

# THE QUESTION OF DIALECTICS IN MICHAEL HEINRICH'S *THE SCIENCE OF VALUE*

**GIORGIO CESARALE**

*Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage*

*Ca' Foscari University of Venice*

giorgio.cesarale@unive.it

## **ABSTRACT**

This essay engages with Michael Heinrich's *The Science of Value* (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*) on the occasion of its translation into Italian. Given the breadth of the discussion that has greeted Heinrich's significant work on Marx, this paper focuses on a specific question arising from Heinrich's method and premises: the role of dialectics in Marx's critique of political economy. On the one hand, *The Science of Value* rightly highlights how many commentators of Marx's writings resort to "dialectics" as a way to bypass the need for a more detailed reconstruction of complex and sometimes fragmentary theoretical passages. On the other hand, the nature of dialectics itself remains underdetermined in the book, despite its premises—such as the informative function of the structure of Marx's exposition—calling for greater attention to this issue.

## **KEYWORDS**

Heinrich; dialectics; science of value; contradiction; Hegel

Faced with a book as important as Michael Heinrich's *The Science of Value* in the field of the most recent interpretations of Marx, it is difficult to approach it like an anatomist dissecting a wonderfully compact body into many pieces. It is not just the rigorous coherence of the reasoning and of the structure of the argument that prevents this; the presence of a strong centre of conceptual irradiation (his interpretation of Marx's theory of value and the scientific novelty that it brings with it) would also command an attitude platonically designed to measure more the *holon* (the overall totality) than the *synolon* (the sum of the parts). Riccardo Bellofiore, however, has already handled the first task subtly and in depth in his introduction to the text (*Su alcuni problemi della teoria marxiana. Considerazioni introduttive a Michael Heinrich, La scienza del valore*). Its problematization of the relations set up by Heinrich between the theoretical field of classical political economy and that of the critique of political economy, production and circulation of value, money and money commodity, periodic crisis and structural crisis of the capitalist mode of production has already questioned *The Science of Value* along lines that I would have

liked to follow. Here I shall ask Michael Heinrich a more limited question, but one, I believe, no less significant, regarding his interpretation of Marxian dialectics.

## 1. EXPOSITION AND CRITIQUE IN DIALECTICS

Without a doubt, one of the virtues of *The Science of Value* is that of destroying, when it was not yet easy to do so (the book was first published in 1991), the idea of *Capital* as “finite theory”, to take up Louis Althusser’s expression, referring to Marxism taken as a whole. On various subjects, from his treatment of value-form to that of credit, Heinrich demonstrates the changing and sometimes fragmentary character of Marxian solutions, closely connected with the change of the original six-volume plan of *Capital* and the role that the category of “capital in general” had in it. *Contra* Rosdolsky, Heinrich demonstrates the gradual dissolution of this last category in favour of a new structure that started to make a distinction between individual capital and total social capital, which is first studied in Chapter 23 of Book I of *Capital* and led to the formation of the average rate of profit. But the changes that had taken place between 1857 (the *Einleitung*) and 1867 (when Book I of *Capital* was published), both in the individual Marxian categories and in the architectonics of the critique of political economy cannot be “reduced merely to didactic considerations, because [...] for Marx the structure of the exposition is in no way arbitrary, but conveys specific information”<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, in perfect accordance with tradition, “dialectic” is that expertise – “the most important one of all”<sup>2</sup> says Plato – that teaches us to join what needs to be joined and separate what needs separating, discovering

when one form is spread all through many, each of them standing separately, or when many forms that are different from one another are embraced from the outside by one; or again when one is connected as one through many forms, themselves wholes, or when many forms are completely divided off and separate. This is all a matter of knowing how to determine, kind by kind, how things can or cannot combine<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore. La critica marxiana dell'economia politica tra rivoluzione scientifica e tradizione classica*, ed. by Riccardo Bellofiore and Stefano Breda, Pgreco, Milano 2023, pp. 258-259; “Veränderungen der Darstellungsstruktur lassen sich aber nicht einfach auf didaktische Überlegungen reduzieren. [...] Der Aufbau der Darstellung [ist] für Marx keineswegs beliebig, sondern transportiert selbst noch spezifische Informationen” (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert. Die Marx'sche Kritik der politischen Ökonomie zwischen Wissenschaftlicher Revolution und klassischer Tradition*, Westfälisches Dampfboot, Münster 1994, p. 163). Here and below, the English translation of passages from *Science of Value* refers to both the new Italian translation of the book and its original edition.

<sup>2</sup>Plato, *Sophist*, ed. by Christopher Rowe, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015, 253c.

<sup>3</sup>Ivi, 253d.

