WITHERING AWAY OF CARTESIAN DICHOTOMIES: THE THESES ON FEUERBACH AND *PRAXIS* AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL CATEGORY

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Thesis Abstract

Evrim Kaya, "Withering away of Cartesian Dichotomies:
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The main project of the thesis is to explain the notion of *praxis* as formulated by Karl Marx as an answer to the distinctively Cartesian problem of the relation between the subject and the object. Focusing mainly on the early writings of Marx and with a special consideration of the eleven thesis directed at Feuerbach, I try to shad light on the Kantian - Hegelian roots of the notion as a unifying category between theory and practice and reformulate it as an epistemological category following the path provided by constructivist philosophies going back to Kant, where the mind plays an active role.

For that matter, in the first chapters, the problem is presented in its Cartesian and modernist core and three reactions from three different historical viewpoints are summarized: from a so-called naïve, pre-modern metaphysics where mind is passive yet no doubt about knowledge is raised, from the tradition of empiricism where experience is the ultimate limit of knowledge and from critical philosophies starting with Kant and continuing with Hegel to Marx. Through a reading of *Theses ad Feuerbach*, a Marxist answer residing in the category of *praxis* is formulated in which different views from idealist and materialist tradition are combined in search for a constructivist materialism.

Tez Özeti

Evrim Kaya, "Kartezyen İkiliklerin Soluşu: Feuerbach Üzerine Tezler ve Epistemolojik Bir Kategori Olarak *Praxis*"

Bu çalışmanın temel hedefi *praxis* kavramını Karl Marx'ın formüle ettiği şekliyle, özne ve nesne arasındaki ilişkiyle ilgili Kartezyen düşünceye özgü olarak ortaya çıkan soruna bir yanıt olarak açıklamaktır. Feuerbach'a yönelttiği 11 tezi özellikle göz önünde bulundurularak ve Marx'ın erken dönem yazılarına odaklanılarak, teori ve pratik arasında birleştirici bir kategori olan kavramın Kantçı ve Hegelci köklerine aydınlatıcı bir bakış atılmaya ve bu kavram tarihi Kant'a uzanan, zihnin aktif bir rol oynadığı oluşturmacı felsefelerin yolunu takip eden bir epistemolojik kategori olarak yeniden formüle etmeye çalışılmaktadır.

Bu bağlamda, ilk bölümlerde sorun Kartezyen ve modernist özüyle ortaya konularak üç farklı tarihsel bakış açısından gelen üç farklı tepki özetlenir: zihnin pasif olduğu ancak bilgi üzerine şüphenin ortaya çıkmadığı naif, modern öncesi metafiziğinki, deneyimin bilginin temel sınırı olduğu ampirizm geleneğininki ve Kant'la başlayıp, Hegel ve Marx'a uzanan eleştirel felsefelerinki. Sonuçta *Feuerbach Üzerine Tezler'*in bir okuması üzerinden, *praxis* kategorisine dayanan, idealist ve materyalist gelenekten farklı fikirleri oluşturmacı bir materyalizm arayışında birleştiren Marxist bir yanıt ortaya konur.

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To the miraculous cherry trees of Gezi Park that blossomed in May.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When Descartes started meditating some hundred years ago, he put it quite simple and confident: "Everything I have accepted up to now as being absolutely true and assured, I have learned from or through senses." Then it followed naturally: "But I have sometimes found that these senses played me false, and it is prudent never to trust entirely those who have once deceived us."[1] These two sentences at the beginning of the Cartesian *Meditations* were designating the clear formulation of a significant problem, which was going to be critical and influential for many philosophers throughout centuries.

The call for certainty brought the problem of justification. Having faith in the possibility of a final solution, Descartes did not hesitate to raise a doubt as comprehensive as possible. For the solution he relied to his faith on the universal symbol of faith, God himself and so he started to doubt the simplest facts: that he was 'sitting by the fire, wearing a dressing-gown, with this paper in (his) hands'. Yearning for a fresh start, a new Archimedean point of certainty for a lasting and certain science and knowledge, which ought to replace Aristotle's old system, he tried to "raze everything to the ground and begin again". His main tool was doubt; he doubted everything, for which he had valid reason to doubt.

[1] Descartes. Discourse on Method and The Meditations. Trans. F. E. Sutcliffe. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976. p.76.

Following these allegedly valid reasons, Cartesian skepticism reaches the point where the existence of the body and external reality is doubted. This is followed by the moment when the skeptic personified in the writer doubts his own existence, since it is possible that a deceiver has persuaded him to be existing. Yet in this idea of absolute deception lies his solution: If he is deceived, than he exists as something deceived. If he assumes to be deceived, than he exists as something assuming. If he thinks, than he exists as a thinking thing. Hence the first principle of his philosophy is found, which is nothing but this conclusion: *I think therefore I am*.

Descartes, in any of his Meditations, does not want to leave the realm of certain knowledge for a second. Any question needs to be answered within the limits of certainty. In the famous wax example, he grants that everything that is known with certainty is not known through senses, nor imagination but through reason. And since everything is known "only through their being understood"[2], what can be known most easily and certainly is one's own mind itself. The rest is thrown away, to be regained only through the existence of a truth-loving God, that wouldn't deceive. It preserves the body and the universe; without God nothing but the mind (my mind) can be known for sure.

With this answer, a problem that would haunt philosophers for many centuries to come was arising. Since the essence of man was identified as thought without any reference to body, the connection between the two realms was at stake. The relation between the mind and the corporeal objects,

[2] Ibid. p. 34.

extended to one's own body, lies at the center of any epistemological theory and the most basic epistemological question is indeed 'how do we know things?', or more specifically, corporeal things. For Descartes, this question could be answered with certainty once the existence of a benevolent, omnipotent and definitely not deceiving God would be postulated. For philosophers of the next centuries who were after an immanent-secular answer rather than his Christian-transcendent one, the Cartesian duality remained a riddle to be solved. Riddles are in mind and mind needs to be justified in its claims. Whether this justification can be made entirely within the mind as more or less claimed by many philosophers representing one side of the debate, or whether mind itself is nothing but a stage for the empirical world, as claimed by the other side, is another question. One thing is sure: after Descartes announced this split, no western philosopher was entirely free from the duty to reconcile two worlds, which were given different names within different traditions: *body* and *soul*, *matter* and *mind*, *thing* and *thought*, *world* and *spirit*, *subject* and *object* and many others. They gave priority to one or another, suggested different theoretical models to describe the interaction between the two and hence created entirely different approaches.

The humble aim of this work is to present one answer among many others in comparison to different traditions, namely the one of the German philosopher Karl Marx who is less known for his work contributing to epistemology than his mainly political and economical studies. Yet as a the brilliant heir of the Critical Philosophy and German Idealist tradition going back to Kant, Fichte and Hegel, a mature understanding and an original formulation

of a theory of epistemology is apparent in Marx's work. Briefly described, he is trying to reconcile the competing theories of materialism and idealism in favor of a 'creative materialism' where the grounds for a separation between subject and object is dismissed. This reconciliation is most powerfully expressed in his rather short and intense work known as the *Theses Ad Feuerbach*[3] where he criticizes Feuerbach's crude materialism but also contributes to it through his Hegel-influenced background in praise of a theory of the active human mind. In order to formulate the immense epistemological value of this short text aptly, I will refer to other texts by Marx and inevitably to second literature on him but due to the limits of this rather small study I will constrain myself to his early work.

But before turning to Marx and his contribution, a historical review will be necessary. When it comes to such a basic question, many different ways of categorization are possible. One of them is made by Hegel in *Logic* who defines the problem as the relation between thought and objectivity and hence differentiates between three "attitudes of thought to objectivity".[4] These are, firstly, the metaphysical approach of the Greeks, secondly, empiricism and critical philosophy (who according to Hegel) share the natural consequence of impossibility of true knowledge and thirdly, the doctrine of immediate or intuitive knowledge which is represented by Hegel's contemporaries like Jacobi but which can be traced back to Descartes. Hegel's own view obviously intends to create the fourth attitude.

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[3] Marx, Karl. *The German Ideology*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1998.

[4] Hegel, G.W.F. *The Science of Logic.* Trans. William Wallace. Oxford, 1978.

Hegel's classification of attitudes on knowledge resonates his classification of various methods of treating history as formulated in *Philosophy of History*. These are the original view, the reflective view and the philosophical view, the last being undoubtly superior as the rational, thoughtful contemplation[5]. In parallel to Hegel's three conceptions of history, Tom Rockmore classifies three general epistemological strategies for the relation of thought to being: The Greek intuitionist approach, the modern Cartesian rationalism and lastly, Hegel's circular form of theory.[6] Hegel's original categorization as well as Rockmore's classification of three strategies of knowledge provide an excellent schema for mapping the different theories dealing with the problem of objective knowledge, given that we keep the necessary critical distance to both formulations suggesting a similar chronology. Rockmore himself points to the fact that since Hegel usually avoids giving direct reference to philosophers in different epochs, it is not very clear whether he has a chronologically based separation and gives Plato as an example, being the complicated philosopher that puts the generalization in jeopardy.

The aim of the next chapters is to provide a background to the discussion prior to Marx and the *Theses*. For this reason, I will follow a fourth classification in terms of different attitudes towards the problem of thought and objectivity. It is largely inspired by those mentioned above yet being not Hegelian for one thing, differs from them to a large extent. The first two groups will follow Hegel

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[5] Hegel, G.W.F. *Philosophy of History*. Trans. J. Sibree. New York: Dover Publications, 1956.

[6] Rockmore, Tom. *Hegel's Circular Epistemology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. p. 10.

on history and will define 'The Original View' and 'The Reflective View' in terms of epistemology. The third group that consists of the theories in which the mind plays an active role will be named 'The Active View' and will be presented through Marx's position in the *Theses* since he is chronologically last and also qualitatively advanced as argued. Since the aim is not to provide a comprehensive history of philosophy, the content will be limited to the few major names that can provide a general idea on the development of the problem in pre- and post-Cartesian periods.

CHAPTER 2

THE ORIGINAL VIEW: FAITH

The pre-Kantian belief that through reflection objects of consciousness are known as they really are was inherent to the writings of Greek philosophers with different metaphysical views. Drawing a connection with the 'naïve Greek ontology", Rockmore names this view the "Greek Intuitionist Approach".[7] Typical of the original view is the notion of immediate, naïve perception that Hegel praises despite this naivety as an alternative to the critical tradition, which shuts down the possibility of knowledge. Two most decisive characteristics of the original view are that it follows a model where the mind is passive and that it shows an uncomplicated faith towards the competence of this passive mind. In Hegel's words;

> It entertains an unquestioning belief that reflection is the means of ascertaining the truth, and of bringing the objects before the mind as they really are. And in this belief it advances straight upon its objects, takes the materials furnished by sense and perception, and reproduces them from itself as facts of thought; and then, believing this result to be the truth, the method is content. Philosophy in its earliest stages, all the sciences, and even daily action and movement of consciousness, live in this faith.[8]

This is the model that Kant challenged with his Copernican revolution. The relation of thought and objectivity, the subject and the object known remains passive, the object does not produce that which is known. Instead it is a mere

[7] Rockmore 1986, p.10.

