

ATENEO DE MANILA UNIVERSITY

**MARX'S IDEALISM:
THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE *ECONOMIC AND PHILOSOPHIC
MANUSCRIPTS OF 1844***

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BY

VINCENT L. CASIL

QUEZON CITY, PHILIPPINES

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The THESIS entitled:

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submitted by Vincent L. Casil has been examined and is recommended for **Oral Defense**.

REMMON E. BARBAZA, Ph.D.

Chair

JEAN EMILY P. TAN, Ph.D.

Adviser

JONATHAN O. CHUA, Ph.D.

Dean

School of Humanities

Comprehensive Examination Passed: September 7 and 14, 2013

The Faculty of Department of Theology, School of Humanities, Ateneo de Manila University ACCEPTS THE THESIS entitled:

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submitted by Vincent L. Casil, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, major in Philosophy

AGUSTIN MARTIN G. RODRIGUEZ, Ph. D.

Member

MICHAEL NER E. MARIANO Ph. D., Cand.

Member

PRECIOSA REGINA A. DE JOYA Ph. D.

Member

JEAN EMILY P. TAN, Ph., D.

Adviser

JONATHAN O. CHUA, Ph. D.

Dean

School of Humanities

Grade: Very Good

Date: April 27, 2017

ABSTRACT

The issue on whether the epistemological view of Engels and the Marxists can be identified to Marx opens the question on what Marx's actual view on knowledge. This debate on Marx's epistemology is divided between realist and idealist interpretation of his texts: the former reads that for Marx knowledge is a copy of an independent reality existing outside of man, while the latter views that for the same philosopher, knowledge is in some sense constructed by the subject. This study contributes to the discussion by closely reading the epistemology of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. The *Manuscripts* contain important epistemological remarks that are subject of scholarly debate. The scope of the study aims to read the texts on their own terms, and through that, avoid the reductive readings of Marx that plague his interpretations. Through this approach, this study argues that Marx in the *Manuscripts* conveys an idealist epistemology based on his concept on how human need shapes human cognition. Marx further develops this idealism in the texts in his critique of political economy, where he shows that this science is grounded on the estranged need. In the end, this study underscores that the *Manuscripts'* idealism shows a part in Marx's thinking that underlines the role cognition plays to address forms of estrangements brought by the structures of private property. It highlights how Marx empowers man as capable of resolving the estrangements in the society through the development of both action and cognition.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Discussions on Marx's epistemology usually start with a distinction between Marx and Marxism.¹ Marx's scholars clarify that Marx's actual view on knowledge should be distinguished from Marxism, despite the common impression that they are the same.² Marxism, which is both a theoretical and political movement, popularized a realist and positivist interpretation of Marx, which become the prominent reading of Marx's

¹ Tom Rockmore, *Marx after Marxism: The Philosophy of Karl Marx* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2002), xii; John Torrance, *Karl Marx's Theory of Ideas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xii – xiii; Erick Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1961), 1-7; Walter L. Adamson, Introduction to *Marx and the Disillusionment of Marxism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 1-3; Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 1; Bhikhu Parekh, "Marxism versus Marx: What Marx's Theory of Ideology Was Not," in *Marx's Theory of Ideology* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1982.), 1-28; Czeslaw Prokocznyk, *Truth and Reality in Marx and Hegel* (New York: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 1-39; Frederic L. Bender, "Marx, Materialism and the Limits of Philosophy," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 25, no. 2 (Feb. 1983): 79.

² Views that Marxism and Marx are the same: Vladimir Lenin, *Materialism and Empirico-Criticism* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1972); Mao Tse-Tung, "On Practice, On the Relation Between Knowledge and Practice, Between Knowing and Doing (July 1937)," in *Selected Works of Mao-Tse Tung* (New York: Pergamon Press Inc., 1965), 295-310; Georgi Plekhanov, "Fundamental Problems of Marxism," in *Selected Philosophical Works*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976); David Myers, "Marx's Concept of Truth: A Kantian Interpretation," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (June 1977): 316-318. Scholars who criticize the view that Marx and Marxism are the same: Rockmore, "On Distinguishing Between Marx and Marxism," in *Marx after Marxism*, 1-4; Prokocznyk, *Truth and Reality in Marx and Hegel*; Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, 2-4.

philosophy.³ This prevailing view was established by the Marxists who declared that Marxism is a philosophy developed and rooted in Marx's thought. As Lenin puts it, "Marxism" is "the system of the views and teachings of Karl Marx."⁴ It is a system of views and teachings continuous to what Marx has thought.

The term "Marxism" was introduced by Lenin's teacher Georgii Plekhanov, who is a Russian Marxist philosopher. It denotes a political movement primarily held by the Soviet Marxists who thought that what they practically realizing were Marx's ideas. In its theoretical aspect, Marxism holds the view that is referred as dialectical materialism, again popularly identified to Marx.⁵ Stalin defines this view as the "the outlook of the "Marx-Leninist party."⁶ This outlook is a hybrid of enlightenment's mechanistic and materialist view plus the Hegelian dialectical logic viewed as the deterministic laws of nature. It is a scientific theory of historical development of society, governed by the deterministic law of contradictions that will culminate in a political revolt against the capitalist society and usher in a new socialist state.

Under dialectical materialism, Marxists' concept of knowledge is understood in the framework of realist epistemology. This epistemology is an offshoot of their materialism that views reality as purely matter independently existing from man. The

³ Rockmore provides a good discussion of the development of the ideas of Marxism. Rockmore, "Hegel, Marx, and Marxism," in *Marx after Marxism*, 1-37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵ Gustav Welter, *Dialectical Materialism: A historical Systematic Survey of Philosophy in the Soviet Union* (London: Routledge, 1958).

⁶ Joseph Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1940).

independent existence of matter suggests that its cognition can be only grasped in a realist sense, which is through creation of a mental copy of the material reality. Lenin summarizes this realist view in *Materialism and Empirico-criticism* where he describes that Marx is a realist in so far that he views reality as “outside of us and [exists] independently of us.”⁷ It means that for Marx cognition consists of a correct reflection of an independent material reality, different from what Lenin calls as “Berkeleyanism,” which is the view that ideas are the basis of knowledge and reality. Lenin underscores that Marx sees that reality is matter independently existing of the mind and not a mere creation of the mind.

The major ideas of Marxism, however, were not derived from Marx but primarily from Engels’ and other Marxists’ writings.⁸ For example, the authorship of dialectical materialism is credited to Joseph Dietzgen who have used the term for the first time in a work published in 1887.⁹ Four years after, the term would be used again by Plekhanov in his work the *Development of the Monist View of History*.¹⁰ His scholars argue that neither Marx in his texts used the term dialectical materialism nor developed its

⁷ Lenin, *Materialism and Empirico-Criticism*, ff: 47, 78, and 146.

⁸ On the influence of Engels to the interpretation of Marx on the concept of ideology, John Torrance, “Marxism versus Marx: What Marx’s Theory of Ideology Was Not,” in *Karl Marx’s theory of ideas* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-28. On Engels setting a misleading context of interpretation of Marx: Czeslaw Prokopczyk, “Philosophical Sources of Marxism in Engels’ Retrospection,” in *Truth and Reality in Marx and Hegel* (New York: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 1-40; Rockmore, “Marx and Engels,” in *Marx after Marxism*, 8-10; Terrell Carver, “Marxism as method,” *After Marx* (1984): 261-279.

⁹ Tony Burns, “Joseph Dietzgen and the History of Marxism,” *Science & Society* 66, no. 2 (2002): 202-227.

¹⁰ Georgi Plekhanov, *The Development of the Monist view of History* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1947).

deterministic and scientific views.¹¹ The source of determinism and scientific views prevalent in the sphere of the Marxists were influenced not by Marx but by the rise of positivism in nineteenth century.¹²

Aside from that, the deterministic and scientific view of Marxism were mainly developed by the Russian Marxists, such as Plekhanov, Lenin, and Stalin, through a series of meetings of International Congress of Worker's Association across Europe, commonly called as Internationals.¹³ These Internationals were discussions of theories, practices, defeats, victories, and directions of the workers' movement. Engels played as the main theoretical figure in these meetings after the death of Marx in 1883, shortly after the demise of the First International. Russian Marxists, such as Plekhanov and Karl Kautsky, became the central theoretical figures in the meetings after Engel's death in 1895. Influenced by Engels, they defended the deterministic and scientific form of materialism and established dialectical materialism and its implied realist epistemology.

Engel's dominance as the spokesperson of Marx's theories set him as the primary source of Marxists' understanding of Marx.¹⁴ The Marxist realist interpretation of Marx was based from Engels who first took the task of showing Marx's philosophical and

¹¹ Rockmore, *Marx after Marxism*, 6.

¹² On the origin and development of the scientific point of view in Marxism: Paul Thomas, *Marxism & Scientific Socialism: From Engels to Althusser* Vol. 10 (New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹³ G.D.H. Cole, *The Development of Socialism During the Past Fifty Years* (London: University of London Press, 1952).

¹⁴ Engels' dominance during the Internationals is always being noted. John Torrance, "Engels and the Marxism of the Second International," in *Karl Marx's theory of ideas* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3-10; Rockmore, *Marx after Marxism*, 3.

epistemological views, since Marx's promise of writing a clear and sustained articulation of his epistemology did not materialize.¹⁵ Marxists assume that Engels correctly understood Marx's ideas, based on the myth that both are joint authors because of their close relation starting in the 1840s. Engels was Marx's friend, closest collaborator, and an important source of financial help. Both also collaborated in the famous works, such as the *German Ideology* and *Communist Manifesto*, which advocate their political program to emancipate man from the injustices of the industrial society. The popularity of Engels' interpretation to the Marxists is further increased by Engels' easy literary style that is more conducive and understandable for reading rather than Marx's own philosophical prose.¹⁶

Engels published his theoretical views in *Anti-Dühring* and more importantly in the *Feuerbach and the Classical Conception of Philosophy*.¹⁷ In these texts, he describes Marx as a realist based on his materialist reading of his philosophy. As a materialist, Marx is viewed as holding the idea that the ontological status of reality is matter and neither spirit nor idea. Engels built a realist epistemology based on this materialism, as it implies that matter independently existing from human mind can be only theoretically grasped by mentally copying the independent matter. With his articulation of materialism, has provided rudiments for the Marxists dialectical materialism and the

¹⁵ Allen Wood, "Philosophical Materialism," in *Karl Marx* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 165-194. Wood's reading often cites Engels and even justifies Engels' interpretation.

¹⁶ Rockmore, *Marx after Marxism*, 9.

¹⁷ Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1946); Friedrich Engels, "Anti-Dühring," in *Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works Vol. 25* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1987).

realist interpretation of Marx. His reading points out that the dialectical logic is an independent law that governs reality, which means that, as he explains, the whole discovery of dialectical movement is a reflection of how nature actually exists in reality. The dialectical law is not a subject-dependent law but an objective law independent of the human mind: “dialectic of concepts itself” are “merely the conscious reflex of the dialectical motion of the real world.”¹⁸

But Engels’ realist epistemology, which was influential to the Marxists, cannot be ascribed to Marx. Engels and Marx are two different thinkers. Although the two collaborated in some works, it does not follow that both held the same views. For example, Engels holds a clear concept that materialism is the view that matter is the fundamental reality but it is less clear in Marx. Marx even criticizes certain type of materialism, because it lacks the active subjective side of practice and views that reality is merely a form of “object” for “contemplation,” a reality that can be described but cannot be changed. In the *Theses*, Marx positions himself against materialism. For him,

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, 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.¹⁹

More importantly, Engels’ and Marxist’s view of Marx were developed out of the limited works of the philosopher, since their conception of Marx was already established

¹⁸ Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, 2.

¹⁹ Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), 143.

before the publication of Marx's important philosophical writings, such as, the *Theses on Feuerbach*, *Grundrisse*, and *Manuscripts of 1844*. Aside from that, there were also political issues involved in the publication of Marx's writings. Marx's writings and its translation were being suppressed when its views contradict the official view of Marx by political Marxists. Some translations were even modified to support the view of the official Marxism.²⁰ Both reasons show the inadequate knowledge of Engels and the Marxists in their articulation of what they consider as Marx's philosophy.

Given the condition in which Marx's philosophy and his view on knowledge have been articulated, the question of Marx's epistemology – what is Marx's epistemological position as derived from his actual texts and not from Engels' and Marxism's primer?—remains pressing. Addressing this issue, this work partly contributes in answering the question by showing the epistemology of Marx as established in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. This work addresses the lack of literature that closely treats the epistemology of the *Manuscript* in view of its concepts that emerged in its distinct context. Commonly, the *Manuscripts* were read in conjunction with the other writings of Marx, where its claims were used to merely support Marx's claims from his

²⁰ Dick Howard, "On Deforming Marx: The French Translation of 'Grundrisse,'" *Science and Society* 33, no. 3 (1969): 364. An example for this case is the French translation of Marx's *Grundrisse*. In the article, *On Deforming Marx: The French Translation of Grundrisse*, the author argues that the translation falsifies the text to fit in to "The Party's" view of Marx and make it readable. As the author points out: "This 'concern' for the readability of the text is important. But the translator tries to make it even more readable by making it fit into pre- conceived notions of 'Marxism'- or rather, into what seem at times to be 'The Party's' views on what Marx should have said! This is a harsh indictment. Yet, the further one reads, the more evident it becomes that the translation is not simply inaccurate, but that there is a deliberate falsification of the text in a distinct direction. This is not a result of reading Marx's nineteenth-century German with twentieth-century eyes; the 'updating' is political, not linguistic." Cf. Rockmore, *Marx after Marxism*, 11.

other writings or to back up an overall interpretation of Marx's epistemological views of Marx.²¹ Both approaches, however, have problems in terms of showing what the actual claims of the *Manuscripts*.

The extent of the study is certainly small, given its focus on a single text of Marx. But this humble scope aims to articulate an aspect of Marx's epistemological view, which could contribute in understanding Marx's overall view on knowledge. The importance of focusing in the *Manuscripts* cannot be exaggerated, since clarifying its epistemological view highlights the thoughts of Marx that are absent in Marxism's and Engels' appropriation but are crucial in the development of his philosophizing. In accomplishing this task, the work recovers Marx's ideas lost because of the confusion emerges out of the popularity of Marxism and the issues on the late publication of his texts, which includes the *Manuscripts*.

The *Manuscripts* are among Marx's writings crucial in his epistemology, yet these texts were absent in Engels' and Marxism's interpretation of Marx. The first publication of the *Manuscripts* appeared in 1929 more than three decades after Engels' death, when the conception of realist Marx was already established.²² In the English speaking world, its first English version was published 1959 when there were already established interpretation of Marx. Fromm refers to this issue of late publication of the *Manuscripts*

²¹ This reading is observable in the readings of Wood, Kolakowski, Myers, and Bender. Wood, "Philosophical Materialism," 165-194; Leszek Kolakowski, "Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth," in *Toward a Marxist Humanist* (New York: Grove, 1968), 38-66; Myers, "Marx's Concept of Truth: A Kantian Interpretation," 315-326; Bender, "Marx, Materialism and the Limits of Philosophy," 79-100.

²² Rockmore, *Marx after Marxism*, 12.

as one of the reasons why Marx's philosophy was misunderstood in the English speaking countries.²³

The importance of the *Manuscripts* in understanding Marx's epistemology is evident on the significant number of its passages that express Marx's view on knowledge. Kolakowski thus is right in his advice that the texts should be appreciated not only on their concept of alienation but also on their "epistemological content."²⁴ Besides the popular concept of alienation, the *Manuscripts* also contain how Marx supports the naturalism and humanism of Feuerbach. This idea is important for Fromm, because it makes evident that Marx is a naturalist and humanist and not a materialist as how Marxism commonly understood him. This naturalism and humanism, for Fromm, fought the type of "mechanical, 'bourgeois' materialism," which is, as he quoted Marx, the "abstract materialism of natural science that excludes history and its process"²⁵ Aside from Feuerbach's ideas, the *Manuscripts* also contain Marx's critique of political economy and Hegel's concept of cognition elaborated in the *Phenomenology*, where Marx provides some discussion on concept of science, theory, and cognition.²⁶ The texts, as what is shown later, also have some of Marx's explicit articulations of his views on truth, knowledge, objectivity, and consciousness, which have been cited by both realist and idealist scholars of Marx to establish their interpretation of Marx's epistemology.

²³ Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, 5.

²⁴ Kolakowski, "Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth," 38-66.

²⁵ Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, 9.

²⁶ Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in *Karl Marx Early Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 379-400.

The *Manuscripts*, however, are being questioned on the quality of its content, since it is intended as Marx's first draft.²⁷ The texts are best described as part of Marx's Paris notes and his studies during his stay in Paris from 1843 to 1845.²⁸ Because of its condition, the *Manuscripts* contain Marx's thoughts at the nascent period: its writing is rough and sketchy, and its topics digress from one to another. It also contains lengthy quotations, a characteristic of a work, which, as Musto describes, is a "position in movement,"²⁹ a writing that is in a thinking process since the texts were drafted at the period when Marx was still searching for his own stand and voice. Because of the quality of its writing, the *Manuscripts* are being doubted on whether ideas are worth studying and whether it could represent Marx's thinking. Its critique on political economy is charged as an incomplete attempt to criticize political economy and its analysis of Hegel's speculative philosophy is criticized as a misinterpretation of Hegel's dialectics and concept of alienation.³⁰

Aside from its sloppy writing, the *Manuscripts* are also beset with editorial concerns, because the texts were not ready for publication and had been long hidden in

²⁷A description of the *Manuscripts* is provided by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Vol. 3 Karl Marx March 1843 – August 1844* (New York: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980), 598.

²⁸ Cf. Marcello Musto, "Marx in Paris: Manuscripts and Notebooks of 1844," *Communications*, trans. Patrick Camiller, *Science & Society* 73, no. 3 (July 2009): 386-402.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 392.

³⁰ Rockmore, *Marx after Marxism*, 45; Michael Evans, "Karl Marx's First Confrontation with Political Economy: The 1844 Manuscripts," *Economy and Society* 13, no. 2 (1984): 115-152.

Marx's desk.³¹ The texts are troubled by missing pages, titles, and questionable structure. Because of this condition, their first publication in the *Marx-Engels Gaustambede* (MEGA) in 1932, close to five decades after Marx's death, is produced out of some editorial decisions and contributions. The second Manuscript, for instance, misses large portion of its text, since the editors only recovered pages 40 to 43 of the second *Manuscripts*, which means that these pages are part of a 43-paged notebook, and there are 39 missing pages. Aside from the missing parts, the titles of the *Manuscripts* are also merely added by its editors. Marx only added the roman numerals page numbers. But the editors further added the title *Heft II* and *Heft III* to the second and third *Manuscripts*, since Marx has only ascribed the title *Heft I* to the first manuscript.³²

There is also a great concern about the overall structure of the *Manuscripts*, especially on the arrangements of its parts.³³ The final version of the *Manuscripts* was produced partly from its editorial reconstruction. The editors decided the order of its sections, because the *Manuscripts* were structured in an unusual form of discontinuous writing. The texts were not written in a continuous flow in a single notebook, rather its first 27 pages were divided into three columns, with the title Wages of labour, Profit of Capital, and Rent of Land, each title referring to Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. There were

³¹ Marx and Engels, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Vol. 3*, 598.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

also editorial problems in the first 41 pages of the third Manuscript, as Marx often digressed from one subject to another.³⁴

But despite these concerns, the *Manuscripts* remain to be a crucial text in understanding Marx's thinking and his epistemology. The texts' publication, as Althusser acknowledges, is a "real event."³⁵ Rockmore also maintains that although Marx's writings here is less developed, the *Manuscripts* are still important texts, since "...taken as a whole, this collection of texts [the Manuscripts] provides an astonishingly mature, more developed discussion which, [...] has become central to understanding Marx's position. It is a text, he continues, "of great power and originality, marking the place early in his writings where Marx, only several years after receiving his doctorate in philosophy, has already found a fresh and original voice."³⁶ Rockmore's descriptions of the *Manuscripts* are no exaggerations. The texts' discovery and publication have opened fresh insight to Marx's philosophy, which was dominated by Marxist interpretation. The *Manuscripts'* concepts of man and alienation have provided a starting point for the development of Marxian humanism and existentialism in Marx's philosophy.³⁷ In reference to the *Manuscripts'* claims, Marx is interpreted as calling for a humane society reacting against the dehumanization of capitalism. These existentialist and humanistic insights from Marx are crucial especially because Marx's philosophy is being identified with the violence

³⁴ Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," 127.

