

IDEOLOGY, CRITIQUE AND CONTRADICTION IN MARX: AN ANSWER TO J. LARRAIN*

György Markus

There are no "innocent" interpretations. The need to interpret some texts expresses, of course, primarily our distance from them, the fact that their meaning ceases to be unproblematic and self-evident. However "interpreting" as an activity equally expresses (and explicitly realizes) an attitude toward the text which presupposes a meaning for us — that the text may throw some light on *our* problems, be they theoretical or practical. By regarding definite writings not as mere "documents" (which indicate and signal something about the past), but as "texts" which *tell* us something today, the interpreter preserves and maintains them as living tradition; he is an active participant in that much broader process in which ideas become "re-animated . . . in the context of new practices," to quote the apt words of Jorge Larrain. Every interpretation inevitably goes "beyond" the text concerned: it depends on the interpreter's comprehension of his own situation, and the cultural and practical problems of his own epoch, from which perspective tradition becomes reconstrued as significant.

I refer to these truisms of hermeneutics only because the dispute between J. Larrain and myself concerning the Marxian concept or concepts of ideology¹ seems to me to be at least partially dependent upon the difference in our understanding of the theoretical and practical situation of Marxism in the contemporary world. It is always a precarious and dubious enterprise to characterize the implicit, orientative premises of one's own critic. I hope, however, not to misrepresent Larrain's views by assuming that he regards this situation to be in the last account healthy and unproblematic. Against all the particular theoretical difficulties and, more

* *Editor's note:* This article is a response to Jorge Larrain, "Three Different Concepts of Ideology in Marx," *CJPST* 8, 3 (1984), 151-159.

DEBATES

importantly, practical distortions, the existence of which he certainly does not deny, he sees Marxist theory on the whole as well able to answer the pressing practical-social problems of our days, and to answer them effectively as proven by its impact on a long list of liberation and radical movements to which he refers (p. 18). Accordingly, he regards Marx's oeuvre as a living tradition in the sense that we find in it *solutions* to many of our problems: answers which are essentially correct even if they may need to be developed or adapted to our changed practices and experiences.

This is certainly a view that I do not share. The history of Marxist theory seems to me to be characterized by the constant recurrence, in new forms, of a number of antithetic interpretations of the "classical heritage," sharply opposed to each other in respect of some well-identifiable (and crucial) problems and difficulties. Furthermore this history demonstrates, after very significant initial success in the realisation of the central aim to unify theory and practice, a growing divorce between the two: a process the beginnings of which can be traced back to the early twenties and which is now virtually completed. For the objective of this unification in its Marxian understanding never was identical with the unspecific claim to a lasting cultural relevance which is *eo ipso* raised and must be fulfilled by any philosophical "tradition." It implies a very strong and specific claim from the side of the theory to provide mass movements of a radical type with a long-run *strategic* orientation in their struggle for the transformation of capitalist societies, and at the same time to offer to their members a unified *cultural framework* of a new type allowing them to make collective sense out of their everyday individual experiences. To assert, as Larrain does, that this twin objective is realized, insofar as recent, intellectually serious and creative developments within Marxist theory are concerned, seems to me a case of self-deception. His rhetorically invoked list — actually a motley collection of liberation struggles recently popular among the Western Left, which actually arose around issues theoretically situated outside the traditional concerns and conceptions of Marxism² certainly failed to convince me.

It would be an outright distortion to introject all the various symptoms of a present "crisis of Marxism" into Marx's own oeuvre. The history of Marxism is just as little a case of filiation of ideas as the history of any other theory. At the same time no truly relevant reading of Marx can today fail to approach his texts in the light of these vagaries and lessons of their "post-history". And in this light Marx emerges, I think, as a living tradition for the present not so much because he provided readily applicable solutions to our problems, but because his oeuvre uncovers and maps out, with an unmatched depth and compass, those theoretical and practical dilemmas and difficulties which radical theories still face and, I fear, fail to resolve. Many of Marx's "answers" have been made highly problematic or

simply untenable by later historical and theoretical developments. But his deep urge toward a systematic intellectual synthesis, combining a never satisfiable, minacious interest in the wealth of the *empiria* with a constant, self-questioning and critical reflection upon his own conceptual framework and methodology, not only frustrated all his attempts to give a completed form to his theory, but also endowed his way of questioning with a paradigmatic many-sidedness and openness. It rendered his *oeuvre* able to keep inter-related — even if often in a tenuous and uneasy way — a number of *prima facie* contradictory insights and impulses in a manner that still retains its power of illumination.