[8] Hegel 1978, p.47.

observant towards the object, which has been constituted without the interference of any subjective act, and in that sense it is totally independent of it.

The difference between an active mind and a passive one, as introduced by Hegel as a paradigmatic criterion for epistemological theories will be of great interest later on for understanding the solution to the Cartesian dichotomy formulated by Marx. Hegel, a chief representative of the active view, avoids favoring any of them over the other when he compares the Kantian and ancient positions. While criticizing the naïve objectivity, whose claim for truth cannot be demonstrated, he thought that it was in some sense even superior to the critical approach, since it had at least a claim for knowledge about the world.

How did this claim develop? An inquiry on the relationship between the subject and the object known and the question of knowledge and perception in general within the history of Greek thought might give the answer.

Pre-Socratic Optimism

J. H. Lesher points to the fact that even before philosophers, poets of the archaic Greece reflected on the nature and limits of human knowledge. [9] It is with Greek poets that an awareness on the limits of human knowledge arose which showed

[9] Lesher, J.H. "Early Interest in Knowledge ." *The Cambdridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy.* Ed. A. A. Long. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

itself in terms of a comparison between mortals and divine beings, where mortals are presented as unable to grasp things in their true essence unlike -to say the least- 'more capable gods'. However, we must note that this doubt mainly arises from the limited time and space that mortals are trapped in, whereas the gods endure for eternity. Human wisdom for them is insufficient because it is mortal and not because of any doubt that it might be distorted hence qualitatively insufficient.

The original view roughly corresponds to that which Kant labeled as prior metaphysics and it differs from the Kantian / modern attitude in its confidence to assert the truth unprejudiced and uncritically. From antiquity to the modern era, knowledge has always been an issue, but not only answers also the questions concerning the extent of knowledge have gone through a radical change throughout time. Lesher calls this feeling of being limited due to being mortal and ephemeral "poetic pessimism"[10]. It is best instantiated in Epicharmus' verse "A mortal should think mortal things, not immortal thoughts."[11]

The poetic pessimism on knowledge is shared by many poets of the time. Xenophanes is quoted as saying "It is for god to know the truth but for men to opine."[12] But this poetic pessimism should be understood as directed to the

[10] Ibid.

[11] Freeman, Kathleen, ed. *Ancilla to The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1952.

[12] Ibid. p.23.

realms beyond the apparent. When it comes to the world that we live in and the nature of objects sensed, Greek philosophers were rather optimistic.

Thales who brought the first basic material principle to explain natural phenomena can be taken as the beginning of a tradition of critical rationality in the West. This tradition of critical rationality marks also the beginnings of modern science and as a scientific approach it aimed at an explanation of natural phenomena with reference to nature itself. What was implicitly presupposed by this epistemological optimism of the period was that an explanation of this sort, in fact of any sort was indeed possible. In parallel to the Hegelian idea that actual is indeed rational and vice versa, the basic presupposition of epistemological optimism was that there were some general principles that coordinated the events in nature and these principles were open to human discovery. When evaluating Thales' view of water as the fundamental substance, one should not forget that he was implicitly also affirming his reliance on his competence on discovering the fundamental substance. For Lesher, from Anaximenes to Democritus, the eminent philosophers of the pre-Socratic era who tried to give an account on the nature of the world all presented variations on an originally Milesian theme that nature operates in a regular, and therefore understandable manner.[13]

In fact many early thinkers shared the belief that knowledge on how the nature operates could be attained and they explored the conditions under which the human beings could attain it. Xenophanes who speculated on the

[13] Lesher. p.228.

fundamental materials of things was one of the first important philosophers who tried to develop a systematic thought. Peculiar to his understanding was the view that the powers of the mortal mind was limited in comparison to a divine view that sees the whole without the need to move in time or space:

> He sees as a whole, thinks as a whole, and hears as a whole.[14]

Xenophanes is also a predecessor to Plato in distinguishing between knowledge and opinion:

> And as for certain truth, no man has seen it, nor will there ever be a man who knows about the gods and about all the things I mention. For if he succeeds to the full in saying what is completely true, he himself is nevertheless unaware of it; and Opinion (seeming) is fixed by fate upon all things.[15]

Heraclitus is another major figure that dealt with the nature of things explicitly and hence also with the limits of the human mind. It is clear that Heraclitus explanation for reality and nature was different from the world as it appears to the senses and this true version of the story could be attained without any doubt if one were to listen to *logos*:

> When you have listened, not to me but to the Law *(Logos)*, it is wise to agree that all things are one.[16]

One who listens to him would find this oneness of all things in the world or *kosmos*, which is nothing but an everliving fire that we mistake for separate unchanging entities:

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[14] (Freeman) p.23.

[15] Ibid. p.23. The original words are "*ouk oide*" for to know and "*dokos*" for Opinion.

[16] Ibid. p.28.

> This ordered universe *(cosmos),* which is the same for all, was not created by any one of the gods or of mankind, but it was ever and is and shall be ever-living Fire, kindled in measure and quenched in measure.[17]

The conclusion that the world is an everliving fire can be drawn by listening to *logos* and apparently not through sense perception. What value he assigns to the sense perception remains problematic. It is clear that Heraclitus does not grant much truth-value to the obvious when he claims that "an apparent connection is stronger than the obvious one" and that "nature likes to hide".[18] One can conclude that for him this hidden nature of things are not given to immediate sense perception but neither is it entirely beyond human reach as it became with some philosophers within the modern tradition. "The eyes and ears are bad witnesses for men if they have barbarian souls."[19] yet those who have a more cultivated soul do not stop at sense perception; they can listen to the logos and analyze what they see and hear, and come up with a notion that is faithful to the reality of nature, which loves to hide.

Traditionally studied as a counterpart to Heraclitus, Parmenides excludes the role of experience more boldly. What exists is an eternal, indivisible, unmoving and unchanging whole, which can be known if one resists experience. Parmenides doesn't undergo the task of explaining what knowledge is or why we may fail to gain it however he gives some clues for a theory in which senses are not rejected but considered somehow insufficient to the knowledge of truth in a way similar to Heraclitus.

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[17] Ibid. p.26.

[18] Ibid. p.33.

[19] Ibid. p.32.

Plato[20]

It is not clear whether Hegel evaluates Plato as a philosopher who held the original view on the question of knowledge. Rockmore believes that he does not. As the man behind the cave allegory Plato definitely deserves a complicated analysis in terms of a theory of knowledge. Since a detailed inspection is far beyond our current project I will only take a brief look at the highlights of a picture that can be roughly called a platonic epistemology.[21]

The most widely known Socratic epistemological notion is his claim of ignorance in a phrase that doesn't occur in the dialogues but that has been attributed to him: I know one thing, that I know nothing. In fact Socrates never utters the phrase in any Platonic dialogue, but there are different passages where he comes very close. Apology is an example where he compares himself to someone with a claim of knowledge:

[20] All quotes from Plato are from "Plato. *Complete Works*. Ed. John M. Cooper. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997."

[21] At this point what is also beyond our current task is a distinction between Socrates and Plato. Since Socrates can be reached via the writings of Plato except for minor comments in other sources, I will treat the different positions he takes in terms of an account on the nature of knowledge, as indicators of Plato's own position developing throughout the early, middle and late dialogs.

> I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know (…)[22]

Meno is another good example:

> I myself, Meno, am as poor as my fellow citizens in this matter and blame myself for my complete ignorance about virtue. If I do not know what something is, how could I know what qualities it possesses?[23]

Maybe it was this claim of ignorance that led scholars to believe that he did not have an epistemological theory[24]. Plato's Socrates many times manipulated the interlocutor in order to raise doubts against the possibility of knowledge and there is no universal agreement whether this claim of ignorance is to be taken serious or dismissed as a provocation but there are many clues pointing to the direction that the writer of the allegory was not a skeptical in terms of possibility of genuine knowledge. An important dialogue is the transitionary Meno, which includes a bold hypothesis on that matter:

> As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it has not learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. As the whole of nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling on thing only – a process men call learning – discovering everything else for himself, if he is brave and does not tire of the search, for searching and learning are, as a whole recollection.[25]

Although relying on a problematic distinction between the immortal soul and the mortal human, Plato clearly shows he has no difficulty with the possibility of

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[22] Apology 21d.

[23] Meno 71b.

[24] See Vlastos, Gregory. "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 35.138 (1985).

[25] Meno, 81cd.

knowledge. Socrates might be ignorant himself as he claims to know nothing at all about the virtue, but his modesty is only for his mortal being. The soul knows everything; there is nothing, which it has not learned, so the man too can learn everything if he can just go deep to his soul and 'recollect' what is already there. Evaluated in light of the passage, the task of the Socratic elenchus seems to be to help us make our latent knowledge manifest.

Peculiar to Platonic view is the distinction between opinion (*doxa*) and knowledge (*episteme*). In *Meno* Socrates talks about true opinions, which 'have now stirred up like a dream'[26] The elenctic method serves to bind them to their causes: If one were repeatedly asked the same questions in various ways, at the end knowledge about these things will come, which is not very different from the true opinion bounded to a cause via recollection. Learning is just recollection, *anamnesis*. Through repeated elenctic questions the interlocutor is not only to recollect true beliefs but also to gain knowledge once he can recollect what is already known by his soul. Although true beliefs are sometimes as useful as knowledge, they are not entirely reliable until one 'ties them down by reasoning about the cause'.

For Plato, the difficulty that arises from the belief of being incomplete and inaccurate can be overcome by rationality. This view is quite different from a Cartesian demon and whether we can talk about a distortion of the senses is a curious question. On the one hand, Plat's cave allegory pioneers Cartesian

[26] Meno, 85c.

doubt, but to attribute him skepticism in the sense of the modern meaning of the term would be anachronic.

C. C. W. Taylor distinguishes between a special kind of knowledge that needs to be grounded by recollection and simple perceptual knowledge[27] that does not.[28] A great help for understanding what Plato accepts as genuine knowledge is *Theaetetus*, which provides an account of what he rejects. *Theaetetus* is a dialogue that ends in aporia after Socrates dismisses three options as the right definitions of knowledge: knowledge is not perception[29], neither true belief, nor true belief with an account. According to *Theaetetus* the soul apprehends the sensible properties by means of the powers of the body.

> Then knowledge is to be found not in the experiences, but in the process of reasoning about them; it is here, seemingly, not in the experiences, that it is possible to grasp being and truth[30]

Taylor evaluates this as following: Knowledge is not perception, not because perception lacks propositional content but because knowledge is primarily knowledge of what things are and for that perception is not sufficient, we need evaluation through reasoning, in other words access to the forms that will make us know also the instances truly rather than having unreliable opinions about them. Hence the cave allegory differs from the Cartesian scenario radically in that it is in fact an allegory. It does not denote the possibility of another realm of

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[27] Like: me seeing Socrates in front of me.

[28] Taylor, C.C.W. "Plato's Epistemology." *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*. Ed. Gail Fine. New York: Oxford University Press , 2008. 165-190. p.185.