³⁵ Louis Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso, 2005), 155.

³⁶ Rockmore, *Marx after Marxism*, 54-55.

³⁷ Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, v - vii

committed by the various Marxist movements.³⁸ Marxian humanists and existentialists offer alternative readings of Marx that challenges the simplified interpretation of his philosophy based from Engels and Marxism.³⁹

More importantly, the *Manuscripts* are critically important works, because they contain Marx's first attempt to lay the ground for his new thinking more concerned with socio-economic condition.⁴⁰ These writings stand as a crucial turning point in the overall development of Marx's philosophy brought by his Paris experience. Before 1844, Marx was still a student of metaphysics and philosophy and Hegelian philosophy had been his concern. But after a year, within his three years stay in Paris, he would be developing something in his outlook as he would be in the process of giving birth to a thinking that uncovers the ground of the estranged society.⁴¹ Marx's Paris experience served as a fertile ground for the turning point and transformation of his philosophy. His stay in Paris, as Struik describes, would turn Marx, an "academic metaphysician clothed in an obscure technical language," into a philosopher that would carry the "theory that would shake the world, and carry a message not only understandable by the fisherman and the peasant, the industrial worker and the student, but also one calling them into action."⁴²

³⁸ Ibid., viii and 6.

³⁹ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vintage, 1968); Mark Poster, "Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser," *Telos* 1976, no. 30 (1976): 224-226; Norman McLeod, "Existential Freedom in the Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre," *Dialogue* 7, no. 1 (1968): 26-44.

⁴⁰ Marx and Engels, *Marx & Engels Collected Works Vol. 3*, 598.

⁴¹ Musto, "Marx in Paris: Manuscripts and notebooks of 1844," 386-402.

⁴² Dirk J. Struik, "Marx's Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," *Science & Society* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1963), 283.

The *Manuscripts* carry a Marx's novel thinking that addresses the problems of his time. Particularly, they contain Marx's first encounter of the science of political economy, his discussions of the alienated condition of the proletariat, his account of its resolution through communism. The texts also include Marx's critical engagements of the important ideas of the period such as his reappraisal of Feuerbach's naturalism and humanism and his critical reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and its speculative philosophy.⁴³

The rich content of the *Manuscripts* has become a space where various interpretations of Marx's epistemology have risen.⁴⁴ In general, two competing readings of the epistemology of the text have been proposed: the first reads the texts as having a realist epistemology, which asserts that the characteristics of reality that human beings know exist independently outside of the human subject; and the second interprets the work as having an idealist epistemology, which views that the characteristics of reality that human beings know are dependent and constructed by the human subject.

Different scholars have been using different passages from the *Manuscripts* to establish their interpretation of Marx's epistemology. Kolakowski, for instance, suggested that Marx in the *Manuscripts* expresses an idealist epistemology by inferring from the concept of "humanized nature" Marx developed in the text.⁴⁵ He underscored that the humanization of nature involves cognitive behaviour where human being

⁴³ Ibid., 283.

⁴⁴ Kolakowski, "Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth," 38-66.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 44.

modifies and categorizes nature to satisfy human needs. This point suggests that for Marx nature is cognitively understood and organized in accordance with how it could best satisfy human beings. Kolakowski interpreted that the epistemology of Marx involved “[t]he assimilation of the external world, which is at first biological, subsequently social and therefore human,” and this assimilation occurs as “an organization of the raw material of nature in an effort to satisfy needs.”⁴⁶ For Kolakowski, Marx thinks that human beings assimilate the world by organizing its objects cognitively to satisfy their needs.⁴⁷

Aside from Kolakowski’s idealist reading of the *Manuscripts*, Wood reads the same text differently as expressing a realist epistemology by emphasizing the text’s assertion of “ontological objectivity of nature.”⁴⁸ With this concept, he interprets Marx in the lines of Engels’ realist reading asserting that Marx also “avows a vulgar realist position very bluntly.”⁴⁹ He further underscored that Marx’s texts are best interpreted as asserting that knowledge is based from the independent reality rather than knowledge dependent to man, because “the objects of human consciousness and human drives ‘exist outside [the human being] as objects independent of him.’”⁵⁰

To further support his realist reading, Wood cites how Lukács’ encounter of the *Manuscripts* and its concept of objectivity of nature had changed his initial idealist

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Wood, “Philosophical Materialism,” 190.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 191.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

conception of Marx.⁵¹ In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács is renowned to pioneer an idealist reading of Marx based on emphasizing the influence of the Hegelian dialectical categories in his philosophy. The claims in the *History and Class Consciousness*, however, were recanted after Lukács' encounter with the *Manuscripts*. In his words, his reading of the *Manuscripts* in 1930s "swept to one side" his "idealist prejudices" of Marx. He explained that *Manuscripts'* assertion that "objectivity was the primary material attribute of all things and relations...completely shattered the theoretical foundations" of his Hegelian reading of Marx.⁵² What he was referring at are the parts of the *Manuscripts* where Marx emphasizes the objectivity of things, which indicate Marx's leaning to realist rather than idealist epistemology.

In view of the debate over the *Manuscripts'* view on knowledge, this work argues that the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* express an idealist epistemology as their claims suggest that our knowledge of reality is subject-dependent. Knowledge, as the *Manuscripts* express, is grounded not only on the independent reality existing outside the subject, but further shaped by the type of subject's need dominant in a particular society.

This form of idealism being ascribed to the *Manuscripts* must not be confused with the other concepts of idealism, such as the uncritical idealism Marx adamantly criticized in the *Manuscripts*. The first chapter of this work "The Question of Marx's Epistemology and the Conflation of Idealisms" clarifies this confusion in the term

⁵¹ Ibid.,190.

⁵² Georgy Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: The Merlin Press Ltd., 1971), xxxvi.

“idealism.” It tackles the difficulties of how the term “idealism” is inconsistently used in the discussions of Marx’s epistemology, and then delineates between ontological and epistemological idealism. This chapter explains that the notion of idealism that is being ascribed to Marx is epistemological and should be understood in the context of the development of Kant of Post-Kantian tradition. Epistemological Idealism’s assertion that knowledge is in some sense constructed by the subject is clearly different from the realist understanding of idealism mainly as an ontological assertion that says that the fundamental reality is idea. Epistemological idealism is also different from the Berkeleyan idealism that views that mind creates reality, because this idealism neither suggests that idea is the fundamental reality nor idea is the creator of reality.

The Epistemological idealism being argued in this work is based on the method of reading the *Manuscripts* on its own terms and in its own context. This reading is important to underscore given that there are problematic approaches that impede the proper understanding of the text. The second chapter, “The *Manuscripts* and the Reductive Readings of Marx,” discusses the issues about the proper approach to the *Manuscripts*. It precisely addresses the issue on how the texts are read reductively in view of the later works of Marx and of the assumption of a “unified Marx,” i.e. that there’s an overall unity in Marx’s philosophy. Addressing these issues, the chapter shows that the *Manuscripts* should be read on its own context, because this approach focuses on understanding what the texts actually have to say, avoiding the problem of reducing the *Manuscripts* to Marx’s later writing and the problem of the contentious assumption of a unified Marx.

After clarifying idealism and addressing the issue of how to read the *Manuscripts*, the third chapter, “The Epistemology of the *Manuscripts*,” is focused on showing the *Manuscripts*’ idealist view on knowledge. This chapter sets this assertion in the context of Marx’s relation to Hegel and Feuerbach. It shows how Marx is criticizing Hegel’s idea while affirming Feuerbach’s naturalist-humanism. The epistemology of the *Manuscripts* is contextualized on how Marx discovers the human and natural ground of cognition like how Feuerbach has revealed the natural foundation of the idea God in the natural needs of man.

After the context is set, the third chapter argues that Marx holds an idealist epistemology in the *Manuscripts* by showing that: (1) Marx views the cognition of reality as subject-dependent, where knowledge is understood as a human construction out of their need that emerge in a particular society. Knowledge is conceived out of Marx’s discussion on how an object is dependent on the subject’s need; (2) Marx’s critique of political economy in the *Manuscripts* highlights the texts’ idealist epistemology. The critique reveals the subjective dependence of certain science – in this case, political economy – in the needs dominant in a certain social condition. Marx, for instance, identifies this estranged need of private property as what shapes the claims of political economy.

As the idealist epistemology of the *Manuscripts* has been established, the succeeding parts of the third chapter are tasked to further clarify Marx’s idealism. They address the issues on the thing-in-itself and the realist reading of the *Manuscripts*. The section, “The Dissolution of the thing-in-itself in Practical Standpoint,” shows that despite the semblances with Kantian idealism, the *Manuscripts*’ epistemology does not

have any concept of thing-in-itself. This section further discusses the similarities and differences between Kant's idealism and Marx's version of it. Aside from the issue of thing-in-itself, the section "The Errors of the Realist Reading of the *Manuscripts*" addresses the arguments of the realist reading of the text, because they contradict the textual evidence given in the *Manuscripts* and simplifies the categories where Marx's view is only read between the concept of uncritical idealism and realism.

This study concludes by emphasizing the revolutionary implication of the *Manuscripts*' epistemology. In the last section, "The Revolutionary Cognition: the *Manuscripts*' Role in Changing the Society," it underscores that the recognition of how the subjective condition affects the subjects' cognition calls for a redirection of science. Marx suggests that sciences and theories must not be simply understood as a pursuit to discover what is out there. Given the *Manuscripts*' idealist epistemology, the concerns of cognition must be redirected so that it is driven to realize the essential needs of the human being and to direct its inquiries to the practical concern of man. Hence, to provide a more humane cognition, Marx is not advocating that our knowledge should provide an exact copy of an objective reality, what he is rather aspiring is the redirection of our cognition so that it is grounded on a need that seeks to realize a humane reality.

CHAPTER II

THE QUESTION OF MARX'S EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE CONFLATION OF IDEALISMS

The term “idealism” itself is ambiguous given its rich philosophical history, which can be found in the writings of Plato, Berkeley, Kant, Hegel and others.⁵³ These philosophers have used the term differently, depending on their own context, view, and intention. Its various usages range from the assertion that the fundamental reality is idea; or the aspiration for a better world; or the contention that ideas are primary over matter. As what will be presented in this chapter, the ambiguity of this term remains even when employed in the discussion of Marx's view on knowledge, which includes the epistemology of the *Manuscripts*. In general, the debate whether Marx holds an idealist or a realist epistemology shows the different senses where the term idealism is used and highlights how it is inconsistently employed in the discussion of Marx's epistemology. Thus, the clarification of the term is necessary, as it illuminates the discussion of Marx's view on knowledge.

In surveying the debate on Marx's epistemology, the term idealism plays a critical

⁵³ A survey of different forms of idealism from Ancient, Early modern, German Idealism, British Idealism, and the contemporary concept of the term can be read on the book, Jeremy Dunham, Iain Hamilton Grant, and Sean Watson, *Idealism: The History of a Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

role in establishing the distinct positions in the discussion. The Marxian idealists⁵⁴, for instance, conceives the concept of idealism as the interpretation to defend, while the Marxian realists⁵⁵ think of the idea of idealism as the position to contrast their reading. The realist Marx articulates the concept to show why their realist interpretation is more acceptable than the other readings of his text.

The same sense of importance for this term can be also seen in readings the *Manuscripts*. Not only that the idea provides Marx's scholars a conceptual tool to grasp what Marx meant in his text, the term is even mentioned by Marx himself in his text to describe the thinking he criticizes and even perceives in moribund state. This Idealism, for him, connotes the loss of the empirical world at the expense of the world of ideas. He explicitly conceives the term as "uncritical idealism" he identifies to the Young Hegelians.⁵⁶

Addressing the ambiguity of the term, this chapter clarifies the idealisms that have emerged in the debate on Marx's epistemology: ontological and epistemological idealism. *Ontological* idealism⁵⁷ claims that idea is the fundamental reality, while

⁵⁴ Kolakowski, "Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth"; Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*; Myers, "Marx's Concept of Truth: A Kantian Interpretation."

⁵⁵ Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*; Lenin, *Materialism and Empirico-Criticism*; Wood, "Philosophical Materialism"; Georgi Plekhanov, "Fundamental Problems of Marxism"; Mao Tse-Tung, "On Practice."

⁵⁶ Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" ff: 359, 381, and 385.

⁵⁷ The term ontological idealism can be also seen defined in Theo AF Kupers, "General Introduction: Epistemological Position," in *From Instrumentalism to Constructive Realism: On Some Relations between Confirmation, Empirical Progress, and Truth Approximation* (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2013), 1-10. Here, Kuper defines ontological idealism

*epistemological idealism*⁵⁸ suggests that knowledge is dependent upon the subject, which means that the subject, in some sense, constructs the characteristics of the known reality.

Given the two concepts of idealism, this chapter elucidates that Marxian idealists precisely defend the epistemological than the ontological. This clarification is important to avoid the tendency of realist Marx to simplify idealism merely as an ontological claim and to untangle the confusions in the conflated understanding of the two senses of idealism, which besets the debate on Marx's epistemology. In the end, although this chapter distinguishes the epistemological idealism from the other senses of idealism, it does not suggest that it is the correct epistemology of Marx. It merely sets the terms of debate and shows the actual meaning of these senses of idealism so that they are not rejected out of misinterpretation.

Epistemological Idealism

The first idealism to be discussed can be termed as epistemological idealism. This idealism holds a constructivist view on knowledge, which claims that what we know is in some sense produced or constructed by the subject. It holds that knowledge is subject-dependent, which means that it is constructed or modified by the subject. This idealism appears in the readings of Marx's epistemology by Kolakowski, Avinerri, and Lukács who suggest that knowledge is in some sense a human construct.

as referring to Berkeley's philosophical position that negatively answers the philosophical question: "Does a natural world that is independent of human beings exist?"

⁵⁸ The term is clearly defined in Alfred C. Ewing, "Epistemological Idealism," in *Idealism: A Critical Survey* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 11-60.

Epistemological idealism can be traced from Kant's critical philosophy that culminated in a shift – akin to Copernican revolution. Kant shifted the source of knowledge from the object being reflected to the subject to subject constructing what can be known. Contrary to the Aristotelian epistemology commonly held during that time, Kant reconceived knowing from the Aristotelian idea that the object is the source of knowledge to the idea that subject is the ground of knowledge. Kant's philosophy is concerned with the transcendental logic, which intends to inquire on the condition of knowledge as produced by the subject. By focusing on this inquiry, he conceives that human knowledge is limited to *phenomena*, i.e. to what is sensed and conceptualized by the faculties of consciousness and not to *noumena* i.e. to what the reality actually is.

German Idealism took the Kantian epistemological view and extended it to complete and deepen Kant's Copernican revolution. The ahistorical transcendental subject of Kant was criticized by Hegel and turned into a historical subject.⁵⁹ He contended that we should realize that subjects are social beings who are products of the historical development of social reason. Post-Kantian idealists and more importantly Hegel historicized the subject and showed that the condition of knowledge is not universal but historical.

There are differences in Kant and the Post-Kantian tradition, but both remains epistemological idealists in so far that both holds a constructivist view of knowledge, where knowledge is in some sense constructed and produced by the subject. This form of

⁵⁹ Karl Ameriks, "Introduction: Interpreting German Idealism," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-17; Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

idealism should be distinguished from the idealism that aspires for a better – or ideal reality – from the present poor and unjust condition. Although Marx is driven with this goal, as he seeks for the emancipation from a dehumanized society and aims for a better political and economic condition, this idealism just the popular sense of the term often related to being optimistic and clearly not epistemological.

Epistemological Idealism is also different from Berkeley's idealism, which conceives that reality is based on perception. Berkeley famously remarks that "to be is to be perceived," which means that the mind creates reality on the moment of its perception. The ultimate mind for Berkeley is God, a being who perceives, thus creates, everything, even things that are imperceptible to human mind. This form of idealism, which is said to have been adopted by the British Idealists such as F.H. Bradley, was rejected by a long line of 20th century analytic thinkers, including Bertrand Russell and the late Wittgenstein.

Contrary to Berkeley's idealism, epistemological idealism no way asserts that mind can ultimately create reality. Epistemological idealism only maintains that the subject modifies what it can know, but it does not assert that the mind has the capacity to create existence for it can only modify the perception of an already existing reality.

Hence, epistemological idealism should be differentiated from ontological idealism. Ontological idealism asserts that the nature of reality is fundamentally idea, which is often contrasted with materialism, which views the reality as fundamentally matter. Although there is an interpretation that epistemological idealism implies ontological idealism, since a subject-dependent-knowledge could suggest that even the "knowledge of existence" could be a mere idea of the subject, the epistemological

idealism by itself, as a claim about knowledge, does not necessarily lead to ontological idealism. Epistemological idealism only maintains a subject-dependent-knowledge, which is clearly not an ontological idealist assertion.⁶⁰

The Conflation of Idealisms in the Realist Reading

It is important to distinguish epistemological idealism from the ontological version of the term, since the lack of delineation between these two idealisms does not only lead to misinterpretation of the two idealisms but also to a lack of appreciation of idealism primarily in the epistemological sense, which what the Marxian idealists are proposing. This problem, which is what argued in this chapter, plagues the realist reading of Marx, as they fail to clearly draw distinction between the two conceptions of the term. The realists limitedly define idealism only as an ontological claim, without acknowledging the epistemological sense of the term. This neglect of the concept of epistemological idealism weakens their realist reading of Marx, since they fail to provide a correct counter-argument against the proposed idealist reading.

