

PHILOSOPHY AND THE DENIAL OF THE VALUE OF LABOR

Abstract

The story told about Thales falling into a well and being mocked by a servant exhibits a relation of philosophy to labor. On the one hand, the story depicts that stupidity of the philosopher in relation to the practical world. On the other hand, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle insist that philosophical reflection is required even in, and perhaps especially in, the world of everyday practice. This tension is turned into a method that Marx calls materialism, a method in which philosophical abstraction and reflection is required in order to “rise to the level of the concrete.”

Philosophy begins in the West, as we still tell ourselves today, with Thales. On the one hand, this is completely appropriate. If, as Aristotle argues, wisdom has some relation to the search for *principles*,¹ then it must not be related to anything of immediate practical concern. In this light, Thales is the perfect beginning of the philosophical enterprise. The notion that “all things are from water,” is certainly a move away from the givenness of phenomena to their principle in something that is not immediately phenomenal. And it is precisely this move toward the principle that led Thales to study the things above the earth, leading to the following calamity:

...just as, Theodorus, a witty and attractive Thracian servant-girl is said to have mocked Thales for falling into a well while he was observing the stars and gazing upwards; declaring that he was eager to know the things in the sky, but that what was behind him and just by his feet escaped his notice.²

The origin of this story, at least in this form, is Plato’s *Theaetetus*. It comes within an argument Socrates mounts showing that the philosopher has no concern for the *agora* and for all those things belonging to the body. The argument, then, culminates in this odd story about Thales. Socrates argues that only the body of the philosopher is at home in the city, while his mind [*dianoia*] disdains such things and turns toward contemplation of “everything that is, each in its entirety, never lowering itself to anything close at hand” (*Theaetetus*, 172c). Aristotle, as we saw, takes this argument seriously, insisting that the search for principles

¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 982b.

² Geoffrey Stephen Kirk, John Earle Raven, et al., *The Presocratic Philosophers: a Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 80.

is precisely what forces the philosopher out of the work-a-day world of the *agora* and the *polis*, i.e., out of the world of practical concern.

The story of Thales falling in the well, however, already references the world of labor, the world of not only practical concern but also of the *work* that is required in order for daily life to carry on. Socrates tells us not just that Thales fell into a well, not just that he fell because he was a philosopher, but that he was mocked by a servant. The clash here is obvious: Thales, as a philosopher, as one concerned with the principles of what is, becomes unable to negotiate the world of practical, everyday concerns and, from the perspective of the one who labors in that world, deserves to be mocked. A strange story indeed to announce the beginning of the philosophical enterprise!

The details of Socrates' story are perplexing. Not only is Thales mocked by a servant, but the servant becomes present at the origin of philosophy in the West, as if a co-founder. Theory and practice, labor and leisure, therefore, are already in a relation in the founding myth of philosophy. What is more, the servant is a woman. She is, however, on the outside, the margin of philosophy. There is here, then, a depiction of both labor and the feminine as both marginal to but also co-constitutive of philosophy in the West. Without this servant-girl, the story could not be told, the story of how philosophy cares little for the life of practice. Philosophy, it seems, is a man's business, the business of a man of leisure.

And Thales was nothing if not a business man. Indeed, another story we have concerning Thales relates precisely to his business acumen. In a discussion of wealth in relation to the state, Aristotle relates the following story about Thales:

Thales, so the story goes, because of his poverty was taunted with the uselessness of philosophy; but from his knowledge of astronomy he had observed while it was still winter that there was going to be a large crop of olives, so he raised a small sum of money and paid round deposits for the whole of the olive-presses in Miletus and Chios, which he hired at a low rent as nobody was running him up; and when the season arrived, there was a sudden demand for a number of presses at the same time, and by letting them out on what terms he liked he realized a large sum of money, so proving that it is easy for philosophers to be rich if they choose, but this is not what they care about.³

The original mockery is turned against itself in this story. Not only is philosophy not useless, but it can lead to richness. It should be noted here that the wisdom of Thales is directly related not to labor, but to capital, as would be expected from a man of leisure like Thales. Aristotle, however, ends this story by pointing out that this does not exhibit the wisdom of philosophy, since this kind of know-how, i.e., the knowledge of how to secure a monopoly, is a "universal principle of business."⁴ Aristotle, therefore, does not take this story as indicative of philosophical wisdom. The story itself, however, does seem to try to answer the mockery of the servant-girl.

³ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Harris Rackham, vol. 21, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1944), 1259a.

⁴ *Ibid*

Aristotle, for his part, responds to this mockery by arguing that the contemplative life is not only in the name of practice, it is the highest form of practice. At the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle turns to the question of happiness, since that is what the goal or purpose of human life and activity should be. He argues, first, that pleasure is “activity in accordance with virtue...”⁵ Now if we refer happiness to virtue and if happiness is the goal or purpose of life, then it seems clear that it could only be in accordance with the highest virtue. That is, while we may talk about happiness in a relative sense, when we talk about happiness in relation to the goal of human life and activity, then we must refer that to the highest virtue and not just any virtue. This highest virtue must be contemplative and not, we might say, active. Or, more precisely, the highest form of virtuous action turns out to be contemplation rather than action in its ordinary sense. Contemplation is superior to action because “we can contemplate truth more continuously than we can do anything.”⁶ The problem is that it is impossible to act continuously, and thus if some form of action were the origin of human happiness we would not be able to be happy continuously. This happiness, the happiness of contemplation, is possible only on the basis of leisure:

And happiness is thought to depend on leisure; for we are busy that we may have leisure...Now the activity of the practical virtues is exhibited in political or military affairs, but the actions concerned with these seem unpleasurably.⁷

In this way, Aristotle gets the ultimate revenge on the Thracian servant. The servant mocks because his falling into the well is a result of his philosophical concern. While the contemplation of what is above the earth and below *ought* to have made Thales wise, it only resulted in his inability to see the immediate world around him, thus making him vulnerable to the dangers of the world. It is not just that Thales was preoccupied, but more seriously that the very thing he was after, understanding of what is, was the source of a serious misunderstanding of what is. Aristotle, however, answers this by insisting that the very practice of the servant cannot achieve what it sets out to achieve, i.e., happiness, and that the only practice that can achieve happiness is the anti-practice of contemplation. The retort to the Thracian servant girl turns on the fact that labor makes one tired. If we tire through labor, then labor cannot bring us happiness; for the fact that we tire means that we could not enjoy for long the thing toward which labor aims. Therefore, happiness must turn away from that which can make us tired toward that which can be enjoyed without taxing us.

To this extent, Aristotle is able to link the non-labor of contemplation with the divine.

If reason is divine, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. But we must not follow those who advise us, being human, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal.⁸

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 1177a.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1177b.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1178a.

This pushes the life of leisure up to the divine, connecting it with immortality. This, too, is related to the fact that labor makes one tired and tiring is a sign of change, imperfection, and mortality. Contemplation replaces labor as the highest form of practice because only through contemplation do we have the possibility of turning out of our mortality toward the immortality of the divine. This turn toward “what is above” asserts the preeminence of theory over practice but along with this preeminence comes the denial of the value of labor as worthy in itself.

The divine as a model of leisurely contemplation, however, is not without its own difficulties. In both *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, Aristotle is forced to admit that there must be some first mover to account for the eternity of the motion in the universe. As the principle of that motion, the first mover will have to be active. However, the activity of the first mover cannot be such that it goes from potency to actuality, “since for anything that is potentially its not-being might obtain.”⁹ The move from potency to actuality characterizes most forms of activity. The first mover, however, must be active in a different way, for the usual form of activity would preclude it from being eternal. We have, then, the need for something primary that is eternal, substance, and active but whose activity is not characterized by any potency whatsoever.

The famous solution to this problem is to locate the activity of the divine in a thought that only has itself for its object. In this way, Aristotle solves two problems: (1) the first mover is in no way in potency; and (2) the first mover does not depend on any object to activate its thought. If the first mover had an object of its thought that were outside it, then it would be marked by potency, a potency that would be activated by the object, in which case, “it is plausible that the continuity of its thinking would be rather arduous for it.”¹⁰ The activity of the first mover, the most divine activity, is nothing but the leisurely contemplation of its own thinking. Once again, the highest activity turns out to be the non-activity of contemplation, an “activity” that, as we have seen, turns away from labor toward leisure.