I certainly would not deny that such an “interpretative perspective” results in an idiosyncratic reading of Marx. And since what Larrain and myself share in theoretical and practical convictions is in all probability more important than what divides us, I would be happy to end our dispute here with the very presumptuous, but in principle, true observation that differences in “interpretative perspective” can ultimately be evaluated only through their subsequent fruitfulness.

I cannot stop here, however, for two reasons. What Larrain concretely proposes as the meaning of the Marxian conception of ideology seems to me simply confused and theoretically quite irrelevant from a contemporary viewpoint: if *this* is what Marx’s theory amounts to, then it is a “tradition” only in an antiquarian sense. But it is also important to point out that “perspectivity” of interpretation does not justify arbitrariness: interpretation must satisfy definite criteria of textual adequacy (or at least should not offend against them without explicit justification). Larrain repeatedly raises this requirement in regard to my paper; in fact, however, it is his views on Marx which fail in this respect at several points.

In general Larrain often reads texts as if he knew better what should be in them than their authors did. This is certainly irritating when it happens to one’s own writing. Thus, Larrain has sought to “enlighten” me in truths well suited to an introductory seminar on Marx (including the insight that “Marx’s scientific and critical capabilities were also necessary” for the creation of his theory (p. 17). But any interested reader can decide on his/her own whether I have confounded social determination of ideas with their ideological character or assumed that ideologies can be overcome by theoretical criticism alone. When, however, such an interpretative practice is applied to the texts of Marx himself, it has some relevance to our real disagreements.

A rather glaring example of such a practice is present in Larrain’s interpretation of the “Preface” to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859). Despite its extreme brevity, no discussion of the Marxian conception can neglect Marx’s here contained formulation of ‘ideology,’ since it is the sole one in his later writings which seems to aim at the

DEBATES

conceptual clarification of the term and because it comes from a published text specifically written for the "concise formulation" of the "general result" and "guiding thread" of his investigations.³ The passage has certainly spawned a number of divergent interpretations — not because it is especially "difficult and ambiguous," as Larrain suggests (p. 9), but for the reason that it is often thought to be hardly reconcilable with the Marxian *use* of the term, both in earlier and later writings, and since there is a general dispute about the significance one should ascribe to the whole text from which it comes.⁴ One thing, however, is certain: the text in question (through which Marx wished to reintroduce himself to the German public, after a decade of complete intellectual exile and under conditions of a severe censorship) is a very carefully and deliberately formulated one.

Now in the incriminated passage, Marx simply counterposes to the material transformations in the economic conditions of production "the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophical, in short, ideological forms in which men become aware of this conflict and fight it out"⁵ [i.e., the conflict between the material productive forces of society and the existing social relations — G.M.]. According to Larrain, Marx means by this formulation only "some specific legal, political, religious, economical and philosophic forms which are ideological" (p. 9) — and through this he happily manages to transform the first half of the passage into a meaningless tautology. But secondly he is also committed to the view (though he conveniently forgets it at this point) that Marx *always and everywhere* meant by "ideology" those distorted forms of thought which *conceal and mask* social contradictions. If this is so, then by stating that in forms of ideology men become aware (gain consciousness) of social conflicts and contradictions (in the next sentence Marx uses these two terms as synonyms), Marx actually intended to say the exact opposite: ideology "diverts the people's mind from," "explains away," conflicts and contradictions. This does not seem to be an interpretation at all, but a prejudiced prescription. At any rate, given Larrain's preconception, the passage truly becomes "notoriously difficult to interpret" (p. 8).

The matter, however, does not end here. Larrain also maintains that this passage is exceptional in Marx's oeuvre in respect of identifying (in his view, of course, only seemingly, for a non-discriminating reading) ideology with entire cultural branches. There is, at least to his knowledge, no corroborative evidence for such an identification elsewhere in Marx (p. 8). I certainly did not provide such evidence, since I supposed that no reader of the *German Ideology* could have missed them. For in this work it is a recurrent procedure of Marx (and Engels) to identify ideology with a (mostly open-ended) list of whole fields of socio-cultural activities (eg.: "morality, religion, metaphysics and the rest of ideology," "the illusions of ideologists in general, eg. the illusions of jurists and politicians," "politicians,

GYÖRGY MARKUS

jurists and other ideologists" etc.⁶) or to designate some specific cultural genre, without any restriction, as ideological (eg. the characterisation of the "pursuit followed by the philosopher as profession" as ideology⁷). I would agree that these formulations are hardly reconcilable with a number of other things Marx says in this work about ideology which seem to implicate a narrower concept — but I argued exactly that he actually employs this term in three different senses.