[29] *Theaetetus* 184b-186a.

[30] *Theaetetus,* 186d.

instances that could be accessed via sense experience, rather it calls for another faculty that could go beyond the instances and reach the forms in order to gain the genuine, true knowledge.

Aristotle: There must be something beyond perception[31]

As for Aristotle, a devoted particularist, Platonists had a mistaken view on what Socrates called forms. He held that definition and form were not separate. What he shared with previous Greek thinkers was the confidence in the possibility of knowledge beyond experience. In fact the aim of theology is knowledge of *being qua being*, which is definitely not an object of experience. Rockmore evaluates Hegel's project as transgressing "the epistemological limits drawn by Kant in order to renew the Aristotelian metaphysical claim to know reality."[32]

Aristotle admits the primacy of the survival function of perception. Nature does nothing in vain and animals have the faculty of perception in order to reach for food and water. Nevertheless there is more: Perception, as a cognitive capacity is valuable in itself. This is what brings him to the essential claim at the beginning of Metaphysics:

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[31] All quotes refer to "Aristotle. *The complete works of Aristotle : the revised Oxford translation*. Ed. Jonathan Barnes. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984."

[32] Rockmore 1986, p.119.

> All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses –for even apart from other usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. [33]

Although Aristotle (similar to Plato) regards the knowledge from the senses, i.e. knowledge of particulars as inferior to a higher wisdom, he does not have an objection in terms of their reliability: "surely (the senses) give the most authoritative knowledge of particulars"[34] In fact one can accuse him of naivety for he does not feel the obligation to ground a claim for the correspondence of perception:

> I perceive that there is food over there, because there is food over there indeed. My perceptual environment is as it is. [35]

De Caelo and *De Anima* underline this pre-Cartesian, pre-Kantian confidence:

> (…) everything that is perceptible subsists, as we know, in matter.[36]

and,

> Objects of perception are external. Whether an object of perception is proper, common or accidental, it is in no way internal or mental.[37]

From the very beginning Aristotle dismisses the possibility that there might not be a correspondence between the world and our perception in accordance with his general paradigm of change conceived in terms of craftsmanship: Perception like any other capacity gives rise to an activity where a change occurs. Every change is the product of two complementary capacities and when the conditions

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[33] *Metaphysics,* I (A) 980^{a}21-27.

[34] Ibid. 981^{b}10-11.

[35] Everson, Stephen. *Aristotle on Perception* . Oxford University Press, 1999.

[36] *On The Heavens* 278^{a}11.

[37] *De Anima.*

are met, the change inevitably must occur. In that sense when a perceptive agent comes across the (right) perceptible object under the right circumstances, it is impossible for the agent not to perceive.[38] Like any other capacity, the capacity of perception is defined by reference to its object. Aristotle at this point makes the claim that what brings about change is prior to what is changed. In that sense, objects of perception -as things that bring about change in the human understanding- are prior to the capacity of perception. Objects of knowledge are prior to knowledge. In *De Anima* Aristotle simply asserts that "as a rule it is of actual things already existing that we acquire knowledge"[39] Later on, he claims that it is the same for perception.[40] In a way Aristotle's statement is very similar to what Kant came in the *First Critique* when he claimed that it was absurd to think "that there can be appearance without anything that appears".[41] However what this meant to Aristotle was quite different, for he would find it equally absurd that this thing that appears *for us* would not be "as it is" *in itself*.

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[38] p13, see Aristotle.

[39] *Categories* 7[b]25.

[40] Ibid. 8a 4-9: "But perception does not carry the perceptible. For if animal is destroyed perception is destroyed, but there will be something perceptible, such as body, hot, sweet, bitter, and all the other perceptibles. Moreover, perception comes into existence at the same time as what is capable of perceiving –an animal and perception come into existence at the same time- but the perceptible exists even before perception exists; fire and water and so on, of which an animal is itself made up, exist even before there exists an animal at all, or perception."

[41] See Critique of Pure Reason Bxxvi-xxvii: "…though we cannot *know* these objects as things in themselves, we must yet be in a position at least to *think* them as things in themselves; otherwise we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearance without anything that appears." Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. London: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1958.

A discussion that involves *The First Critique* and Aristotle would be very interesting and fruitful, still two general points can be made bypassing the hard work: First, for the Ancients, there was hardly any other way than a simplistic epistemology where the mind/soul/subject was merely receptive and fully passive. That the perceiving subject would in any way contribute to the object perceived was far beyond discussion. Secondly, and partly connected to the first; what Aristotle considers self-evident summarizes the general attitude in the ancient period, pre-Socratic and later. It is true that various forms of skepticism were present in the philosophical tradition, but they showed a great deal of difference from the modern form that was inherited from Descartes. The representatives of the original view surely had doubts concerning the extent of human knowledge, yet in many cases this remained in terms of the quantity of the knowledge that would fit into a mortals life or as it was the case with many others, the key distinction was between opinion and true knowledge, the one being superior yet not radically different from the other. In many cases, the insufficiency of the senses can be made up for by reason, (as in the case of the Cartesian wax example without indicating the radical conclusions that Descartes made from the example). One could claim that the problem of epistemological justification is specifically modern since Cartesian idea of radical deception does not fit into any of the theories discussed so far.

CHAPTER 3

REFLECTIVE VIEW: DOUBT

In *Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley points to the root of skepticism as the supposition of "a twofold existence of the objects of sense, the one *intelligible*, or in the mind, the other *real* and without the mind".[42] One should furthermore distinguish between two different but related types of skepticism. These correspond to the questions concerning existence and essence of reality: whether we can be assured that there *is* an external world and whether we actually *know* what it is like. Post-Cartesian thinkers were not free of either one, and empiricists were the ones who had one of the most interesting answers. They make the best example for the reflective view, showing a departure from the naïve original view in that they reflect upon the possibility and limits of knowledge.

Hegel treated Critical Theory and Kant under the same chapter as the empiricists, as the second attitude towards objectivity, since he claimed that Kant's postulation of the *world-in-itself* inevitably leads to the same radical doubt on the reality of the world as empiricism led to. At this point, we are not adhering to Hegel's original classification and limiting the second category to the passive-mind theories.

A principal issue for the so-called empiricists of British philosophy was in fact the problem of justification of knowledge on external objects and if we

[42] Berkeley, George. *Principles of Human Knowledge / Three Dialogues*. London: Penguin Books, 1988. p.84.

take a short chronological look at the three prominent names, Locke, Berkeley and Hume in terms of this problem we can see how Cartesian methodological skepticism developed into its opposite, the consequent skepticism of Hume. While Descartes' famous skeptical contemplations were a transitory stand before the absolute knowledge, for Hume such knowledge is impossible; yet it is also meaningless and unpractical to insist on the outcomes of the skeptical theories in everyday life. We may not be able to prove the existence of the outer worlds while we can take it for granted and live according to this presupposition without any difficulty.

Locke: Modest Metaphysics

Among the three philosophers associated with the empiricist school, John Locke differs from the successors in his claims for the possibility of objective knowledge, which make him stand closer to the Ancient tradition. For Locke, the justification of knowledge on the external world was not really an issue. In *Locke: His Philosophical Thought* Nicholas Jolley warns from reading what Berkeley and Hume later claimed into Locke, thereby treating him as meaningful only as a predecessor to more radical successors, underlining that for Locke justification of external bodies was never really a problem[43].

[43] Jolley, Nicholas. *Locke: His Philosophical Thought.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

It is true that Locke was of pioneering value to his non-dogmatic heirs as the philosopher who undermined the orthodox belief in innate ideas, but his great ambition was to improve knowledge as much as possible. In the *Epistle to the Reader* prefaced to the *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he states that we must inquire with what objects our understanding is fitted to deal with and with what objects it is not, for otherwise man would simply waste his energies and hence give rise to skepticism.

> … five or six friends meeting at my chamber, and discoursing on a subject very remote from this, found themselves quickly at a stand, by the difficulties that rose on every side. After we had a while puzzled ourselves, without coming any nearer a resolution of those doubts which perplexed us, it came into my thoughts, that we took a wrong course; and that, before we sat ourselves upon inquiries of that nature, it was necessary to examine our own abilities, and see what objects our understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with.[44]

Without doubt, it was an inquiry concerning human knowledge that Locke undertook, for he is part of the tradition that dealt with limits and possibility of knowledge. Yet although in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he seems to be developing an underappreciated answer towards skepticism, his interest in the problem was 'subordinate' to others. One important key idea concerning his real task is expressed in the *Epistle.* Locke praises great scientists of the time 'who will leave lasting monuments to the admiration of posterity':

> But everyone must not hope to be a Boyle, or a Sydenham, and in an age that produces such masters, as the great Huygeniu, and the incomparable Mr Newton, with some other of that strain; 'tis ambition enough to be employed as an under-labourer in clearing ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge; which certainly had been very much more advanced in the world, if the endeavors of

[44] Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. London: Penguin Books, 1997. p.8.

> ingenious and industrious men had not been much cumbered with the learned but frivolous use of uncouth, affected or unintelligible terms, introduced into the sciences, and there made an art of, to that degree, that philosophy, which is nothing but the true knowledge of things, was thought unfit, or uncapable to be brought into well-bred company, and polite conversation.[45]

In fact Locke's theory of substances is very similar to Boyle's corpuscular theory, which derives from the Epicurean atoms and also to modern science. Besides being the natural outcome of the scientific developments of the time, Locke's applications of the corpuscular theory is seen as a 'deliberate reaction' against Cartesian views; in any case Locke was very much informed by them.[46]

Many scholars of course claimed that he simply failed to draw the radical skeptical conclusions to which his empiricist premises entitled him and that were to be drawn later on. Being a man of moderation, his position on the realms that the human mind was not "suitably equipped to gain knowledge of" was a reasonable agnosticism rather than skepticism. He was committed to the existence of a mind-independent realm of bodies. What the human mind is bound to do was to strive to discover as much as possible concerning the undoubted reality of the objective realm, even though Locke did not believe that it was apt to get to the essence of things. In that sense Jolley underlines that his discussions of issues such as primary and secondary qualities, substances etc. were contributions to a larger, integrated philosophy of matter.[47]

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[45] Ibid. p.11.

[46] Grayling, A. C. *Berkeley: Central Arguments*. London: Duckworth, 1986.

[47] Jolley, p.56.

Like the Ancients, Locke distinguished between opinion and truth in favor of truth, stating that the one who is not satisfied with opinion but follows truth 'will reward his pains with some delight'[48]

Following Aristotle, Locke takes for granted that knowledge that is of greatest philosophical interest is both universal and necessary. In the *Essay* he is chiefly concerned to advance a body of doctrine about the basis of such knowledge. Knowledge can be the universal and necessary only if the mind, without any hindrance, can have access to the essences as they are. When it comes to mathematics and ethics, it is self-evidently clear that the human mind can have such knowledge since the essences are constructed by the human mind. Yet being a hundred years away from the Kantian-Copernican revolution Locke stops at that point and formulates a theory where the mind has an unmistakably passive role. In natural sciences, all the relevant essences are productions of nature.