Before expounding on how the realists conflate idealisms, there are important things that first need to be said on their ideas. The realist reading of Marx focuses on his epistemology and it asserts that knowledge for Marx independently exists outside of the

⁶⁰ Myers, “Marx’s Concept of Truth: A Kantian Interpretation,” 318. Here, Myers, for instance, sees Marx could be best understood as a follower of Kantian idealism. For him, it is only through Kantian analogy—and not Hegel—where Marx’s claim about subject’s “constitution” can be best clarified. “[H]uman being is a partial creator of the world,” he asserts. Myers emphasizes that human subject has a role in the “constitution of that which is known,” and such constitution is best understood as involving a similar constitution with Kant. Such constitution involves an active mind providing form and categories to the raw matter, or the manifold of sensations, human passively perceive from the world.

subject. In this reading, knowledge of the characteristics of reality is not subject-dependent but independently existing outside of the knower. The famous proponents of this reading are Engels and the Marxists, which includes Plekhanov, Lenin, and Mao. For these thinkers, Marx holds the view that knowledge is produced as the subject's mind copies the independent structure of the reality. They emphasize that reality independently exists outside of the subject and knowing it means it should be copied on the subject's mind.⁶¹

In the discussion of the realists, the term idealism plays a critical role in their reading, as their conception of its meaning provides them the position to contrast their own reading of Marx's epistemology. They contend and engage with their idea of idealism to show why the realist interpretation is more acceptable than the other readings of his text. Most of the realist readings of

The realist Marx's conception, however, restricts idealism only in its ontological sense without any hint of its epistemological sense proposed by the idealist Marx. This limited articulation of the concept of idealism is evident in Engel's realist appropriation of Marx's claims, which has influenced most of the succeeding realist readings of Marx. In *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Engels confines idealism in its ontological sense. He describes the idealists as "those who asserted the primacy of spirit to nature," and thinks that the creation of the world is out from the mind, idea, or God. For Engels, idealism simply means that ideas, and not matter, are the

⁶¹ Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*; Wood "Philosophical Materialism"; Tse-Tung "On Practice"; Lenin, *Materialism and Empirico-Criticism*; Plekhanov, "Fundamental Problems of Marxism".

fundamental reality; ideas are the cause of matter and not the other way around. This concept of Idealism, for Engels, is one of the philosophers' major answers to the greatest question of philosophy, the question concerning the relation of "thinking and being." Philosophers have been divided into two major camps: the materialists who assert the primacy of being and the idealists who assert the primacy of thinking.⁶²

As Engels limits the sense of idealism ontologically, he then concludes that Marx does not adopt any form of idealism. Out of his simplistic distinction, he notes that Marx's philosophy should be distanced from idealism and should be understood as primarily influenced by Feuerbach's materialism, which does not hold that ideas are primary cause of reality but matter. This materialism, for Engels, is the ground of Marx's assertion that reality can be explained through the material objective economic condition. Through this framework, Marx resolves the theoretical contradictions of idealism by showing that its root is nothing but a form of theology, which is a baseless assertion because it is grounded on the fantastic survival of the belief in the existence of an extra-mundane creator.⁶³

Engels' distinction between materialism and idealism has become popular among the Marxists and turned out as the basis for their succeeding interpretations. Part of its popularity was its utter simplicity in its distinction of both concepts. Materialism is defined as the assertion that matter causes ideas, and idealism is conceived as the view that idea causes matter. Aside from this factor, Marx's lack of systematic discussion of

⁶² Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, 16-18.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

his epistemological views greatly contributes as to why his scholars rely heavily on Engels' ideas on materialism and idealism.⁶⁴ Both Plekhanov and Lenin, for instance, follows Engels' limited concept of idealism, which also lead them to reject the idea that Marx holds any form of idealism, including the epistemological sense of the concept. Engels' influence binds their view of idealism as contrasted to materialism, which is only the ontological sense of the term.

Plekhanov, for instance, conceives idealism as distinct from Marx's materialism. For him, Hegel's idealism and Kant's transcendental idealism reduce everything into thought, as both conceive "being, matter, and nature" as either postulate of "Idea" (for Hegel) or of "Reason" (for Kant). Both Kant and Hegel's ideas, for Plekhanov, are closely akin to a "theological concept," which is the view that "nature was created by God," or "reality, matter," is created by "an abstract, non-material being," or "world's law is dictated [...] by divine Reason."⁶⁵ In both senses, it means that the reality is created by mind.

Lenin, same with Plekhanov, also defines materialism against the backdrop of idealism, but he calls it as the Empirico-criticism, which is held be Mach and Avenarius. For Lenin, Empirico-criticism has cloaked the idealism of Berkeley, as it remains grounded on the idea that existence is created by perception, *esse est percipii*. Lenin criticizes this form idealism because of its absurd logical consequence. Berkeley's idealism's end point is solipsism, since when everything is conceived as one's personal

⁶⁴Shlomo Avineri, "Homo Faber," in *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 65-66.

⁶⁵ Plekhanov, "Fundamental Problems of Marxism," 117-83.

idea based on personal perception, then even the existence of human beings becomes a mere product of one's idea. In his ironic remark, he expresses this view that "if bodies are 'complexes of sensations' ...or 'combinations of sensations' as Berkeley said, it inevitably follows that the whole world is but my idea."⁶⁶

Engel's realist influence has extended even in the recent readings of Marx made by Allen Wood in *Philosophical Materialism*, which is a section in his book on *Marx*. Wood follows the same notion of idealism set by Engels and even defends Engels' distinction between idealism and materialism as correct despite of its inadequacy. He argues that "Engels' rather Manichean distinction between idealism and materialism may be a simplistic and philosophically unsophisticated, but it is not wholly misguided."⁶⁷ Engels' real purpose is to aid us delineate the concept and by defining the categories simplistically, he made a clear distinction between the materialist outlook from the "traditional religious outlook" and supernatural explanations.⁶⁸

Wood's support of Engels' categories is his ground why he disassociates Marx from any form of idealism. He also dismisses Marxian idealist account because following Engels, the very concept of idealism gives him an impression that it is related to some supernatural view. Wood's Engels-like argument points out that Marx cannot be identified with idealism, given that idealism is a Hegelian notion where "nature is

⁶⁶ Lenin, *Materialism and Empirico-Criticism*, 34.

⁶⁷ Wood, "Philosophical Materialism," 167.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

‘posited’ by cosmic spirit as its ‘externalization’.”⁶⁹ Idealists maintain that “God created the world,” and “the separation of soul dwelling in the body and leaving it at death,” which no way can be identified as Marx’s ideas.⁷⁰

Contrary to idealism, Wood reads that it is more plausible that Marx is read as a naturalist and a realist. He grounds this realist reading on the assertion that Marx embraces “historical materialism,” a view that “rests on the idea that the deepest and most historically potent human interests lie in developing people’s *natural* powers to shape the world, and not in looking after the *supernatural* destination of their souls.”⁷¹ It means that Marx is neither a supernaturalist nor a mystic, and this philosophical view brings him closer to materialism and realism.

Closely analyzing the categories of Engels, however, reveals that his simplistic conceptual distinction is no longer reliable when one aims to clarify the nuanced epistemology of Marx. The categories, which are set by Engels, limit the possible reading of Marx, since it is focused only on the extremes of idealism and materialism without the intermediate views available. Engels only chooses between the primacy of thought and primacy of being as mutually exclusive alternatives. As a result, he fails to discuss any form of epistemological idealism, which is different from the concept of idealism he is espousing. He lacks an articulation of idealism that originated from Kant, and if he has ever mentioned him, it is in the context of interpreting the philosopher as an agnostic who

⁶⁹ Ibid., 190-191.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 166.

⁷¹ Ibid., 168-169.

thought the reality is unknown. Kant is only viewed on his ontological claim, the view that reality is an unknown “noumenal realm,” neglecting his assertion of a subject-dependent knowledge, his epistemological idealism.

The Difference between Ontological and Epistemological idealism

The realists are certainly correct that Marx does not hold any form of ontological idealism. Even in the *Manuscripts*, Marx explicitly states that he does not subscribe to the view that reality is fundamentally idea; he even refers to it as “uncritical idealism,”⁷² the view where the idea functions as a *demiurge* that creates the material reality. The realists, however, conflate two idealisms into ontological idealism and this should be critically checked. The idealism that Marx readers held is different from Marx.

The realists’ failure to elaborate epistemological idealism has led them to an unwarranted deduction that Marx should be distanced from any form of idealism. Without elaborating the epistemological idealism, the realists have neglected an important insight that Marx probably held, which led them to miss the point of Marxian idealists like Kolakowski. For instance, Wood, who reads Marx as a realist, refutes ontological idealism and then mistakenly ascribed it as the idealism being held by Kolakowski and other Marxian idealists. This tendency of conflating idealisms is common in the readings of the realist Marx.

⁷² As Marx comments, “In the *Phenomenology*, therefore, despite its thoroughly negative and critical appearance and despite the fact that its criticism is genuine and often will ahead of its time, the uncritical idealism of Hegel’s later works, the philosophical dissolution and restoration of the empirical world, is already to be found in latent form, in embryo, as a potentiality and a secret.” Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 385.

The realist conflates ontological idealism with the epistemological idealism of the Marxian idealists, because they fail to articulate properly the epistemological idealism. What they have critiqued is a simplified and crude interpretation of idealism of Hegel and Berkeley, which cannot be identified with the epistemological idealism the Marxian idealists defended. As a result, they easily deny Marx of holding any form of idealism, without considering the actual arguments of Marxian epistemological idealism. They conclude that the most viable interpretation of Marx is materialism and realism, because of what they have perceived as Marx's explicit opposition to ontological idealism.

Contrary to the Realist Marx, Marxian Idealists cannot be viewed as holding supernaturalism and mysticism, which Engels and his followers critique against them. In fact, similar to the realist reading, the idealists also deny identification with uncritical idealism and Berkeley's idealism. For instance, Avineri who is a Marxian Idealist reads Marx as holding idealism in the epistemological sense but maintaining materialism as an ontological view. He explains that although Marx has advanced the idea of the objective and independent existence of the material reality, the philosopher manages to maintain the idealist epistemology where subjects modify what they perceive.⁷³

Similar to Avinerri, Lukács reads Marx as an idealist who still maintains the existence of an "objective social reality." For him, although Marx thinks that perception of the social reality is dependent on subject's class (i.e. one's context and condition), it does not mean that the Marxian view thinks that reality is produced by ideas alone or by an Absolute or Geist. Both the bourgeois and the proletariat perceive the same reality

⁷³ Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, 65-66.

immediately (without theoretical constitution), but the mediation of their different class standpoint creates a varying perception of reality. As Lukács writes, "...the objective reality of social existence is in its immediacy the 'same' for both proletariat and bourgeoisie. But this does not prevent the specific categories of mediation by means of which both classes raise this immediacy to the level of consciousness, by means of which the merely immediate reality becomes for both the authentically objective reality, from being fundamentally different, thanks to different position occupied by the 'two' classes within the 'same' economic process."⁷⁴

Like Lukács, Kolakowski reads Marx under the same idealist terms. He clarifies that Marx's epistemology does not assert that the mind literally creates existence of things. It conceives that the mind provides a modified perception of reality, yet it never denies the existence of things independently. Lukács explains that for Marx "human consciousness, the practical mind...does not produce existence" yet this same mind "produces existence as composed of individuals divided into species and general."⁷⁵ He reiterates that the mental concept is different from actual existence. "It does not follow," he adds "that to be "thought of" is the same thing as "to be."⁷⁶ It means that there's still an actual existence of things, which he refers as the "force of opposition," the reality that the human beings must engage and "must overcome" to satisfy their needs.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 150.

⁷⁵ Kolakowski, "Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth," 45-46.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Clearly, the Marxian idealists, in a certain sense, maintain the independent existence of objects from the subject. Although they see that Marx holds the idea that the subject in some sense modifies reality, they make a conscious effort to distinguish between the idealism that views a subject-dependent knowledge from the idealism that asserts that consciousness produces the reality out of nothing. Contrary to the latter, they never deny the existence of things, or reduce their existence into a mere idea. The Marxian idealists underscore how Marx re-establishes the objective existence of things through his critique of Hegel's philosophy.

Moreover, the emphasis of the Marxian idealists on the independent existence of things highlights the inconsistency between the conceptions of Marxian idealists and realists. It shows that the concept of idealism the realists have refuted is different from the idealism the Marxian idealists have defended. The idealism the realists have refuted is primarily ontological, while what the Marxian idealists have defended is epistemological. Hence, the realists' discussion fails actually refute the idealist reading of Marx, since they miss the point of the epistemological idealism conceived by the Marxian idealists.

Clarifying Idealism

The confusion in the concept of idealism must be clarified by properly delineating the terms of debate. Epistemological idealism must be distinguished from the realist notion of idealism, which is usually crude or "uncritical idealism." This type of idealism is what Marx has criticized in the *Manuscripts*.⁷⁸ It holds the idea that the mind produces

⁷⁸ Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," 385.

the existence of reality *ex nihilo*, which implies the reduction of everything into thought. Same with Marx, Engels rejects this version of idealism, which he captures as a view that gives primacy to “thinking” over Being. And similar to these two thinkers, both Marxian idealists and realists reject uncritical idealism. Both readings do not think that Marx suggests that reality is supernaturally created by mind or consciousness.

As the idea of uncritical idealism becomes clear, then it becomes also clear that the epistemological idealism must be differentiated from it. The later does not assert that the subject directly creates knowledge and reality, but merely views that the subject constructs knowledge. The subject contributes to the construction of knowledge in a certain manner. The contribution does not only come from practical labor, e.g. a worker transforms wood into table or mountain into a building, but also through cognitive activities, that is, by understanding the reality in a set of categories produced by human being existing in a specific socio-economic condition.

The clarification of the notion of epistemological idealism from other idealist notion does not establish that this reading is correct. Its task is to address the terminological inconsistency, since before one can address the textual problems of Marx, the terminological inconsistencies need to be first addressed: the notion of “idealism” needs to be clarified in the debate of Marx’s philosophy. The clarification of these concepts is essential to correctly approach the *Manuscripts*. The confusions should be first cleared out, so that the interpretations will not be accepted or denied for wrong reasons. In the end, although there are errors in the realist reading on the way they understood the concept of idealism, it does not follow that the idealist reading is correct, for the text still remains as the ultimate arbiter of whether Marx’s epistemology is idealist or not.

CHAPTER III

THE *MANUSCRIPTS* AND THE REDUCTIVE READINGS OF MARX

The *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* are critically important works where Marx initially worked out the ground for his new thinking through critical readings of Feuerbach's and Hegel's philosophy. The *Manuscripts* were written between May and October of 1844, four years before the 1848 revolution when Paris was experiencing intense political and intellectual developments. During this period, the 25-year-old Marx entered the city as a young academic who was still searching for his original voice. As Musto describes him, Marx at this point bore a "theoretical dispoñibilitè," a theoretical gap produced by Marx's critical attitude against the Hegelian philosophy and its inadequacies to address the real problems in politics and economics.⁷⁹ Before his stay in Paris, Marx had been criticizing Hegel's philosophy because of its abstractions and mystifications. In his lengthy yet incomplete text, *Critique of the Doctrine of the State*, Marx undermined the political categories of Hegel's philosophy of right and showed its abstract and mystical character. This critique is what Marx mentioned at the *preface* of the *Manuscripts*. He was complaining against the supernaturalism ingrained in Hegel's ideas of the unfolding of the Absolute.

⁷⁹ Musto, "Marx in Paris: Manuscripts and Notebooks of 1844," 387.

Marx's brief stay in Paris provided him a fresh theoretical atmosphere, which is different from his German home that was dominated by the German Idealists who were followers of Hegelian philosophy. Paris, on the other hand, during this period, was experiencing constant political agitation among its workers and artisans. The intellectuals, in the same spirit, were publishing books, journals, and newspapers, as they were living in continuous influence with each other through constant meetings and discussions at the cafes, streets, and other public places. This rich atmosphere in Paris provided Marx a great support for his intellectual development. His encounter with the intellectuals and Parisian working class in their living and working conditions provided him important elements for his thinking.⁸⁰ It provided him a rich context where he would develop his ideas based on his first encounter of the science of political economy and witness of the alienated condition of the proletariat and its resolution.⁸¹

Addressing the importance of the *Manuscripts*, this chapter asserts that the texts should be read on its own terms and context to appreciate what Marx's actual views are. This kind of approach addresses the problematic tendency to reductively read Marx's early texts, which includes the *Manuscripts*. This chapter identifies two types of this reductive reading: first is a reductive reading that reduces the concepts and ideas of the *Manuscripts* to the assertions of Marx's later writings; and second is a reductive reading that reduces the meaning of the *Manuscripts* to an assumed single, overall philosophical view of Marx. As what is shown in this chapter, both types are aspects of the actual

⁸⁰ Musto, "Marx in Paris: Manuscripts and Notebooks of 1844," 367; Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx*, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 81.

⁸¹ Struik, "Marx's Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," 283.

reductive reading that has been done on Marx's text; both are intertwined in so far that, in the reductive reading of Marx, the presupposed unified philosophy of Marx has been based on the readings of his later writings.

Against the reductive reading of Marx's texts, this chapter suggests that the *Manuscripts* should be read neither in view of the later writings nor any philosophical view. As *Manuscripts* are critically important texts in the development of Marx's philosophy and in the interpretation of his epistemology, this chapter recommends that the texts need to be treated closely and read on their own terms to get, if not the exact, at least, their most conceivable and plausible meaning. The *Manuscripts* should be read in the context of Marx's critical engagements with the philosophy of Hegel and Feuerbach and his critique of political economy. A careless reading of these texts is predisposed to misread their meaning in view of the later writings or an assumed overall view of Marx, which leaves the richness of Marx's claims in these texts unappreciated.

The Reduction of Early to Later Marx

The approach to read the *Manuscripts* on its own terms is a pressing task, since, at what this section shows, there are readings that comprehend these texts and its epistemological passages outside of its own context, usually in view of Marx's later writings. The reduction of the early to the later works can be seen on Wood's approach to the *Manuscripts*. He defends that Marx holds realism in the *Manuscripts* not by referring to the claims of the *Manuscripts* but by using the later works such as *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. Wood precisely dismisses Marx's apparent idealist claim in the *Manuscripts* that

“nature...taken abstract for itself is *nothing*.”⁸² As he interprets the claim, he explains that:

...even if Marx is expressing his own view when he says that ‘nature...in separation from the human being is nothing for the human being’, the most he could be saying is that nature is viewed apart from human self-objectification has no significance *for* humans. He is not saying that in the absence of human consciousness or labor nature would cease to exist or that it would be ‘an undifferentiated chaos, without movement’.⁸³

In Wood’s reading of the passage, he thinks that Marx’s remarks about the relation between man and nature should be read under a realist epistemology. For him, nature is only dependent to man through labour and not through cognition; knowledge is produced as a reflection of an independent nature, and no way shaped or affected by the condition of the subject.

Wood, however, proves this realist reading not by citing the *Manuscripts* but Marx’s later writings. He refers to how Marx in the *Grundrisse* only speaks of our knowledge as “reproducing” the real in thought. Using the *Grundrisse*, he underscores that Marx’s “dialectical method” is a process of “reflecting back ideally the life of the material.”⁸⁴ Aside from the *Grundrisse*, he also cites the *Capital*, another later work of Marx, to argue that the idealist interpretation of the passages in the *Manuscripts* “is not warranted by any reasonable reading of the metaphors of copying and reflection as Marx

⁸²Wood, “Philosophical Materialism,” 167. Wood quoted the remark from the *Manuscripts* and explained it as an expression of realism; Cf. Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 399.

⁸³ Wood, “Philosophical Materialism,” 191.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

and Engels use them.”⁸⁵ A prominent metaphor in the *Capital* is Marx’s inversion of Hegel, where Hegel is being turned upside down. Engels understands this imagery as a declaration of Marx’s materialism and realism, a signal of Marx’s shift from Hegelian idealism to a materialist-realist view of the reality. As Engels puts it, when “Hegel’s dialectic was put on its head, or rather, from its head, on which it was standing, it was put on its feet,”⁸⁶ it suggests that Marx has only adopted the Hegelian dialectical logic without subscribing to the idealist ontology being accused to Hegel. For Engels, Marx set the dialectical law as based not on mind or ideas but as a component of an independent reality.⁸⁷

Wood’s realist reading, as it is founded on an implicit reference to Engels, does not actually establish the epistemology of the *Manuscripts*. Engels’ reading cannot be the basis for interpreting the *Manuscripts*, since he does not have any knowledge of the texts, which were unavailable during his time. His understanding of Marx’s epistemology was only based on the later works of Marx and on the recent discovery of the *Theses* during his time. Such claim is confirmed by the fact that Engels died on 1895, more than three decades before the first publication of the *Manuscripts*, which appeared on 1932.⁸⁸ It should be also noted that some of Marx’s text, like the *Manuscripts*, were unavailable in

⁸⁵ Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, 41.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

Marx's early commentators, including Engels.⁸⁹ Hence Wood's, based on Engels, is an inappropriate reading of the *Manuscripts*, as like Engels, he casually applies the ideas in Marx's later writings to Marx's early works such as the *Manuscripts*.

More importantly, although the later works such as, *Grundrisse* and *Capital* (as Engels has interpreted these), could express a certain form of realism, their assertions cannot be simply applied to interpret the *Manuscripts* without taking the texts and its context into account. To use the later works to understand the claims in the *Manuscripts* is a reading that neglects the actual claims of the texts, as its passages are interpreted outside of its context and not on its own terms. As a result of this reading, Marx's claims in the *Manuscripts* are unsatisfactorily treated and this kind of interpretation raises doubt on whether the later works capture the epistemology of the *Manuscripts* or not.

