PART 3

Bolívar Echeverría: Use-Value and Ethos
We now move on to the presentation and interpretation of our second author. While we do not in any way consider Bolívar Echeverría’s work to be merely a subsequent development of the philosophy of Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, it can nevertheless be considered on many points to represent a decisive contribution to deepening the non-dogmatic interpretation of Marx that was initiated in Mexico by Sánchez Vázquez.

In the course of what remains of this book, the following order of presentation has been chosen: in a first step, the question is to present Echeverría’s effort to concretise the concept of praxis in the contemporary context. At the beginning some indications are given about certain differences or parallels to Sánchez Vázquez’s concept of praxis, which is considered by Echeverría to be too abstract. In so doing, we will place at the centre of our investigation the two topics which constitute the core of Echeverría’s social philosophy: on the one hand, his analysis of the concept of use-value – the natural form of the social process of production and consumption – as the centre of the process of material and semiotic exchange, and on the other, his investigation, based on the first element, of the four ethe of capitalist modernity. The latter are not merely four basic moral attitudes, but rather four ways of bearing what is unbearable in ruling relations, including the various types of production and consumption of use-values.

As to the first topic: the concept of use-value, the serious analysis of which interests Echeverría, of course occupies a central position in Marx as a pillar for the creation of value, and Marx did not tire of showing that, under capitalist relations of production, the dynamic of the production of use-values is increasingly dominated by the apparently autonomous dynamic of the production of value. But the founder of the critique of political economy did not enter deeply into the culturally diverse details of these use-values produced under capitalist conditions (and the way that they continue to exist despite the increasingly perfect real subsumption to value). To put it in the language of Marx’s 1859 prologue: Capital concentrates especially on the ‘anatomy’ of bourgeois society: political economy. In so doing (to expand the medical terminology), it takes into account, moreover, psychology and neurology, and this is the critique of ideology; but what remains outside it is what corresponds to the ear, nose, and throat specialist and to internal medicine. The latter correspond

1 Marx does, of course, enter into the details of the deterioration of use-values in general within the ruling economic system; for example, in Capital he notes that the bread eaten by English industrial workers in the period in question consisted of an ever higher proportion of ingredients that have nothing in common with cereals, salt, spices, yeast, water, or milk, which is to say the traditional components of bread (See Marx 1976a, p. 278 n14).