersession of alienation, is reached in the Absolute Idea at the end of Hegel's *Logic*. But Hegel, for Marx, limits the concept of activity to merely an abstract mental activity, his sociality is only the social aspect of

self-consciousness and not of real concrete man, and his solution is an abstract ideal unity. In comparison with Marx, Kant makes primacy of the subject over the object, Hegel equates them abstractly and reaches an ideal unity, while Marx thinks that they are equal in a practical material way through which they are reproduced by human activity. Finally, Kant and Hegel try to reach unity between subject and object at the end of their systems, but Marx presupposes this unity from the beginning because of the mediation of human activity.

The solution to the problem of epistemology is presented by Kant mainly in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The activity of unifying the diverse data received by the sensibility and then the judgments of the understanding ends in the first *Critique* with three unifying ideas: God, Self, and World. The subject's production of the object and his experience of the object are conditioned by this theoretical unity. Thus, this unifying activity is an activity where the subject produces the object and strives to achieve unity with it. But this unity is conditioned by the unity of reason: the essence of the subject, which is reason, must be one, a unit. The subject that produces the object must be in unity with himself at first, in order to be in unity with the object. Thus, the unity between subject and object is conditioned by the unity of the subject that produces the object, which means the unity of reason. Now, the unity of reason is treated by Kant in his second *Critique* as the problem of unity between theoretical reason and practical reason. However, I think Kant presents a circular argument by presupposing the unity of reason to prove the primacy of practical reason over theoretical reason<sup>17</sup> and using the primacy to prove the unity between theoretical

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<sup>17</sup> In the following citation, Kant refuses the conflict between theoretical reason and practical reason by presupposing their unity and that within unity there must be no conflict. This argument makes him able to choose the primacy of practical reason over theoretical reason.

reason and practical reason<sup>18</sup>. We can defend Kant by saying that he presupposes the unity of reason, and he is developing it at the same time in terms of the primacy of practical reason over the theoretical. But the problem in reaching unity is that it is conditioned by an endless pursuit of the highest good<sup>19</sup>, which is the reason behind the need for the immortality of the soul<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, the unity is reached in endless progress for Kant, which means that there is no point where this unity is reached.

Hegel's activity is the dialectical activity of the subject; he replaced the passive substance with the active subject in his ontology. In contrast to Kant's object which is a product of the subject, Hegel's object is more active than in Kant's account because the dialectical activity is between the concept and the object within consciousness. So, the object is a part of the dialectic, it changes, and that requires a new concept or essence in every phase of knowledge, from sense-certainty, which is the first phase in the *Phenomenology*, until the Absolute Idea, which is the last one in the *Logic*. Substance, which is represented as the object in Hegel's ontology, is not passive but is an active

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“Thus, in the union of pure speculative with pure practical reason in one cognition, the latter has primacy, assuming that this union is not contingent and discretionary but based a priori on reason itself and therefore necessary. For, without this subordination a conflict of reason with itself would arise [...]” (*Critique of Practical Reason* 5:121)

<sup>18</sup> In the following citation, Kant uses the primacy of practical reason over theoretical reason, represented by the necessity of pursuing the highest good to unify the concepts of the theoretical reason, which means reaching the unity of reason.

“For we thereby cognize neither the nature of our souls, nor the intelligible world, nor the supreme being as to what they are in themselves, but have merely unified the concepts of them in the practical concept of the highest good as the object of our will, and have done so altogether a priori through pure reason but only by means of the moral law and, moreover, only in reference to it, with respect to the object it commands.” (*Critique of Practical Reason* 5:133)

<sup>19</sup> “Since it is nevertheless required as practically necessary, it can only be found in an endless progress toward that complete conformity, and in accordance with principles of pure practical reason it is necessary to assume such a practical progress as the real object of our will.” (*Critique of Practical Reason* 5:122)

<sup>20</sup> “This endless progress is, however, possible only on the presupposition of the existence and personality of the same rational being continuing endlessly (which is called the immortality of the soul). Hence the highest good is practically possible only on the presupposition of the immortality of the soul, so that this, as inseparably connected with the moral law, is a postulate of pure practical reason (by which I understand a theoretical proposition, though one not demonstrable as such, insofar as it is attached inseparably to an a priori unconditionally valid practical law).” (*Critique of Practical Reason* 5:122)

subject. This means that both the subject and the object are active in Hegel. This Hegelian position is a starting point for Marx's conception of the object as an active pole within a dialectical activity with the subject. For Hegel, knowledge is the activity of consciousness where the object becomes another form of the subject; the subject externalizes itself in the object to re-appropriate it and return it to its unity with the subject. This is knowledge as a movement of consciousness where the subject as self-consciousness posits itself as an object or sets up the object as its self and re-appropriates it. Thus, knowledge for Hegel is an active process where the subject externalizes itself and returns to itself in this activity of knowing.

Marx's critique of Hegel in the *Manuscripts* consists in that Hegel abstracts humanity, nature, and human activity from reality. Humanity is reduced to social collective self-consciousness, nature is reduced to an object of consciousness, and human activity is reduced to an activity of knowing, which is the activity of consciousness. According to Marx in the *Manuscripts*, for Hegel, "the object is only objectified self-consciousness" (132). This makes the object, for Hegel, an abstract object of consciousness or an object as it appears to consciousness. Moreover, Marx argues that a human being, for Hegel, is a subject of knowledge, which makes him reduced to an abstract thinker. "Man, that is to say, is regarded as a non-objective, spiritual being. [...] Man is equated with self. The self, however, is only the abstractly conceived man-man created by abstraction" (132). This makes the human being a non-objective being, while Marx states that "[a] non-objective being is a non-being" (135). For Marx, the concrete human being produces concrete objects, while Hegel's humanity which is reduced to social self-consciousness produces abstract objects. Furthermore, besides that both the subject and the object are abstract, for Hegel, the relation between

them is abstract. Marx praises Hegel for his conception of labor in the *Phenomenology* as the activity through which the human being creates himself, while accusing Hegel's concept of labor because it is limited to abstract mental labor. Human activity is more than an abstract mental activity, it encompasses manual activities like building and cultivating. "The only labour which Hegel knows and recognises is abstractly mental labour" (131). Therefore, Hegel's alienation of the object from the subject and its supersession is ideal and abstract, which is in line with Feuerbach's critique of Hegel: "The unity of thought and being it claimed to have achieved was only the unity of thought and imagination" (Feuerbach 77). So, the unity in-difference that is achieved in Hegel is nothing, a mere abstraction, while the real unity between the real subject and the real object is already built by their common source, which is human productive activity.