In this way, Aristotle provides the ultimate retort to the mockery of Thales. The servant speaks from the perspective of labor, of the activity of ensuring the demands of everyday life, i.e., those very demands that Socrates argued do not befit the philosopher. Aristotle argues that such activity cannot lead to ultimate happiness because it makes one tired. The weariness that is the result of labor is a sign of potency as opposed to actuality, mortality as opposed to immortality, and humanity as opposed to divinity. Thales, it turns out, should have mocked the Thracian servant-girl because, while she was laboring away, she failed to see the principles of the world in which she immediately finds herself. It is only by means of the pursuit of such principles, Aristotle argues, that ultimate happiness can be achieved. This happiness comes in the form of living, as far as possible, the life of the gods, i.e., the life of the active contemplation of that which is highest—thought.

In this way, the story of Thales, the story that is still repeated about the first philosopher, brings the sphere of philosophical contemplation into direct conflict with the sphere of the activity of labor. Yet that confrontation leaves aside entirely the very questions that, Socrates insisted, require the philosopher to have no concern for the cares of everyday life. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates explains that the reason why philosophers fall into wells and are, in general, open to the mockery of all, is that they have no concerns for the immediacy of the world around them. Philosophers, he insists, are concerned with the knowledge of all things not as they show themselves to us but as they are. This means that

⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1071b.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1074b.

really such a man pays no attention to his next door neighbor; he is not only ignorant of what he is doing, but he hardly knows whether he is a human being or some other kind of a creature; but what a human being is and what is proper for such a nature to do or bear different from any other, this he inquires and exerts himself to find out. (174b)

The crucial turn in Socrates' argument—the very same one we saw in Aristotle—is away from what appears to us immediately in the world toward, for example, “what a human being is and what is proper for such a nature to do.” The turn, therefore, is not only away from the immediate, sensible world. It is also *toward* the reality that does not present itself to us immediately.

It would seem, therefore, that the move to what will come to be called metaphysics is at the same time a turn away from seeing a value in labor in itself. Socrates implicitly argues that there is some necessity in the turn away from the immediacy of the world that presents itself to us. It is, in fact, the very immediacy of the world that is problematic, for it runs the risk of overwhelming us.¹¹ In order not to be overwhelmed by what shows itself to us, the philosopher turns toward thought, toward reason, and toward contemplation of the principles of things. Yet this move away from immediacy is at the same time *in the name of immediacy*. As Socrates argued, in the face of one's next door neighbor, one turns away from “what he is doing,” toward “what a human being is and what is proper for such a nature to do.” The philosopher encounters the neighbor as doing something. Yet in the immediacy of the appearance of the neighbor, the question of what is proper for the neighbor to do cannot be addressed. The philosopher turns toward the contemplation of what is *in order to return* to what the neighbor is doing so as to see whether it is proper. In the name of the activity, the philosopher must turn away from activity in order to grasp the activity in relation to its reality.

Aristotle, in fact, opens the *Metaphysics* with just such an argument. From what is presented to us immediately (in sensation), we can come to learn, for example, that fire is hot, but we will never come to understand *why* fire is hot. In order to understand the reasons why fire is hot, we must turn toward an investigation of “principles and causes.” Aristotle contrasts the task of philosophy with the task of both experience and skill. While one with experience, or even skill, is able to grasp only the particulars (in the case of experience) or some universal related to particular circumstances (in the case of skill), the philosopher, i.e., the one who is truly wise, “knows everything in the appropriate way, not having knowledge of these subjects at the level of particulars.”¹² Yet Aristotle too argues that this move away from what immediately presents itself is in the name of practice:

And the things that are most known are the primary things and the causes.
For it is through them and from them that the other things are known and
not the latter through the underlying things. And the most fundamental of

¹¹ This argument is made more explicit in *Phaedo* when, in his description of his “second sailing,” Socrates tells us that looking at things directly is like looking directly into the sun. Such immediacy, he argues, runs the risk of blinding us. Therefore, we need a way to look at things without the risk of blindness. That method is to see things “in *logos*.”