All this is naturally related to the question whether it is illegitimate, and without textual support in Marx, to "extend" the scope of the concept "ideology" to cover whole cultural branches and even (in one of its meanings) a definite type of culture in its totality. But the dispute between Larrain and myself concerns more than questions of a Marx-philology. Our disagreements are ultimately about the theoretical significance of a "critique of ideology" within the whole of the Marxian enterprise. These differences can best be seen in light of the question concerning the relationship between science and ideology, which Larrain spells out in greater detail.

According to Larrain, "(t)o the extent that ideology has a negative meaning, being ideological and being scientific are mutually exclusive enterprises which cannot overlap in the main thrust of their activities but which can, of course, contain limited 'enclaves' from the opposite" (p. 11). Therefore he finds my view (more exactly, my reconstruction of Marxian ones) of bourgeois economy as a form of ideology unacceptable. Classical political economy is science penetrating the veil of appearances and not masking the contradictions of capitalist society (which, at the time of the florescence of these theories, had not yet come "to the surface"), so it is not ideological (p. 10). In particular, turning to the certainly apt example of Ricardo, Larrain accepts that his theory contained "some ideological distortions" and *became* ideological with the later emergence of economic crises (p. 11); but the scientific inadequacies of Ricardo's views cannot be explained by these ideological elements. Nor — much more importantly — do the latter comprise the whole of his analyses (p. 11).

Since Larrain again directly challenges me to produce evidence from Marx's writings supporting my characterisation of classical political economy as ideology, I once more must begin with some textual references. In this case, however, I hope they will also directly contribute to the further clarification of what Marx meant by "science" and "ideology."

My "textual argument" is, in short, the following:

1. Transformation of the particular interests of the class into the general interest of the whole society, of a particular historical situation into the human situation as such, is *one* of the ways Marx, through his whole *oeuvre*, characterizes the accomplishment of ideology. Though he clearly indicates that this procedure plays different roles at different stages of historical development (see *MEW*, vol. 3, p. 47-48), he simultaneously

DEBATES

describes it in general as the "ideological illusion (ideologische Täuschung)" (*Ibid.*, p. 163), and even as "the ground (Boden) of ideology" (*Ibid.*, p. 442).⁹ The ideologists of a class give to its social conditions of existence a "theoretical independence" and thereby render in thought the barriers of its socially determined life situation into barriers of human existence or reason as such. It is this conception of ideology which returns also in the famous passage of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* (cf. especially *MEW*, vol. 3, p. 405 with vol. 8., p. 141-142).¹⁰ To exclude all misunderstandings: it is, of course, *not* social determination of ideas in general, but just the deliberately or unconsciously effected preclusion of any reflection upon this determination, the theoretically accomplished transformation of a limited-historical validity (or relevance) into a universal one, i.e., the *foreclosure* of other possibilities of thinking and acting, which makes such ideas ideological. (Incidentally: it was this understanding of ideology in Marx which I took as paradigmatic for the characterisation of its "second," explanatory-functional meaning.)

2. The most important point in Marx's critique of bourgeois economy, including classical political economy, is the demonstration of the ways, in these theories, the capitalist mode of production is transformed into the *sole rational or "natural" way* of organizing the material life-activities of society. From the time that Marx systematically drew the distinction between classical and vulgar economy (1847), he also maintained that this characteristic is *common* to both of them. There is a countless number of places where he makes this point again and again, so I chose arbitrarily two formulations from his discussions of Ricardo. "Ricardo" — he writes in 1859 — "treats the bourgeois form of labour as the eternal natural form of social labour" (Vol. 13, p. 46). Four years later, again in a passage dealing with Ricardo, he states: "The economists express this definite, *specific*, historical form of social labour, as it appears in capitalist production, as universal, eternal form, as truths of nature, and they represent *these* relations of production as the absolutely (not historically) necessary, adequate to nature and rational relations of social labour" (Vol. 26/3, p. 255).¹¹ The distinction between classical and vulgar economy, between science and pseudo-science, is drawn by Marx *within* this common "ground of ideology."

3. The above-mentioned ideological premise is, however, not some "distortion" superadded to the otherwise correct or incorrect views of the classics. Take the case of Ricardo. The identification of the capitalist form of labour with social labour in general is the fundamental abstraction which forms the basis of his greatest scientific achievement: the consistent elaboration of a quantitative theory of value. By reducing the value of all commodities to the labour embodied in them, to *labour as such*, or "labour *sans phrase*,"¹² Ricardo *eo ipso* identifies commodity-producing ("abstract") labour with productive activity as an eternal condition of human life. Once

GYÖRGY MARKUS

this identification and abstraction becomes *methodologically fixed*, then all the principal difficulties and inadequacies of Ricardo's theory logically follow, ie, they follow under conditions of intellectual honesty and logical consistency. At least, this is Marx's contention. For in his criticism of Ricardo, he is only incidentally concerned with his logical or other "mistakes;" what he tries to demonstrate, is precisely the point that once the aforementioned "ideological illusion" is posited in the initial abstraction of the theory, then a false conception of money, an inability to distinguish surplus-value and profit, and an inadequate theory of land rent, etc., are all logical consequences.