Therefore he remains agnostic when it comes to the ultimate nature of external bodies as well as the mind itself. A certain amount of ambiguity is pervasive in his work, nonetheless several points are clear. What made him an empiricist is that he believed that all material for our knowledge comes from either externally from sense perception or introspection. One might call him "a modest metaphysician" since he was aware that ultimate knowledge concerning natures and essential structures of external bodies was beyond our reach and suggested that we would be satisfied with something less than knowledge.

[48] Locke 1997, p.7.

Nonetheless he never doubted the importance of developing models concerning the nature of the mind and matter. Once again we must note that agnosticism is quite different from skepticism; he had a simple scheme where ideas represent things and words stand for ideas. Experience remains the sole basis that founds all the possible knowledge.

Berkeley: Strange Commonsense

Although he explains his two aims to be to defend common sense by refuting skepticism and to defend religion by refuting atheism, the ontological outcomes of Berkeley's theory do not sound very commonsensical. According to the bishop, there exist only God, finite spirits and ideas of spirits. This implies a strict denial of the 'occult' material substance that Locke postulates without giving much detail concerning its inner nature.

Talking about going as far as banishing metaphysics, Berkeley explains how his controversial idealist arguments are to be seen as the commonsense manifested:

> I am not for changing things into ideas, but rather ideas into things; since those immediate objects of perception, which according to you, are only the appearances of things, I take to be the real things themselves.[49]

[49] Berkeley 1988, p.191.

Traditionally, Berkeley has been primarily if not chiefly evaluated in light of his reactions to Locke yet the debate initiated by Descartes plays a chief role for understanding this not very-commonsensical formulation of common sense. Indeed Grayling points to the "revival of interest in epistemological skepticism generated by the Meditations" as being responsible for Berkeley's reactions to Locke.[50]

Berkeley's central arguments constitute a new theory for the existence of God. In fact both in *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* and in *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* Berkeley states that a refutation of atheism directly follows from his position. For him, any theory concerning matter or any corporeal substance postulated as a counterpart to spirit gave rise to the idea of uncreated substances and atheism. As opposed to this essentially atheistic materialism, his idealism includes the doctrine of divine conservation, where God maintains the universe by continual act of creation.

As formulated in the previous chapter, there are two skeptical questions with stronger and weaker outcomes in terms of possible negative answers. It is possible to be able to answer the first question positively, that there is indeed an external, objective reality without answering the second one in a similar way and to end up in a weaker kind of skepticism, an epistemological rather than ontological one. What is peculiar to Berkeley's treatment of the issue is that he uses the refutation of the first question as his basis for answering the second

[50] Grayling, p. 107.

one: Ideas are things themselves, and things as ideas, without a doubt, do exist. Since they exist as ideas perceived by the mind, the question whether we have access to their inner nature is absurd or void; or rather the answer is self-evident.

For the emergence of the weaker and eventually also the stronger type of skepticism Berkeley holds responsible is the separation of the existence of things from their perception:

> So long as we attribute a real existence to unthinking things [viz. matter or corporeal substance] distinct from their being perceived, it is not only impossible for us to know with evidence the nature of any real unthinking thing, but even that it exists. Hence it is, that we see philosophers distrust their senses, and doubt of the existence of heaven and earth, of every thing they see or feel, even of their own bodies.[51]

Also in the preface to the *Dialogues* he notes that if we are not assured of the existence of things from their being perceived, there arise paradoxes and skepticism.[52] The very distinction between what there is and what we perceive is the source of skepticism; Berkeley holds that if one is to grant existence to anything independent of its being perceived one inevitably ends up in skepticism.

What he hereby denotes is the existence of experience-independent reality: If we are inevitably confined the limits of our experience, asserting anything beyond it (also something to support it, like the idea of Locke's not truly knowable substance) is not justified.

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[51] Berkeley 1988, p.85.

[52] Ibid. p.117.

For that reason, Berkeley insisted on the need for an accurate analysis of the term 'existence'. To state that a chair exists simply means that I, or somebody else, or a divine spirit such as God might perceive it at any time. It means that the chair is perceivable. This definition implies that Berkeley equates the meaning of the word 'existence' to its mode of verification:

> Let it not be said that I take away Existence. I only declare the meaning of the word so far as I can comprehend it.[53]

This is what lies underneath his claim to support commonsense. He considers himself to be in accord with the plain man whose mind has not been misled by metaphysical abstractions. The natural outcome of the view that things are simply what we perceive them to be is of course that there is no substance as bearer of any qualities, for we do not perceive anything like a substance. For Locke this meant that we do not know the inner nature of things that our ideas come from, for Berkeley that our ideas are the things themselves. This type of thinking, which one might carefully label as Phenomenalism necessarily entails theism: What supports ideas is no material substance but God.

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[53] Berkeley, George. "Philosophical Commentaries." *The Works of George Berkeley Bishop of Cloyne*. Ed. A A Luce and T E Jessop. Vol. 1. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1948. p.74.

Fairly or not, many historians consider Berkeley's philosophy the hybrid stepping-stone on the way from Locke to Hume. From Locke to Hume, the remains of rationalism is replaced by a radical anti-rationalist empiricism: for the mind there is nothing beyond perception. Even if there is something apart from sensations, we cannot prove it. When it comes to the connection of perceptions with objects, the battle is long lost:

> The mind has never anything present to it but the perceptions and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connection with objects. The supposition of such a connection is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning.[54]

Hume's position in the broadest sense included the conviction that no metaphysical justification for the natural belief was possible, and reason was useless when it came to essential explanations in terms of existence of objects of perception. An inference from perceptions has to be causal, but causality itself is unobservable and unjustifiable. We can never step out of perceptions and compare them with the unperceivable, and it is neither senses nor the reason but the imagination that leads us to the conviction that something beyond the perceivable does exist.

Yet to overemphasize the problem of justification is missing the point in Humean philosophy. Even if we are confined to the world of perceptions and do

[54]Hume, David. Enquiry concerning Human Understanding. Ontario: Batoche Books , 2000. p.106.

not have access to objects independent of that world, even if cannot prove that body exists, we cannot help believing that it does. It is in vain to ask whether body exists or not, we must take it for granted. This is a pragmatic view that attributes survival value to commonsense. And therein lies the meaning of skepticism. In *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* Hume differentiates between two types of skepticism. Cartesian methodological skepticism is directed to the faculties of the mind, questioning the possibility to attain truth. In that sense it is "antecedent to all study and philosophy"[55]. In contrast to that, there is also the "consequent skepticism" which arises after study and science, i.e. the application of those faculties, and is thus outright and absolute. Yet when it comes to matters of everyday life, it might declare itself irrelevant.

Reflection beyond Reception

Hegel explains the rise of empirical theory with the "need of a concrete subject-matter, as counterpoise to the abstract theories of the understanding"[56] Empirical philosophy's turn to experience indeed marks the abandonment of the search for truth in thought itself, it is a turn from the universal (which is doomed to remain abstract with naïve rationalist realisms) to the particular that provides theory its concrete contents and a firm footing. And therein lies the

[55] Ibid. p.103.

[56] Hegel 1978, p.60.

great principle, which became one of Hegel's starting points: "whatever is true must be in the actual world and present to sensation".[57] While praising it for introducing experience as a major epistemological category, Hegel pursues a ruthless criticism in that he points out that empiricism is in delusion when it takes a stand against metaphysics:

> (Scientific empiricism) employs the metaphysical categories of matter, force, those of one, many, generality, infinity, etc.; following the clues given by these categories it proceeds to draw conclusions, and in so doing presupposes and applies the syllogistic form. And all the while it is unaware that it contains metaphysics – in wielding which, it makes use of those categories and their combinations in a style utterly thoughtless and uncritical.[58]

For Hegel the discussion on the delusions of empiricism is also of historical importance, since he considers it the forefather of materialism. In addition to skepticism, empiricism produces materialism and therein lies the materialists dependence on the "weapons of metaphysics".

Hegel's attack on the metaphysical sources of materialism is insightful, and after almost two centuries, still relevant. Empiricist theory's insufficiency motivated many philosophers in their search for another experience-based model to justify thought's claims for objectivity. Empiricists were right in raising doubts concerning the accurateness of thought based on the naïve model of perception where mind is considered purely passive and receptive. Unfortunately these doubts were directed only towards the outcomes of such a model rather than the model itself. The difference (underestimated by Hegel)

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[57] Ibid. p.61.

[58] Ibid. p.62.

between empiricism and critical theory lies in the latters recognition of the insufficiencies of the model. Critical theory suggested a fundamentally different view of perception and understanding, and hence marked the beginnings of a new tradition, which had branches in irreconcilably different theories including idealism as well as materialism.

CHAPTER 4

THE ACTIVE VIEW: CONSTRUCTION

Critical Theory and After

What distinguishes the Critical Theory from empiricism in a radical way, which Hegel did not appreciate enough, is its constructivist insight that goes back to Hobbes and Vico before him and continues with the German idealist tradition including Hegel himself. Behind Marx's return to the 'active side' in the *Theses* lies the possible benefits that a materialism inspired by the constructivist view of knowledge can provide to theory of knowledge. Rockmore very appropriately formulates the essence of this view as the constructivist approach to knowledge:

> According to the constructivist approach to knowledge that Kant focuses, we do not uncover, discover, find, or reveal the object of knowledge, which we construct or make. In Kant's wake, and to avoid skepticism, we need to shift to a different view of the cognitive object as not already constituted but rather as constructed by the subject or subjects as a condition of knowledge. The result is view of the object of knowledge as no longer independent of, but rather dependent on, the knower.[59]

In this approach, reception, which was the dominant model of perception and knowledge from pre-Socratics on, is replaced by construction. As a major developer of this view, despite the differences at crucial points, there is no question of Hegel's debt to Kant's Copernican revolution. Hegel's awareness of the fact that reflection is an altering process, is a simple post-Kantian indication:

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[59] Rockmore, Tom. *On Constructivist Epistemology* . Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005. p.4.

> By the act of reflection something is altered in the way in which the fact was originally presented in sensation, perception, or conception. Thus, as it appears, an alteration must be interposed before the true nature of the object can be discovered.[60]

But he clearly differs from Kant in that he utterly believes that the true nature of the object can be, indeed, discovered. In §23 of *Logic* Hegel states that through reflection, the real nature of the object is brought to light, since this exertion of thought is *my* act. The 'real nature' for Hegel is nothing but a product of my mind – generated in *my* Freedom.[61]

Hegel's immense confidence in terms of the possibility of knowledge is directly connected with his critique on Kant. In *Logic*, he clearly links him to Humean skepticism, stating, "Kant did no more than offer another explanation of the fact"[62] (that characteristic of universality and necessity are found in cognition, a fact that *even* Hume was aware of).

Hegel's attack is focused on two different points: Partly, he directly attacks the outcomes of the Kantian project for merely giving the knowledge of phenomena rather than truth. At the same time, he dismisses the method as paradoxical. On the one hand, Hegel considers it an important step that the terms of old metaphysics were subject to scrutiny.[63] But "unfortunately", with Kantian critique, "the misconception of already knowing before you know"

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[60] Hegel, G.W.F. *The Science of Logic.* Trans. William Wallace. Oxford, 1978. p.34.