¹² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982a.

the sciences, more fundamental than that which subserves it, is that which discerns for what end each thing must be done. And this is the good for each thing, and in general the best in all natures.¹³

In the name of practice, the philosopher must turn away from practice, in order to discern what is the best in each case. The problem with the immediacy of the world of labor, a world dominated, according to Aristotle, by sensible particulars, is that it cannot grasp its own end. Only by turning away from that world and its immediacy can the philosopher carry out the task of grasping the good for each case.

Thus, when Thales, Socrates, and Aristotle turn away from the practical world, they do so with the promise that theoretical contemplation is the only way to give an account of that world. What seemed to be a denial of the value of labor in itself, therefore, turns out to be the only way to get back to the true value of labor. This is, at least, the promise of metaphysics.¹⁴ The philosopher must find a way to get back to the concrete, the immediate, the world of labor. This movement away from concrete immediacy toward abstraction *in the name of the concrete* is what Marx calls “materialism,” precisely because the only way to avoid being duped by the concrete is to turn toward theory, just as Thales, Socrates, and Aristotle saw.¹⁵

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx presents a terse description of his method of political economy. The problem that Marx confronts is that, on the one hand, political economy deals with that which seems to be both immediate and concrete. “It seems to be correct to begin with the real and the concrete, with the real precondition, thus to begin, in economics, with e.g. the population, which is the foundations and the subject of the entire social act of production.”¹⁶ On the other hand, population is an abstraction. That is, population as such is not entirely intelligible because it is not basic, but rather made up of classes. Classes, in their turn, are unintelligible because in order to understand them, we need to understand elements like wage labor and capital. Class, in its turn, is also abstract because it too is based on elements such as wage labor, capital, etc. There is, then, a difference that Marx sees between the way in which something appears to observation as concrete and the way in which that appearance as concrete covers over the abstractions on which it is based.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 982b.

¹⁴ I take the notion of the promise of metaphysics from Adorno’s “Meditations on Metaphysics,” (Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Aston [New York: Continuum, 1973], 361-408; T. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*, vol. 6, *Gesammelte Schriften* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973], 354-399). The issue is also raised in Adorno’s lecture course, Theodor Adorno, *Metaphysik: Begriff und Probleme*, vol. 1, *Nachgelassene Schriften: Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998).

¹⁵ Marx wrote his dissertation (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected works [of] Karl Marx [and] Frederick Engels*, vol. 1, ed. Richard Dixon [London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975]) on ancient philosophy, particularly on the theory of nature in Democritus and Epicurus. At the beginning of the dissertation, Marx laments the fact that the history of Greek philosophy is all too frequently told as a story of birth, apex, and decline, the apex being Aristotle. While it lays beyond the scope of this essay, it would be interesting to trace Marx’s developing materialist methodology beginning in this work. However, the issues he pursues in the dissertation are not those which will come to the fore in the period, roughly, from the *Contributions* through *Capital*.

¹⁶ Karl Marx, *Zur Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie*, vol. 13.7, Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels Werke (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1971), 631; Karl Marx and Martin Nicolaus, *Grundrisse: foundations of the critique of political economy (rough draft)* (Penguin, 1993), 100. Subsequent references to this text will be *Grundrisse* followed by German and English page numbers respectively.

The false concrete is false because it is a “chaotic representation of the whole” [*eine chaotische Vorstellung des Ganzen*].¹⁷ The problem, therefore, is to arrive at a correct conception of the concrete. This is a problem because the movement of thinking is not identical to what we might call the movement of the real. “The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking, therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure for intuition [*Anschauung*] and representation [*Vorstellung*].”¹⁸ Marx clearly recognizes that thought operates according to a logic that is other than the mode by which reality is constituted. The challenge of method, therefore, is to bring thought to conceive of the real, all the while recognizing that the process of thought is not identical to real processes.

This method, the “scientifically correct method” [*die wissenschaftlich richtige Methode*], begins from the chaotic representation of the whole and then, “by means of further determination, move[s] analytically towards ever more simple concepts, from the imagined concrete toward ever thinner abstractions until [it] arrived at the simplest determinations.”¹⁹ We see, therefore, what made the original representation chaotic. It lacked, at least initially, determination [*Bestimmung*]. It cannot be the case that, as real and as presented to intuition, “population” is indeterminate. Rather, its determinations are not presented immediately to thought. The determinations that thought arrives at are, as it were, too late for the concrete given in reality. What immediately presents itself as concrete is not a result of thought, but can be thought only as a result.