Wood's improper approach exemplifies a type of *reductive reading*, where the meanings of the passages of the *Manuscripts* are reduced to the interpretation ascribed to his later writings. As a result of this reading, Marx's early and later writings are understood in the same context, without the distinct themes where these texts are particularly concerned. The early writings, like the *Manuscripts*, are read without its history, condition, and overall theme, as they are reduced as a mere precursor of Marx's later writings.

Althusser's critique against this reading is worth noting given that he has identified its methodical problems. Althusser criticizes this approach as an "eclectic" reading of Marx: a "form of *reading* of Marx's early writings" which "depends more on

⁸⁹ Rockmore, *Marx after Marxism*, 11.

free association of ideas or on a simple comparison of terms than of historical critique.”⁹⁰ For Althusser, this reading indiscriminately combines different passages from Marx’s writings to support what they perceive as the mature Marx without noting the textual and historical development of the texts.

As Althusser observes, Marx’s early texts are either read out of the presumption of “theory of sources” or a “theory of anticipation,” which means that the early texts are understood as to whether they are the source of the concepts that have been developed in the later works of Marx, or that the concepts of the early writings anticipates concepts of Marx in the later works. In both presumptions, the young Marx—including the *Manuscripts*—is understood in view of the later Marx. As a result, the debate on interpreting Marx is reduced on whether “*the young Marx is not Marx; or that the young Marx is Marx.*” It means that this reading decomposes Marx, as the philosopher’s text is reduced into what is *already materialist* and what is *still idealist*.⁹¹

This reduction of Marx’s early texts to his later works is shown to be a problematic reading, especially in understanding the epistemology of the *Manuscripts*. The claims in the *Manuscripts* are not understood on its own but filtered or worst neglected because of the later Marx. As a result, this reading raises the question on: whether the claims in Marx’s later works can be simply applied to the *Manuscripts*? The answer is it cannot be uncritically applied, since both writings are set in different time and context in Marx’s philosophizing. The issue on whether there’s a break or continuity

⁹⁰ Althusser, “Marxism and Humanism,” 205.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 53-58.

in Marx's text needs to be settled first before one can conclusively apply the claims of the later writings to the early works of Marx such as the *Manuscripts*.

For the meantime, what can be reasonably claim, given the scope of this work, is about what the *Manuscripts* actual claims are, and the best approach is to read them on their own terms and context. Reading the texts on this manner allows its readers to interpret its claims fairly. This approach is what the third chapter of this work attempts. Unlike Wood's reductive reading that interprets *Manuscripts*' claim that, "nature...taken abstract for itself is *nothing*"⁹² in realist sense by using the later works of Marx, this passage is interpreted in view of the other concepts Marx's articulated in the *Manuscripts*, which proves that this claim expresses idealism rather than realism.

The Reduction of Marx to a "Unified Marx"

Aside from the questionable reading of the *Manuscripts* from the perspective of Marx's later writings, another reductive form of reading the *Manuscripts* is by understanding its claims with a presupposition that there's a single epistemological view that runs across Marx's works. A reading of the *Manuscripts* done under this assumption is questionable, since it is not a good starting point to ground one's interpretation on a debatable idea that Marx has a single epistemological view across his works. This assumption must be proven to have credence, and it can only be conclusive after studying the entirety of Marx's corpus. It means that one cannot just claim a unified Marx, since

⁹²Wood, "Philosophical Materialism," 167. Wood quoted the remark from the *Manuscripts* and explained it as an expression of realism; Cf. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," 399.

there's always a possibility that Marx does not have a single and unified view but rather varying epistemologies that have been developing in the progress of his writings. It is always possible that the *Manuscripts*, given their own setting and concepts, have an epistemology different from Marx's other writings.

The reading that assumes that Marx has a single and unified epistemology across his works prevents a proper understanding of the view of the *Manuscripts*. Kain criticizes this assumption on what he termed as the "unified Marx." He cites, for instance, the subjective idealist scholars of Marx as neglecting the shifts in Marx's thinking by assuming that Marx holds idealism in the totality of his works. For Kain, their reading neglects the changes in Marx's thoughts from the early works, such as the *Manuscripts*, to the middle works in *German Ideology*, and to his later works in *Grundrisse* and the *Capital*:

The development of Marx's thought is complex. In the *German Ideology* Marx rejected many of the views he had held in the 1844 Manuscripts. In the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* he rejected many of the views he had held in the *German Ideology* and moved closer to some of those he had held in 1844 but not without modifying them in view of the insights gained in the *German Ideology*. Marx's thought cannot be summed up simply as an essential unity; nor did it undergo a neat-rupture.⁹³

Kain underscores that there are changes in Marx's thinking, but its development lacks a neat rupture where Marx is described as completely turning from being an idealist into a materialist or vice versa. For Kain, the realism of Marx's later works (i.e. *Grundrisse* and

⁹³ Philip J. Kain, "Marx's Dialectic Method," *History and Theory* 19, no. 3 Wiley (Oct., 1980): 294-312.

Capital) is not a radical break from his middle works, since the realism in his later works is in fact a rehash of his epistemology.

Similarly, Althusser sees that Marx's thinking has developed, but this change, unlike with Kain's reading, is a radical break from Marx's early writings. He notes that Marx in his early works was expressing a humanistic philosophy before he was led to a "scientific discovery" in his later writings. As Althusser explains, the later Marx was led to break with every "philosophical anthropology or humanism" of the early works to address the inadequacy of the latter and provide a concrete knowledge that could realize practical change.

Althusser narrates that at the start of 1845, Marx had criticized the "theoretical pretensions of philosophical humanism" of his early work as a mere ideology. Marx realized that his early humanism could not provide a concrete depiction of social reality that can realize social change. As a result, the later Marx developed a form of "theoretical anti-humanism." This anti-humanism is a by-product of new conceptual ground, which no longer uses man as a primary concept to explain the relevant phenomenon. It rather introduces new concepts such as, "social formation, productive forces, relations of productions, superstructure, ideologies, determination in the last instance by the economy, specific determination of the other levels, etc" to make sense of the social reality.⁹⁴

Kain and Althusser have different version of Marx's development. While Althusser underscores the "radical rupture" in Marx, Kain, on the other hand, rejects this

⁹⁴ Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," 111.

radical shift to show an intricate image of how the later Marx rejected his middle works (e.g. *Theses and German Ideology*) while reworking the ideas of his early writings.⁹⁵ Aside from that, Althusser's version refers to the development of Marx's philosophy in general (which includes his epistemology), while Kain precisely explains the changes in Marx's epistemology. But despite of the differences, each reading questions the assumption of a unified Marx, as each version proves that there is a development in the philosopher's thinking.

If the idea of a unified Marx is questionable, then the approach to read the *Manuscripts* should acknowledge this issue. The claims of the *Manuscripts* should not be prejudged on the basis of an assumed single epistemology, since the questionable assumption based on the debate on whether there's continuity or break in Marx's thinking must first be settled. Marx's whole corpus should be examined, and reading limited to the *Manuscripts* does not provide ground to assert whether Marx has a unified view or none.

Although certainly, at this juncture, the work cannot confirm whether Marx has a unified epistemology or there are, as Kain and Althusser suggest it, significant changes in his views, this limitation does not warrant a reductive reading of the *Manuscripts*. Even if it is correct to assume that Marx has a unified thinking, it does not follow that his texts

⁹⁵ Kain, "Marx's Dialectic Method," 307-312. Kain notes that "Marx's thought cannot be summed up simply as an essential unity; nor did it undergo a neat-rupture." For him, the development in Marx's thinking is rather complex: "The development of Marx's thought is complex. In the *German Ideology* Marx rejected many of the views he had held in the *1844 Manuscripts*. In the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* he rejected many of the views he had held in the *German Ideology* and moved closer to some of those he had held in 1844 but not without modifying them in view of the insights gained in the *German Ideology*. Marx's thought cannot be summed up simply as an essential unity; nor did it undergo a neat rupture."

should be read out of its context and use its passages carelessly. In fact, the best way to confirm the unity of Marx's thought is to read the *Manuscripts* properly, and show that although the texts belong to early Marx and have a different setting and concerns, his epistemological views and concepts still express continuity with his later works. For example, Marx often describes himself in the *Manuscripts* as a follower of naturalist philosophy.⁹⁶ An erroneous approach in interpreting Marx's naturalism is to understand it as an expression of his realism based on the assumption that Marx's philosophy expresses realism as a whole. To correct this approach, Marx's naturalist assertion should be read on its proper context as what the texts suggest. It should be interpreted in view of Feuerbach's influence and Marx's position against German idealism to get what Marx actually wants to express, since these are contexts where Marx set his naturalist assertion.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, to simply assume the unity of Marx's thinking is a counter-productive way to understand the epistemological claims in the *Manuscripts*. Such an assumption forces the passages from the *Manuscripts* to support the contentious presumption that there's a unity in Marx's thinking. Such a reading dismisses the richness of the *Manuscripts*, as it disregards the possibility that Marx's epistemology could have developed and could have changed throughout his thinking, and that the early writings like the *Manuscripts* could have contained an epistemology different from Marx's later writings.

⁹⁶Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" ff:281 and 348.

⁹⁷ For discussion on the *Manuscripts*' context, see section "Marx's Critique of Hegel and Feuerbach" in Chapter IV pp. 49-50 below.

The Context of the Manuscripts

Instead of reading the passages of the *Manuscripts* basing on the later writings and single epistemology of Marx, they should be read on its own terms, themes, and context. This approach acknowledges the Althusserian spirit of reading the Early text of Marx on its own problematic. For him, the “analytic-teleological method” or the assumption of the unity of all elements in Marx’s text must be rejected. Although this work does not follow the details and technicalities of Althusser’s view on ideology, which is what he termed as the application of “Marxist principles of a theory of ideological development to our object,” it rather maintains the spirit of Althusser’s inquiry that suggests that the early texts, such as the *Manuscripts*, should be read in view of their internal unity and problematic and should not be reduced to later or unified Marx. As Althusser warns, “[o]f course, we know that Young Marx *did* become Marx, but we should not want to live in his place, reject for him or discover for him. We shall not be waiting for him at the end of the course to throw round him as round a runner the mantle of repose for at last it is over, he has arrived.”⁹⁸

Hence, this work shall read the *Manuscripts* and its passages on knowledge under its major themes. They are interpreted in the background that the *Manuscripts* is Marx’s early attempt to search for a new thinking or a theoretical ground to realize change in

⁹⁸ Althusser, “Marxism and Humanism,” 63-70. Althusser sought to think that the early texts should be viewed not in relation to end (a final view of Marx) but on its own “internal unity” and on its “own problematic.” For him, the meaning of the text “depends not on its relation to the *truth* other itself but on its relation to the existing *ideological field* and on the *social problems and social structure* which sustain the ideology and are reflected in it. As Althusser explains, “the actual history is reflected in this individual development according to the complex ties between the individual and its history.”

society. More importantly, the *Manuscripts* must be approached on the background of the influence of the prominent ideas of its time – Hegel, Feuerbach, and Political economy. The texts' epistemology is anchored in Marx's critique of the Hegelian philosophy, the influence of Feuerbach's naturalism and humanism, and the critical analysis of the political economy.

By recognizing the *Manuscripts'* distinct context, this work avoids the problematic reductive reading of the texts. It is a more productive approach to the *Manuscripts*, since their passages and concepts are read on the standpoint of their own particular context. Unlike the reductive reading, this method gives what is due to the *Manuscripts*, as it neither reduces its passages nor extracts them casually from Marx's writings to merely support his later thoughts or a single epistemological view. This reading opens for a more meaningful understanding of the *Manuscripts*, as it seeks to understand its actual epistemology that could be different from his later thoughts or from any assumed unified Marx, whether idealist or realist Marx.

CHAPTER IV

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE *MANUSCRIPTS*

This section, as the title suggests, focuses on the epistemology of the *Manuscripts*. It shows how Marx in this early work holds an idealist epistemology, as expressed through his method of critique of the political economy; his concepts such as, need, objectivity, man, and nature; and some of his explicit statements about knowledge and knowing. Marx in the *Manuscripts* provides a rich epistemological writings, given its themes and its epistemologically fecund concepts Marx discussed.

But before discussing the epistemological view of the *Manuscripts*, some things should be first said about the text's structure important to clarify its content. The *Manuscripts'* format also provides guide on how this work approaches the text to highlight its epistemological view. To begin with, there are three Manuscripts discovered and each has its own pagination in Roman figures. The first Manuscript is composed of 27 pages. Originally, it was written in three columns, headed by *Wages of Labour, or Profit of Capital, and Rent of Land*; these titles are apparently related to the topics of Smith's *Wealth of Nation*. The first Manuscript is epistemologically relevant in so far that it shows the method of Marx's critique in his analysis of political economy. It shows that Marx begins with the application of his epistemological standpoint in the text by underscoring the contradictions and inadequacies of the economic aspect of the society. In brief sketch, the first Manuscript describes the conflict between worker and capitalist,

which put the worker in an unjust condition. Marx's discussion on the condition of the workers in the first Manuscript culminates at the beginning of the 22nd page, where Marx starts a six-paged continuous discussion about the worker's condition, which Marx's editors famously entitled as the *Estranged Labour*. On this part, Marx explains that the system of private property makes the worker not at home with his working condition; he shows how the workers ironically lose life in their work.

Unlike the first Manuscript, the second Manuscript is rather short as it is discovered incomplete with largely missing pages. In its publication, the second Manuscript runs for only 8 pages, missing 39 pages. It starts with a sentence fragment about the concept of interest and capital and ends abruptly about the hostile and reciprocal relationship between labour and capital. In this part, Marx discusses the relationships that emerge in private property, for example, the antithetical relationship between landed property and capital and how capital won over the landed property. Marx commends the political economy for discovering labour as the source of wealth rather than land and private property.

In comparison with the first and the second, the third Manuscript contains the richest epistemological discussions of Marx in the text. The editors discover that in contrast with the other two, the third Manuscript is the longest as it has 43 large pages. It also contains the introduction for the *Manuscript*, which its editors rearranged and put at the beginning. Among the epistemologically interesting parts, the third Manuscript contains the section entitled *Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy*. In this section, Marx discusses his critique on the Hegelian cognition and his commendation of what he recognizes as the humanism and naturalism of Feuerbach, both the former and

the latter philosophers are important to understand how Marx formulates his view on knowledge. Aside from that, the third *Manuscripts* contain Marx's discussion on Communism, Need, and Corporeal man. On his discussion of these concepts, he shows his idealist epistemology by depicting how corporeal man constitutes reality not only objectively but also subjectively, which means that man in some sense constructs what he or she knows.

Since the most important epistemological claims of Marx is located in the third Manuscript, then there's good reason to start not chronologically (i.e. from first to third) but from the concepts Marx explored in the third Manuscripts. This part is a good starting point, because compare to the other sections of the text, it contains the more explicit articulation of Marx's epistemology.

Hence, this section's starting point is the third Manuscript, and its themes and concepts are explored and discussed in the first and second part. The first part, which is entitled as "Marx's Critique of Hegel and Feuerbach," discusses Marx's critique of Hegel and Feuerbach's influence to Marx. This part sets the context of Marx's critique of the Hegelian philosophy, using the criticism of Feuerbach, to situate the idealist epistemology of the *Manuscripts*.

The second part, entitled as "The Idealist Cognition of the Corporeal Man," is a key piece as it articulates the idealism of Marx in the *Manuscripts* based on his concept of corporeal man, objectivity, and needs. This part begins with a discussion of how Marx follows the philosophical humanist tradition, which both Hegel and Feuerbach followed. Philosophical humanism typically provides a concept of man that serves as the ground for articulating a concept of cognition. This part is followed by the articulation of Marx's

concept of corporeal man that is objective and has needs, which is contrary to the Hegelian view as Marx understands it. With this concept of corporeality, Marx provides ground for the constitution of reality both objectively and subjectively; he acknowledges how corporeal man and his or her condition shape the cognition of reality. This idea highlights the idealism of the *Manuscripts*, which is emphasized at the end of this chapter.

After articulating Marx's epistemological view in the *Manuscripts*, the third section of this chapter, entitled as "Marx's Idealist and the Critique of Political Economy" shows how Marx applies his epistemological view in his critique of political economy by underscoring how Marx unravels the subjective ground of political economy. This section focuses on the first Manuscript and offers a brief sketch of Marx's critique of political economy, which culminates on his concept of estranged labour. After providing a sketch on how Marx critiques political economy, this part shows how Marx argues that the errors of the science of political economy are grounded on estranged need dominant in the system of private property. This estranged need for Marx shapes the political economists' view of the reality.

The last two sections of this chapter further clarify the idealist epistemology in the *Manuscripts* by discussing its other issues. The fourth section, entitled as "The Dissolution of the thing-in-itself in Practical Standpoint," shows the issues concerning the similarities of Marx's epistemological view and the concept of thing-in-itself. In the end, this section argues that the concept of thing-in-itself cannot be ascribed to Marx as it does not fit in the overall context and concept of Marx's discussion, especially in his concept of practice. Another issue in Marx's epistemology is the realist reading of the texts. The

last section, entitled as “The Errors of the Realist Reading of the *Manuscripts*, addresses the issues that involve in the realist reading of the *Manuscripts*. It defends the idealist reading of the *Manuscripts* against the realist reading of the texts, highlighting the false dichotomy that pervades the realist reading.

Marx’s Critique of Hegel and Feuerbach

The epistemological view of the *Manuscripts* has emerged out of Marx’s critical engagement with the prominent ideas during his time – Hegel and Feuerbach’s philosophy.⁹⁹ Marx’s hero at this point was Feuerbach, and he utilized the latter’s right-wing reading of Hegel to build his own critique of Hegel’s philosophy. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx describes Feuerbach as the one who destroyed the “foundation of the old dialectic and philosophy” and the “true conqueror of the old philosophy.”¹⁰⁰ Marx in the *Manuscripts* acknowledges that Feuerbach’s ideas are “the only writings since

⁹⁹ The discussion of Marx’s epistemology is set on Feuerbach and Hegel, because these are the two philosophers Marx constantly mentioned in the *Manuscripts*. Marx also provides a lengthy discussion of Hegel while praising Feuerbach’s naturalism and humanism. To refer to these philosophers does not mean that I’m asserting a unified Marx from Feuerbach, Hegel, and early Marx. The early writings such as the Dissertations, On the Jewish Question and others are not discussed, there’s no claim that they are in unity with the *Manuscripts*. Furthermore, no way that setting the context using Hegel and Feuerbach implies an idea of unified Marx. They are used because their ideas can be found in the texts and even Marx recognizes them as his predecessors.

¹⁰⁰ Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 381. This old philosophy refers to Hegelian thinking, and Marx agrees with Feuerbach that this “philosophy is nothing more than religion brought into thought and developed in thought, and that it is equally to be condemned as another form and mode of existence of the estrangement of man’s nature.” For Marx, “Feuerbach is the only person who has a *serious* and a *critical* attitude to the Hegelian dialectic.” He has greatly contributed in showing the flaws of Hegelian thinking, different to his contemporary Young Hegelians who “has not once voiced so much as a suspicion of the need for a critical debate with its progenitor, the Hegelian dialectic.”

Hegel's *Phenomenology* and *Logic* to contain a real theoretical revolution.”¹⁰¹ He positively aligns his thinking with Feuerbach while he critically positions against Hegel and those he refers as critical theologians who are Hegel's followers.¹⁰²

Influenced by the right-wing reading of Feuerbach who thinks that Hegel conceives mind as the creator of reality, Marx also criticizes the perceived supernaturalism of the Hegelian philosophy. At the latter part of the third *Manuscript*, in the section entitled *Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy*, Marx objects against the claims of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* for reducing everything into the movement of consciousness, which leads to the loss of objectivity of things. Marx's criticism here is epistemologically rich, since unlike his previous work, which is more about social and political, the *Manuscripts* touch the issues on cognition and how human beings are related to its object. Marx's early focus on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, which is mainly about the development of state, shifted here to the *Phenomenology*, which is Hegel's work about the development of cognition. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel describes the cognitive development of the mind from its most basic perception to its journey to the realization of absolute knowledge and freedom.