These are the main reasons (certainly having ample textual support) on the basis of which I regard the Marxian characterisation of political economy as "the theoretical expression of capitalist production" (*MEW*, Vol. 26/3, p. 271; see also *Grundrisse*, p. 844: "the theoretical expression of bourgeois society") to mean not the truism that it is a theory *about* this mode of production, but that it is its theoretical expression in the sense of its *basic ideology*. Such an interpretation seems to me especially vindicated in view of the fact that in his manuscript of 1865, Marx repeats this characterisation, but now in respect of political economy and *philosophy of law* (meaning by this latter primarily the Lockean theory of natural law).¹³ Philosophy of law certainly is not a theory *about* the capitalist mode of production.

Given all this "evidence," I regard it merely a lucky, but unimportant, corroboration that among the exceptionally few cases when Marx explicitly applies the *term* "ideological" to the characterisation of economic systems, at least one actually happens to refer to the *whole of classical economy*. In the same manuscript of 1865, he states: "Hence, the general *juridical* idea, from Locke to Ricardo, is that of the petty-bourgeois property, while the relations of production they describe belong to the *capitalist mode of production* . . . One finds with all these writers . . . [that] they *ideologically and juridically* transfer without more ado the ideology of private property founded on labour to property founded on the *expropriation of the immediate producers*."¹⁴ It is, I think, self-evident that this "ideological transference" of the relations of property founded on one's own labour to capitalist relations of production is essentially the same as the identification of wage labour (as labour of universal commodity production) with labour in general: the fundamental abstraction of Ricardian (and in general, classical) theory.

The mutually exclusive character of science and ideology follows in Larrain's argumentation from the simple fact that he identifies *critique* with *dismissal*. The concept of ideology with Marx is a critical one; therefore, he argues, it has a "negative meaning" — and since Marx clearly did not "dismiss" bourgeois science or art, did not regard the whole of Ricardo's analyses as "compromised," these cannot be ideological (cf. p. 13 and 11).¹⁵

DEBATES

This is a view too crude to capture even the force of the purely *polemic* use of "ideology" in Marx. And it certainly leaves one to wonder: how could Marx then characterize (*expressis verbis* and repeatedly) the whole of Hegelian philosophy as ideology¹⁶ — unless he joined those who regarded Hegel as a "dead dog" to be dismissed.

This simplistic conception of critique misconceives, in my view, the very character of a critique of ideology insofar as it constitutes a part of the systematic critical theory of capitalist society. It misconceives both what is involved in such an enterprise, and what it is ultimately aimed at.

In Larrain's understanding, being ideological means simply *a subcase of being false*: it expresses a relation of inadequacy, non-correspondence of a specific kind (masking, concealing contradictions) between a theoretical content, on the one hand, and its extratheoretical object (society with its contradictions), on the other. The fact that the theories in question fulfill a definite social function, namely, to serve the interests of the ruling class, follows logically for him, as if in a prioristic fashion, from the character of this relationship. Marx, on the other hand, when he analyses ideologies within the framework of his critical theory of capitalism, is interested in the question how, by what cultural and theoretical means, *the function of legitimation* of the existing order (and the preclusion of the possibility of its projective transcendence) is fulfilled in this society, and how these means and forms change with its historical development. Marx explicitly warns us *not* to treat this question in terms of an abstract epistemological relation between the content of a theory and its object, because the social function of ideas cannot be abstracted away from the specific way they are culturally formulated and presented within definite works, or from the concrete, historically specific impact they have upon intellectual and public life (itself a function of many variables) at a given time. In his discussion of the history of the theory of rent, he emphatically draws attention to the fact that one and the same theory, with different authors and in different historical conjunctures, can actually serve *opposed* social interests. "The *same* doctrine has been used by its originator [i.e., Anderson], and by Malthus *for*, and by Ricardo *against*, landed property. At best one can say that some, who represented it, defended the interests of landed property, while others, who represented it, *fought* against the *same* interest. . . ." ¹⁷ I would say that from Marx's own standpoint, Larrain's view of ideology partakes of the typical illusion of ideologists, since it transforms a historically and socially specific and concrete relationship into an abstract epistemological one.