In short, scientific discourse is possible only if it is “dialectical”, because, if forms and categories remained extraneous from each other, how could we speak coherently about them?<sup>3</sup> Heinrich is right: the structure of exposition conveys specific information, in the sense that without its unity it would be impossible to identify what is to be united, distinguishing it from what should be distinguished. The identity of systematic exposition is identity of identity and non-identity, Schelling and Hegel would say much later and in another conceptual universe. That is why “dialectical” refers to an “overall approach”<sup>4</sup>, to the capacity to unearth the totality of a discourse: “anyone who has this overall picture is dialectical. Anyone who doesn't have it is not”<sup>5</sup> Plato states drily elsewhere<sup>6</sup>.

Certainly, this has given rise to much confusion and misunderstanding, and many contrived identifications, and it is true that “many authors that appeal to Marx use the term ‘dialectical’ in an inflated sense, without clarifying what they mean by it”<sup>7</sup>. But Heinrich may break free too quickly from the need for this “overall approach”, immediately after in some way authorizing it, speaking of the structure of the exposition that supplies “specific information” on the categories that it organizes. Descending from generalities, in fact, Heinrich says that “generally the label ‘dialectical’ seems intended to underline the fact that the questions discussed are ‘contradictory’ developments and complicated interactions between different moments”<sup>8</sup>. With this there is a transition from the conjunction of what is conjoined and the non-conjoined, as a marker of the structure of the exposition, to the indication of the principle that controls its *movement*. But a dialectic that is deployed on the general forms of the category connection (the dialectic of the ancients, in simple terms) is one thing; a dialectic that tries to discover in contradiction the generative cell of conceptual or real development (the dialectic of the moderns, in simple terms) is something else<sup>9</sup>. Heinrich has no particular interest in dwelling on these aspects –

<sup>4</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 259; “als Charakteristik für dessen gesamten Ansatz” (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, p. 164).

<sup>5</sup>Plato, *The Republic*, ed. by G.R.F. Ferrari, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, 537c.

<sup>6</sup>The totalising aspect of Plato's dialectics has been highlighted by the young Marx, in his studies on Ancient philosophy: dialectics is “the torrent which smashes the many and their bounds, which tears down the independent forms, sinking everything in the sea” of totality. It fosters “the efflorescence in the gardens of the spirit, the foaming in the bubbling goblet of tiny seeds out of which the flower of the single flame of the spirit bursts forth” (K. Marx, *Notes on Epicurean philosophy*, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, vol. I: 1835-1843, trans. by Richard Dixon, Lawrence & Wishart, London-New York 1975, p. 498).

<sup>7</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 259; “viele sich auf Marx beziehende Autoren benutzen den Begriff „Dialektik“ in geradezu inflationärer Weise, ohne deutlich zu machen, was sie darunter verstehen” (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, p. 164).

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*; “Meistens scheint die Etikettierung „dialektisch“ darauf abzuzielen, daß es sich bei den angesprochenen Sachverhalten um „widersprüchliche“ Entwicklungen und um komplizierte Wechselwirkungen verschiedener Momente handelt” (*ibid.*).

<sup>9</sup>György Lukács succinctly set out this difference: “This in turn presupposes that the rigidly reified existence of the objects of the social process will dissolve into mere illusion, that the dialectic, which

though they are essential in relation to Marx – because he wants to rid himself at once of the possibility that the dialectic, once it has acquired objectivity with the idea of “contradiction”, slides towards the ontological dimension, just as in late Engels.

The only question that interests him is that of dialectical exposition as a “method of scientific explanation”, as the “logic of science” one might say, if this expression were not too implicated in a neo-Kantian philosophical vocabulary (Rickert, Lask etc.) or in neo-empiricist or neo-rationalist methodological discussions. Of course, such an interpretation of dialectics is possible, but what needs investigating is the connection with the process of constituting the “scientific field”, which rests, in the case of Althusser and Heinrich, on the distinction between “object of theory” and “real object”. In the face of this split, any dialectic is blocked, in the manner of a differentiation between constitutive context of science, context of justification and context of application, reminiscent of some movements of transcendental philosophy. It is no accident that the Habermas of the 1960s, starting from the aim of constructing a “dialectical” logic and epistemology both of the empirical-analytic and the historical-hermeneutic sciences, later turned, immediately after *Knowledge and Human Interests*, towards neo- or quasi-transcendental solutions.

However it is, Heinrich is not satisfied with analytic or neo-empiricist readings of Marxian epistemology: “these attempts at interpretation, however, assume that Marx’s dialectic does not provide scientific claims with a *specific* argumentative framework”<sup>10</sup>. Nor is he satisfied with the opposite interpretive trend, long dominant in the social-democratic movement, by which *Capital* is “a historical work”<sup>11</sup>. The