[61] Ibid. p.35.

[62] Ibid. p.65.

[63] Ibid. p.66.

creeps very soon[64]. He famously compares this to refusing to enter the water until you have learned to swim, a metaphor ironically echoed in *German Ideology*, this time directed to post-Hegelians[65].

The fact that the forms of thought are at once "the object of research and the action of the object" simply requires another model when one needs to avoid this paradox and Hegel therefore develops a circular view that gives room to a peculiar chronology.

The claim that history is rationally comprehensible since it is reason that "rules the world"[66], hints (in addition to the intrinsic rationality) at the circularity of Hegel's thought. Epistemological circularity, in contrast to linear views, is essentially a pre-Socratic idea that can be traced back to Heraclitus and Parmenides, and although there is a rupture with the Aristotelian teleology, it kept a certain prominence among later thinkers and is a part of many modern epistemological theories. As Rockmore rightly highlights in *Hegel's Circular Epistemology*, the anti-foundationalist circular view is highly connected with the "like knows like" attitude that pre-Socratics bequeathed to Vico, Kant and Fichte in addition to Hegel and eventually to Marx.

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[64] Ibid.

[65] See Marx 1998, p.30: "Once upon a time a valiant fellow had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they were possessed with the idea of gravity. If they were to knock this notion out of their heads, say by stating it to be a superstition, a religious concept, they would be sublimely proof against any danger from water."

[66] Hegel, G.W.F. *Philosophy of History*. Trans. J. Sibree. New York: Dover Publications, 1956

Carried to its logical conclusion, the "like knows like" attitude requires an action-based epistemology.[67] Thought itself must be in movement if it is supposed to know something that moves. Hegel suggests circularity between the Aristotelian 'subject as potential' and 'subject that is actualized'. The result is a presuppositionless theory since any attempt to state an ultimate principle for knowledge must necessarily lead to an infinite regress. Hegel expands the circular method and conceptualizes philosophy as the circle of circles.

> Philosophy as a whole grounds itself and the reality of its cognition, both as to form and as to content, within itself.[68]

The task that Hegel sets ahead of knowledge, or science as postulated to be identical to knowledge and philosophy as the ultimate circle is 'reconciliation' of consciousness with actuality which indicates passing over the Kantian limits. In *Logic* he explains, "the highest and final aim of philosophic science" may be "to bring about a reconciliation of the self-conscious reason with the reason which is in the world - in other words, with actuality". This is only possible through the harmony between actuality and experience and this harmony may be viewed "as at least an extrinsic means of testing the truth of philosophy".[69]

To overcome the dichotomy between *the world in itself* and *to us*, hence to enable the subject the access to the object, we need to overcome another cleavage. Hegel posits an identity between science and its parts and by doing so

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[67] Unless the object is reduced to a form of appearance, as in the case of certain idealist theories. For a discussion of diverse uses of the term 'idealism', see: Rockmore, Tom. *Hegel, Idealism, and Analytic Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

[68] Hegel. *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Phliosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977. p.179.

[69] Hegel 1978, p.8.

aims at securing the basis for the problem of epistemological justification. Knowledge does not rest upon fist principles that need to be justified themselves but it justifies itself through the relation of the existing part to the at-first only implicit hole. The idea is quite against the commonsense where the result of theory must justify its beginning.

The key term behind the "like knows like" attitude is a term that Hegel critically adapted from Kantian epistemology: the Experience. From the empiricists to Hegel, the meaning of the term 'experience' significantly changes. Hegel indeed praises Kant for his understanding of the two sides of experience. These are first, the individual event and second, the *a priori* constituents, necessity and universality, the contributions of the experiencing mind. His disagreement arises from the fact that, instead of defining the objectivity in terms of these constituents, critical theory subsumes the "ensemble of experience" under subjectivity, including the so-called objective components and the particular, leaving only the *thing-in-its*elf out of the picture.[70] For Hegel, objectivity in Kantian sense is doomed to remain "to a certain extent subjective"[71]. Hegel's claim for objectivity, on the other hand, depends on the subsumption of objects under a concept that can be very easily regarded as subjective: the consciousness. As products of experience, objects are products of the consciousness, which becomes the ultimate objectivity in Hegel's philosophy and this model does not tolerate anything that falls beyond the limits of this act. Hence there is no room for the Kantian *thing-in-itself*:

[70] Ibid., p. 66.

[71] Ibid., p. 67.

> The Thing-in-itself (and under 'thing is embraced even Mind and God) expresses the object when we leave out of sight all that consciousness makes of it, all its emotional aspects, and all specific thoughts of it. It is easy what is left- utter abstraction, total emptiness, only described still as an 'other-world'- the negative of every image, feeling and definite thought. (…) One can only read with surprise the perpetual remark that we do not know the Thing-in-itself. On the contrary there is nothing we can know so easily. [72]

At this point, returning to his claim for reflection's grasp of "the real nature of objects" as products of mind we can further investigate his understanding of Experience and the act that produces the object of Experience. As quoted earlier, §23 of *Logic* states that

> The real nature of the object is brought to light in reflection; but it is no less true that this exertion of thought is *my* act. If this be so, the real nature is a *product* of *my* mind, in its character of thinking subject – generated by me in my simple universality, self-collected and removed from extraneous influences- in one word, in my Freedom. [73]

It is not Hegel's idea of an *act* that determines the real nature of the object of reflection that makes him an absolute idealist he is, but rather the characteristics of that *act*. With Hegel, mind, or the Cartesian 'thinking subject' becomes the only agent responsible behind this creating act 'removed from extraneous influences'. Hegel's notion of the Absolute rises from this ground of Freedom of consciousness; the constructive faculty is attributed to the mind.

Marx's position is basically a reaction to his formulation of consciousness as the responsible agent and to its determinations. The essential change from Kant and the German idealists to Marx is that the model of construction that replaces passive reception of Ancient and mostly pre-Kantian philosophies is

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[72] Ibid., p.72.

[73] Ibid., p.35.

not kept as it is but it is replaced with a more complex model of interaction between mind and matter. Through interaction both parties become interdependent so that the formulation of a relation between subject and object becomes problematic. An interesting irony arises if we follow Hegel's categorization in *Philosophy of History*: after the original view and the reflective view, the philosophical view comes to its peak with Marx's critique of philosophers and in his dismissal of the philosophical terminology.

CHAPTER 5

THESES AD FEUERBACH

In his famous theses, mostly quoted for the revolutionary 11th Thesis which claims that so far "the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways" and what matters is actually "to change it", Marx's criticisms are mainly addressed to Ludwig Feuerbach and the so-called previous materialism that conceive "things, reality, sensuousness" merely "in the form of object or of contemplation".[74] Although not a single name other than Feuerbach himself is uttered in this short yet dense text, there is much reason to conclude that his criticism can be expanded to the history of philosophy in general. Among materialists and idealists, there is hardly any philosopher who conceived the reality exactly as it should be according to Marx: as 'human sensuous activity, practice' – as 'subjectively'.

The aim of the next chapter will be to understand what Marx meant by the *active* side, which was "set forth by idealism" although only abstractly in contrast to *passive* materialist philosophies, and how this dichotomy would fit into a bigger picture of the problem of the subject-object division as hitherto discussed.

As already stated, Marx is no way the first philosopher to conceive the reality subjectively as a result of some sort of human activity. This is a view that goes back to Vico and the German idealists, including Fichte and Hegel of which

[74] Marx 1998, p. 569.

there is not really a controversy that they have been great influences on Marx. What is an issue of disagreement between different scholars is at most the different degrees of influence they believe each of these philosophers had on young or late Marx, and this is not of any interest for our current purpose. The crucial point is that Marx carried this tradition of subjectively active theories of knowledge to a rather unexpected point, far from its idealist roots to a materialistic understanding of the world. Through that, the meaning of activity in terms of an epistemological standpoint for the possibility of objective knowledge is changed into something material and this-worldly, rather than transcendental, mental or beyond the constrains of space and time. Since for Marx any theory of epistemology or ontology -i.e. any strictly philosophical theory- was of interest as far as it had the potential to actually shape the reality, his formulation of this material activity, *praxis* as a category was meant to serve on that direction as well. But our current concern is to evaluate this category epistemologically, within the tradition of theories of perception discussed so far and vs. Cartesian duality.

The key idea that summarizes Marx's treatment of the problems that Cartesian dualism gives rise to is in the second thesis: "The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of this thinking in practice."[75] And in a way, this is what Marx is trying to prove.

[75] Ibid. p.572.

The first thesis might be interpreted as a quasi-Hegelian defense of active creation of the world by the perceiving subject over the passive, receiving perception theories - although Marx spent a lot of time before and after the spring of 1845, the date he wrote the *Theses*, developing a view that was to a large extent a critique of Hegelian ontology. The *Theses* were published posthumously in 1888 by Engels as an appendix to his book on Feuerbach with small editorial intervention, but Marx actually showed no intention to publish it himself. Written between *Holy Family* (1844-45) and *German Ideology* (1845-46), the eleven theses are structurally and thematically mixed and partly repetitive. Some are comparably comprehensive, whereas some are laconic and rhetorical and all of them are related to issues that have been or are about to be elaborated in other texts, yet this does not make them less than what they are: a great starting point for solving the most important problem of modern epistemology.

Attempting to read the *Theses* from such a point of view, as a starting point for solving a general problem, it is important to keep a certain distance from the context that might blur the lines. Nonetheless, some information will be useful for mapping the man within the traditions he is referring to without much explaining. In the Foreword to *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy,* his lifelong collaborator Friedrich Engels explains the return to Feuerbach after Marx's death as an evidently important task to finish since Feuerbach "after all in many respects forms an intermediate link between

Hegelian philosophy and [their] conception"[76]. Again, in the same book Engels refers to *Holy Family* as the clear manifestation of the influence Feuerbach and his *Essence of Christianity* had on many Hegel-influenced peers including Marx:

> Then came Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. With one blow, it pulverized the contradiction, in that without circumlocutions it placed materialism on the throne again. Nature exists independently of all philosophy. It is the foundation upon which we human beings, ourselves products of nature, have grown up. Nothing exists outside nature and man, and the higher beings our religious fantasies have created are only the fantastic reflection of our own essence. The spell was broken; the "system" was exploded and cast aside, and the contradiction, shown to exist only in our imagination, was dissolved. One must himself have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general; we all became at once Feuerbachians. [77]

In a letter to Arnold Ruge in March 1843, Marx has one criticism: "Feuerbach's aphorisms seem to me incorrect only in one respect, that he refers *too much* to nature and *too little* to politics."[78] Nonetheless, he adds that Feuerbach remains "the only alliance by which present-day philosophy can become truth."[79]

Mainly written as a reaction to the Bauer brothers, famous young Hegelians of his time wittily referred to as the 'holy family', the book published in February 1845 under the name of *The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Criticism* was indeed at the Feuerbachian track. The ruthless tone of the *Theses* that were written months after the publication of that book however, indicated

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[76] Engels, Friedrich. *Basic Writings On Politics and Philosophy / [by] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels*. Ed. Lewis S. Feuer. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959. p.176.