The absurdities to which such a view leads when applied to concrete historical cases are well illustrated by Larrain's treatment of Ricardo. According to him, Ricardo's theory was originally scientific, but at the moment when the crisis of the capitalist economy emerged, it became ideological (p. 11) — and therefore, one should assume, also ceased to be

GYÖRGY MARKUS

scientific, since these two characteristics exclude each other. This, however, is the exact opposite of Marx's view (and of any reasonable view on the history of economic thought in the nineteenth century). For Marx, the *scientific relevance* of Ricardo (also from the viewpoint of his own investigations) is never in question. What his detailed discussions of the post-Ricardian phase in the development of economy purport to disclose is just the process through which — under the impact of changed historical circumstances — this theory became *ideologically irrelevant*, unable to function as an adequate legitimation for capitalist society; Ricardo was therefore abandoned (according to Marx often by the flimsiest arguments) and replaced by theories of another type (vulgar economy). Marx traced this process painstakingly, beginning from the "metaphysical dispute" of the twenties, demonstrating how new historical developments (primarily the recurrent economic crises of the world market and the course of the class-struggle) made Ricardo's legitimation of capitalism untenable, and at the same time conferred a completely unintended *critical* potential upon some of his views.¹⁸

Larrain's view of ideology misses the ultimate target of ideology critique. He accepts as self-evident that the critique of ideology is a critique of *theories*, or, more generally, cultural formations of a definite type. This is, of course, true in a trivial sense. But one has only to take into account that Marx regarded his critical history of economy as an integral part of *Capital* to see the *insufficiency* of such a view. His breathtaking effort to outline the complete history of a science, from its emergence to its (in Marx's view, final) demise, is neither dictated by an antiquarian, nor by a school-masterly interest in giving good or bad marks to various economists. In the more than thousand printed pages that Marx, in his various manuscripts,¹⁹ has devoted to this topic, he is not dealing primarily with the "correction" or "dismissal" of various theories, many of them completely obsolete and forgotten already in his own time. What he is investigating, is the way a definite type of society *produces* definite cultural-theoretical forms of its own self-understanding: forms which exclude the comprehension of the true regularities of its reproduction and development just as much as that of the possibility of its radical transformation. He investigates this as a unique historical process, which depends upon the course of social struggles and upon changes in the material conditions of social existence, but has also its own characteristics and direction. And he is specifically interested in the way the very premisses of such an understanding are progressively dissolved in this process, so that, from a definite historical moment, a society becomes incapable of meeting those very cultural standards and criteria that it has created itself historically. As a historian, Marx is well aware that he does not deal with some mysterious and automatic necessity, and he gives due consideration to the achievements, attitudes and biases of

DEBATES

individual economists (and as a theoretician he meticulously indicates his own indebtedness to each of them). But what he primarily does, is not to criticize individual systems of thought as bad or deceptive theories, but to "criticize" a *type of society* whose practical and cognitive horizon precludes the adequate comprehension both of its own trends of development and those socio-historical alternatives which in principle it creates; a society in which therefore men cannot gain rational control over the course of their lives and historical development.

Larrain's conception of ideology therefore fails to cover the theoretically most significant use or uses of this concept in Marx; it is modelled on its directly polemical use alone, itself misunderstood in some important respects. The formal definition of ideology proposed by him seems to be broad enough, but it is so only because it is ambiguous, confused and certainly unsuited today for critical or theoretical purposes.

According to Larrain, ideology is "equivalent to a distorted form of consciousness which conceals social contradictions in the interest of the ruling class" (p. 6). The stumbling-block in this definition is the concept of (real, social) *contradiction*. In a relatively short paper Larrain manages to apply this term to a truly impressive variety of cases and states of affairs. "Contradictions of capitalism" seem to designate with him the antagonistic relations of interests between the class of capitalists and wage-workers (p. 5); class struggle (p. 10); the occurrence of economic crises (p. 11); the inverted and alienated character of social relations under capitalism, i.e. ultimately the domination of objectified past labour over living labour (p. 5); the relation between the material content and social form of capitalist economic development (pp. 8 and 12); and, at one point, (p. 4) it is apparently used as a synonym for oppression. I would suggest that there is no possible definition of the concept "contradiction" which would make it applicable to all these *categorically* different cases; they have nothing in common, even so far as their most abstract structure is concerned. "Contradiction," in Larrain's use, remains an illusive metaphor without any clear content. To base the very meaning of one important concept and element of critical theory (i.e. that of ideology) on such a confused metaphor actually means to discredit it and to render it quite irrelevant to contemporary theoretical concerns.