While Marx argues here that the process of thought is the reverse of the process by which the concrete comes into being, there is no need to take this strictly. That is, we need not necessarily maintain that the two processes are the same, though working in opposite directions. Rather, the basic insight of Marx is that the concrete itself is not a result of the determinations of thought. That is, the concrete itself has principles and a “logic” that is other than the principles and logic of thought. According to Marx, Hegel failed to recognize just this otherness of thought and what we might call “the real.”²⁰ “In this way Hegel fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, whereas the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is the only way in which thought appropriates [*anzueignen*] the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind [*als ein geistig Konkretes*].”²¹ The recognition that there is something other than thought, the real, means that thought should attempt to make it its own and reproduce it as something thought [*geistig*]. This appropriation and reproduction, however, is only possible if the difference between the real and what is thought is maintained. That is, the insistence that the real be appropriated is at the same time an insistence that the real is not identical to thought nor is it its

¹⁷ *Ibid.* I translate *Vorstellung* as “representation” in order to keep in line with the Hegelian terminology of this section of the Introduction. Marx clearly has in mind here an engagement with Hegel, following him to a certain extent, turning away from him at crucial points.

¹⁸ *Grundrisse* 632/101.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 631/100.

²⁰ Marx is attempting to think through the difficulty that thought regards something other than itself. One could also mark this by noting that thought is always of something, i.e., has an object, though not necessarily in the Kantian or Hegelian sense.

²¹ *Grundrisse* 632/101.

product. If the determinations of thought were the process by which the real itself came to be, no appropriation, no reproduction would be necessary.

There are, therefore, two dangers. The first danger is the assumption of a “false concrete,” e.g., population as real. This danger leads to the evaporation of the complete representation and the result is an abstract determination, but not the more basic concepts that determine the concrete. The second danger, however, is the assumption that the determinations arrived at in thought are taken as the principles by which the real comes into being. These two dangers, however, share a common element: they both refuse the difference between thought and the real. The first danger refuses the difference by assuming that what presents itself to immediate intuition or perception [*Anschauung*] is concrete and therefore can form the basis of a deductive chain. From population we can deduce division of labor, money, and value. From these, we can ascend to state, exchange between nations, and the world market.²² Here, the problem is that the apparent concrete, population, is nothing at all without the apparent abstractions of division of labor, class, etc. If I assume it as given, then the move to states, exchange between them, and the world market will prove not to appropriate the real into thought and reproduce it, but rather will falsify the concrete from which we began. The second danger assumes that whatever is real and concrete is the product of thought, and therefore has come to be according to the same principles by which it has come to be thought. This movement, which Marx ascribes to Hegel, misses the very point of its own departure: it wanted to think something.

The method Marx outlines here, therefore, is one that appropriates and reproduces the real concrete in thought without ever making the metaphysical assumption that the principles and movement of thought are the principles and movement of reality. But it also refuses the opposite metaphysical gesture of assuming that the difference between thought and the real makes no difference, that thought can adequately capture the real as such. The assumption that the principles and movement of thought are the principles and movement of the real, i.e., the assumption that the real is a *product* of thought, is idealism. The assumption that thought adequately captures the real as such is a naïve realism that leaves the concrete shrouded in the mystery of its givenness. This sort of realism can also be the foundation of a materialism that says whatever is must be matter, as if the givenness of matter required no further analysis. Marx’s method, in contrast to these two, seeks to appropriate and reproduce the real in thought for the sake of an analysis of the real, while recognizing that the concrete in thought is other than the real concrete because they come to be through different determinations.

Marx provides an illustration, returning to the categories of political economy.

For example, the simplest economic category, say e.g. exchange value, presupposes population, moreover a population producing in specific relations; as well as a certain kind of family, or commune, or state, etc. It can never exist other than as an abstract, *one-sided* relation within an already given, concrete, living whole. As a category, by contrast, exchange value leads an antediluvian existence.²³

²² *Ibid.*, 632/100-101.

