

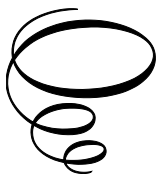
Marx's Struggle
Against the Terminal
Abstract with a Focus
on Political Economy

Marx's Struggle Against the Terminal Abstract with a Focus on Political Economy

By

Jesús Muñoz-Bandala

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



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This book first published 2026

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN: 978-1-0364-6323-6

ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-6324-3

To my parents: Jesús and Elsa.

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PREFACE

[T]“he immoral, irrational and soulless abstraction of a particular material object and a particular consciousness ...subordinated to its object (Marx 1842).”

“A rough outline of this process from the empirical to the abstract to the concrete is found in... Marx 1903 (quoted in Reuten 2003, 173).”

The discarding of both vague assumptions and arguments positively impacts theory creation with respect to the assessment of such epistemic elements as essence, object, subject, abstract, concrete, appearance, sequence, concatenation, and contradiction. The immediate goal is the identification of Marx’s conceptual aims with the purpose of dimensioning his legacy on concreteness. Marx was grounded on new methods (habits of mind) and humane motivation for the purpose of tracking out the basics of the fields he founded or participated in. He departed from the solving of juvenile disquietudes to conduct an innovative outline of such social concepts as alienation and greed pointing towards the construction of a concrete sketch *apropos* human emancipation. Alternatively stated, he resorted since 1843 to a novel vista that generated a concrete method to be embedded in his offering of humane insights in the linked fields of ontology, morals, and economic-politico-social philosophy.

Marx’s mission related to epistemological emancipation may not be fully diaphanous for some readers. This being the case, Marx’s perdurable aim is hereby chronicled by way of the delineation of his epistemic sequential categorization: Naked observation-the abstract-the sophisticated concrete. The elements of the former chain conform the gist of Marx’s method. This is of paramount relevance since many of his rivals and even some of his peers do not bypass the stage of abstractionism, which explains either their generation of bare theories or the misunderstanding of significant visions. In a nutshell, abstraction is misleadingly taken by some researchers as an ‘ultimate’ stage, but it is hereby argued all the way through that abstraction is uniquely an intermediate step in the accomplishment of knowledge.

The relevance of the analysis of the sequence nude concrete-abstract-elaborated concrete, the main proposal of this volume, may prove to be a

fascinating issue especially because of the discussion of Marx's notion and overcoming of "final" abstraction (a solecism at this stage of writing) takes a historical character. The outlining starts with the accurate definition of the abstract. Then it examines the overstatement of the abstract in Marx's predecessors (Hegel, Ricardo, and Proudhon), continues with the chronicle of Marx's and Engels's findings on the abstract, to be followed by the narrative of the works of dominant Post-Marxists (Althusser, Ilyenkov, Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, Sohn-Rethel and so on). Thereafter this narrative is focused on the passthrough from Capitalism to Socialism, and the implementation of Socialism as it is conceived in the Marx's Scientific Research Program. It then examines the practical importance of Marx's concrete categories on political economy based on Dialectical Materialism. These cumulative examinations about the realism and applicability of Marx's theories and their misinterpretations of the abstract on the part of others constitutes a stronghold in the viability of Marx's project of liberation.

This relation of the succession between the abstract and the concrete is about the history of the use of these epistemic entities by means of the chronicle of dialectic immanent dynamism, previously to Marx, by Marx, and by his successors (c. 1890-2024). The gap in knowledge within human history hereby covered is referred to the provision of an historic landscape starting out from the mid-nineteenth century showing off the epistemic notions imbricate in both Capitalism and conventional wisdom. The salient point is that most of the foundations of these slants are presumed to be eternal and ubiquitous. Conversely, Marx's theory is inventive for being historical, and hence dynamic, interrelated, and continuous – representative of his dialectic between freedom and necessity (see Balibar 2014). In parallel terms, abstraction as a misleading or excessively used cognisant resource may prove to be an error if considered as a "final" epistemic resource since those speculative findings related to purely static notions are abstract and immobile, to say the least. But this is only a hypothesis at this stage. Whether this is true, this multisided investigation will reveal (see our Chapter 11).