is self-contradictory, a logical absurdity as long as there is talk of the change of one 'thing' into another 'thing' - (or of one thing-like concept into another), should test itself on every object. That is to say, its premise is that *things should be shown to be aspects of processes*. With this we reach the limits of the dialectics of the Ancients, the point at which they diverge from materialist and historical dialectics. [...] The dialectics of the Eleatic philosophers certainly lay bare the contradictions underlying movement but the moving object is left unaffected. Whether the arrow is flying or at rest its objective nature as an arrow, as a thing remains untouched amidst the dialectical turmoil. It may be the case, as Heraclitus says, that one cannot step into the same river twice; but as the eternal flux is and does not become, i.e. does not bring forth anything qualitatively new, it is just a becoming that confronts the rigid existence of the *individual objects*. As a theory of the whole eternal becoming eternal being; behind stands revealed as the flowing river stands an unchanging essence, even though it may express itself in the incessant transformations of the individual objects. Opposed to this is the Marxian dialectical process where the objective forms of the objects are themselves transformed into a process, a flux. Its revolutionary character appears quite clearly in the simple process of the reproduction of capital” (*History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone, The Merlin Press, London 1971, pp. 179-180).

<sup>10</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, cit., p. 260; “Bei allen diesen Interpretationsversuchen ist aber immer schon unterstellt, daß die Marxsche Dialektik keinen *spezifischen* Begründungszusammenhang wissenschaftlicher Aussagen liefert” (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, p. 165).

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*; “historisches Werk” (*ibid.*). In our view, it is more doubtful whether Lenin, in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, can be considered representative of this interpretive tendency, as Heinrich argues. Lenin opposes the populist claim that the capitalist outcome in Russia was not inevitable by emphasizing the intrinsic connection between the generalization of commodity production

historicizing interpretation of *Capital* forgets, Heinrich rightly says, that the historical becoming of capital is different from arisen capital, i.e. that “knowledge of what has developed historically discloses knowledge of what is less developed”<sup>12</sup>. Little different, but no less open to criticism, is the parallelism between historical and logical development, as affirmed by Engels in his 1859 *Review of Critique of Political Economy*.

Those who try to “define the specificity of the dialectical mode of exposition from the perspective of Hegelian philosophy”<sup>13</sup> take a different view. Naturally, Heinrich recognizes – it is part of his “critical” Althusserianism<sup>14</sup> – that the Marx of the critique of political economy has returned to Hegel, though from a different position from that he had adopted some years earlier. The famous metaphor of the “rational kernel” of dialectic contained “within the mystical shell”, used by Marx in the “Postface” to the second edition of Book I of *Capital* is enough, in a sense, to prove it. But it is equally true that Marx’s simple “coquetting” with Hegel does not allow us to decide more precisely the nature of Marx’s theoretical debt to Hegel at this stage of his itinerary. There have been various hypotheses on the subject, about which Heinrich seems rather doubtful. He considers two of them, in particular: that of Helmut Reichelt (and many others along with and after him), who notes a structural homology between the Hegelian spirit and Marxian capital, both of which can “posit” and then absorb natural material and historical-economic material respectively, and that of Bubner, Krahl, Brentel (and many others along with and after them), who believe that Marx’s method can only be understood with reference to some forms of Hegelian logic (for example, that of determinations of reflection) that were later “transposed” into the structure of exposition of *Capital*.

On the hypothesis of Reichelt (and many others along with and after him), Heinrich, after mentioning it, does not provide further elements for evaluating it, though it is legitimate to suppose that Althusser’s split between “object of knowledge” and “real object”, which he accepts, precludes his appreciation. He intervenes more specifically, however, on the thesis of the Hegelo-Marxists, who are interested in the “transposition” of Hegelian into Marxian logic:

and capitalist relations of production – a connection demonstrated in *Capital* and empirically verifiable in Russia at the time. In this context, the logical structure of Marx’s exposition in *Capital*, explicitly referenced by Lenin, provides the framework for his argument, which is then empirically substantiated. Thus, the young Lenin’s interpretation is neither a “logicist” reading of *Capital* nor a purely “historicist” one.

<sup>12</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 261; “die Erkenntnis des historisch Entwickelten erschließt die Erkenntnis des weniger Entwickelten” (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, p. 166).

<sup>13</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 262; “[Der andere Interpretationsansatz von zentraler Bedeutung] versucht die Spezifik der Marxschen Darstellungsweise aus der Perspektive der Hegelschen Philosophie zu bestimmen” (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, p. 167).

<sup>14</sup>On this see Vittorio Morfino, *Una nota su Heinrich e Althusser*, in Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, pp. 71-86.

it is Hegelian philosophy itself that seems not to allow such a procedure, as a transposition of the Hegelian categories presupposes that the argumentative figures of Hegel's *Logic* can be separated from their speculative content, but Hegel, who saw in his logic a new, epoch-making beginning, had opposed the traditional way of viewing the question, by which logic was concerned with thought determinations that, as pure forms, needed to be filled with content later<sup>15</sup>.

On this we can certainly agree with Heinrich: in his *Logic* the concepts Hegel makes use of present a determination of content that makes them incompatible with the "pure concepts" that can be obtained by abstraction from the empirical material. In this way Hegel formulates an outlook that programmatically sets aside the polarity typical of formalist or transcendental approaches to conceptual content, between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*<sup>16</sup>. Thus, the very status of the dialectical-speculative determinations, which rest on the unity of content and form, preclude these forms from being first extracted from the *Logic* and then applied, *sic et simpliciter*, to a different material.