## CHAPTER 2

### HUMAN ACTIVITY

#### 2.1. Human Activity: Subjective and Objective

“Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity” (*Selected Writings* 171). In this sentence from the first of the *Theses on Feuerbach* where Marx states that activity is objective, he does not mean that it is only objective without being subjective. Rather, he means that activity is not merely subjective, but it is also objective, as is clear in the *Manuscripts*<sup>21</sup>. We must not take activity as merely subjective, as pragmatism<sup>22</sup> usually takes it, but also objective. The subjectivity of the activity is evident because the activity is coming from the subject and not the object. However, this subjectivity is pointed out by Marx in the first sentence of the same thesis:

“The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively.” (*Selected Writings* 171)

Here, Marx argues that reality, or the object, is not conceived to contain subjectivity when this conception lacks human activity. So, for Marx, the real object contains subjectivity because it's a product of a human activity that changes it. This is

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<sup>21</sup> “Whenever real, corporeal man, man with his feet firmly on the solid ground, man exhaling and inhaling all the forces of nature, posits his real, objective essential powers as alien objects by his externalisation, it is not the act of positing which is the subject in this process: it is the subjectivity of objective essential powers, whose action, therefore, must also be something objective.” (134)

<sup>22</sup> Livergood (23) mentions that McFadden, taking James as a representative of pragmatism, asserts the following: “It is true that Pragmatism likewise proposes practice as the criterion of truth, but when it speaks of “practice” it usually refers to subjective practice” (McFadden 77). But Livergood takes Dewey as a representative of pragmatism who thinks that “the search for knowledge is always forward-moving it can never attain certainty” (26). This is because activity for Dewey “[...] must forever be connected with the uncertain” (23). Thus, for pragmatism, activity is subjective and brings uncertainty.

to be contrasted with previous materialism according to which reality is given as an object that is not produced by the subject. That is why, in previous materialism, the subject contemplates the object passively<sup>23</sup>.

The activity is an interaction between the subject and the object, so its objectivity mainly comes from its relation to the object and from the fact that this activity causes a change in the subject by reproducing his powers and providing him with new capacities and abilities. Man is an objective being, for Marx: “his objective product only confirms his objective activity, his activity as the activity of an objective, natural being” (*E. and P. Manuscripts* 134). Furthermore, according to Marx, man is an objective being because he is related to his external world: “A being which has no object outside itself is not an objective being” (*E. and P. Manuscripts*, 135). Besides, the main relation between man and the rest of the world, which is the mediation between them, is human productive activity. Thus, activity is the source of the objectivity of man and his objective product because it represents the relation between man and his external world of objects. But the meaning of the objectivity of the activity is different from the meaning of the objectivity of beings like the subject and the object. Activity is the relation between two objective beings, namely the subject and the object. These two are objective in the sense that they are external to each other, but the activity is objective in the sense that it relates objective beings to each other and affirms that they are external to each other, and thus affirms their objectivity as beings. In this sense, Chris Arthur argues that “Marx's ontology comprises the complex totality man - activity

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Contemplation’ is translated as ‘given’ by Suchting: “... objectivity, actuality, sensibility is grasped only in the form of the object or the given ... ’ - ‘the given’: ‘Anschauung’, passive registration, intuition” (57). Moreover, in (Suchting 5), he relates ‘sensuousness’, which he translates as ‘sensibility’ to ‘the given, which is contemplation. he thinks that ‘sensuousness’ coming from Kant’s sensibility that is the mental capacity for being affected by objects, and also from Hegel’s ‘sensible consciousness’ which is the immediate apprehension of an object.

- nature” (20), considering that the objective beings, man and the objects of nature, are related through objective activity. Thus, we must distinguish between the ontological objectivity, which is the objectivity of human productive activity that relates humanity to nature, and the epistemological objectivity, which is the correspondence between thought and reality. While traditional epistemology reduces the ontological objectivity to the epistemological objectivity by reducing the human activity to an activity of knowing and man to his consciousness, Marx’s position is to take the ontological objectivity as a starting point for epistemology. Therefore, epistemological objectivity depends on practice in the sense that the objectivity of our thinking must not be abstracted from our social production. Our thinking is objective when it grasps the dialectic between our social productive activity and our reality, which is a product of this activity.

Moreover, I think that there is another reason behind the objectivity of productive activity in Marx that is related to the subject more than the object. First, the activity is objective in the sense that it does not depend on consciousness, and second in the sense that it is determined or mediated by the social reality that it creates. Activity does not depend entirely on our consciousness, and thus it is objective exactly in the sense that it does not depend on consciousness to be done. So, a part of the objectivity of the activity comes from an unconscious<sup>24</sup> part of this activity. The unconscious residue in a process of a certain activity allows it to be an activity that does not depend on consciousness. This is what Marx explains in *Capital* when he argues that people

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<sup>24</sup> By ‘unconscious’, I do not mean the psychoanalysis unconscious, but I mean an act that is not determined by physical or biological instinct like digestion, neither it is a product of conscious reasoning. Mental activity is a part of the activity, but the activity does not depend on our consciousness to be done. In the example given above from *Capital*, we are doing the reduction of labor, and even if we become conscious about it, this does not change the process of the activity because this process does not depend on our consciousness of it.

carry out exchange activities without knowing what they are really doing; they are not conscious that they are carrying out a reduction of kinds of labor into one abstract labor, which is not a kind of labor but an aspect of value creating labor that is contrasted with concrete labor<sup>25</sup>: “We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it”<sup>26</sup> (*Selected Writings* 475). This means that the activity of exchange is objective because it does not depend entirely on our consciousness to be made, but it also depends on the act whereby we commensurate different kinds of labor without being aware of it.