²³ *Ibid.*, 632/101. The emphasis is in the German but omitted in the English translation.

Recall that exchange value is not something that appears immediately to intuition or perception [*Anschauung*], but is the result of thought moving from what is given, population, to the abstractions that determine it. Now we see that this category does not have either an ontological or logical independence, but rather is wrapped up with population, relations, and social formations. The abstraction we discovered in thought, exchange value, has a mode of existence within a given concrete whole. The category of exchange value, as opposed to its real function, is always an abstraction, yet it is an abstraction that thinking requires in order to appropriate the real. This is why it appears to emerge from the distant past, like a dinosaur. This tempts us to assume that this category that emerges for thought is productive of the social whole whose givenness led to the abstraction of the category.

In this way, Marx recognizes that the method of political economy, which is, in the end, a method of materialist philosophy, must deal directly with the most fundamental problem that the analytic categories that emerge for thought are the only way to think the real concrete, and yet these categories cannot be taken as the ontological principles of the real concrete. This is a method for philosophical materialism precisely because it acknowledges that there is something other than thought that is the “object”²⁴ of thought. The obviousness of this problem is precisely the reason for its difficulty. To posit that being is matter or that whatever happens to be is material runs the risk of positing matter as it emerges *in thought*, which is not matter at all. There is something that presents itself to perception or intuition [*Anschauung*] as concrete. Yet its concreteness cannot be grasped in perception or intuition, but rather requires thought to uncover its determinations. This requires concepts that are ever more basic, and even abstract, and yet, nevertheless, are required in order for thought to “rise to the level of the concrete.” The mere supposition that whatever exists is matter posits matter as a chaotic whole, as, indeed, something mystical. Therefore, what appears to be materialism on its face, turns out to be either theological or, at best, idealistic. It is theological if it simply posits some unknown entity, matter, as that which is by its very nature. It is idealistic if it posits matter as something that is adequately grasped by thought. Marx's method, on the contrary, insists on a fundamental difference between thought and what is other than thought. This insistence, however, does not risk being either theological or idealistic precisely because the *other* emerges as a result of thought recognizing ever more determinations and thus rising to the concrete.

Marx goes one step further. It is not just that he has a preference for materialism or that he insists on materialism because it is the only philosophy that can lead to the social and political consequences he has chosen in advance. Rather, he argues here in this Introduction that materialism is necessary to avoid the contradictions inherent in idealism or naïve materialism. In the *Nachwort* to the second edition of volume one of *Capital*, Marx returns to this “materialist basis of [his] method.”²⁵ There Marx indicates that the “method of presentation” [*Darstellungweise*] must be different from the “method of inquiry” [*Forschungsweise*]. On the one hand, the method of inquiry “must take in the material in detail ... and to

²⁴ I put “object” in scare quotes here to indicate that we need not think this along Kantian or Hegelian lines but, as indicated above, that thought always intends something. I would argue that Descartes has something similar in mind in the 3rd Meditation when he recognizes that even if the thing of which I have an idea does not exist, still the idea claims to be the idea *of something*.

²⁵ Marx, Karl, *Capital*, Ben Fowkes (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 100. Marx, Karl, *Das Kapital*, vol. 23, Karl Marx Friedrich Engels *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968), p. 25. Hereafter cited as *Capital* followed by German and English page numbers respectively.

track down their inner connection.”²⁶ Once this work is accomplished the actual movement can be accordingly presented. This work, according to Marx, is preliminary to the ideal reflection of the life of the matter.²⁷ Once reflected back into the ideal, it can seem as if the one is dealing with an a priori construction.

This is the context in which Marx distinguishes himself from Hegel. It is not that the ideal has no role to play in Marx's thought. Rather, the ideal appears as a reflection of the real world and not as the principle of its being. In the afterword to the second edition of *Capital*, Marx once again outlines his method in relation to and in opposition to that of Hegel. The affinity between the Marxian and Hegelian dialectic turns on the role of the ideal. Marx, for his part, never denies the role of the ideal. Rather, the entire argument focuses on the moment at which the ideal appears. Once again, Marx shows that for Hegel, “the process of thinking...is the creator [*der Demiurg*] of the real, which only forms the external appearance of the idea.”²⁸ Marx's materialist method reverses this metaphysics: “the ideal is nothing other than that material translated and transferred into the human head.”²⁹ Here again we see that the ideal is the reflection of the real, of the material, and is not to be thought as its origin.