Following Feuerbach's reading of Hegel, Marx in the *Manuscripts* shows how Hegel reduces everything into mind. He underscores that for Hegel, the movement of the mind, which is the “dialectic of pure thought,”¹⁰³ mystically reduces every concrete event

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 281.

¹⁰²Ibid., 381.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 385.

in reality into thought, where the concrete is transformed into a mere moment in the whole movement of the Absolute Idea or Spirit. He complains that in Hegel's philosophy, the idea and mind alone become the reality and "the true essence of man," the human beings and their concrete activities and properties, such as religion, state, wealth and other human engagements, are reduced into abstract consciousness and "spiritual entities."¹⁰⁴

Marx in the *Manuscripts* criticizes how Hegel turns the concrete reality into an abstract idea, and turns these ideas as supernatural causes of the concrete reality. For Marx, Hegel reverses the proper relation between the subject and predicate. He turns "[r]eal man and real nature" into "mere *predicates*" instead of treating them as subject. He rather treats "*God, absolute spirit, the self-knowing and self-manifesting idea*" as the subject and real actors in a form of "a mystical *subject-object* or *subjectivity encroaching upon the object*."¹⁰⁵ As a result of the inversion of the subject and predicate, Hegelian philosophy reduces man (the subject) into the activity of ideas and consciousness (the predicate). Instead of identifying the real man as the actors, Hegel turns the movement of ideas as the supernatural actors of human events and problems.

Against the Hegelian view that reduces reality and the subject into consciousness, Marx in the *Manuscripts*, rather, provides an alternative view of the reality and subject. He emphasizes that the things and the subject are objective and not only created by

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 396.

mind.¹⁰⁶ Marx has found this novel thinking from Feuerbach who for him started the “*positive*, humanistic and naturalistic criticism.”¹⁰⁷ For Marx, this naturalist-humanism is different from Hegel insofar that it acknowledges that man, who is a knowing subject, is a natural and a corporeal being, and therefore objective and has needs. This view is different from what he thought as Hegelian view of reducing the real men into a mere aspect of the Absolute; unlike Hegel who reduces everything into Absolute, Marx returns to a natural and corporeal man as the starting point of understanding reality.

Furthermore, given Feuerbach’s influence, Marx’s humanist-naturalist criticism should no way be identified to naturalism in a positivist sense,¹⁰⁸ which is a popular view for Marxism. Given the popularity of positivism during the 20th century, the Marxists held that naturalism simply means that the best pursuit of knowing nature is to study it scientifically; thus, this naturalism presupposes a realist epistemology as it also implies that nature independently exists to be studied by science. Marx’s naturalist-humanism,

¹⁰⁶ Rockmore, *Marx after Marxism*, 49. There are criticisms with this critique of Marx on Hegel, one of which, is on the manner Marx oversimplifies Hegel’s philosophy. Rockmore has mentioned this critique and pointed out the need to actually critique Hegel, which both Feuerbach and Marx’s right wing theological reading of the philosopher has failed to do so. But despite of Marx’s possible error, what is significant at this point is Marx’s critique shows the development of his thinking as in a contrary position from Hegelian thinking, showing at the same time his epistemological framework.

¹⁰⁷ Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 281.

¹⁰⁸ Recent interpretation of these ideas of Marx’s naturalism can be read from Wood. When Marx identifies himself with naturalism, then it implies that he is a realist, since realism, or the idea that knowledge independently exists outside of one’s mind, is one tenets of naturalism. Wood’s reasoning, however, fails to provide warrant on the logical connection between naturalism and realism. Naturalism has no clear and necessary relation with the idea that knowledge is based on the independently existing structures. Logically speaking, even the idealist epistemology is compatible with Marx’s naturalist outlook. The idea that the subject actively constitutes knowledge expresses a human and natural knowledge, which is also an expression of a naturalist outlook.

however, is set in the context of Feuerbach's thinking. It should be understood in the context of philosophical humanism, which characterizes Feuerbach's inquiry. This humanism inquires on the concept of man as the basis for understanding how man is actually related to the reality. The clarification of the concept of man also includes how human cognition relates to the reality. In Feuerbach's version, he shows how our concepts are formulated in view of the natural characteristics of man. How, for example, our concept of God is produced out of our human condition. Marx follows this naturalist inquiry of Feuerbach and shows his own version of naturalist understanding of man, which had a critical implication in Marx's epistemology.

In his knotty relation with the Hegel's and Feuerbach's thinking, Marx shows his idealist epistemological view. His critique of Hegel and appraisal of Feuerbach's naturalist and humanist criticism provide ground for his idealist concept of human cognition. As what will be presented later, Marx in the *Manuscripts* is an epistemological idealist, as his ideas, although critical against Hegel through Feuerbach, maintain the post-Kantian thesis, that the mind, in a sense, constructs what it knows. Through his critical engagement with Hegel and Feuerbach, Marx sets the ground for his articulation of his epistemological idealist inclinations.

Marx's conception of man, cognition, objectivity, and need are defined in view of Marx's critical appreciation of the Hegelian philosophy. Marx differentiates himself from Hegel as he defined man as corporeal and not merely as an aspect of the Absolute. This concept of man has an important epistemological implication, as it sets different condition of knowing. Contrary to Hegel, Marx idealist epistemology grounds the cognition not on a mystical subject or on an Absolute idea but on a corporeal man. This

corporeal man, for Marx, acknowledges the independent existence of things yet still holds the idea that knowledge is constituted by man, as it is dependent on subject's needs. Thus, although Marx maintains the German idealist view that acknowledges that the subject constitutes knowledge, Marx differentiates himself from the tradition, as he does not follow the supernaturalism and abstraction of the subject, which for him pervades the German idealism. Marx, although maintains the idea that man constitutes knowledge, does not think that reality is created by the Absolute mind or Idea. This point shall be further clarified in the succeeding sections, which discuss the concept of the corporeal man and how this subject constitutes reality.

The Idealist Cognition of Corporeal Man

Marx's Philosophical Humanism

As Marx has positively commended Feuerbach's naturalism and humanism, he then adopted Feuerbach's philosophical humanism, and similarly expounded the concept of man as a way to understand the character of human knowing. This idea of humanism should be understood in a philosophical context and should be distinguished from humanitarianism (or the love of humanity) and also from the revival of ancient classical works during the Renaissance period. Philosophical humanism is set on the tradition of formulating a view of knowledge based on a concept of human being.¹⁰⁹ The British empiricists, for example, with their variety of understanding the human being, provided different views on knowledge. Locke, Hume, and Berkeley provided different

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 67. Rockmore provides a discussion on different concepts of humanism.

conceptions of the knowing subject; and although they agree that all knowledge are based on experience, their varying concepts of human being provides each of them a different understanding on how the experiences are formulated and conceived by the subject.

Post-Kantian German philosophy, which includes as its practitioners Fichte, Hegel, and Feuerbach, are also humanists in this philosophical sense, as they defined a view on knowledge grounded on a certain conception of human being. The tradition was started by Kant as he had rethought the universal condition of knowing and established it based not only via reflection of independent reality in an Aristotelian sense but through the active participation of the subject. Kant, in his technical subject, termed this active subject as the transcendental unity of apperception. Hegel, however, criticized Kant's concept of knowledge as ahistorical, hence non-human, and established a historical subject of knowing. Hegel historicized the human subject and showed how the epistemological and philosophical problems were product of the unfolding of the historical subject. Feuerbach's reading, however, criticized this Hegel's concept of subject as a mystical subject. Hegel's historicizing of the subject was premised upon the reduction of the subject and reality to mere movement of ideas. Instead of mere ideas, Feuerbach rather launched a philosophical anthropology, and defined man as a natural subject who has needs that ground human concepts and understanding of the reality.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Rockmore, *Marx after Marxism*, 68. Rockmore traces this philosophical anthropology of Feuerbach from Kant. Rockmore explains *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, pointing that in this text, "Feuerbach deepens the turn in philosophy after Kant to philosophical anthropology, or the basing of philosophy on a theory of the human person. Feuerbach typically stresses that reason is human reason, and that all knowledge is human knowledge in arguing for anthropology as the universal science."

The humanism in Feuerbach's philosophy is best exemplified in his articulation of the ground of the concept of God. In the *Essence of Christianity*, Feuerbach revealed that the secret of God and religion is the human being. For him, human beings created God out of their need to answer their unanswered questions, alleviate their sufferings, and satisfy their eternally unsatisfied needs. As Feuerbach writes, "[t]he more empty life is, the fuller, the more concrete is God. The impoverishing of the real world and the enriching of God is one act. Only the poor man has a rich God."¹¹¹ God accordingly is nothing but a reflection of a natural needs of man, "God," for Feuerbach, "springs out of the feeling of a want, what man is in need of, whether this be definite and therefore conscious or unconscious need—that is God. Thus, the disconsolate feeling of a void, of loneliness, needed a God in whom there is society, a union being fervently loving each other."¹¹² Feuerbach suggested that human needs drove the creation of the reality of God. For him, God is a product of various drives: an intellectual need, or a need to alleviate a life of suffering, or a need to fill an empty life.

Even though Marx loosely defined naturalism and humanism and often used these terms interchangeably, the major theme of humanist thinking is clearly shown in the *Manuscripts*. Following Feuerbach's philosophical anthropology, Marx in the *Manuscripts* defines the concept of man as a corporeal being, a being which is objective and has needs. The concept of a corporeal man is contrasted from abstracted man and mystical subject in the form of Absolute Idea, which what Marx referred as the Hegelian

¹¹¹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, Trans. George Eliot (Walnut: MSAC Philosophy Group, 2008), 38.

¹¹² Ibid.

uncritical Idealism. Marx's conception of man has an important epistemological implication. Like the philosophical humanists, Marx's concept of corporeal man grounds a distinct epistemological view. As what remains to be shown, Marx's re-conceptualization of man as corporeal still retains the basic idealist thesis that human beings in some sense produce knowledge and at the same time provide a different ground of knowledge.

The Corporeal Man as an Objective Being

Marx in the *Manuscripts* first defines man as a corporeal being who is part of nature, like trees, birds, and sky. Man, for him, is "real, corporeal *man*" who's "feet firmly planted on the solid earth breathing all the powers of nature."¹¹³ He underscores that man is an objective being, and by doing so, he disengages this concept from the idea of man as a mere participant in the movement of Hegel's Absolute spirit. As Marx further continues, he points out that,

When real, corporeal *man*, his feet firmly planted on the solid earth breathing all the powers of nature, establishes his real, objective *essential powers* as alien objects by externalization, it is not the *establishing* which is subject; it is the subjectivity of the objective essential powers whose action must therefore be an *objective* one. It creates and establishes only objects because it is established by objects, because it is fundamentally *nature*.¹¹⁴

By underscoring that man's objective activity is expressed through externalization, Marx contrasts his concept of man to what he conceived as the Hegelian reduction of

¹¹³ Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," 389.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 389.

everything into the movement of ideas, which includes man. Man for him is not a mere Hegelian abstraction.

This concept of man is a product of, as what noted earlier, Feuerbach's and Marx's right-wing criticism of Hegel. In this reading, Hegel is thought to conceive the subject as being reduced to mere aspect of the unfolding of the self-realizing Idea. Contrary to Hegel's transformation of the human subject into ideas, Marx in the *Manuscripts* clarifies that the subject and the actors are not mere ideas but real corporeal beings that are part of nature. To treat man as nature means that he/she is neither spirit nor idea, which is a being that lacks flesh and bodies.

As a corporeal being, Marx further underscores that man is an objective being, which means that man, as being part of nature, is not an isolated ego, since "there are objects [that exist] outside" of them.¹¹⁵ These objects can affect man, since man is part of them. As an objective being, man can be grasped by the other beings since man has a body outside oneself that can be grasped by the senses. As Marx writes, "[t]o be objective, natural and sensuous and to have object, nature and sense outside of oneself, or to be oneself object, nature, and sense for third person is one and the same thing."¹¹⁶

Marx further describes that an objective man is engaged in an objective activity, which means that man does not only subjectively constitutes reality by cognition but it is also constituted through real corporeal action. Man is thought to create reality actively in

¹¹⁵ Ibid.,390.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

reality through labour and not only through consciousness and intellect.¹¹⁷ Marx emphasizes that what transforms the reality is not the idea of “establishing” but it is the subjects’ objective action that establishes its objects. This concept of objectification, where man objectifies his essence in nature, carries the Hegelian notion of “externalization.” Marx’s Feuerbach’s right-wing reading of Hegel, however, prevents Marx of acknowledging this similarity with Hegel. Instead, he contrasts his concept of objective and natural human subject from the concept of man that is reduced into unfolding of ideas, which what he thought as the implication of Hegel’s philosophy.

As man is an objective being, Marx also describes that corporeal man is a being that has needs. As man is a sensuous being who is a part of nature, it means that men are affected, suffering, and possessing drives, and therefore s/he needs objects outside of his/her. As Marx further defines the objective man, he claims that,

Man is directly a *natural* being. As a natural being and as a living natural being he is on the one hand equipped with *natural powers*, with *vital powers*, he is an *active* natural being; these powers exist in him as dispositions and capacities, as *drives*. On the other hand, as a natural, corporeal, sensuous, objective being he is a *suffering*, conditioned and limited being, like animals and plants. That is to say, the *objects* of his drives exist outside of him as objects independent of him; but these objects are objects of his need, essential objects, indispensable to the exercise and confirmation of his essential powers. To say that man is a corporeal, living, real, sensuous objective being with natural powers means that he has *real, sensuous* objects as the object of his being and of his vital expression, or that, he can only express his life in real, sensuous objects.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 389-390

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Given that the corporeal man suffers and thus has need, this aspect of man carries through his activity and affects his constitution of reality. As man is driven by needs, Marx clarifies that the objects of man does not only exist independently from man but these objects are objects of human needs. It means that in some sense the object that independently exists outside of man is affected by his needs. This need, as what will be elaborated later, affects not only the objective activity of man but also the subjective and cognitive aspect of him.

The Corporeal Man's Constitution of Reality

Grounded on his depiction of a corporeal man who is objective and has needs, Marx would also redefine the manner where man constitutes reality objectively and more importantly, subjectively. What Marx is doing is not new in a philosophical humanist tradition. Both Kantian and Post-Kantian tradition show that the various views on the cognition of the world are based on a certain concept of human being. Kant's transcendental apperception, Hegel's historical man, and Feuerbach's natural man suggest different nuances in the way man cognizes reality. Similar with these philosophical humanists, Marx's conception of a corporeal subject redefines how the objective reality is constituted and perceived by these subjects.

Given that corporeal man is being driven by needs, Marx puts a special emphasis on this concept of need to show it shapes man's objective and subjective constitution of reality. Marx's concept of need generally refers to what human beings' desire in order to be satisfied as a human. It does not only point to what human being's requires for

subsistence, since for Marx man needs more than animals and plants, which are limited to their survival. Marx, however, does not provide a discussion on ontology of need¹¹⁹ in his text. What he rather provides in the *Manuscripts* is an ostensive conception of need, identifying the three types of it. First is the basic need of subsistence common to human beings. Second is the estranged need, which for Marx manifests in various forms in the capitalist society, but essentially boils to the need to profit and multiplication of capital. And third is the human need. Marx describes this need as liberated from the estranged need to profit. It is rather the need to realize what is essential to the human person, which is not limited to material wealth or money.¹²⁰

In the context of the *Manuscripts*' discussion of objectivity, Marx describes man as driven by hunger, and this need, as he further suggests, requires a "nature" or an "object" for its realization. As he writes,

*Hunger is a natural need; it therefore requires a nature and an object outside itself in order to satisfy and still itself. Hunger is the acknowledged need of my body for an object which exists outside itself and which is indispensable to its integration and to the expression of its essential nature.*¹²¹

In this passage, he shows that there's an important relation between need and its object. He suggests that the confirmation of need can only be realized through a subject outside

¹¹⁹ A discussion on Marx's concept of need can be read on Frédéric Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire* (London: Verso Books, 2014). Lordon uses Spinoza's concept of conatus to illuminate Marx's concept of need and desire.

¹²⁰ Marx's usage of the concept of need is scattered in the *Manuscripts*. But there are also parts where Marx is more explicit on his ideas of it. Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," ff: 299-230, 354-356, 359-361.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 390.

itself, yet at same time, he also acknowledges that the recognition of an object is also realized through needs.

Marx underscores that need constitutes things, as he describes how need, in general, is related to its object. To establish this point, Marx first describes how object is constituted through its relation to the other objects. He clarifies that an object is constituted not out of its independent existence alone from man and from other objects. For him, an object is a product of relation among objects, which includes man and nature. Objectivity is more than the idea of independent existence outside of man, because it also requires that it must be an object of a third person. Marx stresses that a being is an object if it is an object of another. He even goes further in saying that “[a] being which is not itself an object for a third being has no being for its *object*, i.e. it has no objective relationships and its existence is not objective.”¹²² In other words, for him, an object, without being an object of another being, is equivalent to non-being. What Marx wants to point out here is that a thing (x) may exists outside of all beings in the world but if it does not participate in any kind of objective relation, whether a thing is grasped by senses, or an object of thought, of love, of desire, which what Marx thinks as form of objective relation, then its existence is of no concern to anyone.

Among these objective relations (e.g. object of senses, of love, of desire, et. al.), Marx places a critical role on the needs of beings as what establishes the relation of one object to another and eventually constitutes its objective existence. For him, need establishes the relation of one object to another: to be an object requires that it has needs

¹²² Ibid.

and at the same time it is needed. As for example, Marx cites how plant and sun establish a relation with each other. “The sun” Marx writes “is an *object* for the plant, an indispensable object which confirms its life, just as the plant is an object for the sun, an *expression* of its life-awakening power and its *objective* essential power.”¹²³ He describes how the sun and plant mutually establish their objectivity. Although not explicitly mentioned in the passage, Marx places need an important key in constituting the objectivity of each other: the sun becomes an object for a plant in so far that it is needed by a plant to grow, and at the same time, a plant becomes an object for sun, not because it needs a plant to grow, but because it needs a plant to affirm its characteristics and power (e.g. light, life giving being), which then affirms the objective existence of the sun. What he shows in the relation between sun and plant is that need, which seeks for another being for its satisfaction, affirms the existence of another being.

Like the relation between sun and plant, the same is true with the relation of corporeal men and how they constitute nature and at the same time be constituted by nature. Like how plant possesses needs, Marx also acknowledges that human being has needs (e.g. hunger) and this need is affirmed by constituting an object and nature outside of man. Unlike plant and sun, however, man is rather a more complex being. The relationship of man and his/her object is not only established by an object being an object of consumption for man, like how plant needs sun, and how the sun in some sense affirms its being by the consumption of plant. Men’s need and their constitution of objects are not only limited to the basic needs but extends to the subjective aspect, such as the spiritual,

¹²³ Ibid.

intellectual, and conscious life of man. As Marx concludes his concept of man in the *Manuscripts*, he clears that,

But man is not only a natural being; he is a human natural being; i.e. he is a being for himself and hence a *specie being*, as which he must confirm and realize himself both in his being and his knowing. Consequently, *human* objects are not natural objects as they immediately present themselves, nor is *human sense* in its immediate and objective existence, *human* sensibility and human objectivity. Neither objective nor subjective nature is immediately present in a form adequate to the *human being*. And as everything natural must *come into being*, so man also has his process of origin in *history*. But for him history is a conscious process, and hence one which consciously supersedes itself. History is the truth natural history of man.¹²⁴

In this passage, Marx confirms that the modification of man of nature does not only happen through objective activity alone but also through human cognition and self-consciousness. Marx's discussion on how objective reality is constituted by needs is not only limited to the constitution of reality through labour. He rather describes that consciousness are what made man different from the other objects from nature. The reality for Marx is not only an object of consumption but also an object of thought. Here, he clarifies that man is a holistic being, who is composed of both physical and mental activity. Thus, when Marx asserts that man constitutes nature, he thinks that the constitution happens holistically, as nature is being modified "objectively" through human activity and also "subjectively" through the human conscious process.