At this point, however, elementary justice demands to absolve Larrain from much of the force of this criticism. He certainly only follows Marx himself in this use of "contradiction" — for all his applications of this term, he could have provided precedents from Marx's own texts. Furthermore it was Marx himself who often characterized and criticized economic theories by indicating their relation to the "contradictions of capitalism." True, the sense of such critical evaluations is, as a rule, quite clear in his texts, since they in general unambiguously indicate what is meant by these "contra-

GYÖRGY MARKUS

dictions" in this or that case.²⁰ And what is of far greater import, Marx, as far as I can see, never used such an ambiguous and inflated concept as the basis for further theoretical constructs or arguments. It remains, however, a fact that the metaphorical inflation of the term occurs already with him.

The problem of contradiction is inextricably interwoven, insofar as Marx's late writings are concerned, with the most complex among all the questions related to his intellectual development: namely, that of his "second Hegel-reception." "In the method of elaboration (Bearbeitung)" — writes Marx early in 1858 to Engels²¹ — "it rendered me a great service that by mere accident I again skimmed through Hegel's *Logic*." The premisses of this "methodological service" seem to be clear enough. Already in 1844 Marx conceives Hegel's *Logic* as the logic of a universally alienated existence. Apparently in 1857 this idea re-appears in a concretized form: in the Hegelian dialectics of Concept as identical substance-subject, Marx now finds elaborated (in a metaphysically disguised and distorted form) the constitutive principles for the analysis of that self-reproducing and self-relating collective pseudo-subject which preserves and maintains itself only by suppressing the real subjectivity of social individuals, i.e. that of capital.

This idea is taken by Marx originally in a very strong sense. The close correspondence between the main stages of the Marxian analysis in the opening parts (notebooks 1-3) of the *Grundrisse*, on the one hand, and the Hegelian construction of Quality-Quantity-Essence (as ground and substance) in the *Science of Logic*, on the other, has often been indicated.²² And some of his early plans for the systematic construction of the whole envisaged work can truly be read as straight "economic applications" of the Hegelian *Logic*.²³

In correspondence with this general methodological idea Marx's first attempt at the analysis of capitalist relations of productions veritably takes the Hegelian principle of "progressing contradiction" as its guiding thread. The analysis in the *Grundrisse* departs (or more exactly, intends to depart, since the systematic exposition begins at a later point, with money) from the commodity, which posits the relationship between use-value and exchange value as a mere "difference" (Unterschied): the commodity is at this time conceived by Marx as the necessary unity of these two determinations which, with an equal necessity, completely fall outside each other, as unrelated.²⁴ With the transition to money this "difference," as Marx explicitly states (*Ibid.*, p. 65), becomes transformed into "opposition" (Gegensatz). And with the transformation of money into capital, the relationship between use and exchange value, now personified by the social agents of the wage-labourer and capitalist, turns into that of "real contradiction" (Widerspruch).²⁵

DEBATES

However, this original project, which in a very strict philosophical sense has been oriented by the Hegelian conception of contradiction, falls apart already in the *Grundrisse*. The muster of the *Logic* proves to be inadequate for the systematic theoretical reproduction of the totality of capitalist economic relations. The deeper theoretical and practical motives which moved Marx to modify radically his original plan-outlines, and in some respects, also the very sense of a "critique of political economy," cannot be discussed here.²⁶ But they certainly result in a lack of systematic correspondence in detail between the structure of *Capital* and that of Hegel's *Logic*.

Nevertheless, Hegel's presence is conspicuous in *Capital*, too. It also certainly amounts to more than mere "coquetting" with a Hegelizing mode of expression. Some fundamental elements of Hegel's dialectics, especially his understanding and analysis of the essence/appearance and form/content dichotomy, retain (or just acquire) a constitutive significance for the conception of *Capital*.

Among these ideas retained from Hegel is also the most striking and basic element of his theory of contradiction: contradiction is a relation ultimately not between propositions, but between *concepts* and (with Marx, primarily) between those *realities* these concepts designate. But the strict Hegelian understanding of the relationship involved is now dissolved with Marx, without being replaced by any clearly articulated notion. Nothing signals this better than the fact that Marx now (actually from 1859 on and to a growing degree) uses without any discrimination a number of categorical expressions ("opposition", contradiction", "antagonism" etc.) which in Hegel had a quite distinct meaning and designated relations with quite different structures. The use of the term "contradiction" in Marx's writings of the sixties can best be seen, I think, as a "*promisory note*" to interconnect (through mediating links), in the completed analysis, the most elemental and fundamental relation ultimately defining the historical *limits* of the capitalist mode of production (i.e. the relation between abstract and concrete labour) with the recurrent, open *dysfunctionalities* and interruptions of its reproduction (economic crises), on the one hand, and, on the other, with class struggle, which makes its *overcoming* possible. These are relations of a different type and, insofar as I can judge, none of them corresponds closely to the real Hegelian model of contradiction. When Marx deals with these (and other) "contradictions" in a detailed fashion in his exposition, he also very carefully analyzes the actual structure of each of them. Furthermore, he does not use this metaphorically vague, unclarified term for any argumentative or constructive purposes; he certainly is not ready to take his own *promisory note* for the real solution of the task it indicates. Nothing demonstrates this better than his constantly renewed (and never quite completed) efforts to work out with logical clarity all the