But if we cannot value "specific argumentative figures"<sup>17</sup> of Hegel's *Logic* and then transfer them to *Capital*, what is the root of the Marxian *kokettieren* with it? Heinrich believes that Marx adopted

a specific *state of the problematic*, but which should be drawn from Hegel's philosophy. The interpretation of the *Science of Logic* provided by Theunissen can be read in this very perspective. Starting from Marx's famous description of his work as "at once an exposé and, by the same token, a critique of the system" [...] Theunissen proposes a similar formulation for Hegel: "according to the methodological idea at its base, Hegelian logic is unity of critique and exposition of metaphysics" [...]. Leaving aside how much Theunissen's interpretation of Hegel is convincing in its details, it seems to me that only with this state of the problematic we reach the plane on which the question of Marx's relation to Hegel can be meaningfully posed<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>15</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 265; "Vor allem scheint aber auch die Hegelsche Philosophie selbst ein solches Vorgehen kaum zuzulassen. Denn eine Übertragung der Hegelschen Kategorien setzt voraus, daß sich die Argumentationsfiguren der Hegelschen *Logik* überhaupt von ihrem spekulativen Inhalt abtrennen lassen. Hegel, der in seiner *Logik* einen historischen Neubeginn sah, hatte sich aber gerade gegen die traditionelle Vorstellung gewandt, die Logik habe es mit Denkbestimmungen zu tun, die als bloße Formen erst noch mit Inhalt gefüllt werden müßten" (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, p. 169).

<sup>16</sup>The Hegel-Marx debate has been addressed in this regard by Sean Sayers, "Dualism, Materialism and Dialectic", in R. Norman e Sean Sayers, *Hegel, Marx and Dialectic: A Debate*, Gregg, Brookfield 1994 (1980), pp. 68-72 and Tony Smith, *The Relevance of Systematic Dialectics to Marxian Thought: A Reply to Rosenthal*, in "Historical Materialism", 1 (1999), pp. 220-221.

<sup>17</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 266; "bestimmter Argumentationsfiguren" (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, p. 170).

<sup>18</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, pp. 266-267; "einen bestimmten *Stand der Problemstellung*, der aber allererst einmal aus der Hegelschen Philosophie zu gewinnen wäre. Die Interpretation von Hegels *Wissenschaft der Logik* durch Theunissen läßt sich in einer solchen Hinsicht lesen. Ausgehend von Marx' bekannter Charakterisierung seines eigenen Unternehmens als „zugleich Darstellung des Systems und durch die Darstellung Kritik desselben“ formuliert Theunissen Ähnliches für

Here, I think, Heinrich's meta-theoretical reflection is enveloped in a particular difficulty: if, as is rightly assumed, partly on the basis of Theunissen's work on Hegel's *Logic*, the guiding principle of Marx's mature work is that of the unity of "exposition" and "critique", which in turn rests on the unity of content and form, that would mean that the category *order*, the very *structure* of the exposition, must be modified in correspondence with the process of *critical* determination of the content itself. Which is what Theunissen himself claims when in *Sein und Schein* he goes so far as to subsume under the *Logic's* bipartite division between objective and subjective logic, the tripartite division between "Doctrine of Being", "Doctrine of Essence" and "Doctrine of the Concept" on the basis of the thesis by which the conditions for achieving "communicative freedom" had at last been obtained in the "Doctrine of the Concept". The critique of the objectifying and reifying forms of thought typical of classical metaphysics, which happened in objective logic as a whole, and thus in the "Doctrine of Being" and the "Doctrine of Essence" together, was *one* with obtaining their inner truth; but that was simply the condition of access to subjective logic, where Hegel intended to *expound* exclusively the truth, which consisted of every category content in being-with-self-in-other<sup>19</sup>. In this respect, however, Marx is still more radical than Theunissen, as there is nowhere in the critique of political economy where the unity of exposition and critique ceases to be and to operate, as happens, according to Theunissen, in the subjective logic of the *Logic*, where the link between *Kritik* and *Darstellung*snap, wholly to the advantage of *Darstellung*. In Marx, indeed, the further he proceeds with his analysis of the phenomenic forms of the capitalist mode of production, the more the critique of the objectifying and reifying forms of thought progresses and deepens (see the critique in Book III of *Capital* of the "trinitarian formula" of classical economists). More: in Book I the change in the structure of exposition is evident, as one passes *critically* from the enquiry into value-form, where, in my view, the determinations of reflection are decisive - the theoretical determinations that in Hegel are to be found in the "Doctrine of Essence" of the *Logic* - to the enquiry into the process of accumulation, where capital's now achieved capacity to rest on its presuppositions grants it a universality that no longer needs to refer to reflective categories.