Social reality is nothing but social relations that are shaped and produced by social productive activity. Human activity changes the objects of reality and shapes the form of the structure of human relations that the social reality consists of. Every society, like a feudal or capitalist society, is an ensemble of social relations shaped by its mode of production, like the feudal or the capitalist mode of production. Thus, the capitalist social reality is the ensemble of capitalist social relations that are formed by the activity of capitalist commodity production. However, social reality produced by human activity can mediate and determine our activity, and this is when fetishism occurs under capitalism. Fetishism is the treatment of the object that is a product of our activity as

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<sup>25</sup> Concrete labor is the individual labor that produces commodities, like the carpentering that makes the table. The equivalence between commodities that happens in commodity exchange presupposes that the different kinds of labor that produce these commodities are reduced and equated through homogeneous abstract labor, which is called ‘abstract labor’. In Marx’s words:

“By making the coat the equivalent of the linen, we equate the labour embodied in the former to that in the latter. Now, it is true that the tailoring, which makes the coat, is concrete labour of a different sort from the weaving which makes the linen. But the act of equating it to the weaving reduces the tailoring to that which is really equal in the two kinds of labour, to their common character of human labour. In this roundabout way, then, the fact is expressed, that weaving also, in so far as it weaves value, has nothing to distinguish it from tailoring, and, consequently, is abstract human labour.” (*Selected Writings* 469)

<sup>26</sup> This is analogous to Hegel’s consciousness when it does not know how the emergence of the new concept happens in the dialectic between concept and object. In his words in the introduction of the *Phenomenology*:

“As a result, a new shape of consciousness comes on the scene for which the essence is something different from what was the essence for the preceding shape. It is this circumstance which guides the whole series of shapes of consciousness in their necessity. However, it is just this necessity itself, or the emergence of the new object, which presents itself to consciousness without consciousness knowing how this happens to it. It takes place for us, as it were, behind the back of consciousness.” (61)

merely an objective subject, which makes the subject treat himself as an object; it's the inversion of the roles between the subject and the object. When human activity is determined by social reality, the subject treats himself as an object in this reality. So, social reality as a product of the activity that involves unconscious residue, namely the reduction of labor under capitalism, mediates our activity. The capitalist social reality mediates our activity by determining its mode of production to be through wage labor, and by making the aim of our activity be capital accumulation. Thus, the unconsciously produced reality determines our activity externally, which gives an objective aspect to our activity as being determined externally.

Finally, the fact that the objects of reality contain subjectivity makes it possible to surpass fetishism and the mediation of social reality because when we uncover the subjective side of social reality as a product of our activity, we will be aware that if we change the mode of our activity then this would change this reality, and thus we will have the ability to control it.

## **2.2. Human Activity: Mental and Manual**

“The only labour which Hegel knows and recognizes is abstractly mental labour” (*E. and P. Manuscripts* 131). In this sentence, Marx critiques Hegel that he conceives labor, which is a human productive activity, as only mental, an activity of consciousness. However, Marx does not mean that activity is only manual, but that activity is simultaneously mental and manual. Later on, Marx identifies the absolute Idea or the absolute Spirit of Hegel with the subject as an abstract thinker<sup>27</sup>. In contrast,

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<sup>27</sup> “The absolute idea, the abstract idea, [...] this whole idea which behaves in such a strange and bizarre way, and which has given the Hegelians such terrible headaches, is from beginning to end nothing else but abstraction (i.e., the abstract thinker), [...]” (*E. and P. Manuscripts* 143)

Marx's conception of the human being is influenced by Feuerbach<sup>28</sup>, he is a "real, corporeal man, man with his feet firmly on the solid ground, man exhaling and inhaling all the forces of nature" (*E. and P. Manuscripts* 134). On the other hand, Marx considers knowing as the activity of the consciousness of this objective natural being; "[t]he way in which consciousness is, and in which something is for it, is knowing. Knowing is its sole act." (*E. and P. Manuscripts* 137). Thus, since man is a sensuous being that has consciousness, man is not separated into parts of consciousness and body, but he is a unit; his activity involves both the activity of his body and the activity of his consciousness. There is no separation between these two activities; activity is one, and it has two sides: mental and manual. For example, the philosopher sits on the chair, writes, and talks; these are sensuous activities, while the farmer does a mental activity when he thinks about what kind of plants is suited to the specific kind of soil in a particular season. So, the concept 'practical', 'practice', or 'activity' involves mental activity, which also involves cognitive activity performed by the whole human being. This, mental activity cannot be separated from manual activity because consciousness cannot be separated from the sensuous real man taken as a unit that is active. Thus, mental and manual are like two sides of the same coin, which is human activity or practice. The products of this activity can be perceptible objects like a table; imperceptible objects of social reality like value or capital; and objects of intellectual abstraction like beauty. The products of activity can differ in kind, but the activity of each kind is not separated from the other as a separation of mental and manual.