Hegel may here be nothing more than the culmination of the essential task that metaphysics as such has always set for itself, namely to bring thinking and being together. According to Marx, Hegel realizes this dream in positing the ideal as productive of the real. His opposition to this positing, however, is not simply to reject the ideal, to reject the process of thinking. This would lead to a mystification in its own right. While the Hegelian mystification shrouds matter and the material world in a cloak of thinking, the mere rejection of the ideal would take the abstract (e.g., population) for the actual concrete. Marx's materialism, therefore, amounts to the use of thinking, and even the ideal, in order to “rise to the concrete.” As we have seen, this method is required because what presents itself to sensation and intuition is never simple, never immediate, and never concrete. The task, therefore, is to analyze what presents itself to sense and to intuition so as to discover the actual concrete that is cloaked within this seeming immediacy.

Marx seems to indicate two complexities relating to that which presents itself to sensation and intuition. First, the presentation to sense and intuition does not carry along with it the mode of presentation itself. *How* the material world shows itself to sensation and intuition is crucial in coming to grasp in thought the actual concrete. This mode of presentation, however, is discovered not through sensation or intuition itself. This is precisely why something appears to be concrete even though it is abstract. A move to abstraction, and therefore to the ideal, is required in order to come to trace the mode by which something is given to sensation and intuition.

Second, what presents itself to sensation and intuition is a *result*, i.e., the result of socio-historical processes. This again has to do with the mode of givenness. In the *Nachwort* to the second edition of *Capital*, Marx points to this notion as one where he and Hegel agree. Marx notes that Hegel's philosophy turns on the recognition that there is no being without becoming. The mystical element of Hegelian dialectic does not prevent the recognition of its “rational kernel.” This rational form of the dialectic, which is contained already within Hegel, “because it includes in the positive understanding of the existing at the same time also the understanding of its negation, of its necessary demise, it grasps that developing form in

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27/102.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 27/102.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27/102, translation modified.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 27/102, translation modified.

the flow of movement, thus also according to its transitory side, it does not allow imposition and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.”³⁰ Dialectic, therefore, is the only method that grasps the movement and becoming that stands behind that which exists and which presents itself to sensation and intuition. Traditional political economy took merely the result of this process, and thus mistook what is complex and constructed for what is simple and immediately given.

Marx's method is one, therefore, that does not insist at the outset that whatever exists is material, i.e., that matter as such is being. Rather, Marx recognizes that matter is that which is other than thought. This fundamental insight is the hinge upon which his method turns. His goal is the proper understanding of material reality. The complication rests in the fact that this understanding takes place *in thought*. Because of this fundamental insight, materialist metaphysics turns almost entirely on method. If matter is that which is other than thought, and yet is grasped *by thought*, a method must be pursued that allows matter to emerge as a result of thinking and not as a simple presupposition of it.

The method, therefore, that Marx calls “materialism” is one that makes a foray into the abstraction of rational determination but *in the name of* the concrete. This is the concrete in which class, division of labor, and means of production are not empty names. They are determinations that are lost in the overwhelming nature of the concrete presented to us in our everyday lives. Yet they are the determinations that allow Marx to uncover labor as a value, indeed as that which is the value of any commodity that is exchanged. The method that Marx details, however, is one that moves along similar lines to that of Thales, Socrates, and Aristotle in the sense that it recognizes the ways in which the immediacy of the world can cloud our vision of the real. What Marx understands, and Thales and Aristotle misunderstand, is that the move away from the activity of labor is not a metaphysical move, but an analytic move.

To the extent that Thales and Aristotle insisted that what is discovered in rational abstraction is the real, to that extent they are right to be mocked. Marx understands, however, that to make good on the value of the labor of the Thracian servant, to think in the light of the hopes of labor, requires a turn away from immediacy in order to rise to the level of the concrete. Thales' problem was that he looked to the heavens when he should have been looking to labor.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 28/102, translation modified.