Now, can the unity required by dialectic thought between content and form, exposition and critique, constituent and constituted, category order and the categories themselves be safeguarded by the epistemological vocabulary Heinrich adopts,

Hegel: „die Hegelsche Logik ist nach der methodischen Idee, die ihr zugrunde liegt, Einheit von Kritik und Darstellung der Metaphysik“ [...]. Unabhängig davon wie gelungen Theunissens Hegel-Interpretation nun im einzelnen sein mag, scheint mir mit derartigen Problemstellungen überhaupt erst die Ebene erreicht zu sein, auf der die Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Marx und Hegel sinnvoll gestellt werden kann“ (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, pp. 170-171).

<sup>19</sup>Michael Theunissen, *Sein und Schein. Die kritische Funktion der hegelschen Logik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1978, pp. 33-40.

which reduces the Hegelian influence on Marx to a “specific *state of the problematic*”? In Heinrich’s own words, the problematic is

not simply a single research question, but rather the structure of a discourse, which generates specific kinds of questions and excludes others [...]. Different problematics can in turn be placed in relation to a *theoretical field* that lies at the base of them and that consists in a series of assumptions, mainly not made explicit but seen as self-evident. These assumptions concern the structure of the object and the possible ways of understanding it. The theoretical field thus constitutes the way in which the object of a science is given; it is the theoretical field that determines the representation of the empirical world in force at any time<sup>20</sup>.

According to Heinrich’s proposal, then, the problematic, for it to be such, is not directly linked to the structure of the object, subjected to its feedback. Between the “problematic” as “structure of a discourse” and the “structure of the object” is placed the “theoretical field”, whose assumptions, “regarded as self-evident”, mediate the relation with the empirical world. This is certainly in contrast with present-day neo-empirical and neo-rationalist epistemology, which recognizes only observations and theories and nothing else between them. But this is also in contrast with any project of dialectically forming the object with the aim of a unity between exposition and critique of it – with the result that the transformation of the given and of the observations in the content is not achieved by internal overturning of the given and the observations, an upheaval so strong as to require the intervention of a new “shape of consciousness”, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, or a new category, in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. The given is here transformed into content, as it is positioned in a new “theoretical field”, in turn subsumed under the “structure of a discourse” provided by the “problematic”. In Kantian terms, it is the mutation in Heinrich of the “conditions of possibility of knowledge” that allows the transformation of the given into content. But Heinrich does not refer to Kant directly, but rather to the historicist revision of the transcendental problematic carried out by twentieth-century French philosophy of science (Bachelard, Canguilhem, Althusser and Foucault)<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>20</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 105; “eine *Problematik* [ist] nicht nur eine einzelne Fragestellung, sondern die Struktur eines Diskurses, die bestimmte Arten von Fragen hervorbringt und andere ausschließt [...]. Verschiedene Problematiken lassen sich ihrerseits wieder auf ein zugrunde liegendes theoretisches Feld beziehen, das aus einer Reihe von Annahmen besteht, die meistens gar nicht expliziert, sondern als selbstverständlich angesehen werden. Diese Annahmen betreffen die Struktur des Gegenstands und die Möglichkeiten seines Begreifens. Das theoretische Feld konstituiert damit die Art und Weise, in welcher das Objekt einer Wissenschaft gegeben ist, es bestimmt überhaupt erst die jeweilige Vorstellung von Empirie” (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, p. 23).

<sup>21</sup>Riccardo Bellofiore describes well the deadlock reached, from a Marxian viewpoint and in alignment with Ian Hacking’s positions, by this critico-transcendental epistemology. But this interpretive insight risks immediately looking doubtful: interpreting the *Science of Logic* as “logic of science” would return him to the difficulty of relating to the very content from which he explains the need to

## 2. DIALECTIC IN THE MARXIAN CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

Heinrich's critique of the thesis of the *Übertragung*- the transposition - of the categories of Hegelian logic into the categories of the critique of political economy does not, however, exhaust his research on the peculiarity of Marxian *Darstellungswaise*. At bottom, his "minimum programme" for understanding the latter is, in one respect, close to that of Gerhard Göhler, for whom the economic manuscripts of Marx's maturity had gradually undergone a *Reduktion* in dialectic. In another respect it is close to the diagnosis of Backhaus and Reichelt, who were concerned about the "popularization" that the critique of political economy had suffered, particularly after the second German edition of *Capital*. Heinrich, however, distances himself from this diagnosis, for two reasons: the first is that in Backhaus and Reichelt

the "dissimulation" of the method is made to coincide with its modification or partial discontinuation, though this is not a necessary consequence, but needs to be investigated in individual cases; in addition, concentrating on the *Grundrisse* and the *Urtext* leaves out of consideration the fact that there were not only popularizations later, but also clarifications, so that the *Grundrisse* too may misdirect us<sup>22</sup>.