Now, I will state the importance of the unity between manual and mental activity and its relevance to the problem of epistemology. Marx's position is based on

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<sup>28</sup> "Much of what Marx says about the objective character of man and his world is drawn from Feuerbach." (Arthur 104)

the unity between the subject and the object through both having the same source of production and reproduction, namely human productive activity. Suchting treats this problem and its solution in his book *Marx and Philosophy* without considering the unity between manual and mental activity. In the ninth section of the first study (Suchting 19-28), he distinguishes between the economic mode of production and theoretical mode of production, as if they are two separate modes that need an analogy between them. Theoretical production is a mental activity, while economic production is considered a manual activity. Suchting did not clarify if there is a unity between mental and manual activities, as if it is irrelevant to the problem of epistemology, while I think it is essential. If there is a separation between these activities, there will be a separation between the theoretical and the material. For example, if manual activity produces concrete objects while mental activity separately produces the forms of consciousness as theories of objects, then there will be a separation between the subject that produces mentally and the subject that produces manually, and between mentally produced objects and manually produced objects. If there is a separation in human activity between what is mental and what is manual, it cannot be a source of unity between the subject and the object. The activity must be one to be a source of unity of subject and object. Therefore, there must be a unity between mental and manual activities to reach the unity between subject and object. There is no separation between these two activities; activity is one, and it has two sides: mental and manual. The main difference between Marx's mediation between man and the rest of the world and the mediation of traditional epistemology is that we must not abstract the activity of knowing and thinking from human activity as a whole. This abstraction makes a separation between subject and object, but taking the activity of thinking as embedded in and unified with

human activity makes it a source of unity between subject and object. Thus, thinking and mental activity must be unified with manual activity to have a unity between thinking and being, subject and object.

Finally, as I mentioned in the first chapter, the division between manual and mental labor appears in the Greek slave society where mental labor is honorable in contrast to manual labor. In *The German Ideology*, Marx argues that the division between mental and manual labor is historically and socially developed.

“The most important division of material<sup>29</sup> and mental labour is the separation of town and country. The contradiction between town and country begins with the transition from barbarism to civilisation, from tribe to state, from locality to nation, and runs through the whole history of civilisation to the present day.” (72)

He also argues in *The German Ideology* that men develop their consciousness due to their productive social activity, and then the social division of mental and manual labor makes consciousness flatter itself by being independent of human manual activity (50). This makes us mistakenly think that manual and mental activities are two separate acts. “Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears” (50). This historical and social appearance of the division between mental labor and manual labor does not mean that human productive activity itself is divided between mental and manual. The unity between mental activity and manual activity is not affected by the division of labor. The division of mental and manual labor is only a division between the activity that is more mental than manual and the activity that is more manual than mental. The philosopher is honored in the Greek slave society because his activity involves mainly mental production, but this

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<sup>29</sup> I understand “material” in this context as manual in contrast to what is mental or intellectual.



does not eliminate his manual activity while philosophizing, such as writing, speaking, walking, etc.

### **2.3. The Contribution to the Problem of Epistemology**

Marx's position that human productive activity is the mediation between man and nature constitutes his contribution to the problem of epistemology. The fact that this activity produces and reproduces the subject and the object, makes the activity the source of man's reality. The subject is a different entity compared to his object of knowledge, but they are both parts of the same reality. This reality does not separate between internal reality and external reality because this separation comes from the separation between subjectivity and objectivity, which are unified by human activity. Activity, being subjective and objective, mental and manual, produces the object of knowledge and the knowledge of this object at the same time. Thus, on the one hand, the dichotomy of internal subjectivity and external objectivity is a mistake because the external object contains subjectivity, and the internal thought contains objectivity. On the other hand, knowledge as mental production cannot be separated from manual and material production because knowing is a human activity, and human activity is simultaneously mental and manual. Therefore, the problem of epistemology must not be isolated from the social and concrete aspects of the subject, the object, and human productive activity. Reality itself must not be isolated from its social aspect: concrete reality is social because the objects of reality are either raw materials or products of human social productive activity. The human productive activity uses the first nature as a raw material to produce a second nature, which is a humanized nature. First nature is physical and biological like oceans and forests. However, second nature is the product

of human productive activity; it is what humanity changes in nature as crops, parks, and reservoirs, besides what humanity produces to create our social human reality as social traditions and practices.

Therefore, the problem of epistemology that rises when we consider the subject and the object as separated entities, is only a result of abstracting the subject, the object, and their mediation from their reality. Epistemology must be embedded in reality: The subject must be treated as a concrete social man, the object must be treated as a concrete social object, and the mediation of knowledge must be a part of human social activity. In other words, the epistemological unity between the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge must presuppose and take as a starting point the ontological unity between humanity and the rest of the world. As we saw in the previous chapter, Marx follows Hegel's method by replacing the separation between subject and object with the externalization of the essence of man in social reality, which is done through human activity that is not only mental or abstract but also manual and concrete. Besides, natural objects that are not products of human activity are related to man through his human activity as raw materials, and not only through the activity of consciousness, which is knowing. Thus, the starting point of Marx is that there is no separation between subject and object, because the subject of knowledge is the social human being and the object of knowledge is the world or the humanized nature, which are in unity. The subject can know the object when he does not abstract himself and the object from the concrete social reality, as well as the concrete social mediation between them.

However, the object of knowledge for Marx is the social reality as a whole and not the reality of particular objects. Even when he uncovers the social relations that underlie the cherry tree (*The German Ideology* 45), he is building the knowledge of the

social reality as a whole. The subject can know the essence of the social reality because it is the externalized essence of man, it is also the alienated essence under capitalism. Thus, the essence of the object of knowledge is the externalized or alienated essence of the subject, which means that there is no separation between the subject and the object and that the subject can grasp the essence of the object. The externalization is no separation because it only means for Marx the self-realization of man through human activity. Besides, alienation for Marx means the contradictory unity between subject and object, which takes place under capitalism. Capital is the essence of capitalism; it is the alienated ensemble of social relations that Marx seeks to know by making a theory of the human activity and social relations that constitute it in his critique of political economy. Capital is the process of self-valorization, but also the complex of social class relations that is interdependent with this process.