With man's holistic constitution of nature, Marx notes that human beings are incapable to grasp the "immediate" nature, since we have modified and transformed it to satisfy our needs. Beginning with the raw and untransformed nature, we have laboured on

¹²⁴ Ibid., 319.

it: tilled the grasslands into agricultural space, cut the trees and built houses and societies, and still, build and invent more, as expressed in our modern industrial societies, all to address the needs of man.

But aside from the objective activities of men, Marx also notes that men have also lost the grasp of the immediate nature out of our subjective activity. Here, Hegel still rings in the discussion of Marx, the concept of mediate and immediate are concepts Hegel used to describe the process through which consciousness grasps and becomes self-conscious of the truth. In rather abstract terms, for Hegel, the truth cannot be grasped by immediate acquaintance of an individual object. For him, grasping the truth undergoes a process where an object is mediated, that is, when an individual object is no longer grasped as an isolated object but as a product of contradictions, which are negated by comprehending an object in view of the greater whole, which what Hegel termed as the universal. It could be said that Marx no longer followed the same exact process of Hegel where truth become self-conscious for man. However, by suggesting that we are incapable to grasp an immediate nature subjectively, he clearly suggests a basic idealist thesis that nature must be brought in the level of thought and categories where it can be understood by man. In this process, it is clear that the *Manuscripts* refer to needs of man as what shapes the human thought of nature. In the *Manuscripts*, the human cognition is shaped not only by what exists outside of man but also on what is relevant to the subject's needs. As what will be shown later, the need that emerges in the system or private property and the need for a more humane society play an important role in shaping a particular view of the society.

Marx in the *Manuscripts* sets that knowledge is shaped by corporeal man who is objective and has needs. Need for Marx is an important driver on how human being cognize the world; need is critical in constituting man's objects that are to be consumed and to be conceived. At this point, we can see how Marx retains a basic idealist thesis, which Kant and post-Kantian tradition holds. Marx also holds the idea that knowledge is constituted by a subject, and for Marx it is the subject's needs that play an important role in the constitution of the object of perception.

Although Marx criticizes Hegel's reduction of reality into consciousness, Marx remains as an idealist in view that he thinks that man subjectively grasps the reality in view of the subject's needs. Marx does not subscribe to the idea that the independent existence of things alone is enough to be an object of man. Things may have independent existence but to be an object for man means that it must have an objective relation with man, which Marx underscores, as being established by needs. By acknowledging the role of the subject's needs in the constitution of reality, he shows how the reality is dependent on the subject, where men are incapable to cognize nature immediately because of their needs, in so far that their needs determine objectivity, and hence affects their perception of the reality. As what discussed previously, the reality is constituted both objectively and subjectively through needs. On the subjective aspect, man's cognition cannot grasp an immediate nature, since man—through needs—subjectively modifies his grasp of reality. How need plays an important role and precisely plays one's cognition of the reality shall be further elaborated in the next chapter; it will show how the type of need that is dominant in private property shapes the claims of the political economy.

Marx's Idealism and the Critique of Political Economy

Marx, as what the previous sections have shown, holds a basic idealist thesis, which asserts that subjects in some sense construct knowledge. What is distinctive, however, in Marx's idealist view in the *Manuscripts* is on how he extends his idealism and applies it to the realm of the political economy. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx further shows how the subject's needs affect the cognition of the reality. The type of need that drives the human subject shapes the human cognition. To further clarify how the subjective need shapes the human cognition, this section expounds on a particular need that is dominant in the private property; it shows and how this particular need, for Marx, supported the emergence of the science of the political economy. Marx refers to this need as an "estranged need," which can be described roughly as a need to profit and accumulate more private property. For Marx, the estranged need is also the ground of political economy's abstractions, contradictions, and its neglect of the estranged condition he observable in the economic system of private property.

Marx's Critique of Political Economy

Marx, in his autobiographical remark, traced the start of his concern over political economy when he was working as an editor of *Rheinische Zeitung*, an independent and radical newspaper. His newspaper experience has directed his interest not on ideas and logic of consciousness but to the issues of material condition, such as the debates on worsening economic conditions of the *Moselle* wine-growers, wood theft laws in the

Rhenish, and issues on free trade and protection.¹²⁵ After his editorial stint, Marx's interest on the economic concerns further grew when he read on Engel's *Outline of a Critique of Political Economy* in Paris.¹²⁶ His encounter of the text provided him an initial sketch of the character of the political economy. He even acknowledged Engels' *Outline* as one of his major influences at the preface of the Manuscripts.¹²⁷

The *Outline* shows that political economy sprang at the expansion of trade and commerce, when the economy was experiencing radical changes. As Engels describes, the science of economy, which is founded on the famous works of Smith, Mill, and Ricardo, elaborates the laws of private property and its basic economic categories when the old order established by the feudal and guild systems have been overcome by the growing industries and rising merchant class. The *Outline's* aim, moreover, is to expose the immorality of this new economic system and its defenders, the political economists. Engels underscores that political economy is but a form of a "licensed fraud," as this science does not articulate the laws of private property but only provide a justification of an economic system that impoverishes and dehumanizes humanity.¹²⁸

Inspired by his reading of Engel's *Outline* in Paris, Marx started reading numerous literatures of the political economists namely, Smith, Mill, Ricardo, Say, List,

¹²⁵ Evans, "Karl Marx's First Confrontation with Political Economy: The 1844 Manuscripts," 115-116.

¹²⁶Ibid., 121.

¹²⁷Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," 281.

¹²⁸ Evans, "Karl Marx's First Confrontation with Political Economy: The 1844 Manuscripts," 121.

Osiander, and Skarbek. Large excerpts from these authors were collected in his Paris writings, primarily in the *Manuscripts of 1844*,¹²⁹ where he declared to have his early “critical study of the political economy.”¹³⁰

Before launching into what Marx’s critique is, it is important to note that Marx in the *Manuscripts* praises political economy for discovering the secret of the wealth of private property in human labour. Marx recognizes Smith as the Martin Luther of the political economy, just as Luther grounded religion and salvation in the human being, Smith discovered the human labour as the ground of private property. For Marx, he explained that the wealth of private property is produced in the grounds of human labour, opposing the fetishistic idea that private property, such as money-capital and land, are the sources of wealth.

In the *Manuscripts*, Marx certainly applauds political economists for discovering “labour” as the source of private property, but he has also plenty of criticisms against them. First, he criticizes their concept of labour as “abstracted,” as their notion of labour fails to capture the miserable lives of the workers, which is the real source of the wealth of nations. Political economists ignore the estranged condition of the workers, which is the “real deduction of life.”¹³¹ They fail to see the ironic condition, “[where] labour produces marvels for the rich, but it produces privation for the worker. It produces palaces, but hovels for the worker. It produces beauty, but it casts some of the worker

¹²⁹ Ibid., 130.

¹³⁰ Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 281.

¹³¹ Ibid., 288.

back in the barbarous forms of labour and turns others into machines. It produces intelligence, but it produces idiocy and cretinism for the worker.”¹³² It makes the workers’ lives reduced to animal life, a “beast of burden... reduced to the minimum bodily needs.”¹³³

Political economists, as the *Manuscripts* continue, only see work as a “wage-earning activity.” They do not regard labour as a human work but a commodity, a living commodity that contributes more profit to capital. These economists, as the *Manuscripts* further add,

regards labour abstractly as a thing; labour is a commodity; if price is high, the commodity is much in demand; if it is low, then it is much in supply; ‘the price of labour as a commodity must fall lower and lower.’¹³⁴

As a commodity, labour is governed by the laws of supply and demand, where the influx of labour’s supply makes the worker’s price and life declines. The value of workers’ lives is subjected to stiff competition of the capitalists against workers and workers against workers. These competitions pull labour to its cheapest price, which is the tendency of any product or commodity.¹³⁵ Workers’ lives, as a result, are calculated on how much they could contribute to increase profit and how much they could produce more and could be paid less.

¹³² Ibid., 325.

¹³³ Ibid., 290 and 288.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 293.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

Second, aside from the abstracted concept of labour, Marx in the text further criticizes the political economy's contradictory categories its proponents are not aware of. In the *Manuscripts*, he notes, for example, the conflicting claims of Smith who tells that "originally in theory the *whole* product of labour belongs to the labourer," yet he also tells that the workers are supposed to get the "smallest part of the product," only necessary to propagate the "slave class of the workers."¹³⁶ The idea that product belongs to workers is inconsistent with the other idea that the workers, as a wage-earner, only gets the minimum part enough for him to survive and for the capitalist to profit.

In general, Marx shows that political economists commit to self-contradictions. He presents that these economists claim that labour is a means to buy everything, yet they also claim that labour also produces workers whose majority of life is work, and workers who are "far from position to buy everything" and must sell themselves and their humanity. Marx further notes that political economist also claim that labour is a "means" where man can enhance the "value of natural products," it is the active property of man," yet oddly, they claim that the landowners and the capitalists, who are "idle gods," are much superior to the workers, as they are the one who establish the law for the workers.¹³⁷ In whole, Marx describes the general problem of the political economists: their inconsistent economic categories that lead to self-contradictions.

After showing the abstractions and contradictions of political economy, Marx completes his initial attack to this science by highlighting its inability to explain the

¹³⁶ Ibid., 287.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

emergence of the economic system of private property, which in the first place, it aims to describe. In the famous section of *Estranged Labour*, Marx complains that political economy merely describes the different categories of the private property in general but neglects to explain how its whole system was formed. He claims that political economy merely “proceeds from the fact of private property... it grasps [its] material process ..., the process through which it actually passes, in general and abstract formulae which it then takes to be its laws.”¹³⁸ But it does not “explain” the economic system, it “does not *comprehend* these laws, i.e. it does not show how they arise from the nature of private property,” it does not show its “necessary, inevitable and natural developments.”¹³⁹ Marx shows that political economy assumes that the system of private property, with its laws and categories, is a fact. It means that political economy fails to show that there are particular conditions that provide ground for its structures to flourish, that there are causes and reasons for the necessary development of the system that produces large estrangement in part of the workers. The problem, as Marx indicates, is that the political economy is unable to go deeper in its analysis, they ignore *the “direct relationship between the worker (labour) and production.”*¹⁴⁰

To address the shortcomings of the political economy, Marx attempts to explain the logical and necessary materialization of private property in reference to an “actual

¹³⁸ Ibid., 322.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 325.

economic fact” – the alienated labour.¹⁴¹ In the remainder of the first manuscript, he develops the concept of alienated labour to explain the system of private property. The *Manuscripts* on alienated labour depicts the real conditions of the worker: the worker who experiences inhumanity by being separated from his product, activity, specie-being, and from other human being. The concept, for Marx, explains the development of private property and the relations that appear in this system. As he expresses this discovery:

It is true that we took the concept of alienated labour (*alienated life*) from political economy as a result of the movement of private property. But it is clear from an analysis of this concept that, although private property appears as the basis and cause of alienated labour it is in fact its consequence, just as the gods were *originally* not the cause but the effect of the confusion in men’s mind. Later, however, this relationship becomes` reciprocal.¹⁴²

In this passage, Marx reverses the causal relation between private property and the alienated labour. Commonly, it is the economic system of private property that causes workers’ alienation. But for Marx, it is the other way around. The alienated labour is not only a product of the oppressive economic system but its root. The alienated labour created the system of private property and the relation that estranged the human being. As Marx continues,

...through estranged labour man not only produces his relationship to the object and to the act of production as to alien and hostile powers; he also produces the relationship in which other men stand to his production and product, and the relationship in which he stands to these other men. Just as he creates his own product as a loss, a product which does not belong to him, so he creates the

¹⁴¹ Among Marx writings, the *Manuscripts* are the only text that contains the conceptualization of the estranged labour, and it is one of the reasons for the popularity of the *Manuscripts*.

¹⁴² Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 332.

domination of the non-producer over production and its product. Just as he estranges from himself his own activity, so he confers upon the stranger an activity which does not belong to him.¹⁴³

Marx deduces the system of private property from estranged labour. For him, the estranged activity separates the worker from his product, activity, and species being, which what makes the worker not at home with what he is doing. Furthermore, the estranged labour produces the estranged and unjust capitalist-worker relationship, where the capitalists gain profit from the estranged activity of the workers, and where the workers are impoverished while the private property and its owner flourish.

The political economy's errors of assuming private property as fact and neglecting the glaring estrangement that is happening in this economic system is grounded on a certain needs dominant in a particular society. This point is taken in the next section. But before continuing this discussion, it is important to note that Marx's critique of political economy highlights how this science puts man in a powerless position, where its laws and structures, in so far understood as an objective reality, are realities that can no longer be altered. On the contrary, Marx's emphasis on estrangement in labour, and also in cognition, suggests that man himself is the one who created the estranged reality he has sunk in. With this assertion, he places man in an empowering position, where man has also the capacity to alter reality and view it in a different light.

But the *Manuscripts'* attempt to explain the development of private property through alienated labour is not without fault. The alienated labour as an explanatory concept is problematic, because it cannot explain the development of the economic

¹⁴³ Ibid., 331.

categories developed in private property. Thus, Marx's claim is problematic as he sees that the alienated labour alone could explain the development of categories in the political economy. Marx writes that,

So with the help of these factors [estranged, alienated labour] it is possible to evolve all economic *categories*, and in each of these categories, e.g. trade, competition, capital, money, we shall identify only a *particular* and *developed expression* of these basic constituents.¹⁴⁴

But how exactly could estranged labour be the cause of all the categories in the political economy? Marx did not elaborate. Apparently, the concept is unable to provide explanations and essential connections why the private property operates in a certain manner. For example, the alienated labour cannot explain the development of private property from feudal land into industry. The concept of alienated labour is plagued with oversimplification, which makes it inadequate for its explanatory function.

Furthermore, the *Manuscripts*' claim that alienated labour is the root of private property begs the question of what is the root of this alienated labour? Marx in his text, however, does not clear out the ground of alienated labour. At one point, he explains that alienation is ingrained in the characteristic of labour: “[t]he *externalization* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside* him independently of him and alien to him...”¹⁴⁵ And on the other parts, he refers to the same economic system of private property as the source of alienation, which arguably a form of circular reasoning. Marx returns to the idea that the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 333.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 324.

cause of estranged labour is none other than the private property. For him, “[w]ages [which is the aspect if private property] are an immediate consequence of estranged labour, and estranged labour is the immediate cause of private property.¹⁴⁶ Marx expresses that estranged labour is the cause of private property, but the cause of estranged labour circles back to private property. It could be interpreted that the latter explanation shows how the alienated labour and private property supports each other in their coexistence. But on the other hand, Marx’s explanation could be understood as facing a chicken and egg problem, where it is not clear whether the alienated labour or private property that comes first. What makes Marx’s reasoning inadequate is because his deduction proceeds from the very idea he needs to prove, which is labour as externalization – i.e. alienation – of the subject in nature, without proving first that it is really the actual cause.

The Subject’s Need and Political Economy

The *Manuscripts’* critique on political economy certainly has inadequacies, but despite of that, as what will be shown later, Marx’s critique exemplifies how he deepens his idealist view on knowledge and extends it as a way to show that the errors of political economy is grounded on a certain subjective aspect of man, which is their needs as dominant in the society. In this critique, Marx shows how the theoretical claims of political economy are shaped by a socially subjective need that is dominant in private property.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 333.

Marx establishes relation between the condition of man and political economy at the opening part of the third Manuscript. He describes the political economy as a conscious reflection of the society in the system of private property. As Marx writes in the *Manuscripts*,

It therefore goes without saying that only that political economy which recognized *labour* as its principle (Adam Smith) and which therefore no longer regarded private property as nothing more than a *condition* external to man, can be regarded as both a product of real *energy* and *movement* of private property (it is the independent movement of private property become conscious for itself, it is modern industry as self), a product of modern *industry*, and a factor which has accelerated and glorified the energy and development if this *industry* and transformed it into a power belonging to *consciousness*.¹⁴⁷

In this passage, Marx starts with the premise that political economy as a science is a product of an economic system. Political economy, for him, is a conscious or theoretical reflection of the material condition, which is the movement of private property and its latest development in the form of modern industry. The question is, how does political economy precisely become a theoretical reflection of private property? Marx next elucidates how this private property precisely shapes the claims of political economy. He then directs his attention to the subjective needs that emerge in private property and shows how it affects this economic science.

Marx in the *Manuscripts* elaborate the concept of need that is central in private property in different ways, but it boils down to its core idea that this need desires the benefit and profit of private property rather than realize what is essential to humanity. This need can be clarified in Marx's discussion of the concept of specie being. Here,

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 341-342.

Marx describes how man's labour, in the system of private property, has been reduced to satisfy "the need to maintain physical existence," similar with how the beasts acts to satisfy their "immediate needs" to survive.¹⁴⁸ The worker's need is reduced into minimum, their maintenance. Marx differentiates that human's productive life does not only aim to satisfy "immediate physical need" as man has the capacity to produce "according to the standard of every species" that is "in accordance with the laws of beauty."¹⁴⁹ In the context of addressing the estrangement in private property, Marx describes human need, as the acknowledgement of man and their social needs, "man's *need* has become human need [when] the extent to which the *other*, as a human being, has become a need for him, the extent to which his most individual existence he is at the same time a communal being."¹⁵⁰

The estranged need, however, is the dominant need in the system of private property. Marx at some point identified this need with the Capital, but it could be also interpreted that the need to profit is the need of the capitalist, the dominant class, "the *alien* being, to whom labour and the product of labour belong, in whose service labour is performed and for whose enjoyment the product of labor is created, can be none other than *man* himself."¹⁵¹ Out of the capitalist's need, everything is compromised for the sake of profit. For example, driven by this need, Marx describes how healthy environment is

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 328.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 329.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 347.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 330.

sacrificed for the sake profit, as “[l]ight, air, etc. –the simplest animal cleanliness—ceases to be a need for man. *Dirt* – this pollution and putrefaction of man, the sewage of civilization—becomes an *element of life* for him.”¹⁵² The human life, in the same vein, is sacrificed, as this need encourages one to spend thrift and make everything “venal,” where one needs to save more and have more, because “the less you are, the less you give expression to your life, the more you *have* the greater your alienated life...”¹⁵³ In this type of need, the genuine human relations are lost. Because of the drive to have more profit, this “need” creates more desires, that it “becomes the *inventive* and ever *calculating* slave of inhuman, refined, unnatural and *imaginary* appetites.”¹⁵⁴ This need capitalizes that every need is a potential for profit, where “[e]ach person speculates on creating a *new need* in the other, with the aim of forcing him to make a new sacrifice, placing him in a new kind of *enjoyment* and hence economic ruin. Each attempts to establish over the other an alien power, in the hope of thereby achieving satisfaction of his own selfish needs.”¹⁵⁵As this need prioritizes private property, Marx describes this need, with a moralistic sense, as an expression of anti-humanism, as its ideal act is to sacrifice everything – the environment, human beings, and human relations – for the sake of private property.

¹⁵² Ibid., 359.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 361.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 359.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 358.