[77] Ibid. p.205.

[78] Italics mine.

[79] Marx 1995, pp.398-99.

that his criticism against Feuerbach, once expressed in terms of quantity was rather a sign of a qualitative shortcomings that he was about to discover soon: The problem with Feuerbach was not that he was referring *too much* to nature, but to a nature that did not exist at the time. Feuerbach used the notion as an alternative to mind that was one of the leading concepts among thinkers of the time who were dominantly Hegelian. However, this notion of nature as Feuerbach was referring to it, later became inacceptable as Marx started to part ways with this old materialism. In *German Ideology* he already defended that pure natural science was impossible, since nature was inseparable from man who changed it from generation to generation, brought it to be what it is throughout history. Therefore:

> … the nature that preceded human history, is not by any means the nature in which Feuerbach lives, it is nature which today no longer exists anywhere (except perhaps on a few Australian coral islands of recent origin) and which, therefore, does not exist for Feuerbach either.[80]

For that reason, natural science, as well as any discipline with a claim for knowledge had to take the human factor into consideration and it should take it into consideration not abstractly but as a simple concrete active force that actually changes the object of observation continuously.

This is the reason that Marx turned to idealism for help, not because he would revive the Hegelian spirit that had hardly ever perished from the German philosophical scene, but to refute the mechanistic model that materialism mistakenly adapted, to negate the negation of idealism in favor of a new philosophy.

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[80] Marx 1998, p.46.

The nature of this new philosophy, referred as the "new materialism" in *Thesis 10* has been the subject of endless discussions. Balibar who attempts to analyze Marx's work pluralistically, open to many different readings, denies that there is such thing as Marxist philosophy[81]. Rather, he regards Marx's project as an alternative to philosophy, the non-philosophy or the anti-philosophy of the modern age explaining that philosophy as Marx learned it from Plato to Hegel, including Epicurus and Feuerbach is "an undertaking aimed at interpreting the world".[82] Since Marx himself never announced a way out of philosophy, it must be discussed whether anti-philosophy is an appropriate label or not. But in terms of our current concern, his answer to the problem of the relation between subject and object, Balibar's emphasize seems helpful. From the first thesis it is obvious that Marx is a game changer: Rather than directly commenting on the nature of such a relation, he dismisses the ground of such a problem buy denouncing the very term *object*. At this point, let us take a closer look at the *Theses* to clarify what this actually means.

[81] Balibar, Étienne. *The Philosophy of Marx*. Trans. Chris Turner. London ; New York: Verso, 2007.

[82] Ibid. p.2.

First Thesis: Human activity as objective activity

The chief defect of previous materialism — that of Feuerbach included — is that things [Gegenstand], reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the object [Objekts], or of contemplation [Anschauung], but not as human sensuous activity, practice [Praxis], not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to materialism, was developed by idealism — but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects [Objekte], really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective [gegenständliche] activity. In Das Wesen des Christenthums, he therefore regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and defined only in its dirty-Jewish form of appearance [Erscheinungsform]. Hence he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary", of practical-critical, activity.[83]

The key word of the first thesis, and the key notion of a Marxist epistemology -if any such thing exists- is, without a doubt, the notion of *praxis* that has been the center of numerous discussions. Between the main dichotomy presented in the first Thesis, the one between objective and passive side and the subjective and active side, practice *seems to be* falling to the second one. But the real nature of the cleavage in the first thesis is more complicated than it seems. There is a first step where Marx seems to be immediately in favor of one side of the contest:

[83] All citations from the *Theses* are from Marx 1998.

Active Side (positive with caution)	Passive Side (negative)
idealism	previous materialism, materialism
subjectively	object [Objekt]
human-sensuous activity	contemplation [Anschauung]
active	(passive)
practice	theoretical attitude
?	appearance

Yet this is not the only dichotomy that is inherent to the first thesis. Marx merely states that, because of the 'chief defect' of previous materialisms, "it *happened* that the active side (…) was set forth by idealism"[84] rather than materialism – "but only abstractly". There is another dichotomy inherent to the first Thesis implying that the active side represented by idealism is not all there is for a perfect epistemology and that materialism which is by definition free from illusions like god or an independent consciousness has its own virtues.

Active side (negative)	Passive side (mixed)
Idealism	materialism
Abstractly	(concretely)
Conceptual objects	sensuous objects

Naturally, at first glance, the first thesis seems to be more a critique of materialism than idealism, but it is hard to miss that Marx behaves like an insider when he is aiming at the materialist part. According to Ernst Bloch, it

[84] Italics mine.

was Feuerbach and "politically empirical experience from the Rhineland period" that made Marx immune to the "mind and nothing but mind" attitude of left-wing Hegelians.[85] What he has in mind is to implement the positive elements of idealism gathered under the pro-side of the list, those elements that make it label as the *active-side* vs. the materialisms present at the time in order to achieve a new epistemology, i.e. a new theory of objectivity which will enable the possibility of attributing truth to the human thinking as formulated in the next thesis to come.

In the first thesis, there are some terms that need to be classified entirely beyond this dichotomy. First, there are three terms that are purely neutral: *Things* [der Gegenstand], *reality* [die Wirklichkeit] and *sensuousness* [die Sinnlichkeit] are used to express that thing which in a way exists before the problem of 'conception', perception or representation arises. This is what materialism and idealism, and if one would care to expand the framework, all theories of perception try to be faithful to and this is the main problem common to many, at this point formulated in Marx's terminology: How to conceive *things*, *reality* or *sensuousness* as it is?[86] Without doubt this is the elementary part of the problem of knowledge in general. In Hegelian terms, it is the problem of "actual knowledge of what truly is".

Pierre Macherey considers the three neutral words as a 'preliminary basis', 'as the materiality of the world in its immediate representation' – that

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[85] Bloch, Ernst. *The Principle of Hope*. Trans. Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight Neville Plaice. Cambridge, Mass. : MIT Press, 1995. p.252.

[86] Terms that are quoted directly from the First Thesis are italicized.

thing traditionally called 'the given'.[87] This should not be misleading, for according to the 'active philosophies' such a submission is in fact not spontaneous, but itself already constituted. Marx praises the German idealist tradition for its awareness of this constitution without agreeing on the details. According to the first thesis, the real problem with previous materialisms is that they tend to understand this given in the form of object or contemplation. The word contemplation might suggest more easily a negative connotation, however, to make a distinction between two German terms both translatable to English as object [*Objekt* and *Gegenstand*] and treat one as neutral [*Gegenstand*] while dismissing the other one [*Objekt*] is quite an original and comprehensive claim. In fact, if we look back to the traditions already discussed, we can hardly find any thinker who makes such a distinction. Also, the etymological meanings of both words suggest a similar root. *Gegenstand* - derived from the German 'entgegenstehen- to stand against' seems to be the logical translation of object – from Latin *objectus* – to throw, put against. *Gegenstand* is translated as things (which is not a literal translation but a preference by the English translator to cover what he actualy had in mind, there is also a German word (*die Dinge*) that corresponds to plural "things" better). Marx intentionally creates the difference and 'loads' the word *object* in a way that the very question of the relationship between a subject and an object is itself questioned: It is wrong to look for a relationship between the subject and the object that it represents to itself,

[87] See Macherey, Pierre. *Marx 1845 Les "Thèses" sur Feuerbach*. Paris: Editions amsterdam, 2008. p.47: "la matérialité du monde dans sa presentation immediate".

because the object as the thing that stands against the subject has a history with the subject, it stands there because it was put there.

Every attempt to reveal its inner nature without considering this history will repeat the conditions that gave rise to such a division in the first place, making the cleavage insurmountable. The choice between two terms, the Latin *object* and German *Gegenstand* might seem arbitrary but it is likely that the reason behind such a preference is that the German word for the typical German reader is not far away from its epistemological roots and still suggests an action: to put something against oneself. As suggested by Macherey, this is what one comes across, 'that which comes at first sight'. In contrast to that, object is that which comes to be after theoretical interpretation. Hence the source of the crisis of epistemological theory lies in the theory itself.

If we are not supposed to treat that thing- reality- or sensuousness as object or contemplation, how are we supposed to treat it then? Should we stop at the immediate terms or is there a way to go further without being stuck at the barriers of theory? The first thesis actually suggests a solution. In addition to purely neutral terms, it also includes the mediated positive terms, which are developed after the first two distinctions, between the positive and negative elements of the two sides. These are

1. *real / human sensuous activity as such*,
2. *"revolutionary" activity* [*Tätigkeit*]
3. *practical-critical activity*

Like human sensuous activity or *praxis* appearing on an earlier point in the distinction, the *practical-critical activity* is subjective activity that is grounded on the objective world or as he formulates it: "human activity itself as *objective* activity". Hence the possibility of an alternative to the purely theoretical "object". The critique directed at Feuerbach at the 5. Thesis is based on this new formulated phrase, human sensuous activity.

Thesis 5: Sensuousness as human-sensuous activity

> *Feuerbach, not satisfied with abstract thinking, appeals to sensuous contemplation; but he does not conceive sensuousness as practical, human-sensuous activity.*

While apparently replacing Feuerbach's sensation with practice, Marx implicitly makes a difference between two kinds of sensoriness. The first type is the contemplative sensoriness, whose outcome is the *object* in the traditional passive epistemological terms. In contrast to the first, there is the practical one. In the fifth thesis, the dichotomy is between sensuous contemplation and sensuousness as practical, human sensuous activity and (as we know from the first thesis) the latter is surprisingly the subjective side. It is crucial and should be underlined that sensuousness does not equal contemplative perception. Thus, his use of empiricist terminology should be regarded with caution.

It is clear that Feuerbach is given credit for being unsatisfied with abstract thinking. This echoes Hegel's praise of Empiricism for their critique of

previous rationalisms. Even thinking needs to start with a sensuous element; perception remains the basis for any knowledge, or else thought will remain abstract. The antonym of the term 'abstract' is never uttered in the thesis, nor is the concrete way described in detail. But the seventh thesis gives a clue why abstract thinking is insufficient and how one can go beyond abstract thinking. The seventh thesis includes a discussion of the abstract individual whom Feuerbach analyses. It remains abstract because he fails to see that it "belongs to a particular form of society" and the religious sentiment that this abstract individual develops is a social product. A concrete analysis ought to include the social conditions (which are themselves practical and material as suggested in the eight thesis and), which bring about the subject matter to be what it is. The subject matter can be a non-material being like the religious sentiment, an individual or a simple material entity like a cherry tree. To know something concretely includes the knowledge of the practical activity that makes that entity possible.

If we sum up the problem in this new analyzed terminology: What any theory of knowledge aims at doing is to ground the possibility of *conceiving* the *reality* as *objectively true,* or to resolve the question of reality of thinking. Unlike active but abstract idealism and passive and limited old materialism, the new materialism[88] will meet this task by referring to *practical-critical activity*, *praxis* rather than pure thinking. Another way of formulating the same position is the interdependent relation between objectivity and subjectivity. The problem of

[88] The term 'new materialism' will be used in the Tenth Thesis as "the new".

objectivity can only be solved only if one understands the nature of subjectivity, and vice versa.