“In simple circulation, C—M—C, the value of commodities attained at the most a form independent of their use-values, i.e., the form of money; but that same value now in the circulation M—C—M, or the circulation of capital, suddenly presents itself as an independent substance, endowed with a motion of its own, passing through a life process of its own, in which money and commodities are mere forms which it assumes and casts off in turn.” (Marx, *Selected Writings* 488)

C—M—C is the process where we exchange commodities with money in order to exchange with commodities again; this circulation was the dominant one in pre-capitalist societies. However, M—C—M is the process where we exchange money with commodities in order to exchange them back with money; this circulation is the dominant one under capitalism. For Marx, the surplus value, which is the profit that the capitalist makes through buying the labor power of the proletariat, stems from the objectification and the quantification of what is qualitative, which is the domination of

dead labor over living labor. Thus, class relations presuppose the self-valorizing process of capital, and this process presupposes the class relations between proletariat and capitalists. Capital as social relations is expressed by Marx in the following passage:

“The reproduction of a mass of labour power, which must incessantly reincorporate itself with capital for that capital’s self-expansion; which cannot get free from capital, and whose enslavement to capital is only concealed by the variety of individual capitalists to whom it sells itself, this reproduction of labour power forms, in fact, an essential of the reproduction of capital itself. Accumulation of capital is, therefore, increase of the proletariat.” (Marx, *Selected Writings* 516)

Moreover, in wage labor, the proletariat sells his labor power, and not his labor, to the capitalist. Labor in Marx is the human productive activity, which under capitalism takes the form of wage labor. In contrast, labor power is labor as a commodity, the human capacities that are used as a commodity that produces other commodities. In other words, labor power is labor that is alienated as a private property that is sold to the capitalist.

Marx does not reduce reality to social reality nor nature to humanized nature, but he thinks that philosophy must deal with social reality in order to change the world and not merely describe it, as he states in the last of the *Theses on Feuerbach*<sup>30</sup>. Thus, I think that Marx’s point is that philosophers may seek to grasp the essence of particular objects, like tables and trees, but this will not make any difference in reality. However, if they seek to grasp the essence of social reality as a whole, they can contribute to changing it. However, maybe science grasps the essence of particular objects, but in order to be scientists in the Marxist sense, I understand Marx as inviting us to consider the social aspect of these objects. In other words, if we distinguish between essence as

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<sup>30</sup> “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (*Selected Writings* 173).

function and essence as quiddity, we must consider the difference between the social aspect of each kind of essence. On the one hand, the essence as function is what the object is relative to human ends, which is the usefulness of the object, as the function of the chair that we use to sit. On the other hand, the essence as quiddity is what the object is independently of human ends, like the atoms and the molecules of a chair. The former is directly social because the function of an object is socially constructed, while the latter is indirectly social. The essence as quiddity represents the physical structure of an object, which is not constructed by humanity, but the science that studies this essence uses concepts that are socially generated. The atomic structure of an object exists independently of humanity, but the concept 'atom' is an abstraction generated by human thinking about an existing quiddity of the object. This mental activity is a part of the social human productive activity, which means that it is shaped by the mode of social production according to Marx. This position preserves the objectivity of scientific inquiry because it does not reduce the essence as quiddity to a social construct, as in constructivism.

Moreover, we can surpass the skepticism about knowing the particular object by uncovering the social relations that underlie it; skepticism becomes unjustified when we take into consideration the sociality of the subject and the object. Skepticism can arise as a distrust in the correspondence between the object as such, which can be represented by the Aristotelian categories, and our mental faculties, which can be represented by the Kantian categories. An object is either a product or a raw material of human activity that is affected by it, like the soil. Thus, the Aristotelian categories of the object are a product of human activity. For example, if the substance is a particular chair, its quantity can be that the chair has four legs, its qualification could be that the chair is

brown, its relative relation is that the chair is lower than the table, etc. All these categories are products of human productive activity that produces chairs. So, we can trust that, when we are looking at a chair or a cherry tree, these are in reality a chair or a cherry tree because they are produced and defined socially. If I isolate myself from society without considering the social relations and activities that underlie the chair or the cherry tree, I can easily distrust my perception. Thus, skepticism can be surpassed by embedding epistemology in social reality by considering the social relations behind the existing objects. Besides, if we saw a new object, like a tree on another planet or in a hidden part of the woods in Australia, we will define it in reference to its similarities to the trees that we already know and are products of human productive activity. Now, concerning our mental categories, I will take causality as an example to argue, against Kant, that they have a prior origin, which is human activity. Causality is built through our causal activity throughout history, I mean the practice of our ancestors producing fire with rocks and woods in their everyday cause-effect practices. Thus, a human social activity defines and constitutes causality, and that is why we can trust our causal judgment. Again, if I isolate myself from society, I can be skeptical that my causal judgments are legitimate. Furthermore, if I isolate myself from society, I can be skeptical about having a dream of a centaur considering that what I saw in my dreams might be something else. However, a centaur is socially defined as a creature with the body and legs of a horse, and the head and arms of a human. Thus, when I take into consideration the socially built definition of a centaur, I can surpass my skepticism.

## 2.4. Criterion and Theorization

Social reality is a product of a subjective-objective activity. Thus, it is the externalization of the capacities and powers of man. To consciously know reality, we must theorize the activity that produces it, which means to make a theory of the object of knowledge that involves the social relations that underlie its reality. Non-objective thinking of a real object is thinking that excludes the subjective part of the object that comes from human activity; this part is the social relations that underlie this object. A theory that does not encompass the social activity behind an object is refused by Marx as artificial or scholastic in the second of the *Theses on Feuerbach* because it isolates theory from practice. “The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question” (*Selected Writings* 171). Therefore, Marx’s contribution to the problem of epistemology is that there is no separation between subject and object, and thus there is no separation between theory and practice because we can consciously uncover the social relations and the unconscious activities that underlie the objects of reality.