Reasonably enough, Heinrich claims that Marx's development in his maturity was uneven, neither constantly improving, as a certain orthodox Marxist-Leninist Vulgate recites, nor worsening, as judged by the *Neue Marx Lektüre*. One fixed point in all the transitions of his maturity - the "minimum programme" mentioned above - is the Marxian awareness that the working-up of observation and conception into concepts gives rise to a development, independent, as such, of the empirical world, but able to relate to it as it also acquires a universality that is not ideal or nominal, but real. On the other hand, as the modern economy is an organic system - i.e. a mutual reference to its various moments and relations - one would not know where to start to investigate it, says Heinrich. And so, one must force open (*aufsprengen*) the conceptual exposition so as to allow it to begin.

But does not appealing to the need to "force open" the exposition so as to provide it with a beginning entail an unforeseen acceleration in interpretation? After all, Marx had long reflected on the arduous commitments involving the question of the "beginning", since in the *Grundrisse* he had wanted to have a chapter

free oneself (see *Su alcuni problemi della teoria marxiana. Considerazioni introduttive a Michael Heinrich*, *La scienza del valore*, in Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 32).

<sup>22</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 268; "das „Verstecken“ der Methode mit ihrer Veränderung bzw. partiellen Aufgabe gleichgesetzt, was nicht zwangsläufig folgt, sondern in jedem Einzelfall zu untersuchen ist. Zum anderen wird mit der Konzentration auf die *Grundrisse* und den *Urtext* nicht berücksichtigt, daß es danach nicht nur zu Popularisierungen, sondern auch zu Präzisierungen gekommen ist, so daß einen auch die *Grundrisse* auf Abwege führen können" (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, pp. 171-172).

concerning the determinations of production in general, common to all modes of production, preceding his treatment of exchange-value. The conclusion he reached was that if the premise of the exposition had not been adapted to the totality of relations present in the “completed bourgeois system” – which is exactly what would have happened if the beginning had remained external, as a vector of the determinations of production *überhaupt*, to its specifically capitalist development – it would not be possible to produce any *immanent* category connection. That is to say, a fundamental *scientific* demand is deposited in the question of the beginning, despite the “theologizing” atmosphere surrounding it: if the beginning were only the beginning of something, without persistence the category immanence would inevitably be broken; conversely, if the beginning had been only the first moment, homogenous with the following one, it would not be a real beginning as it would collapse into its development. Marx perceived it acutely: in the “immense collection of commodities” with which he inaugurated *Capital* and that is really its originating moment, he needed to identify what, in becoming other, would remain the same; that is, he needed to identify in it both the “*elementary* cell” of the economic totality of relations and the factor that, by generalizing and multiplying itself, could lead each time to that totality. But, as Marx explained in an extract of the “Preface” to the first edition of *Capital*, which, though it contains important epistemological clarifications, has been ignored by the Heinrich of *Science of Value*, it is only the researcher’s “power of abstraction”, his “*Arbeitskraft*”, only his *analytical* capacities that allow this “cell-form” to be taken as a sample from the “complete body”:

the value-form, whose fully developed shape is the money-form, is very simple and slight in content. Nevertheless, the human mind has sought in vain for more than 2,000 years to get to the bottom of it, while on the other hand there has been at least an approximation to a successful analysis of forms which are much richer in content and more complex. Why? Because the complete body is easier to study than its cells. Moreover, in the analysis of economic forms neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of assistance. The power of abstraction must replace both. But for bourgeois society, the commodity-form of the product of labour, or the value-form of the commodity, is the economic cell-form. To the superficial observer, the analysis of these forms seems to turn upon minutiae. It does in fact deal with minutiae, but so similarly does microscopic anatomy<sup>23</sup>.

It is a declaration of loyalty to the “analytical method” and the link that should then join it to the “synthetic method”, whose importance Heinrich has probably reduced to avoid tackling the problems related to the transition from the second to the third part of Chapter One of *Capital*, which includes that from the substance of value to value-form. That is, Heinrich refuses to grant the analytical method the capacity to determine, in the first two sub-chapters of *Capital*, the category of value<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>23</sup>Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Ben Fowkes, vol. I, p. 90

<sup>24</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, pp. 324-325; *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, pp. 222-224.

But a “power of abstraction” must intervene in the chaotic, indeterminate totality of the “immense collection of commodities”, with which *Capital* opens, able to identify in it its “elementary unity”, the commodity – and this is the most conceptually rigorous way to escape Heinrich’s claim that the conceptual exposition was forced open (*aufgesprent*) so as to confer on it a beginning.

The interpretive radicalization around the “forced open” beginning of the conceptual exposition may, however, signal a deeper uncertainty regarding the determination of the status of the simple categories of *Capital*, those of the sphere of circulation. What, in fact, is the “simple” in Heinrich?

In the simplest category the “simple” relation is initially expressed without reference to more complicated relations. In this sense this “simple” category always contains an abstraction already. However, the determinations of the simple category are already unable completely to grasp the simple relation, and are incomplete, “full of lacunae”. At this stage of the exposition, this “incompleteness” is necessary: since it is abstracted from the relation this category has with the others, it *must* be incomplete.