As Macherey describes it, the first thesis basically claims that "a materialism that affirms the primacy of the objective to the detriment of the subjective is disabled"[89]. Marx's subjectivism is not idealism, as a matter of fact it precludes idealism in its dependence on simple matter and its insistence objective qualities of any subject. In the Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy, he states "the starting point", "the subject of discussion" to be "naturally" material production by individual as determined by society[90]. In *German Ideology* the materialist conception of history is further explained:

> The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way. [91]

What he means by a 'purely empirical way' might be unclear and possibly naïve. At this point we might remember that Marx praises Feuerbach for realizing that man is an object of sensuousness despite all the criticism that will follow.

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[89] Macherey p.40 « elle prend nettement position contre un matérialisme qui est seulement un matérialisme de l'objet opposé au sujet et séparé de lui un tel matérialisme, qui affirme le primat de l'objectif au détriment du subjectif, est un matérialisme mutile… »

[90] Marx 1998 p.36.

[91] Ibid. p.36-37.

Adorno's formulation of 'dialectical primacy of the object'[92] is the most helpful for understanding the reciprocity suggested by the phrase "material conditions of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity". Marx in fact proposes an understanding of subjectivity as a result of engagement with objects; subject is only possible because it is an object itself. "The existence of living human individuals" is first premise of all human history as underlined in *German Ideology*:

> Only after (having considered) four aspects of primary historical relations, do we find that man also possesses "consciousness". But even from the outset this is not "pure" consciousness. The "mind" is from the outset afflicted with the curse of being "burdened" with matter, which here makes it appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language. [93]

Adorno points to the two-fold meaning of the term 'subject', as the particular individual (as Kant uses it in *Prolegomena*) and, as consciousness in general and these two meanings are in a reciprocal relationship.[94] Once the particular subject as an object is equipped with subjective qualities the second meaning as a generalization arises. Different from the Kantian terms, this is a historical process that can be scrutinized under the title of 'production of man's material life':

> Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of

[92] Adorno, Theodor W. *The Adorno Reader* . Ed. Brian O'Connor. Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass. : Blackwell, 2000. p.137-151.

[93] Marx 1998, p.49.

[94] Adorno p.137-151.

> subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life.' [95]

Marx insists that man, his needs and the means for fulfillment of the needs are products of history. And since man is the one who produces the history, man is in a way self-produced. Production of subjectivity, an idea that might be over-praised by post-modernist thinking has its roots in this hardly ambiguous formulation by Marx. 'Production', which strangely also becomes the starting point of a theory of knowledge, is the term that both makes him come closer to idealism and simultaneously leads it away.

What enables him to introduce the term 'activity', which was surely not part of objectivist materialist epistemologies in 1845 and remain within the limits of materialism is the two-fold meaning of the term 'praxis'. If there would be a keyword connecting the Theses, it would be praxis: In the 1., 2., and 8. Theses the term 'praxis' is used, 1, 2, 4, 5, 8 and 9 include the word '*praktisch'*. Macherey follows his steps: In his dissertation Marx indeed interpreted Epicurism from a Fichtean viewpoint, which meant the incorporation of the Epicurism revisited by a philosophy of will to the tradition of materialism, which was for Macherey a problematic hybrid.[96] With *Theses*, he goes further in integrating terms such as subject and activity and invents the *objective activity* as a counterpart to the idealist versions. The motivation might be to supersede

[95] Marx 1998, p.37.

[96] Macherey.

cleavage between the I and not-I in Fichtean terms. 'Praxis' is the term that manifests shortest and clearest what he had in mind when he objected the word object as a fixed category for representing the 'things'. As referred to "human sensuous activity" in the first thesis, this category is not far away from the term 'labor' [*Arbeit*] in *1844 Manuscripts*[97]. Praxis indicates a certain kind of a relation towards the world where the world is being transformed according to practical needs of men. This act is continuous, historical, material and mental at the same time. The human mind and 'subjectivity' in the second sense of the word as 'consciousness in general' produces this is not a transcendental, spiritual act beyond time and space but it produces the world by producing chairs and tables, paper and pen, which are conditions for writing hence theorizing, expressing one's consciousness.

If we return to the dichotomies of the first thesis, the trick is that praxis falls neither to active nor to the passive/theoretical side completely. It can be the link between theory and crude objective practice if there is such thing, because it does not entirely fit to any of the two sides. *Real sensuous-activity* includes matter and mind, since an activity cannot be realized with one part only. And since man's mind has access to material capacities in a very unmysterious way, the second term, *"revolutionary" activity* becomes unproblematic. In other words, Marx can have a philosophy of will without remaining in Fichte's idealistic territories.

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[97] Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Trans. Martin Milligan. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1988.

Thesis 2: Objective truth is a practical question

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

It might be tempting to read the second thesis as a sort of pragmatist proclamation, however the differences surpass the similarities, hence a reading with from the perspective of pragmatism won't be much helpful. One should rather keep Horkheimer's critique of the instrumental reason in mind and understand that the epistemology suggested by Marx cannot be one which 'equates truth with calculations that work'[98]. Also, as argued by Nathan Rotenstreich[99], Marxist view of man as the creator of the world is incompatible with the idea of a pre-existing and essentially irrational world that man ought to adapt himself and the notion of truth accordingly.[100] The critical philosophy or 'practical-critical activity' formulated in the first thesis is meant to be a basis for practice rather than being a substitute for it. This can be best expressed with the model of unity between theory and practice. Bloch who suggests a thematic classification for the Theses suggest that the Theses 2 and 8 are read together

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[98] Antonio, Robert J. "Immanent critique as the core of critical theory: its origins and developments in Hegel, Marx and contemporary thought." British Journal of Sociology 32.3 (1981): 330-345.

[99] Rotenstreich, Nathan. *Basic Problems of Marx' Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1965.

[100] Rotenstreich's formulation is inapt as a general claim about pragmatism but rather characterizes a certain type. Scholomo Avineri extends the discussion with a comparison to William James' 'premise about the irrationality of the external world'. In: Avineri, Schlomo. *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1968 p.74

under the title of "Theory-practice-group: proof and probation" [101] The rest of the classification might be problematic to follow but the title and grouping for these two theses seem appropriate. In fact the second thesis can be seen the continuation of the 8 Thesis, which has a more general claim.

Thesis 8: Prequel to Thesis 2 - Social life is practical

> *All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.*

Social life provides the man (as it is discussed in the *1844 Manuscripts* and *German Ideology* in detail) the basis for its being. It includes the natural, economic conditions, as well as the cultural environment. Needless to say, this embraces also the antagonistic elements of the class system, which gives rise to alienation and ideology as false consciousness, but essential to the second thesis is also the view that social life is the only environment that the man dwells in. Social life does not have an antonym such as *antisocial* life; this would be against the spirit of any Marxist text. Hence the phrase 'all social life' is clearly intended as a concept as general as possible, including all the means and manifestations of theory: "morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these"[102]. In *German Ideology* Marx underlines that the terms from the list does not have a real independence:

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[101] Bloch.

[102] Marx 1988, p.42.

> (These terms) have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of this thinking. It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness. [103]

In later works Marx will dismiss these mysteries, which lead theory to mysticism as ideology. Since the thesis is mainly addressed to Feuerbach, religious mysteries that Feuerbach tried to uncover probably constitute the best example. Also the phrase "this-worldliness" is a direct reference to Feuerbach's terminology.

Again in *German Ideology*, Marx talks about phantoms formed in the brain, that are "necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable". This is at least the second time that Marx is talking about empirical verifiability, and since the question of objectivity requires that we explain the notion of empirical verifiability, we face the danger of begging the question. The mystery, which might "mislead theory into mysticism" seems to be the very possibility of empirical verifiability itself: how does a subject verify an object empirically? According to the 8. Thesis, the rational solution ought to be in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice. This is a reference to the first thesis again: The question of objectivity becomes a riddle when one misses the point that there is no object, which is isolated from the human practice.

[103] Ibid.

It is not only ideology, false consciousness resulting from division of labor and alienation, that Marx has a problem with but any conception of consciousness that is presented as pure and having independent existence. The scope of consciousness is broad, and as quoted before, no "form", also not is free from burden of matter. The passage from German Ideology continues with an intersubjective description of language, which aims to prove that consciousness is a social product. Written hundred years before Wittgenstein's *Investigations*, Marx's analysis foreshadows if not inspires the private language argument:

> Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical, real consciousness that exists for other men as well, and only therefore does it also exist for me; language like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity of intercourse with other men. [104]

Consciousness as a social product is mediated; it is necessarily the consciousness of something – the immediate sensuous environment, nature, one-self or others. But once the division of mental and material labor enters the historical scene, it starts to "flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice" [105] or that it represents something without actually representing anything real. Unlike Feuerbach, Marx believes that it is never another form of consciousness that is responsible for such an alienation, which also lies behind the emergence of mysterious phenomena such as 'pure' theory or theology. They are what they are because of the contradiction of "existing productive forces" with "existing social relations"[106]. Since the

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[104] Marx 1988, p.49.

[105] Ibid. p.50.

[106] Ibid. p.51.

difference between productive forces and productive relations has been a reoccurring subject of disagreement within Marxist circles, the phrase "existing productive forces" needs a little clarifying. Like Avineri explains in *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, a careful reading will put forth that it denotes a combination of means of labor with labor power, i.e. any kind of tools, land or infrastructure with human elements, hence it is far from implying merely 'objective' facts external to human consciousness and activity. Avineri underlines that contrary to what Engels argued, the distinction between material base and superstructure, that famously lead to reductionist readings of Marx is not a distinction between matter and spirit. The best answer to such reductionism of Marxist views is of course the *Theses* again. Specifically the third thesis.

Third Thesis: Dialectics of will and world

> *The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated. Hence, this doctrine is bound to divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society (in Robert Owen, for example).*
>
> *The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionising practice.*

Bloch rightly places the third thesis under the epistemological group dealing with perception and activity[107], whereas Macherey finds it difficult to make sense of: At first glance it does not seem to be addressed at Feuerbach as meant

[107] Bloch, p.255-262.

to be and it is not clear how one should read it.[108] The third thesis treats the problem of the formation of the subject by the external circumstances different from a necessarily deterministic abstract utopianism that depends on an epistemology presented in the first thesis: abstract, mechanistic, objectivist and deterministic and hence incapable of establishing a substantial link between the knowing subject and its object. But the key concept of the third thesis is *change* rather than *knowledge*, in that sense it is parallel to the famous last thesis that sets *change* as the ultimate objective of philosophy.