GYÖRGY MARKUS

mediations necessary to transform the "abstract possibility" of crises, contained already in the structure of commodity exchange, into their "reality."

The promisory note of the unification of the three indicated relations has not been redeemed by Marx. *Capital* remained a fragment abruptly ended at the most crucial point: at the clarification of the connection between the "objective contradictions" of capitalism, with class struggle as their "subjective expression." It is now fruitless to speculate whether this abrupt end, unexplained by any biographic circumstances, signals an awareness on Marx's part of those grave difficulties which from the hindsight of a later century are easily discernible both in the philosophical and in the economical aspect of his critical theory. In any case, the terminology of "contradictions" in such circumstances necessarily turned, during the historical reception of Marxian theory, into a *rhetoric of unity*, not quite borne out by the theory itself.

Already Engels has initiated the transformation of this rhetoric into a philosophical pseudo-theory which uses all the metaphoric vagueness and ambiguity of "contradiction" to do away with the internal strains and unresolved problems of the theory. This tradition has been continued, in a much more pedestrian way, by Plekhanov and turned into a verbal industry in "Soviet Marxism." I am virtually certain that Larrain has little sympathy toward this sort of Marxism — his own effort, however, seems to me situated within this tradition.

This brings me back to the question from which I departed: in what sense is Marx a living tradition today? And I would say that it is certainly not the (non-existent) "theory" of contradictions in his late economic writings, but rather the contradictions *of* these writings, and his never-ceasing (and never concluded) effort to face them and to trace out their implication, which is illuminative for any present attempt at critical understanding of our own society.

Department of General Philosophy
The University of Sydney

Notes

1. See my "Concepts of Ideology in Marx" and J. Larrain's rejoinder "Three Different Concepts of Ideology in Marx" in this journal, vol. VII, 1-2, 84-103 and vol. VIII, 3, p. 151-159, respectively.
2. Perry Anderson has just recently commented perceptively upon this fact. See *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 81ff.
3. *Marx-Engels Werke (MEW)* (Berlin: Dietz), vol. 13, p. 8.