Now, if we theorize an activity, how do we know that this theory reflects reality? Do we need a criterion of knowledge? In the introduction of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel argues that the criterion or the standard of knowledge must be internal to the object of knowledge because a criterion of knowledge is itself a claim of knowledge. Thus, it must be immanent or internal and not external to the activity of knowing; we do not need a criterion that is prior to knowing the object. Thus, for Marx, what we need is to theorize the activity and we do not need to determine a criterion that is external to the knowledge of the activity. Marx presented a theorization of our economic activity throughout his critique of political economy, especially in

*Capital*. However, he did not write about the criterion of knowledge. The only thing we need to do to examine a theory if it reflects a particular practice is simply to observe and search for inadequacy between theory and the actuality of the object, I mean the actual state in its change process. This way, we can adjust the theory to be adequate to actuality. If the change that happens to the object is not theorized, then the theory does not reflect the whole of the activity that produces the object. Thus, we do not need a criterion of knowledge, we just test the adequacy between theory and activity. For a theory to be true, it must involve the whole activity that changes reality.

This is based on Hegel's critique of Kant and traditional epistemology in the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*. In the *Encyclopedia* of Hegel, the introduction of the *Science of Logic*, he argues that Kant examines reason as an instrument<sup>31</sup>. "But to want to know before one knows is as incoherent as the Scholastic's wise resolution to learn to swim, before he ventured into the water" (10<sup>32</sup>). Hegel means by this sentence that examining the instrument of cognition is itself an act of knowing. So, since we cannot learn how to swim before swimming, analogously, we cannot learn how to know before knowing. Kant's categories represent the criterion of knowledge as prior or external to the activity of knowing. Thus, for Hegel, we do not need such criteria. In the introduction of the *Phenomenology*, he argues that we do not need a criterion for consciousness to examine the correspondence or the adequacy between the concept and the object, since they are both internal to consciousness. "Rather, we are lifted above

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<sup>31</sup> In the introduction of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel argues that traditional philosophy approaches knowledge as an instrument, by which he means rationalism and Kant, and as a medium, by which he means empiricism.

"If knowledge is an instrument, actively applied to reality, it must alter what it is applied to, and consequently cannot give us things as they really are in themselves. Similarly, if knowledge is a medium through which reality is somehow filtered, then we can never know reality as it is in itself." (Norman 10)

<sup>32</sup> This is the number of the section in the *Encyclopedia* of Hegel, not the page number.



comparing the two and conducting a genuine examination such that, while consciousness examines its own self, the only thing that remains to us is purely to look on” (59). The footnote explaining the expression “look on” states: *reine Zusehen*; “*be simply an onlooker*”. This means that observation is sufficient to cognize the inadequacy and then adjust it accordingly by presenting a new more adequate concept, which is itself the new internal criterion of knowing the object.

However, theorizing an activity is uncovering social relations and consciously determining unconscious activities. For example, in theorizing the activity of exchange, Marx uncovers the unconscious activity of reducing and equating different kinds of labor: “whenever, by an exchange, we equate as values our different products, by that very act, we also equate, as human labour, the different kinds of labour expended upon them” (*Selected Writings* 475). Moreover, Marx gives a program of theorizing future change in the third of the *Theses on Feuerbach*: “The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice” (*Selected Writings* 172). By this, I think he means theorizing the change of the social system from capitalism to communism. So, to understand rationally a social reality, Marx suggests coinciding the self-changing of the subject with the changing of the object. This is done by a ‘revolutionary practice’, which is the change of the mode of production so that we decide how to change the object of knowledge. In this way, the coincidence between the two changing poles is rationally understood and then consciously theorized. Thus, the direct way of theorizing an activity is to change social reality and theorize the change at the same time. We can take this as a way to understand social reality by changing it, which is in line with what Marx claims in the second of the *Theses on Feuerbach*: “Man must prove the truth, i.e.,

the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice” (*Selected Writings* 171). Thus, if a theory does not explain how reality changes, it is not a true theory.

Livergood, in his second chapter (12-26), mistakenly understands Marx as saying that we must have a future vision, which is communism, and apply it so that the theory of that vision becomes a true theory. This interpretation of Marx makes Livergood see similarities between Marxism and Pragmatism, precisely Dewey’s pragmatism. He seems also to reduce Marx’s epistemology to this future vision as if what Marx did in explaining the capitalist social reality is independent of his epistemology, while I think Marx’s epistemology is mainly about understanding the present social reality. Balibar, in *The Philosophy of Marx*, argues that Marx does not mean to have a future vision in the *Theses on Feuerbach*. “The revolutionary practice of which the *Theses* speak does not have to implement a programme or a plan for the reorganization of society. Still less does it need to depend upon a vision of the future offered by philosophical and sociological theories” (Balibar 21-2). Thus, the only program that Marx wants is the change of reality without a future vision, and the only coincidence he means is the coincidence between the act of theorizing and the act of abolishment of the present system. Marx is clear that communism is not the future system, rather, it is the act of abolishment of the current capitalist system. Marx wants this movement to be theorized, which means that we must make a theory of our act of abolishing capitalism. In his words:

“Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of

this movement result from the now existing premise” (*The German Ideology* 57).

Thus, Marx unifies theory and practice in two senses: first, in theorizing our current capitalist system as he did in his critique of political economy, and second, in theorizing our revolutionary activity of abolishing this system. The main difference between the forms of consciousness that he classifies as ‘ideologies’ in *The German Ideology* and his theories is that the former theories lack social relations, while the latter does not. “If in all ideology men and their relations appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process” (42). In this sentence from *The German Ideology*, Marx states that the forms of consciousness or the theories that do not encompass the human activity as Marx is suggesting, conceive reality inverted. The reality is that practice has primacy over theory<sup>33</sup>, which means that human activity produces that subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge. However, the ideology inverts this primacy to conceive that the forms of consciousness have primacy over our practice. This means that if we think that communism must be a theory to be applied in practice, we are being ideologists. Thus, any change at the level of theory does not make any difference in reality, but when we change our practice, then reality will change. Suchting explains this inversion of reality as an inversion of the primacy of practical relations over theoretical relations<sup>34</sup>. This primacy is meant by

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<sup>33</sup> “Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse alter - along with these - their real existence and their thinking and the products of their thinking.” (*The German Ideology* 16)

<sup>34</sup> “It is precisely ‘theoretical relations’ that are regarded as primary in the traditional epistemological picture: people have sets of representations and then seek to find out what they represent, if anything. Marx argues, in effect, that this picture reverses the actual relation, which is in general that practical relations precede corresponding systems of representations.” (Suchting 15)

Marx when he writes in *The German Ideology* that “[i]t is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness” (42). Therefore, analogously to Kant who unifies the practical reason with the theoretical reason through the primacy of practical reason over the theoretical reason, Marx unifies theory and practice through the primacy of practical life over theoretical forms of consciousness.