Marx sees that this need that has emerged in private property has an important role in shaping the inadequate claims of political economy. Political economy,

which *primly* abstracts from this large area of human labour, and fails to sense its own inadequacy, even though such an extended wealth of human activity says nothing more to it perhaps than what can be said in one word—‘need,’ ‘common need’?¹⁵⁶

The inadequacies of political economy, for Marx, do not only refer to its contradictions but more importantly, it refers to its neglect of the real estranged condition of the workers as it only understands them in terms of abstract labour. For Marx, the distinctive need that has emerged in private property explains the inadequacies of political economy. The need to profit more explains why its thinkers only recognize the abstract labour but ignore the obvious estranged condition of the worker. The quantified abstract labour is the relevant concept for calculating how private property can accumulate more, and the concrete alienation of the workers, on the other hand, is ignored as it is irrelevant to benefit the private property.

Marx explains the neglect of the abstract labour of political economy in the manner that emphasizes the effects of subject’s need to its claims. For him, as there’s a need to accumulate more private property, political economy “gives nothing to labour and everything to private property.”¹⁵⁷ Political economy for Marx does not recognize the inhumane working condition of the labourers, because of it is focused on satisfying its need to profit and accumulate more. The workers’ concrete condition is disregarded as

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 354.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 332.

they are abstractly understood on how much they can contribute for profitable end. Marx describes this abstraction of the workers in this process:

...as political economy is concerned, the requirements of the worker can be narrowed down to one: the *need to support him while he is working* and prevent the *race of workers* from dying out. Wages therefore have exactly the same meaning as the *maintenance and upkeep* of any other productive instrument, or as the *consumption* of capital in general which is necessary if it is to reproduce itself with interest.¹⁵⁸

As Marx shows, the workers are reduced on the amount of wage enough for them survive and greatly contribute to the profit of capital. In this claim, Marx also shows that the reduction of the worker into abstract labour is precisely driven by the private property's need to profit more. Because of this need, political economy only understands figures of workers, an abstracted quantity grasped on how much they can increase or decrease the capital.

The subjective need that emerges in the setting of private property sets the parameters where the political economy conceive the concept of labour. The need to profit means that labour should be understood on how much it serves this end, which the end concept is an abstract labour. This need, for Marx, explains why political economy cannot "recognize the unoccupied worker, the working man in so far as he is outside this work relationship. The swindler, the cheat, the beggar, the unemployed, the starving, the destitute and the criminal working man are *figures* which exist not *for it*."¹⁵⁹ This need also explains why political economy never questioned the glaring oppressive conditions

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 335.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

arising in private property, and how they never wonder about the meaning of the reduction of “greater part of mankind to abstract labour.”¹⁶⁰

By explaining that socially subjective needs shape the thinking of political economy, Marx shows how he extends his idealist view of knowledge as grounded generally from the natural needs of man to a more specific type of need, which is dominant need in a society structured in private property. Marx still retains the idealist thesis where knowledge in some sense depends on the subject, but here, he shows that this set of knowledge is the science of political economy dependent on the subject’s needs under private property. Here the way Marx understands political economy clearly departs from a positivist and realist understanding of science, where science is only understood as a product of objectively discovering the elements and structure of an independent reality. With such an understanding of science, the errors of political economy are understood as a mere failure to provide an exactly theoretical copy of the independent reality. But for Marx, the errors of political economy are not precisely about its poor copy of the reality. More than that, the incapacity of the political economy to understand the social reality is rather based on the subjective ground where it is built, which is precisely on the type of need that drives this science. Contrary to the positivist sense of science, Marx views political economy as a science that has subjective grounds and not as a mere disinterested science. Political economy for him is formed by a certain subject that possesses particular needs that emerge in the system of private property. This description of political economy is more fitting for the idealist epistemological view,

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 289.

since it recognizes how the subjective aspects affect the cognition of the world; it also asserts that knowledge, in a certain sense, depends on the subject.

The Dissolution the thing-in-itself in the Practical Standpoint

One cannot completely discuss Marx's idealist epistemology without addressing the question of whether he accepted the Kantian concept of the "thing-in-itself" in his epistemological view. The issue of thing-in-itself has become significant in the discussion of Marx's epistemology as Engels has explicitly defined a concept of thing-in-itself in his realist interpretation of Marx. For Engels, Marx's epistemological view should be distinguished from the agnosticism of Kantian philosophy. He interprets Marx as a positivist who thinks that reality is ultimately matter independently existing from the subject and it can only be discovered through scientific investigation. As a result of his materialist and positivist framework, Engels posits that Marx's concept of "thing-in-itself," if there's any, is simply the reality not yet discovered by science. As Engels appropriates the concept of thing-in-itself, he explains:

...The chemical substances produced in the bodies of plants and animals remained just such "thing-in-themselves" until organic chemistry began to produce them one after another, whereupon the "thing-in-itself" became a thing for us – as, for instance, alizarin, the coloring matter of the madder, which we no longer trouble to grow in the madder roots in the field, but produce much more cheaply and simply from coal tar.¹⁶¹

Here, Engels departs from the initial introduction of the concept of thing-in-itself in Kant's philosophy. He rather reconstructs the concept as an undiscovered matter. The

¹⁶¹ Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, 18.

concept of thing-in-itself is introduced by the Kantian idealist epistemology, which views that the subject's knowledge is limited only to the phenomena, i.e. to the reality as what appears to the subject rather than to the actual reality. What the subject can perceive is only a thing for the subject and not a thing-in-itself. The thing-in-itself (or the noumenal realm) is unknown to the human subject, since the categories of human cognition sets the conditions that limits the perception of the thing-in-itself, as this cognition provides form to the formless manifold of raw experiences. For Engels, however, the thing-in-itself is not a condition of human cognition but simply an unknown matter yet to be discovered by science. Eventually, for Engels, as soon as industry and science advance, this unknown matter (e.g. chemical and planets) will be known in time.

But the *Manuscripts*, unlike of Engels' interpretation, imply a limited condition of human knowing. In the *Manuscripts*, the unknown aspect of nature is not simply undiscovered by science but a condition of knowing. Although the text doesn't explicitly use the term "thing-in-itself," the idea that the available knowledge for man is dependent on human relation suggest that what is outside of the human needs is not an object for human concern, hence unknown to human being. In the *Manuscripts*, the knowledge of reality is dependent on man's needs. Without human dependence, Marx even expresses that such reality is nothing. In an often quoted remark in the *Manuscripts*, he expresses how the concept of nature makes sense only on human being:

nature too, taken abstractly for itself, and fixed in its separation from man, is *nothing* for man... *Nature as nature*, i.e. in so far as it is sensuously distinct from the secret sense hidden within it, nature separated and distinct from these

abstractions is *nothing*, a *nothing proving itself to be nothing*, it is devoid of sense or only has the sense of an externality to be superseded.¹⁶²

The *Manuscripts*' discussion on nature is set in the context of Marx's acknowledgement of the important contribution of the Hegelian philosophy. Before the remark on human dependency on nature, Marx praises Hegel for realizing that the concepts are human positing and creation. This thought, he sees, is the "positive achievement" of Hegel's philosophy. He commends Hegel for realizing that the concepts and thoughts are results of "universal estrangement of human existence,"¹⁶³ which means that the erroneous ideas of men are the result when men fail to realize the truth within themselves (i.e. men's self estrangement), which in Hegel's thought, men's failure to realize that the concepts and ideas are product of men's own consciousness.

Marx's approbation of some aspects of Hegel's philosophy suggests that he agrees on the idea that the condition of the human existence determines the type of concepts significant and relevant in certain thinking. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx has been explicitly against the Hegelian view that reduces everything into abstraction of mind, yet the quoted passage show what Marx thinks as correct in Hegel's philosophy. In the passage, Marx sees nothing wrong on the idea that knowing nature involves abstracting and putting it into certain thoughts and categories. He acknowledges, like Hegel, that the concept of nature is in a certain sense dependent upon man.

¹⁶² Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," 398-399.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 397.

Yet although Marx acknowledges the subjective dependence of the thinking about nature, he is cautious that his thinking could be identified plainly with what he thought as the Hegelian uncritical idealism. At the end of his praise on Hegel's philosophy, Marx returns to his criticism on how Hegel crudely reduces everything into thought, that is, how Hegel erroneously reduces the external existence of things into an error of consciousness or its self-estrangement. Marx writes,

Externality here is not to be understood as the *self-externalizing world of sense* open to the light, open to the man endowed with senses. It is to be taken here in the sense of alienation—a mistake, a defect, which ought not to be. For what is true is still the Idea. Nature is only the *form of the Idea's other being*. And since abstract thought is the *essence*, that which is external to it is by its essence something merely *external*. The abstract thinker recognizes at the same time that *sensuousness—externality* in contrast to thought weaving *within itself*—is the essence of nature. But he expresses this contrast in such a way as to make this *externality of nature*, its *contrast* to thought, its *defect*, so that inasmuch as it is distinguished from abstraction, nature is something defective.

A being which is defective not only for me, not only in my eyes, but in itself, has something outside itself which it lacks. ¹⁶⁴

By reducing objectivity as a form of illusion or a kind of defect, Marx critiques the abstraction in Hegel's philosophy, which reduces the human beings with their history, society, institutions, and problems, are reduced into movement of self consciousness. Against this view, Marx delineates that externality and being object of sense of another are not human misconceptions. He clears out that the dependence of nature to man must not be understood as a simple reduction of nature into thought, where nature becomes merely a product of consciousness. Marx, on the contrary, holds that nature still exists externally and independently from man.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 399-400.

By maintaining the quality of “externality” in the *Manuscripts*, Marx denies that the subject produces the reality and its truth ex nihilo. He rather suggests that reality independently exists from man yet maintains the idealist view that knowledge is a product of man’s abstraction and categorization. Given that what we know from this independent reality is a product of man’s conceptions and abstractions, a concept of thing-in-itself is inevitable. If what is available knowledge of the external reality are the “objects for us,” then there are aspects of the external reality that is unknown, since it is not put into human categories as it is not an object of needs of man. In the *Manuscripts*, the “thing-in-itself” is a logical implication of Marx’s idealist conception that knowledge is constructed by human being and his condition.

Probably, with the *Manuscripts*’ epistemology, it could imply that Marx suggests a certain concept of thing-in-itself. It could be interpreted that for Marx, human being has no capacity to know the nature in-themselves as Marx also explicitly states that nature is nothing without man, where the knowledge of nature is dependent to man. With this view, Marx’s critique of Hegel recurs back to some elements of Kantian epistemology. Myers, a Kantian Marxist, could be right in noting that like Kant, Marx views that “knowledge is the product of the interaction of the subject’s categorical structuring activity and the externally given raw material of sensation.”¹⁶⁵ Like Kant, he holds “the belief that the object cannot be conceived without the subject that constructs it.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Myers, “Marx’s Concept of Truth: A Kantian Interpretation,” 319.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 316.

Similarly, Kolakowski, despite being cautious in distinguishing Marx from Kant, is ready to accept Kantian elements in Marx's philosophy. Although Kolakowski does not use the term "for-itself" and "thing-in-itself," he instead uses the term "humanized or anthropological nature" to suggest how the perception of nature is modified by man. He understands that nature, for Marx, is being humanized cognitively. As a consequence, he explains that for Marx, the subject cannot know the "in itself," or the pure, absolute, and objective knowledge. "[I]t is fundamentally futile," he argues, "to hope that man by emancipating both elements of this relationship from himself can come to know the pure self, and thus himself as an independent consciousness, or else to know the pure "externality," and thus existence in itself, which is not "given" to anyone."¹⁶⁷

But the idea that Marx's idealist epistemological view is the same with Kant, and that Marx also holds a concept of thing-in-itself, is rather questionable. One reason is that the development of Marx's idealism is set in a different context with Kant. Unlike Kant who is set in the debate between empiricists and rationalists, Marx is set in the context of discussion and influence of being influenced primarily of Hegel and Feuerbach. The idealist view of Marx is produced out of his critical appraisal of Feuerbach's naturalist-humanism and his critical reading of Hegelian Idealism based on the right wing reading of the philosopher. Marx's idealism is shaped as he acknowledges first the truth of the German idealist tradition (which is primarily Hegelian), which is the idea that the subject constructs the knowledge, and second, as he recognizes the naturalist criticism he adopted

¹⁶⁷ Kolakowski, "Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth," 44.

from Feuerbach, which underscores that the knowledge constructed by men is grounded not on a mystical subject but on a real corporeal man.

Aside from that, the idea of thing-in-itself does not cohere with Marx's concept of *practice*, as articulated in the *Manuscripts*. In a certain sense, although Marx holds an idealist epistemology, Marx has been able to evade the complications of the concept of thing-in-itself, as he articulates a distinct standpoint where the corporeal man relates to reality. Marx calls this standpoint as the practical standpoint (*practice*).

The practical standpoint evades the question of thing-in-itself as it limits the probable questions to be asked by restoring man's unity with nature. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx poses the natural man in practice as a standpoint that sets what are possible questions to be inquired and what knowledge can be known. The practical standpoint is a man that is already engaged to his objects. A worker who is in production does not doubt the existence of the tools he is using or the objects of his productive activity. Presupposed in the practical activity is the existence of the things that can be an object of human engagements. In practice, Marx restores the unity between subject and object and man and nature, where "man as the existence of nature for man and nature as the existence of man for man."¹⁶⁸

As a standpoint, practice is contrasted from the contemplative attitude or the theoretical standpoint, which views the reality as an object of inquiry separated from human engagements. The contemplative attitude has been articulated by several of Marx's commentators to contrast with the practical standpoint. The contemplative

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 357.

attitude is understood as being detached and purely driven by a theoretical pursuit, which eventually leads to contradictions. It can be seen Descartes' and Hume's inquiries as primary examples of the contemplative standpoint; both also ended up into sceptical conclusions in their contemplation about the possibility of knowing an object.

The contemplative attitude, however, has questionable presumptions about the nature of relation between the knower and the known (i.e. the subject and object). The attitude separates the real things from our thoughts and creates a "destructive tension or unbridgeable gulf between our consciousness and real things we experience" leading to scepticism.¹⁶⁹ It creates a gap that produces unnecessary questions and problems.

Unlike the theoretical attitude that separates the subject from object, or man from nature, practice, for Marx, reunites man and nature and consciousness and its object. The standpoint opposes man's separation from nature, which is a product of the abstraction of man from nature, which is a product of abstracting man out from its condition and place. The standpoint is against the fragmentation of human being, where consciousness is disunited from its object.

With the practical standpoint, Marx criticizes the questions that apparently have no answers; he points out that there are questions that are impossible to pose when we are engaged in an activity, when we are into practice. Through the shift in standpoint, some questions are dissolved. Marx suggests that questions that search for "primary causes" of things, of "who begot the first man, and nature in general?"¹⁷⁰, are product of a

¹⁶⁹ Wood, "Philosophical Materialism," 188.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 357.

fragmented subject from its object, which is “itself a product of abstraction.”¹⁷¹ These questions can only be asked if men are disengaged from their activities. These questions have become one of the primary concerns of philosophizing. They try to find out: “what is the origin of everything?” “Does god exist?” “Is god the primary cause?” “Is reality eternal.”¹⁷² Noting these types of questions, Marx highlights the foundation where these questions are grounded; these questions, for Marx, have a presupposed standpoint, which is not the practical but rather abstracted and fragmented, often referred as the contemplative attitude. Marx asks against those who inquire with those kind questions:

Ask yourself how you arrived at that question. Ask yourself whether that question does not arise from a standpoint to which I cannot reply because it is a perverse one. Ask yourself whether that progression exists as such for rational thought.¹⁷³

With this remark, Marx launches what can be described as critical inquiry in a Kantian sense of the term, which is a search for the condition of knowing. Marx does not aim to answer those philosophical questions of cosmogony but posing another critical question, that is, how are these philosophical questions possible? Marx’s answer leads to the idea that these philosophical questions, which end into skepticism and paradoxes, are mere product of theoretical standpoint unnatural to man and which abstracts man from his/her activity.

The same critical questions can be asked with the questions of “thing-in-itself.” How is the question of thing-in-itself possible? Given Marx’s critical analysis of the

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 357.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

grounds of the abstracted philosophical questions, it is reasonable to think that the inquiry about the thing-in-itself can only be posed from the standpoint of contemplation and can be dissolved in the practical standpoint, when the standpoint of man engaged in practice is adopted.

As the concept of thing-in-itself is posed in the contemplative standpoint, the concept could be seen as leading to self-contradiction, since the fact that it is unknown means that we cannot say anything or describe it as a certain kind of realm, yet we are describing it as something unknown, which means that in a certain sense, the realm is known.

This kind of paradox arises when we assume that an object is unknown and a separated realm from man rather than a realm that is integrally connected to the human subject, since it is part of man in practice who integrally engaged with its object. As Lukács correctly describes the said point, he explains that the question of thing-in-itself has led to theoretical contradictions and therefore into scepticism. Thus, the culmination of modern philosophy in Kant ended into scepticism, which shows the limitation of the contemplative attitude. Kant's concept of thing-in-itself, for Lukács, captures the limit of the theoretical attitude. The quest for understanding the reality objectively, that is, distant from subjective affects and condition concluded in the idea that the subject becomes limited to appearance and the object that man engages becomes unknown. Lukács notes that because the theoretical attitude strives for pure "theoretical clarification and

analysis,” it leads into a pure theoretical picture, too formal, that it is liberated from all the content.¹⁷⁴

In the end, the thing-in-itself as part of Marx’s view on knowledge is incoherent with the overall view of Marx and to the ideas he has articulated in the *Manuscripts*. Engels’ reading of Marx’s thought is correct by noting that Marx in a certain way has resolved the issue of the question of thing-in-itself. But, to clarify, Marx does not resolve the issue by turning himself into a positivist or a realist. No way in the *Manuscripts* where Marx asserts that the thing-in-itself is simply a yet to be discovered unknown reality existing independently from the subject. If there’s any solution that Marx has given, it is the suggestion that the question of thing-in-itself is a product of a contemplative standpoint that destroys the unity between the subject and the object. The question can only be asked in the context of the subject being objectively distanced from its object. Thus, Marx’s solution to the question of thing-in-itself is not to discover it, because there’s actually nothing to be discovered. Marx would rather suggest to change our standpoint into practical to prevent posing meaningless questions produced in a standpoint that abstracts the subject and the object.

Nonetheless, the development of Marx’s concept of practice does not lead him to entirely abandon an idealist epistemology. Although Marx develops practice as a standpoint that resolves the abstracted questions produced by the contemplative standpoint Marx criticized as perverse. Marx’s notion of practical standpoint is still grounded on an idealist epistemology, since, for Marx, practice as a standpoint implies

¹⁷⁴ Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” 126.

that the subject has an active role in delineating the theoretical problems; this subjective standpoint modifies and even constructs what we can know and what can be asked. For Marx, the practical standpoint implies a consciousness that has a different starting point in viewing the reality. The practical standpoint, for Marx, is a “*positive* self-consciousness of man,” a kind of consciousness where “its starting point is the *theoretically and practically sensuous consciousness* of man and of nature as *essential beings*.”¹⁷⁵ What Marx is suggesting here is that practice as a standpoint recognizes the world differently; the consciousness it carries is not only a theoretical consciousness, which is distant from its object but also a “practically sensuous consciousness” which acknowledges that man and nature are not mere ideas but also sensuous beings. The practical standpoint hence implies idealism as it recognizes subject’s active role in determining one’s view of the reality, hence, it determines knowledge. Marx’s articulation of practice as a standpoint suggests the relation between the subject and object arises not out of the subject’s mere passive and theoretical reproduction of the state of affairs but it is also grounded on the subject implied standpoint.

If there’s any similarity between Marx and Kant, it is the recognition of the basic idealist thesis of a subject-dependent knowledge, which can be also grasped from the post-Kantian and philosophical humanist tradition. However, unlike Kant, Marx views that knowledge is produced not by subjects alone but by social subjects: “the object of social knowledge cannot be understood apart from the social subjects that constructs

¹⁷⁵ Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 358.

it.”¹⁷⁶ Marx advances that human beings, with their consciousness, views, and ideas belong not only in nature but also in a society. “The individual” Marx notes, “*is the social being.*” Thus, “[h]is vital expression – even when it does not appear in the direct form of a *communal* expression, conceived in association with other men – is therefore an expression and confirmation of *social life*”.¹⁷⁷ Marx recognizes that men are social subjects, he differentiates himself from Kant, he views that knowledge is produced not by an individual alone but by a subject in a social condition.