The way in which the incompleteness of a category manifests itself shows at the same time how it can be remedied through a further category: the first category refers beyond itself to the second category, but that too is incomplete, until the totality of the bourgeois mode of production is expounded. In this way the “dialectical exposition” provides an *explanatory link* determined by the individual categories; the sequence of the categories, the “transition” from one category to the following one is not, then, a question of didactics, but has a specific content of information<sup>25</sup>.

This is the crux of the whole problematic connected to *Darstellungsweise*: it conveys a specific content of information because it binds the categories to each other on the basis of the need each has of the following one in that it is noetically inferior. This is not a circle, because the categories no longer simply refer to each other, but are placed in a logic of degree, by which the following category deepens and actualizes the content of the previous one, as if in a spiral. Yet, Heinrich’s reasoning seems to bear the marks of a vicious circle: if the simple *qua* simple is such because *not* complex, the presupposition of the totality to the process of its development is the only way, not only to identify what there is that is simpler, but also the reason that a

<sup>25</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 269: “In der einfacheren Kategorie wird das „einfache“ Verhältnis zunächst ohne Bezug auf die komplizierteren Verhältnisse ausgedrückt. Insofern beinhaltet diese „einfache“ Kategorie immer schon eine Abstraktion. Die Bestimmungen der einfachen Kategorie können dann aber bereits das einfache Verhältnis nicht vollständig erfassen, sie sind „mangelhaft“. Dieser „Mangel“ ist auf der erreichten Darstellungsstufe notwendig: da von der Beziehung dieser Kategorie auf die weiteren Kategorien abstrahiert wird, *muß* sie sich als mangelhaft erweisen. Die Art und Weise wie sich der Mangel einer Kategorie äußert, zeigt zugleich, wie er vermittels einer weiteren Kategorie behoben werden kann: die erste Kategorie weist über sich selbst hinaus, auf die zweite, die ihrerseits aber wiederum mangelhaft ist, solange noch nicht die Totalität der bürgerlichen Produktionsweise dargestellt ist. Damit liefert die „dialektische Darstellung“ einen bestimmten *Be gründungszusammenhang* zwischen den einzelnen Kategorien; die Abfolge der Kategorien, der „Übergang“ von einer Kategorie zur nächsten ist daher keine Frage der Didaktik, sondern besitzt selbst noch einen spezifischen Informationsgehalt” (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, p. 173).

later conceptual supplement is required. The simple, that is, is called on, by way of later additions, to produce the complex; but this has already been presupposed in the process of its production from the first. In this way, the dialectic of the process of exposition is purely *apparent*, as no real conceptual movement could, under these conditions, be ignited. Nor, in my view, is the further definition of what is simple in terms of abstraction enough to resolve the *impasse*: certainly, the abstractions with which Marx develops the first movements of *Capital* are such by virtue of their unilateral nature, their *separation* from the whole, their “incompleteness”, as Heinrich says. But if the abstract passed into the real – an old and difficult problem of philosophy since the ancients – because the former is separate from the totality, it would become an illusory *Schein* of the latter, which consequently become the true *ens realissimum*. Much of the parade of categories in Book I of *Capital*, particularly that of the sphere of circulation, would be reduced to a brilliant but fleeting play of lights, without autonomous demonstrative coherence. However, I do not believe Heinrich can accept this outcome of his argument: his interpretation of the theory of value is founded on the idea that the categories of value and surplus value are presupposed “*begriffslogik*” of the categories of profit and price of production<sup>26</sup> and so must display “strong” conceptual coherence.

The fact is that the characterization of the abstract as separate and defective, and therefore requiring later additions, is still dialectically insufficient and is not enough to produce the longed-for, immanent conceptual movement. On this, once again we must visit the long shadow of Hegel, who, in his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* illustrated in clear-cut terms the nature of the abstract, associating it with the immediate moment of the understanding of everything logically real:

α) Thinking as understanding stops short at the fixed determinacy and its distinctness vis-a-vis other determinacies; such a restricted abstraction counts for the understanding as one that subsists on its own account, and [simply] is<sup>27</sup>.

Thus, the abstract can exist inasmuch as it “subsists on its own account and is”, as such stopped by the intellect (which is *analytic* activity) in its “determinacy”, not at once sucked back into that totality of which it is only the dead skin.

In the face of such abstractions, says Hegel, two attitudes are possible, very different one from another. The first is that of

Reflection [that] is initially the transcending of the isolated determinacy and a relating of it, whereby it is posited in relationship but is nevertheless maintained in its isolated validity<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>26</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 392; *Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, pp. 281-282.

<sup>27</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic (with the Zusätze)*, ed. by T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, and H.S. Harris, Hackett, Indianapolis/Cambridge 1991, § 80.

<sup>28</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, § 81.

