

The "Abstract to Concrete" Way of Thinking in the Economic Manuscripts 1857-1858

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Abstract: *Marx in the "1857-1858 Economic Manuscripts" in the introduction to the study of political economy from the "abstract to concrete" method. Previous political economists used the first path of political economy research "from concrete to abstract", that is, from perceptual concrete to thinking abstract, and the second path is "from abstract to concrete", that is, from thinking abstract to thinking concrete, thinking concrete is The second path is "from the abstract to the concrete", i.e. from thinking abstractly to thinking concretely, and thinking concretely is thinking abstractly which contains the prescriptive nature of difference and opposition.*

Keywords: Economics manuscripts 1857-1858; From abstraction to concreteness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Marx's study of political economy began, at first, in the Philosophical Manuscripts of Economics of 1844. At the time, Marx was in exile in Paris, then read the works of Adam Smith, David Ricardo and others in the British Museum, analyzed the theories of classical political economists, and came up with the fourfold theory of alienated labor. The idea of alienation, whereby the object created by the subject in turn dominates and enslaves the subject, was similarly expressed later in the Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858 as "monetary power." After the failure of the European revolution in 1848, the revolution turned to a low ebb, Marx was forced to go into exile in London, and resumed the study of political economy. 1857, the world economic crisis broke out, Marx decided to complete his work on economics before the beginning of the revolution, and thus began the writing of the Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858.

The economics manuscripts of the period 1857-1858 include six manuscripts: Bashisha and Carey, Introduction, Critique of Political Economy (Manuscripts 1857-1858), Gold Weighing Machine, Index to Seven Notebooks (Part I), and Fragments of the First Draft of Chapter 2 and the Beginning of Chapter 3 of the First Division of the Critique of Political Economy. The main body of the work consists of the Introduction and the Critique of Political Economy (Manuscripts 1857-1858). In "Balthasar and Carey" Marx refutes the vulgar economists Balthasar and Carey in arguing that the harmony of the capitalist economy essentially reflects the bourgeoisie's defense of capitalist economic relations. In the Introduction, he argues for the relationship between production, distribution, exchange, and consumption, proving that they are mutually predicated and interconnected as a whole, and describes the methods of political economy research: abstraction rising to the concrete, the method of backward thinking, and the method of universal illumination, among others.

2. FORMAL VS. CONCRETE ABSTRACTION

The so-called "formal abstraction" is to extract from many phenomena, each phenomenon has, the general universal definition, this abstraction makes the definition of the connotation of the scarcity of the extension. Adoption of "formal abstraction" out of the thing, does not contain any specific content, but only in order to conform to each phenomenon so as to extract the "thinnest", "least prescriptive" definition. It is only the same abstraction of all phenomena. According to the principle of "formal abstraction", anything can be abstracted from the same, for example, in the example given in Ilyenkov's "Dialectic of Abstraction and Concreteness in Marx's Das Kapital", the notion of the "generality of a circle" is abstracted from the forms of a soccer ball, a spark, and a bearing ball, but no matter whether it is a soccer ball, a spark, or a bearing ball, the notion of the "generality of a circle" is abstracted from it. "However, it is not possible to derive the concept of "circle in general" from the forms of a soccer ball, a spark, or a bearing ball. [1] This formal abstraction has no practical significance; it does not specify this class of things. This metaphysical abstraction is therefore only a generalization based on empirical facts and can only serve as an "appearance".

Concrete abstraction, on the other hand, is not an abstraction of the same from all phenomena, but a unity rich in diversity, containing differences and opposites, which is what makes an object what it is. According to Lenin, scientific abstraction reflects the essence and is not only more profound but also more fully concrete than vivid intuition and representation. The concrete is not lost, but is revealed for what it really is. If it is only a generalized homogeneity, it remains at the stage of "appearance", and it is only when it becomes a differentiated unity of provisions that it can reflect the essence of the thing, and only then it reaches the stage of "concept".

These two abstractions can be understood in terms of Feuerbach's and Marxist formulations of "man". Feuerbach understood the essence of man as the commonality of many individuals linked together, and the commonality of man as a "class" is man's reason, emotion, and love. Marx, on the other hand, defines the essence of man, in his Syllabus on Feuerbach, as "it is the sum total of all social relations." [2] ; in the Philosophical Manuscripts of Economics of 1844, as "And free conscious activity is precisely the class characteristic of man" [3] ; and in The German Ideology, "Their needs are their nature" [4]. . It can be seen from these two expressions that Feuerbach's definition of "man" is an "abstraction inherent in a single human being" divorced from sociality and history, whereas in Marx's expression, first of all, man, as the sum of social relations, not only embodies sociality, but also In Marx's formulation, first of all, man as the sum of social relations not only embodies sociality, but also "social relations" inherently contain historicity; at the same time, "free and conscious activity" embodies man's labor process; finally, man's need also determines man's practice and activity of transforming the world. Marx's stipulation of man is a rich whole, embodying the social-historical nature and the process of emergence and development, and shows a clear difference from the metaphysical stipulation.