DEBATES

4. On this point see e.g. A.M. Prinz: "The Background and Ulterior Motive of Marx's 'Preface' of 1859" *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1969), p. 437-450.
5. *MEW*, vol. 13, p. 9.
6. *MEW*, vol. 3, pp. 26, 49, 339; but cf. also pp. 49, 60, 539, etc.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 363, but see also pp. 63, 212, 263, 362, etc.
8. *Grundrisse*, (Berlin: Dietz, 1953), p. 844.
9. Further relevant formulation in *MEW*, vol. 3, pp. 63, 271, 404-405.
10. It should be indicated that in the *Brumaire* Marx does not use the term "ideology," but writes about "the political and literary representatives of a class" (*MEW*, vol. 8, p. 142). In general, it is very conspicuous that in his later writings Marx employs this term exceedingly rarely (it occurs, to my knowledge, in the many thousand pages of his economic writings and manuscripts only a few dozen times). Since, on the other hand, he does not drop it altogether and he most certainly does not renounce the conception connected with its earlier use, I have no explanation to offer for this striking and in all probability deliberate avoidance of the terminology. With regard to the relevant passage from the *Brumaire*, I have not come across any systematically argued doubt that Marx discusses ideology here.
11. Cf. also *MEW*, vol. 4 (1847), pp. 139 and 170; *Grundrisse* (1857-1858), pp. 236, 450, 904; *MEW*, vol. 26/2 (1861-1863), pp. 149, 504-505, 528-529; vol. 23 (1867), pp. 95-96, etc. etc.
12. Marx's letter to Engels, 8. 1. 1968. *MEW*. vol. 32, p. 11.
13. *Resultate In Archiv Marx-Engels*, vol. II (VII) Moscow, 1933, p. 264.
14. *Ibid.*, cf. also *MEW*, vol. 26/1, p. 343.
15. Larrain's standpoint at the same time involves, as an unstated premise, the traditional, epistemological and (positively) evaluative concept of science. Though science is not the only way to truth and though scientists not only make "mistakes," but are also subjects to historical limitations, science evidently means for him the methodologically secured and controlled knowledge of the essential and lawful interrelations. This misses, however, what is truly illuminative in Marx's approach to science. No doubt, Marx did regard it as a "progressive and liberating element" (p. 13). But his concept of science was neither directly evaluative, nor primarily epistemological. As is demonstrated, especially by his discussions concerning the emergence of scientific economy, he treated science as a historically located *socio-cultural* phenomenon characterized by a definite relation to everyday consciousness, on the one hand, and, on the other, by relation to those forms of "encyclopedic knowledge" which have been articulated within the framework of religious-metaphysical world-views. What is truly significant in his approach is, first of all, the fact that departing from such an understanding of science as socio-cultural objectivation of a specific type, he is nevertheless able to draw from it epistemological consequences with normative force allowing him to distinguish between science and pseudo-science. The *way* he does it — through the use of the categories "essence/appearance" — is from the present standpoint, in many respects, highly problematic (as I indicated in my earlier paper). But *what* he intends to do seems to be most relevant to contemporary disputes in the theory of science.
16. See *MEW*, vol. 3, pp. 167, 331, 442, etc.
17. *MEW*, vol. 26/2, pp. 115-116.
18. It is another question that, according to Marx, this critical potential can only be freed, if the "ideological illusion" fixed in the primitive abstractions of Ricardo's theory is overcome. Marx is not engaged in "correcting" Ricardo's "mistakes", as Larrain suggests (p. 11); this was actually the enterprise of Ricardian socialists who wished to draw the *correct* conclusions from, and to iron out the inconsistencies of, his theory. According to Marx they remained precisely *for this reason* captive to a bourgeois horizon (cf. *MEW*, vol. 26/3, pp. 256-257, 269, etc.). Larrain fails to perceive the decisive *problem-shift* which divorces the critical economy of Marx from the

GYÖRGY MARKUS

theories of the classics (from the question: "how capital produces 'social wealth' and distributes it in ways effecting the further growth of productive forces?" to the question "how capital as a social relation is produced and changed in the total process of social reproduction?"). Therefore he also fails to see that the theoretical object of an "economy" is differently constituted for Ricardo and Marx. For Larrain, Marx's theory evidently is the further development and consummation of the classical, labour theory of value, and not *its critique*. About this question, however, so much has been written that its further discussion seems to be needless. See especially the classical essay of H. Grossmann (1941), *Marx, die klassische Nationalökonomie und das Problem der Dynamik* (Frankfurt: 1969); but also, from the recent English-language literature, the works of G. Pilling, S. Clarke and M. Postone.

19. First of all, in the two "historical" chapters of *A Contribution to Critique*, in the *Theories of Surplus-Value* from the 1861-63 manuscript and in the ideo-historical parts of the third volume of *Capital*.
20. If one disregards these contextual indications and simply takes what Marx has written about the relation of some economic theory to the "contradictions of capitalism" *in general*, then his texts seem to be full of elementary logical contradictions. E.g., in the case of Ricardo, one can read in one and the same manuscript of Marx that these social contradictions find in Ricardo's work "a *theoretically* resounding, though unconscious expression," and further that he "elaborated the antagonism (Gegensatz) within economy itself;" and simultaneously that he "denies the contradictions of bourgeois production" (*MEW* vol. 26/3, pp. 256, 492 and 49). The irreconcilable character of these statements, however, disappears if one takes into account their larger context: Marx speaks about "contradictions" and "antagonism" in quite different senses, well-indicated in the relevant text fragments.
21. Letter to Engels, 16. 1. (1858), in *MEW*, vol. 29, p. 260.
22. Most recently, and in the greatest detail, by F.E. Schrader, *Restauration und Revolution. Die Vorarbeiten zum 'Kapital' von K. Marx in seinem Studienheften 1850-1858* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1980), esp. pp. 117-126. Schrader's general view of the Marx-Hegel relation seems to me, however, unacceptable.
23. See e.g. *Grundrisse*, pp. 186-187.
24. See, e.g., *Grundrisse*, p. 180.
25. See *Ibid.*, pp. 180-85, and 203.
26. I have discussed some of these motives and the general character of this change in earlier publications. See: "Four Forms of Critical Theory," *Thesis Eleven* I No. 1 (1980), and the second part of my book *Langage et Production* (Paris, Denoel, 1982), the English variant of which has been published in *Dialectical Anthropology* IV, No. 4 (1979), and V, No. 1 (1980).