‘The Circular Course of Our Representation’: ‘Schein’, ‘Grund’ and ‘Erscheinung’ in Marx’s Economic Works

Igor Hanzel

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to deal with the methodological aspects of Marx’s economic works, and here especially with the ways he proceeds from a certain cluster of concepts of political economy as a science to other ones. I start with a short overview of Marx’s procedures in Capital Volume I leading to the manuscript ‘Chapter VI. Results of the Immediate Process of Production’ and show how they correspond to a circular type of theory-construction.

For a better understanding of this type of theory-construction, I then analyse Hegel’s logico-categorial reconstruction of the movement of scientific knowledge from Schein via Wesen to Erscheinung as given in his Science of Logic and I show how Marx draws on Hegel’s category-clusters Schein, Wesen and Erscheinung, and their orderings. Based on this account I also propose a translation into English of the category-pair Schein and Erscheinung that takes into account these peculiarities. Because I make this proposal only at the end of this chapter, I shall use throughout my text the German terms for this pair as well for categories that are related to it. As the primary source for the quotations I will use the texts published in the MEGA edition; all the quotes in English are my translations from German. For a better understanding of the categories employed by Marx, I insert into the English quotations in square brackets the corresponding German terms in their basic, for example, infinitive form. In the English translations of quotations from Hegel’s Wissenschaft der Logik I use the German terms for those categories. In order to distinguish the categories of cognition from their linguistic expressions, I put the former in italics and the latter in quotation-marks. I capitalise those categories which stand for clusters of categories.

Finally, I give an epistemological account of the category-pair Schein and Erscheinung with respect to Marx’s economic works together with a

---

1 This paper was written with the support of the grant VEGA, number 1/0221/14.
description of the peculiarities of German syntax in relation to that pair. Based on this account, I propose an interpretation of the term ‘subject’ from Chapter IV of *Capital* Volume I, and of chosen sections in Marx’s manuscripts used by Engels in the publication of *Capital* Volume III.2

1 Marx’s ‘Circular’ Logic of Theory-Construction

Marx starts Chapter I of *Capital* Volume I, with the following statement:

> The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears [erscheinen] as an ‘immense collection of commodities’; the individual commodity appears as its elementary form. Our investigation therefore begins with the analysis of the commodity.3

Then, in a sequence of steps he subjects the commodity to a series of analyses, based on which he reduces in thought the exchange-value of a commodity to its value-character, and then in turn derives the concepts of exchange-value and money as a form of exchange-value. This enables him also to move to understanding how surplus-value is produced. All these steps, finally, lead, or to be more precise (if Marx had stuck to his initial plan), should have led, to ‘Chapter VI. Results of the Immediate Process of Production’. Its most important aspect, from the point of view of this chapter, is what Marx labels as ‘Cirkellauf unsrer Darstellung’, that is, the ‘circular course of our representation’4 with respect to what should have been the end of the first volume of *Capital*:

> The commodity, as the elementary form of bourgeois wealth, was our point of departure, the prerequisite for the emergence of capital. On the other hand, commodities appear now [erscheinen] as the product of capital... If we consider societies of developed capitalist production, the commodity appears [erscheinen] in them as the constant elementary

---

2 See Marx 1992 and Marx 2012. I would like to thank Dr Gerald Hubmann from the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin, Germany, for enabling me to access the manuscript Marx 2012 shortly before its publication.

3 Marx 1987d [1872], p. 69, Marx 1976c [1867], p. 125. The term ‘erscheinen’ appears in the German original only once, not twice as in the English translation.