3. TWO PATHS OF POLITICAL ECONOMY RESEARCH

On the first path, general abstraction from real and concrete phenomena was a common method used by political economists in the past. Marx took "population" as an example: "Population is an abstraction, leaving aside the classes which constitute it. If I do not know the factors on which these classes are based, such as wage labor, capital, and so on, then class is again an empty word. And these factors presuppose exchange, division of labor, prices, and so on. Capital, for example, is nothing without wage labor, value, money, prices, etc." [5]. "Population" is an abstract concept often associated with class. In ancient Greece, for example, only citizens of the city-state were counted in the "population", while slaves were only used as "talking instruments". And the concept of class is related to a certain social form, which is determined by certain productive forces and relations of production, and so on. Thus, "if I begin with population, it is a chaotic representation of the whole, and by means of more approximate stipulations I arrive at simpler and simpler concepts in my analysis; from the concrete in the representation I arrive at thinner and thinner abstractions, until I arrive at some of the simplest stipulations" [5].

Accordingly, Marx proposed a "second path": from abstraction to the concrete. The first path, i.e., "the rise of the sensible concrete to the thinking abstract", is not the result of thinking, but the intermediary link of the rise to the "thinking concrete", and the first path can be the premise of the second path. It should be pointed out that the "abstraction" which is the precondition for rising to "concrete" is not the "representation" which abstracts and generalizes experience, but the "abstract concept" which reflects the essence of a certain aspect of things. It is an "abstract concept" that reflects the essence of a certain aspect of a thing. It is the practice of vulgar economists to generalize empty "representations" from sensible things, like Say's "capital-profit, land-rent, labor-wage". The trinity formula of "capital - profit, land - rent, labor - wages" like Say's is essentially a conflation of apparent use value and value. Classical political economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo made useful explorations of the "essence" of value. Adam Smith distinguished between use value and value, arguing that value is determined by the labor involved in the production of commodities, but on the one hand, he explored the intrinsic linkages of capitalism, arguing that value is determined by the labor expended in production; On the other hand, he confined himself to empirical induction, arguing that value is determined by the labor contained in the commodities that can be purchased, thus bringing his system into contradiction. Ricardo distinguished between appearance and concept, examined the capitalist system as a connected whole, and proposed that "value is determined by labor time". Instead of simply abstracting complex phenomena, Ricardo attempted to deduce complex phenomena from entities, and introduced the developmental categories of value, such as "profit, rent", and so on. Rather, he tried to deduce complex phenomena from entities, and introduced "profit, land rent" and other developmental categories of value. However, Ricardo's defect is that he does not regard capitalism as a historical category, but as an eternal category, so naturally he cannot deduce the theory of "labor duality", and thus does not get the correct abstract concept.

Therefore, abstraction, as a prerequisite for "rising to the concrete", should be a "concept" derived from the analysis and generalization of the essence of things. After the abstraction of an essential aspect of things, but also

the use of synthesis, the essential aspects of the understanding of the connection, the formation of a comprehensive and profound understanding of specific things. "The concrete is concrete because it is the synthesis of many provisions, and therefore the unity of diversity. Therefore it manifests itself in thought as a process of synthesis, as a result, not as a starting point." [5]. Through the method of synthesis, the abstraction of thinking is raised to the concrete of thinking. This concrete understanding is the unity of diversity, the reproduction in thinking of the united whole of opposites composed of contradictions in all aspects of things themselves. At the same time, Marx pointed out that "the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thinking uses to grasp the concrete, to reproduce it as a spiritual concrete. But it is by no means the process by which the concrete itself is produced"[5]42. Unlike Hegel, who saw the whole real world as a process of absolute spiritual self-generation and development, the real world is thought to unfold through the movement of thought. According to Marx, concrete thinking is only the process used by thinking to grasp reality, the processing of perceptual reality in the mind, not the process of generating reality itself, "The concrete totality as the totality of thought, as the concrete of thought, is in fact a product of thinking, of understanding; but it is by no means the product of concepts which lie outside or above intuition and representation and which are thought and self-generated, but it is the product of the concept of the transformation of intuition into a concrete world, which is the product of the self-generated concepts. but the product of the process of processing intuitions and representations into concepts." [5]. The concept is the product of the process of processing intuition and representation into concepts" [5].