Reflection, external and comparative of the enquiring subject, can certainly put together the essentially isolated determinacies, but its activity does not actually damage the rigidity of the abstractions. They remain as they are and only subjectively find the means for their unification with the totality.

The second attitude, on the contrary, is that of the dialectic, which

is the immanent transcending, in which the one-sidedness and restrictedness of the determinations of the understanding displays itself as what it is, i.e., as their negation. That is what everything finite is: its own sublation. Hence, the dialectical constitutes the moving soul of scientific progression, and it is the principle through which alone immanent coherence and necessity enter into the content of science, just as all genuine, nonexternal elevation above the finite is to be found in this principle<sup>29</sup>.

What we should note here is that for Hegel the abstract is not really negative like being-for-other, as it is part of a whole that, if ignored, is outside itself; it can only pass into the concrete by way of contradiction: the abstract is in itself negative and, as such, surpassing itself in the following conceptual level<sup>30</sup>. As negative in itself, the abstract need *not* presuppose to itself the totality that it needs so as to refer to and pass over to it: it develops autonomously into something other, thus producing a real immanent category connection.

This means that to conceive *Darstellungsweise* as a unity of exposition and critique, we cannot rely only on the unilateral, imperfect nature of the abstract. We must proceed towards the conceptualization of the contradiction as the “moving soul of scientific progression”. But Heinrich recoils from this possibility: the very idea that the *Gegensatz*, the “opposition”, between use value and value is the principle of connection between the premise (the commodity) and the totality of relations of the mode of capitalist production finds no place in his interpretation:

Now, what constitutes the content of the category lacunae, or “contradictions”, that set off the conceptual development, and how the exposition proceeds, are not questions that can be defined generally or reduced to an ever-increasing “developing contradiction” (for example, between use value and exchange value, between private labour and social labour, etc.), because the “dialectical development” that should expound the connection of the object is the result of a tangible process of enquiry, not of some type of dialectical mechanism of development<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> This is one of the moments of the Hegelian dialectics that Marx claims to have retained: “it is a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation” (Postface, in Karl Marx, *Capital*, p. 103).

<sup>31</sup> Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 270; “Was nun den Inhalt der kategorialen Mängel oder „Widersprüche“ ausmacht, die die begriffliche Entwicklung vorantreiben, und in welcher Weise der Fortgang der Darstellung erfolgt, läßt sich nicht allgemein bestimmen oder auf einen sich immer weiter „entfaltenden Widerspruch“ (zwischen Gebrauchswert und Tauschwert, privater und

Though he rejects the very possibility of a category *continuum* based on “dialectical contradiction”, Heinrich is in any case right to claim that what counts is not so much, or not only, the formulation in general terms of a development mechanism, but its actual analysis, the penetration into the various relations with which the “completed bourgeois system” is studied. On this terrain the gap between Hegel and Marx becomes ever more yawning: the way in which Marx manages to set the historical and political parts (the chapter on the limits of the working day or on primitive accumulation, for example) in systematic exposition has few equals in the works of Hegel, whose system, as is well-known, wavers between adopting an independent conceptual justification and a historical justification. In the same way, one can absolutely agree with Heinrich’s critique, on this basis of the theory that the conceptual development in *Capital* can be described through a simple succession of ever-less-abstract models. In this context, it is the theoretician who must subjectively decide how to pass from one stage to the other as specific restrictive clauses fail, as would the hypothesis, which Heinrich rightly holds on to, that it is developed capitalist production in its entirety that poses its presupposition.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

In this piece I have concentrated on a question that may have less significance than others in the overall economy of *The Science of Value*, starting from those linked to the demonstration of the constitutively monetary character of Marx’s theory of value, which enables us to consider some otherwise insoluble contradictions (the “transformation problem” of values into prices, etc). On the other hand, to obtain a monetary theory of value it is, it seems to me, absolutely necessary to demonstrate the immanent (Heinrich also speaks of “temporal identity”<sup>32</sup>) character of the relation between commodity, money and capital. If this link falls short, so too does the monetary theory of value<sup>33</sup>. That is why I believe Heinrich’s caution regarding the dialectical nature of Marx’s exposition in *Capital* is not beneficial. I hope my contribution has explained the reasons for this.

gesellschaftlicher Arbeit etc.) reduzieren. Die „dialektische Entwicklung“, die den Zusammenhang des Gegenstandes darstellen soll, ist Resultat eines konkreten Forschungsprozesses und nicht Ergebnis einer irgendwie gearteten dialektischen Entwicklungsmaschine” (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, p. 174).

<sup>32</sup>Michael Heinrich, *La scienza del valore*, p. 347; “zeitlichen Identität der Existenz von Wert und Preis” (*Die Wissenschaft vom Wert*, p. 243).

<sup>33</sup>On this see Riccardo Bellofiore, *A Monetary Labor Theory of Value*, in “Review of Radical Political Economics”, vol. 20, n. 1-2 (1989), pp. 1-25.