The Errors of the Realist Reading of the Manuscripts

As the previous sections show how the *Manuscripts* express an idealist epistemology, this section addresses the issues involved in the realist reading of the *Manuscripts*. The sections show how corporeal man cognizes reality, discussing Marx’s concept of subjective constitution of objectivity, and showing how cognition of reality is shaped by man’s needs. It is also shows how Marx’s idealist view is deeply manifested in the *Manuscripts*, as Marx, using the idealist standpoint he established, critiques the science of political economy. In this critique, as what is shown in earlier, Marx discovers the subjective ground of political economy, noting how the estranged needs dominant in the system of private property shapes the claims of political economy and at the same time grounds its errors.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.,319.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 350.

After showing the idealist epistemology of the *Manuscripts*, this section examines the realist reading of the texts and shows that this kind of reading is insufficient to reflect what Marx has written in the *Manuscripts*. The realist reading, which is best articulated in the recent works of Wood, erroneously simplifies the possible reading of Marx into two epistemological categories. For Wood, the reading of Marx's epistemology is reduced either under uncritical idealism or realism, that is, whether Marx follows Hegelian uncritical idealism, which views that cognition creates reality or he follows a realist epistemology, which holds the idea of an independent reality from man. The limited dichotomy between uncritical idealism and realism neglects to articulate the other possible readings such as the epistemological idealism, which what is reflected in the *Manuscripts*.

The argument of the realist reading of the *Manuscripts* is shown by Wood in his essay *Materialist Realism*. For him, Marx's realism is premised on his critique of Hegelian idealism. As Wood explains, Marx's opposition to the idea that the mind creates the reality suggests a shift of Marx's thinking to realist epistemology. Wood argues this reading in the following form:

It is true that Marx's talk about nature as man's 'creation' or 'objectification' is reminiscent of Hegel's notion that nature is 'posited' by cosmic spirit as its 'externalization'. But the resemblance hardly justifies ascribing idealist views to Marx. Marx is emphatic that the process by which human beings 'create' nature or objectify themselves in it is labor, and he attacks Hegel for reducing this labor 'abstract mental labour'.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 191.

Wood, in this passage, argues that Marx does not hold an idealist epistemology. Wood's argument is premised on his understanding of uncritical idealism, which is a view where the mind can transform the reality. As Wood denies that Marx holds the idea that nature could be modified via cognition, he also denies that Marx holds an idealist epistemology. For him, Marx's critique on Hegel's abstract (mental) labour suggests that Marx also holds the idea that nature can only be transformed through objective labour. Given that for Marx only through objective labour alone where reality could be transformed, Wood thinks that Marx limits the role of cognition as a mere reflector of reality rather than a creator of it. Wood stresses that Marx holds a "reflective theory of knowledge," where knowing merely means reflecting the independent reality and its properties, because the critique of Marx against the Hegelian form of idealism proves that he obviously subscribes to common-sense realism.¹⁷⁹

The main problem, however, of Wood's reasoning, however, is it reduces the option of reading Marx into two: either as uncritical idealist or a realist, neglecting to articulate the epistemological idealist stance. As Wood underscores Marx's critique of Hegel, he points out that the properties of things no way depend on man's cognition, he then describes that,

...the only way in which Marx thinks of nature or its properties as *dependent* on human beings is that the properties of natural objects can be changed by the direct or indirect action on them of human fingers (or bodily parts) guided by human intelligence. *Both exist independently of the existence of human beings, and the properties they have do not depend on anyone's being conscious (practically or otherwise) of these properties.*¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 189-190.

¹⁸⁰ Wood, "Philosophical Materialism," 193. Emphasis mine

Wood's assertion here is founded on a simplistic reasoning that if Marx criticizes the notion that reality is created by cognition, then reality must be independent from cognition, which for him implies that knowing the reality means copying its independent structure and properties. The point is if Marx criticizes certain form of idealism, it does not follow that he rejects all forms of idealism, such error occurred out of the confluences of idealism, which is discussed at the earlier chapter. One could acknowledge that Wood's reading is correct, that Marx certainly criticizes Hegelian idealism, and reasserts the sense of objectivity lost in Hegel; however, Marx's critique of Hegel does not follow that it implies realism and a copy theory of knowledge, since Marx's critique of Hegel and his notion of objectivity are also logically compatible to an idealist epistemology. In fact, Marx's assertion that we constitute reality both objectively and subjectively rather suggests an idealist thinking.

Like other realists, Wood also conflated the uncritical idealism and the epistemological idealism, which results to his inadequate appreciation of the epistemological idealist reading of Marx. Because Wood limits the epistemological implication of Marx's critique of Hegel to either being a realist or an uncritical idealist, Wood's reading overlooks the substantial evidence in the *Manuscripts* that clearly suggest an idealist epistemology. Wood, for instance, fails to completely articulate the unique concept of objectivity Marx expanded in the texts. He rather simplifies the way Marx articulates the notion of objectivity. Although Wood is correct in noting that the

Manuscripts underscore the notion of “ontological objectivity of nature,”¹⁸¹ he, however, only defines it as suggesting the independent existence of things, which is just one of the aspects of objectivity as developed in the *Manuscripts*. His reading neglects Marx’s idealist assertion in the *Manuscripts* that object for human beings are object of his needs that exist independently of him, where knowledge of an independent object for Marx is constituted out of human needs. An object, for Marx, is not only an object because it exists but because it is an object of human needs. Thus, knowledge

Furthermore, the realist claim that nature is only constituted through labour is also contradictory on the *Manuscripts’* view that human beings constitute the view of nature subjectively. Marx in the *Manuscripts* views that the constitution of nature happens not only through labour but it happens holistically: nature is constituted both through objective labour and subjective consciousness. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx describes that the human beings constitute the object both objectively and subjectively to satisfy their needs. He views that knowledge is, in some sense, shaped subjectively through human needs, which is better understood under idealist epistemology. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx shows how need constitutes our subjective views, and this is further shown by Marx on how the subjective need that emerges in the private property shapes the claims of the political economy.

¹⁸¹ Wood, “Philosophical Materialism,” 190; Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” xxxvi.

CHAPTER V
THE REVOLUTIONARY COGNITION: THE *MANUSCRIPTS*' ROLE IN CHANGING
SOCIETY

The epistemology of Marx developed in the *Manuscripts* is clearly different from his popular realist and positivist interpretation established by Marxism and Engels. The *Manuscripts* does not simply view that knowledge is produced by theoretically copying the independent reality or by a scientific investigation. Instead of reading Marx as holding the view that knowledge is based from an independent reality, he should be understood in the *Manuscripts* as expressing the idealism that asserts that knowledge is in some sense constructed by man. The realists' and positivists' neglect of Marx's idealism in the *Manuscripts* overlooks much of what Marx wants to say in the text. These readings cannot make sense of how he articulates the ideas of need, objectivity, and his critique of Hegel and political economy.

The idealist epistemology of the *Manuscripts* needs to be underscored, as the ideas of these texts stand at the critical juncture in the debate of Marx's epistemology. The *Manuscripts*' epistemology contributes in clarifying Marx's early views on knowledge, which is a prerequisite to understand the overall development of the philosopher's epistemology. To neglect the epistemology of these texts misses an important aspect of the overall epistemology of Marx, inadequately understanding his

epistemology. Early Marxists, for instance, unsatisfactorily conclude Marx as a realist, since the *Manuscripts* were absent in their initial formulation of Marx's epistemology. Engels, who is a major influence to the early readings of Marx, mainly referred to Marx's later works, which are the available texts during his time. The Marxists, influenced by Engels, similarly referred to these later works.

The discovery and publication of the *Manuscripts* have resulted to richer discussions of Marx's epistemology. The texts contain Marx's important epistemological claims about man, need, and object, set in the critique of Hegel and political economy and critical adoption of Feuerbach's naturalism and humanism. To clear that Marx's epistemology in the text is idealism settles the discussion on how the *Manuscripts* should be read in view of its own epistemological assertions and in view of the development of Marx's overall epistemology.

As established previously, the idealism of the *Manuscripts* is rest in the tradition of Kant and Post-Kantian philosophies. Marx precisely set his discussion on his critical engagement of the philosophies of Hegel and Feuerbach. He utilizes Feuerbach's reading of Hegel to position his own version of naturalism and humanism. This concept of humanism has a long tradition of defining man to clarify the way which man acquires knowledge. Like Feuerbach, Marx follows this tradition and defines man as a corporeal being, i.e. objective and being driven by needs. By defining man on this manner, Marx re-conceptualizes the idea of knowledge, showing how human knowledge is constructed out of the human corporeality, which is the human condition. He underscores that objectivity is dependent on the subject's needs. Objective beings are not simply established by their independent existence but also by their dependence on humans'

objective relations, most especially as an object of needs of another being, which in this case, man. Marx repeatedly underscores that an object is an object of man not only because it independently exists but because it is an object of human needs.

But more than Feuerbach's notion of man, Marx extends Feuerbach's humanism to the realm of economy and its science and not only in the realm of religion. Framed under idealist epistemology, Marx critiques the political economy to show its errors and how it is driven by the subject's needs dominant in the private property. Marx's critique of political economy in the *Manuscripts* further proves how Marx views that knowledge (e.g. ideas, theories et. al.) is dependent on the socially subjective needs that drive the system of private property. For Marx, the need that emerges in system of private property explains not only the errors and contradictions of the political economy but also explains why this science neglects the glaring estrangements in the economic system. Marx's critique shows that the dominant need to accumulate more is a factor that shapes the view of the political economy. It explains why this science only abstractly understands the workers as engaged in a wage-earning activity thereby neglecting their estranged condition.

Given the Idealism of the *Manuscripts*, the realist reading of the texts fails to correctly grasp Marx's concept of objectivity and needs as developed in the text. The realists neglect the *Manuscripts'* key assertion that objectivity is in a sense determined by human needs, which suggests that knowledge is shaped by this aspect of human being. This misreading of the realists is grounded on their view of Marx's notion of objectivity, which is limited to the idea of independent existence of things. As a result, the realists cannot provide a correct account of Marx's arguments in the *Manuscripts*. They fail to

correctly understand Marx's critique of political economy, where Marx unveils the subjective ground of this science in the subjective needs dominant in the system of private property.

Aside from the textual evidence, what makes the idealist reading of the *Manuscripts* reasonable is because it is grounded on the proper approach of the text. First, this idealist reading is based on a careful delineation of the concepts of idealism. It avoids the erroneous conflation of different idealisms, which have been used in the discussion of Marx's epistemology. This reading does not follow Engels' conceptual definition, which understands idealism simply as either an ontological or an uncritical view. Engels' conceptual distinctions are disregarded, because they cannot provide sense to the idealism in an epistemological sense. Engels only defines idealism as an assertion that reality is idea or that idea produces reality, neglecting its sense as an assertion that knowledge is produced, constructed, modified by the subject.

Second, this reading is conscientious of the distinct context of the *Manuscripts*. It does not follow, for example, Wood's reading where he understands the claims in the *Manuscripts* in view of Marx's later works such as the *Grundrisse* and the *Capital*. His reading fails to note the context of the *Manuscripts*: it disregards how Marx's first encounter of the political economy and how his continuing critique of Hegelian philosophy brought him to an idealist epistemology, which maintains the independent existence of things and the subject's cognition through needs. Contrary to Wood, this work's approach is different from the reductive reading that has been employed to understand Marx. Against this reductive reading, the idealist reading of the *Manuscripts* avoids this tendency to understand the *Manuscripts* in view of the later writings of Marx.

The idealist reading is based on the recognition that any approach to the *Manuscripts* should recognize that it has its own epistemology and it cannot be reduced to the later works of Marx. To reduce the *Manuscripts'* distinct view to Marx's later works does not help in providing an overall idea of the development Marx's epistemological view, that is, it could not confirm or deny whether Marx's development in his later thoughts is continuous or has deviated from the framework he developed from his early works such as the *Manuscripts*.

Taken together, the *Manuscripts'* idealist view provides a significant insight on the aspect of how cognition could be also a force to address and change the estranged social conditions. Societal change, for Marx, does not happen through practical action, political movement, and revolution alone but also through development in consciousness and cognition.

Certainly, Marx emphasizes that practical action can generate change, as he reacts against the prominent Hegelian notion that societal transformation can be realized through the movement and self-realization of consciousness. During Marx's time, Hegel and Young Hegelians popularized the idea that the transformation of the realm of cognition and theory is a tool to practically change reality. For them, change in consciousness also means change in the empirical reality. Cognition of what is true, or being conscious to what is rational, is tantamount to transform the material reality.¹⁸² Set

¹⁸² Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, 131. Hegel reconceptualises practice initially conceived by Aristotle. He unites theory and practice and thinks that is a form of practice. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle conceives practice and theory as different form of knowledge. Practice is understood not as an activity but a mode of knowledge about what is instrumental. What Aristotle refers as the "instrumental, applicable knowledge." Theory, on the

in criticizing the Hegelian view of change, Marx underscores not the mere movement in self-understanding as the one that can provide change but practical action. Change is materialized by the objective and empirical actions—of real hands and feet—that hold and transform the reality.

But aside from real action, Marx also acknowledges the important role of cognition for changing the society. Change in consciousness and thinking are also important aspects for resolving the contradictions of the estranged economic system. This view is grounded on Marx's concept of a holistic human being that is both a subject and an object. Under the concept of a holistic man, the development of man's subjective senses also changes the object of these senses, it also takes part in the transformation of the society.

Marx shows this importance of the cognitive aspect in his discussion of the development of the communist movement. In the section *Private Property and Communism*, he expounds that the development of communism is a holistic process that involves not only the empirical action but also the birth of its thinking consciousness. As he writes,

The entire movement of history is therefore both the *actual act* of creation of communism – the birth of its empirical existence – and, for its thinking consciousness, the *comprehended* and *known* movement of its *becoming*; whereas the other communism, which is not yet fully developed, seeks in isolated historical forms opposed to private property a historical proof for itself, a proof drawn from what already exists.¹⁸³

other hand, is knowledge that aims for the “ultimate, universal truth.” Unlike practice, this knowledge aims for knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself.

¹⁸³ Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 348.

For Marx, communism, which is a real movement that can positively supersede the estrangements in private property, needs to give birth to its “thinking consciousness” to be a fully realized movement. He further discusses this idea of development of thinking and subjective senses as he leads his discussion to private property. After his two sections devoted to Communism, Marx argues the need to develop the senses to address the estrangements of the private property. For him, the extent on how these subject’s senses developed determines the extent of one’s view of the reality. As Marx writes,

... the most beautiful music has *no* sense for the unmusical ear, because my object can only be the confirmation of one of my essential power, i.e. can only be for me in so far as my essential power exists for me as a subjective attribute (this is because the sense of an object for me extends only as far as *my* sense extends, only has sense for a sense that corresponds to that object). In the same way, and for the same reasons, the *senses* of social man are *different* from those of non-social man. Only through the objectively unfolded wealth of human nature can the wealth of subjective *human* sensitivity – a musical ear, an eye for the beauty of form, in short, *senses* capable of human gratification – be either cultivated or created. For not only the five senses, but also the so-called spiritual senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.) in a word, the *human sense* the humanity of the senses – all these come into being only through the existence of *their* objects, through *humanized* nature.¹⁸⁴

Marx’s remark here is an important claim because it shows that the development of human senses, which includes thinking, is essential for determining the extent of what can be perceived as real. For him, political economy holds the undeveloped senses that limit its view of the social reality. It is driven by needs dominant in private property, a crude need centred on accumulating more private property. This crude sense of political

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 353.

economy explains why it cannot recognize the various estrangements of the workers in a capitalist world.

Noting how Marx unveils the root of thinking, the *Manuscripts*' critiques of political economy and Hegelian idealism can be understood as not mere criticisms per se. Implied in these critical readings is the idea that cognition is an important factor for social change. For Marx, right theory and outlook should be developed; theoretical criticism must be also a paramount concern, because it is an important force to address the estranged condition set by private property. Marx calls to develop a form of cognition that is human as oppose to the crude senses of political economy. This cognition takes the man's essential needs at the centre instead of the "egoistic desires" that are dominant in the system of private property. The human need is not a need of private property, it is not a selfish need for more accumulation. The human need instead is the need to emancipate man from the estrangement of private property.¹⁸⁵

The human need, hence, produces a different understanding of the reality. Contrary to the estranged thinking, the human thinking, for Marx, views nature as an object that serves humanity and not only as an object of utility for egoistic ends.¹⁸⁶ It conceives object in view on how it can satisfy the essential needs of human beings. Driven by human needs, Marx's analysis discovers the estranged labour and the miserable lives of the workers from the abstractions of political economy. The human thinking, which is grounded on human needs, views the world differently compare to

¹⁸⁵ Marx indentifies this need with socialism, where "not only man's *wealth* but also *poverty* acquire a *human* and hence a social significance." *Ibid.*, 356.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 352.

thinking grounded on the estranged needs that has emerged in private property, which only understands labour as a mere process of production and not a process of dehumanization.¹⁸⁷ In this human thinking, Marx notes that “[t]he eye has become human eye.”¹⁸⁸ It means that the object has “become a social, *human* object, made by man for man.”¹⁸⁹ The transformation of an object to a human object suggests that these objects are no longer created for selfish needs to accumulate more profit. It is now created to serve the needs of the community. The cognition of the object is perceived not on how it serves the amassing of property but on how it realizes the essential human needs. Hence, for Marx, the “new need” of the workers and members of political movement for the “new society” is necessary for the birth of the communist consciousness and thinking.¹⁹⁰ It shapes a new form of cognition. the emergence of a new thinking is not only based on the discovery of the outside world, because new thinking involves the cultivation of the new needs of man, a need that is more human in comparison with the need that emerges in private property.

The *Manuscripts*’ idealism shows the revolutionary role of cognition in changing the society. It opens an epistemological task of developing knowledge not only by refining its tools to provide an exact representation of the reality but by re-grounding its foundation on human needs. As for Marx, “[t]he idea of *one* basis for life and another for

¹⁸⁷ Marx points the concept of abstract labour if seen sufficient, even “conceals the estrangement in the nature of labour.” *Ibid.*, 325.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 365.

science is from the very outset a lie”¹⁹¹ thus the ground of theoretical quest must not be the estranged needs but the human needs. This aspect of Marx’s thinking is important to highlight because of the widespread association of Marx to the cruelty and bloodshed that are associated to his name.¹⁹² Given the enormous violence that have transpired in the Soviet Russia that bears Marx’s name, he has been negatively interpreted as the foundation of these gruesome events. Man on these events seems powerless in face of the dictatorship of the state. But contrary to this view, the idealist view of the *Manuscripts* places man in a more powerful position, as man’s cognition no longer functions as a mere copy of what is out there. To underscore man and his capacity to question the assumptions of his thinking that produces estrangement, Marx returns man into an empowering point to address the different of estrangements that has emerged in the modern world.

In the *Manuscripts*, cognition, rather, takes part in the drive to realize a humane world; it has the capacity to create a conception of reality that best serves the needs of humanity. Its idealism suggests that it has a critical role to play for changing and humanizing the world. It shows that the quest for societal change not only requires us to act but also to challenge our assumptions and foundations of our thinking. It requires us to be conscious, not only about the information we have in this world, but also with the interests and needs our cognition serves. In the end, the *Manuscripts*’ idealist epistemology provides a vantage point where the change even in our very cognition could be asked. It provides a space where we can challenge the foundation of cognition that

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 355.

¹⁹² See note 2 above.

supports and recreates estranged reality and to create a type of cognition that liberates man from estrangement and serves the creation of a humane world.

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