The utopian socialist Robert Owen as the example of this materialist doctrine is Engels contribution to the text; it does not exist in Marx's original version. Owen was one among many who regarded man as the product of his environment and upbringing and therefore found the solution to any social problem in education and reforms coming from sources that are privileged and separate from the subjects that ought to undergo the change. Ironically, a mechanical reading of Marx materialism has been attributed to Engels himself, and he was held responsible for some mechanistic views of materialism including that of Lenin. Avineri who criticizes Engels' *Dialectics of Nature* for treating the spirit as a biological byproduct of matter is an example. Avineri also holds Engels's views responsible for the "ultimate conservatism and quietism of German SPD.[109]

It is true that such a mechanistic view characteristic to the 18th century materialists and Feuerbach includes and optimism arising from the faith in the

[108] Macherey, p.82.
[109] Avineri, pp.65-66.

immanent and necessary progress of history disregarding the role of the active agency. Or, (as in the case of Owen) there must be some superior, privileged class independent from circumstances and upbringing, who leads the rest to salvation. Contrary to that, the central idea of the *German Ideology* is that the world can be changed by man if and only if it is man's own making. The view of men as *homo faber* is not contradictory with the view that men as products of the world, on the contrary they complete each other. "Revolutionizing practice" is the coincidence of the two.

On a different level, the twofold meaning of 'productive forces' suggests that the contradiction between social relations and productive forces, which gives rise to another contradiction between theory and existing relations is also not a relationship between purely material and mental parts. The theory arises as it is, as pure and independent in appearance because of a complicated network of relations that are mental and material, subjective and objective at the same time. The interesting consequence of such a view is that, even a thing like theory that seems purely mental has its roots in material conditions like property of land and tools or relations of production, and yet as we just underlined, Marx carefully abstains from a simplistic scheme that will suggest a one-way causation. Once we realize that practice is not an excluding counterpart to theory, but it is the material conditions arising from human practice that 'mislead theory into mysticism' and also that that human practice necessarily has the mental element to it, a phrase like "comprehension of (human) practice" does not seem to be including two separate realms anymore and it can be used without any difficulty. The 8. Thesis introduces this phrase in

direct opposition to "contemplation" from the first thesis, which is a term of negative connotations as argued earlier and this seems to be the model for any kind of understanding and (as carried further in the 2. Thesis) for "objective truth". The rationalistic tone in both of the theses is apparent. Bloch compares Marx's insistence on thought with Feuerbach, the nominalist who denigrated thought because it is general and grants sensation the ultimate place[110].

Truth

During the discussion on the first Thesis, it was argued that Marx's choice on the terms '*Objekt*' and '*Gegenstand*' might be arbitrary, nonetheless it is consistent: In the second Thesis the phrase that is translated as objective truth is "*gegenständliche Wahrheit*", from the same root *Gegenstand* which was translated as "things", the neutral term, and not as object that was dismissed as pure theory and contemplation. It is further explained; in fact the second thesis includes a definition of truth: Truth is "reality and power", also "this-worldliness" of thinking. This is a definition quite in accord with Hegelian tunes.

In *The Phenomenology of Mind* Hegel first approaches knowledge "as the instrument by which to take possession of the *Absolute*, or as the means through

[110] Bloch, p.267.

which to get a sight of it"[111]. In light of that, 'subject proper' of philosophy is defined as actual knowledge of what truly is. The words used to describe knowledge are of course chosen deliberately: "Instrument" and "possession" both suggest substantial, concrete meanings that Hegel wants to emphasize. The very idea that knowledge can give an account of something *per se* is absurd and so is the idea that between knowledge and the Absolute there is a boundary cutting off one from another:

> For if knowledge is the instrument by which to get possession of absolute Reality, the suggestion immediately occurs that the application of an instrument to anything does not leave it as it is for itself, but rather entails in the process, and has in view, a moulding and alteration if it.[112]

Even to accept that knowledge could be a passive medium would not change the fact that anything that reaches us through this medium is mediated. Any attempt to remove the contribution of the instrument is absurd, since it would only put us to the initial state where the Real was unreachable. The mediation is described in detail as a dialectic process which consciousness "executes on itself". The phenomenological knowledge arises when consciousness distinguishes from itself something.[113] From this "being for another" a being *in itself* or *per se* is distinguished. Hegel defines the "determinate form of the process of relating" to this something as knowledge and the second aspect distinguished from that thing the being *per se* of that *being for another*, as

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[111] Hegel 1967 p.131.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Note that rather than using the neutral Kantian phrase "there is something for consciousness" Hegel prefers to emphasize the active role of consciousness.

Truth.[114] And when we return to the epistemological task of inquiring the truth of knowledge, the very nature of knowledge surmounts this separation: being *per se* and *being for another* overlap when the object is knowledge. Knowledge becomes possible after a dialectic process, which consciousness executes on itself, *Experience*, and through that a new object arises. Since by the process of relating to an object per se that object is altered and ceases to be the object *per se*, the knowledge is necessarily the knowledge of an object intrinsic to consciousness: "This new object contains the nothingness of the first; the new object is the *experience* concerning the first object."[115]

The idea that knowledge is always the knowledge of experience gives him the confidence that was supposed to be lacking in Kant. Hegel connects the attempts to surpass the medium and define a realm independent from and inaccessible to that medium with the fear of error, which is the initial error. This initial error is not different from the fear of truth since it necessarily places the *Absolute* and knowledge on different sides and hence separates knowledge from the truth. For Hegel truth is something that rests in the *Absolute*, the *Real* as a whole and the goal for knowledge or "the *terminus*" is at the point where it is "no longer compelled to go beyond itself, where it finds its own self, and the notion corresponds to the object and the object to the notion"[116]. The notion that is immanent to the thinking of the subject is supposed to be compatible with the object, (or as the second thesis claims, the reality must correspond to

[114] Ibid. p.139.

[115] Ibid. p.143.

[116] Ibid. pp.137-138.

thinking), because the object only arises with the consciousness executing this dialectical process whose outcome is the *Experience* as the object of consciousness.

There are several points in this picture that enable us understand knowledge as it is conceived in the Theses regardless of whether they are in agreement or complete disagreement with Marx's view. First of all, Hegel states that knowledge independent from experience is inconceivable and this implies a bold reading: experience is that which makes knowledge possible by providing the object. The object comes into being in this process conducted by the active subject, as Marx claims in the Theses:

> On the view above given, (…) the new object is seen to have come about by a transformation or conversion of consciousness itself. This way of looking at the matter is *our* doing, what *we* contribute; by its means the series of experiences through which consciousness passes is lifted into a scientifically constituted sequence (…) [117]

However, this is also the passage where he begs to differ. "A transformation or conversion of consciousness itself" is far from the "human activity itself as *objective* activity"[118]. The words referring to that active subject "our" and "we" are italicized in the original text, it is clear that unlike Marx, Hegel's premises are not "real individuals and the material conditions of their life" but that famous, mysterious actor called consciousness whose biography will be written in detail.

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[117] Ibid. p.143.
[118] Marx 1988 p.569.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: THESES AD DESCARTES

> *The cherry-tree, like almost all fruit-trees, was, as is well known, only a few centuries ago transplanted by commerce into our zone, and therefore only by this action of a definite society in a definite age it has become "sensuous certainty" for Feuerbach.*[119]

As argued earlier, the epistemological questions after Cartesian *Meditations* radically differ from the previous ones in that the possibility of total and continuous deception had to be taken into consideration and this was a result of the sharp cleavage between the knowing subject and the object known. Revisited after the *Theses ad Feuerbach*, such a division has two basic indications and the two-part answer contributed by the *Theses* is a reaction to these.

First, Descartes failed to see that the object known was not independent of the knowing subject. Hence the criticism addressed to Feuerbach and previous materialism in the first Thesis applies to him as well:

> … things, reality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of the *object* or of *contemplation*, but *not as sensuous human activity*, *practice*, not *subjectively*.[120]

[119] Marx 1998, p.45.

[120] Ibid. p.569.

Descartes could doubt the existence of the fireplace or his own body, because he disregarded his own contribution to these *objects*. This contribution consists of a mental element in interaction with the material one, since the experience of any particular object is a subjective construction of the object. At this point Marx owes much to Hegel and German Idealism, as they owe much to Kant's Copernican revolution. With the constructivist epistemology developed by Kant, the *subjective* construction of the *object* (as Marx used the terms) was already acknowledged. Following Hegel, Marx described this process as contextual and historical. Behind his praise for idealism in the *Theses* lies the fact that the German Idealist tradition after Kant developed a model that served as an adequate critique of this subject-independent formulation of objectivity. Marx' objections to Feuerbach's view on natural sciences and one of the main ideas in *German Ideology*, that the world is man's own making, can be read, in this sense, as directed to Cartesian treatment of sense objects as isolated from and set against the senses in form of *contemplation*. Unless one appreciates the practical history of the subject that both *makes* the sense object and brings himself in a certain contact with it, the process of perception and knowledge will remain mysterious. As Feuerbach failed to recognize the practical historical circumstances that made a certain cherry tree the object of his sensuousness, Descartes fails to see the interaction between himself and the objects of his consciousness and this is the main reason behind his difficulty to make sense of the identity of the melting wax.

On the other hand, the second part of Marx' Cartesian critique deviates from the idealist tradition at a very essential point appropriating a materialist

principle: Cartesian model was also deficient because he did not treat the subject as an object. The natural outcome of the 'dialectical primacy' of object over the subject is the reckoning that the subject as consciousness can only exist because it exists as yet another physical object, but more importantly it is dependent on various objects as well as subjects other than himself. Or as Marx famously puts it: *Life determines consciousness*[121].

But as Marx' warning in the third Thesis suggests, this should not be interpreted as a mechanical, purely materialistic structure. The production of subjectivity as a dialectical process occurs through the interaction between different subjects and objects: Subject produces itself via producing the means of its subsistence and different subjects produce each other in that they produce the *life* that determines their consciousness.

Since Cartesian doubt fundamentally relies on the separation between matter and mind or the knowing subject and its object known, the answer lies in the definition of the two. For Descartes, the mind is separated from the bodily realm so strictly that it can prove its existence without reference to the other. For Marx, there is a historical interdependence that results in a continuous act of production where the subject and object produce each other. Man as subject through producing the means to his existence produces itself and no epistemology can be formulated without the acknowledgement of this very '*this-worldly'* act of production.

[121] Marx 1998, p.42.

On the one hand Marx follows the Kantian/Hegelian idea that the object of knowledge is dependent on the knower, but he tries to break away with their idealism in that he posits *praxis* as an epistemological device. As 'sensuous human activity' *praxis* goes beyond the realms of theory and practice and as long as it is not constrained by the limits of the two, it serves as a link for the two. Defined as a certain kind of relation towards the world where the world is continuously, historically, materially and mentally transformed according to the needs of the man, *praxis* provides an epistemological category that goes beyond epistemology and becomes the model for philosophy in general, since for Marx critical philosophy is essentially 'practical-critical activity'. The possibility of *praxis* as the constant interaction between theory and practice, mind and matter, knowledge and action secures two different claims with compatibly important indications. The first one is an epistemological answer to skepticism: *Mind can know the world because it can shape it*. One can well argue that after a dialectical process, the critical philosophy makes a qualified return to the original view and its (so-called naïve) claim to know.

Yet relying on this epistemological claim, there is a second one, which provides the foundation for a more assertive idea and illuminates the famous last Thesis: The opposite is also true: to a certain extent *mind can also shape the world, in so far as it can know it*.

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