4. "CONCRETE" IS A UNITED WHOLE CONTAINING CONTRADICTIONARY OPPOSITES

The essence of things is not expressed by sameness. The metaphysician, in making abstractions, focuses only on the sameness of the phenomena, and wants to exclude all the opposing and contradictory aspects, and the abstraction thus obtained cannot reflect the essence of things. What makes the wage-worker and the capitalist what they are is not that they are both human beings, that they both have to dress and eat, that they are both in the same three-dimensional space, and that the essence of the thing, that is, the stipulation of what makes the thing what it is, cannot in any way be deduced from this abstract sameness. The defect of the vulgar economist lies in the fact that it is only looking for the abstract sameness of all phenomena, with the intention of concealing the exploitative relations of capitalism.

The essence of things is expressed precisely by the unity of contradictory opposites. A thing is what it is and not what it is, precisely because of the prescriptive nature that distinguishes it from other things, precisely because of the contradictory aspect that opposes it. As Mao Zedong expresses in *The Theory of Contradiction*, "If there is no contradictory side against it, its own side loses the conditions of existence. Without the top, there is no matter what the bottom is; without the bottom, there is no matter what the top is without landlords, there would be no tenant farmers; without tenant farmers, there would be no landlords." [6]. What makes the wage laborer and the capitalist what they are in themselves is not their sameness but their opposition. The capitalist does not act as a capitalist without the wage-workers who serve him; nor does the wage-worker act as a wage-worker without having nothing but his labor to sell to the capitalist. It can be seen that the concrete unity is the unity of contradictions, a united whole of opposites.

The bourgeois economists, however, try to avoid contradictions, partly because, as defenders of class interests, they must avoid the contradictions inherent in capitalism and describe its "harmony", and partly because they are influenced by the philosophy of metaphysics. Metaphysics rejects contradiction, and thus summarizes the "appearance" of identity rather than the "concept" of unity of opposites containing contradiction. Therefore, they seek the direct identity and complete consistency between phenomenon and appearance, theory and reality, and if the theory does not correspond to the reality of the phenomenon, then the theory will be modified. They believe that the concreteness of theory is to encompass all existing situations, and this kind of empirical generalization inevitably leads to the eclecticism of "both and". For example, the "Smith dogma" criticized by Marx contradicts the labor theory of value and argues that "wages, profits, and ground rent are the three original sources of all exchange value." [7] The idea that value is determined by both wages, profits, and ground rent is eclecticism resulting from empirical generalization of the direct identity of metaphysics. David Ricardo is right not to stop at empirical induction, but to try to see each individual category as a variant of a universal "entity" and to try to derive other forms of development from the category of "value", but he is also influenced by metaphysical philosophy. In deriving "rent, profit, money" from "value", he tries to prove that these economic categories are directly compatible with the law of value, which is necessarily fruitless.

The "concrete", as articulated by Marx, does not avoid contradictions, neither between phenomena and concepts, nor between things themselves. Each individual phenomenon, each particular economic category, is not in direct apparent agreement with the concept because they are in essential agreement with each other. Profit does not seem to be in accordance with the law of value, because profit, as a transformed form of surplus value, produces surplus value due to the inclusion of labor, a special "commodity" whose use-value is the source of value, but its essence is in accordance with the law of value. At the same time, the "concept" abstracted by Marx is a unity of opposites: the concept of the labor of the worker contains the opposition between private and social labor, the concept of the labor of the production of commodities contains the opposition between concrete and abstract labor, and the concept of "commodities" contains the opposition between the use value and the value, which leads to the transformation of the two sides of the contradiction, that is, through the exchange relationship to achieve the transformation of the other side. Therefore, the transcendence of Marx's "concrete" lies in the fact that what he examines is not the same abstraction, but the "concrete" which contains the unity of contradictory opposites, and it is precisely for this reason that the concrete becomes concrete.

5. CONCLUSION

"From the abstract to the concrete" is Marx's scientific method of studying political economy. Using this method, in the Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858, Marx first criticized the metaphysics of the Proudhonist Darimun, who equated phenomenon with essence, and pointed out his mistake of equating price with value, which are different determinants; at the same time, Darimun saw the manifestation of the crisis in the economic field, i.e., the monetary crisis, and tried to eliminate the economic crisis by reforming the currency, which was also based on formal abstraction and could not see the inner contradiction. to eliminate the economic crisis by reforming the currency, which is also based on the results of formal abstraction, not seeing the essence of economic things and the inner contradictions. Through scientific abstraction, Marx initially explained his theory of value in the Economic Manuscripts of 1857-1858, in which products become commodities in a capitalist society and different use values are abstracted into homogeneous and comparable values. Marx also argued for the category of value not as an abstract concept, but in conjunction with the two factors of commodities that are opposed to each other but united in the whole: use-value and value. Value is later defined in Capital as the undifferentiated general human labor condensed in commodities, a concept that is a concrete abstraction containing prescriptive qualities. Through the method of "abstraction to concrete", Marx obtained the concept of unity of opposites containing real content through concrete scientific abstraction.

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