## **2.5. Epistemology and Political Economy**

In this section, I will try to elucidate the relation between epistemology and political economy in Marx’s work. In contrast to theories in morality, religion, and metaphysics, Marx finds Hegel’s philosophy and the bourgeois political economy as having a common standpoint in giving human activity a central role. Marx critiques Hegel for considering only the positive side of labor, which is labor as the wealth of nations, without considering its negative side, which is that it produces privation for the proletariat<sup>35</sup>. Hegel and the modern political economy have the same standpoint, which is that humans produce themselves through alienated labor, which means that labor is the essence of man and the source of his reality. For Hegel, externalization is an alienation, thus labor is alienated labor for Hegel. This means that Hegel confuses productive activity and alienated activity, while Marx distinguishes between them. Moreover, modern political economists confuse human productive activity with wage labor, which is the objectified activity according to Marx. Therefore, the theories of modern political economy are forms of ideology because they do not theorize activity as the source of change of reality. Rather, they only theorize activity as a passive activity

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<sup>35</sup> “Labour produces works of wonder for the rich, but nakedness for the worker. It produces palaces, but only hovels for the worker; it produces beauty, but cripples the worker” (Marx, *Selected Writings* 88).

and not an active activity. I call passive activity the one that reproduces the same social system, while active activity is the revolutionary practice or the change of the mode of activity that abolishes the current social system. In other words, active activity is the act of abolishing the current passive activity. Ideology does not distinguish between activity and wage labor in order to reproduce the same social reality, while Marx does this distinction in order to abolish wage labor and free our activity from the shape of value that it takes through commodifying itself. Modern political economists conceive wage labor as a passive activity that cannot be abolished because it is not different from transhistorical or pre-capitalist activity, as if wage labor is a transhistorical and natural necessity to our existence. From their point of view, there is no other form of activity, thus there is no active activity or revolutionary practice.

The relation between epistemology and political economy lies in their relation to human activity: knowing is a human activity, and manual labor is a human activity. In other words, economic activity and the activity of knowing are related in being both parts of human activity. These parts are not isolated from each other because we produce our forms of consciousness and our social reality through the same activity. The activity of knowing is a part of the activity that produces social reality by externalizing the essence of man. Thus, since capitalism is the alienated ensemble of social relations, the passive activity that reproduces this system is not only a passive economic activity but also a passive knowing activity. Human activity is passive as a whole, and in order to become active, it is not sufficient to change our mode of knowing, but we must change our mode of activity as a whole. This is Marx's argument in *The German Ideology*, as we saw in the previous section. Thus, separating knowing from economic activity enhances passive activity because it makes us think that

changing our mode of thinking and our forms of consciousness could change reality. Therefore, Marx's epistemology is central to his work in political economy; it consists in building knowledge of the present social reality as a product of the human activity that is simultaneously mental as a knowing activity and manual as an economic activity. Therefore, Marx invites modern political economists to distinguish between wage labor and human activity, and to consider that activity includes the activity of knowing and producing forms of consciousness.

Moreover, Livergood (11) argues that Marx is mistaken in over-emphasizing economic activity and excluding all other kinds of activity. But I think that it was essential for Marx to focus on political economy and economic activity. Political economy is the science that studies economic activity and its relation to society. And since under capitalism all our activities are subordinated to economic activities to serve capital accumulation, then Marx's focus on the critique of this science is an attempt to free our activity from this limitation. In order to survive, under capitalism, we must sell our labor power and thus commodify it. This particular commodification is the source of all commodity production. Thus, our activity and everything it produces are parts of the capitalist social reality, and thus are shaped by value. The limitation of our activity lies in that we are forced to produce in order to exchange and not to use: the subordination of use-value to exchange-value. This makes the economic activity dominant, as the commodity form is the dominant category. Wage labor is the main mode of activity under capitalism, so activity itself is shaped by value, and thus is mainly economic. Thus, activity under capitalism has an exchange-value as a commodity. Practically, we can see that most of the productive time spent by people is a production that aims for exchange and not for use, which makes the economic activity

dominant. Man is reduced to a worker or laborer under capitalism; thus, his main activity must be economic in order to survive, he even has to treat his labor power and capacities as commodities through wage labor. Therefore, to free our activity we must change the present social reality, and for this purpose, we must change our mode of activity, which is mainly economic under capitalism, and thus abolish wage labor.

However, the activity of knowing is included in the commodification process as objectification of mental powers. The production of forms of consciousness is an activity that is done mainly at schools and universities through wage labor. Professors sell their intellectual powers, as well as their physical powers, through wage labor to produce knowledge. Thus, knowing is commodified through wage labor, and thus our cognitive ability has an exchange-value insofar as it enhances our labor power and economic productivity. Therefore, economic activity is not separated from the activity of knowing in the process of commodification. So, the critique of political economy involves a critique of the activity of commodified knowledge production. Finally, as we saw in the third of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, the social revolution is also related to epistemology, for the coincidence between our change and the change of social reality is a way to understand this changing of reality and consciously theorize it.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONCLUSION

Marx's critique of epistemology shows that the separation between the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge presupposes a separation between humanity and nature, intellectual labor and manual labor, and between social classes as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The lesson that we can learn from Marx, is that if we want to surpass the separation between theory and practice, subject and object, we must not limit epistemology to the inquiry of the knowledge of the isolated abstract individual, but we must take it as a starting point that man is a concrete social being. As a contribution to epistemology, Marx introduces the centrality of human social activity and thus the social dimension connecting the subject to the object. Human activity is the mediation between man and nature; it is the source of the subject and the object in their constant change. The non-separation between subject and object of knowledge is based on the unity between humanity and nature. In other words, the epistemological objectivity is based on the ontological objectivity as a relation to external entities, which means that epistemology must start from the unity between humanity and nature and that our thinking is objective when it reflects the centrality of social reality. Objective thinking grasps the social aspect of the object of knowledge and its relation to social production. Skepticism can be surpassed by uncovering the social relations and activities that underlie the object of knowledge, which unifies it with the subject of knowledge. This means that the subject and the object are unified under the realm of social relations. The subject can grasp the essence of social reality because they are both



products of the same activity. This is done by theorizing the activity that underlies the objects of social reality, which is to uncover the social dimension.

The problem of epistemology can be formulated in the question “how can the subject know the object?”. This problem is based on the separation between subject and object because if there is a unity between the subject and the object, the subject can know the object as it is in reality. The separation between subject and object is an abstraction or a reduction: it arises when we abstract the subject, the object, and their relation from reality. When we reduce man to his reason, as in rationalism, or his sensibility, as in empiricism, we are separating the subject from the object. When we reduce the object to an object of consciousness and the human activity to an activity of knowing or perceiving, we are separating between subject and object. The relation between man and nature, or man and the rest of the world, is reason for idealism. The relation between man and the rest of the world for biological reductivism is immediate, and thus there is no need for mediation between them. However, for Marx, the mediation between man and nature is human activity: thinking, knowing, cultivating, building, etc. This mediation does not reduce thinking to a physical action or reality to an idea, it does not reduce man to a subject of knowledge nor the object to an object of knowledge. Before the object becomes an object of knowledge, it is an object of human activity, and before the subject is a subject of knowledge, he or she is a real concrete social human. Human activity relates between man and the rest of the world by being the common source of change: it changes the object and the subject’s capacities and abilities. The human activity that is not reduced to the activity of knowing unifies man and nature, the subject and the object. It unifies the subject who is not reduced to his reason or consciousness with the object that is not reduced to an object of knowledge.

The subject and the object are two different entities in unity by the mediation of activity.

We can see the separation between subject and object in traditional epistemology in the need for a criterion of knowledge as well as in skepticism. When the starting point is the separation between subject and object, we need a criterion of knowledge for the subject to know the object, and if we do not have a criterion, we will be skeptical that the subject can know the object. For example, the separation between subject and object appears in Descartes' doubt and Hume's skepticism. This makes rationalists need a criterion of knowledge that is related to reason, while empiricists need a criterion related to sensible experience. Kant's work in the first two *Critiques* is an attempt to reach the unity between subject and object, but the separation between subject and object appears in the need for a criterion of knowledge and the unknowability of the essence of the object, the thing-in-itself. For Hegel, the essence of the object of consciousness is given by consciousness through a dialectical process of knowing that ends in the Absolute Idea at the end of his *Logic* where the unity between subject and object is reached. This unity, for Marx, is ideal because Hegel reduces man to his consciousness, the object to an object of consciousness, and the human activity to an activity of consciousness. Thus, this Hegelian unity is not real. Marx's unity is not a point that must be reached at the end of an inquiry, as in Hegel and Kant. Rather, it is presupposed from the beginning of his inquiry through the real common source of subject and object, which is human activity. However, the unity between man and nature is different from the unity between animals and nature in that human activity is a conscious, creative, and social production.

The object of knowledge for Marx is the social reality. We can know the essence of this object or this object as it is in reality because we produce it. Human activity is the social activity that externalizes the essence of man, which is the ensemble of social relations, to produce the social reality. Social relations are the interdependence relations between men and between men and the rest of the world. Under capitalism, our social essence is alienated through objectifying our activity in wage labor. Marx's critique of political economy uncovers the social relations that underlie the social capitalist reality so we can know the essence of this reality, which is capital. We can know capital because it is our product, the product of alienating our essence through objectified activity. Thus, Marx theorizes the unconscious activity and social relations that underlie the production of capital and our present social reality. The theory, as a product of this theorization, is not separated from reality or practice because it considers and encompasses the social practice. Besides, alienation, for Marx, does not involve a separation between subject and object, rather it involves a contradictory unity between them. Therefore, there is no separation between subject and object, theory and practice in Marx. Now, concerning the skepticism of knowing a particular object, we can see that for Marx a particular object is a part of our social reality. Thus, a particular object is a part of our externalized essence and an object of our human activity as a product or raw material. Marx does not reduce reality to social reality, rather, he emphasizes that social reality is central to reality. Therefore, the social aspect of a particular object is a part of reality, and we can be sure that we know this object by uncovering the social activity that underlies its existence. For example, we can know a table as being a product of human activity and a part of our social reality.

My interpretation of Marx differs from Livergood's in that Marx's epistemology is not limited to a future vision, as he claims. It is not about having a theory of a future situation, like communism as a system that replaces capitalism, that we apply in practice to prove its truth. Rather, it is about theorizing the activity of abolishing the current system. Besides, Marx's epistemology is also about knowing the current capitalist social reality. Moreover, my interpretation differs from Suchting's in that it emphasizes the role of unity between mental activity and manual activity. Marx's position lies in that the activity of knowing is not separated from human activity as a whole. Knowing as a mental activity is unified with other manual activities to form human activity as a unified source of unity between subject and object. The unity between theory and practice begins in the fact that knowing is itself a practice that produces theories. The activity that is done by the subject to produce theories is unified with the activity that he does to produce and change the objects of reality. The fact that the activity of thinking is not abstracted from human activity as a whole is Marx's main contribution to the problem of epistemology, which means that mental activity must not be abstracted from human activity that involves manual activity. This is how thinking and being are unified, and we no longer need to reduce reality to an idea or reduce thinking to a certain physical activity.

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