The utility of the abstract as a mark out resource in the epistemic terrain has been recurring throughout the history of social theory. This being true, the assumption throughout the book is that the "final" abstract must be deputized for the "terminal" concrete as the latter entity leads to sensible practice. Of course, a bottomless reason underlies this choice of the topic on the part of this author. Marx's concrete method was apposite for the explanation of the development of phenomena for being underpinned in

both organicism (the whole is different from the addition of its parts) and immanence, instead of being concerned on the effects of insulated events arising from either external or random causality. A helpful citation *apropos* the strength of concreteness is: “[T]he simple categories of...[*knowledge*]...are the expressions of relations within which the less developed concrete may have already realized itself before having posited the more many-sided connection...which is mentally expressed in the more concrete category (1857-58).” A double idea can be derived from this Marx’s statement. The existence of concreteness must not be taken for granted as an element of social analysis. It must be discovered and put in display. Even more importantly, concreteness entails the resort to inner knowledge therefore being apt for the provision of solutions.

This is only guesswork at this moment. The definitions of the abstract, concreteness, and dialectic are given in Chapter 1. Then the examination of the foundations of Marx’s insights conducted in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 is rounded out by both the pondering of the role of the abstract and the concrete in Marx endeavoured in Chapters 5 and 6 and the description of the interpretations generated by his immediate and mediate inheritors is undertaken in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. The crowning of the study is the skeleton of political economy endeavoured in Chapter 10. I became obsessed with the need for the demolishing significance of the concreteness since I was perplexed by the abstract character of the lessons on both political economy and political philosophy that I took on economics (c. 1980). For me, the world portrayed by British Classical Political Economy (1776-1830) and its continuators (1848-90) seemed to be static and immeasurable. I learned c. 1990 that modern conventional political economy is mostly based on “final” abstractions except by such isolated concrete notions as net present value or the behaviour of the exchange rate. Later I became conscious that stasis is a condition prefigured by abstractionism, so I decided to pen a text on the view on the abstract by the rival school: Marxism, since the mentioned periods of gestation of political economy coincide with Marx’s epoch. Marx is treated here as a reputable but also a problematic philosopher since, among other reasons, extremes are emotional abstractions. The interest of this writer on the epistemic entity heretofore named “final” abstract will be made crystal clear during this reading, hoping that the reader will be able to sympathise with this approach which critically deals with classical and recent sights on Marx’s attitude to abstraction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To those qualified Marxologists, especially Diana Fuentes and Sergio Lomelí, who conduct both teaching and research on Marx and related philosophers and topics in UNAM (Mexico City). To those teachers who taught me concrete notions on Marx's methodology by work of a pluralistic perspective during my early days in ITAM (Mexico City), for example Rodolfo Delatorre or Franz Oberarzbacher. To my professors in Lancaster University (UK), University of Missouri-Kansas City (US), and Georgetown University (US) whose imprint on my acumen *apropos* economic philosophy is transcendent. To anyone capable of understanding the biases inherent to abstractionism and mystification in the understanding of phenomena.

INTRODUCTION

Abstract

Abstraction or the condensation of issues into a unilateral diffuse diversity is an epistemic quality residing in mental processes, especially in dialectic, to be resorted to after the undertaking of the ‘initial’ observation of the conditions of a problem. Abstraction provides the initial comprehension of a phenomenon by way of the imagined rearrangement of the interrelated and dynamic parts of an investigation to be disgorged in the end into concreteness. Its defective form, “terminal” knowledge in the form of “final” abstraction, a solecism of this author meaning that abstraction used in excess or in inappropriate places must acquire a concrete character apt to understand the real world. Thereafter praxis must stem from the transit of the subjective to the objective. Thus, the assessment of Marx’s epistemology concerning inner concrete conceptualisation is the theme of this volume. That is, the Marx’s methodological seal is the reinstatement of abstraction as an “intermediate” entity in the cognisant dialectical process ending up in concreteness. This is the hypothesis of this qualitative historical analysis to be undertaken in the form of textual exegesis. To restate, this book attempts to demonstrate that Marx innovatively took in abstraction (properly defined in the beginning of this book) only as a secondary –cursory or evanescent– phase in dialectic (his method of inquiry was inherited from Hegel), with the aim to arrive at the third stage: Concrete praxis (see Marx’s *Thesis XI*).

The Marx-Engels’s Scientific Research Program directed to action is the point of departure of this epistemic revision if only as a scientific tenet. The definition and contextualisation of the abstract are the subject matter of the first Chapter. Marx’s methodological and ontic inversion of Hegel’s subjective concepts in favour of the consideration of material conditions as the engine of history along with the overcoming of speculation –as conducted by Hegel or the Utopian Socialists as well as the imagery of Classical Political Economy– are examined in Chapters 2-4. The most important part of this writing is a relation of Marx’s and Engels’s critique and overcoming of the abstract “being” and abstract reason to be steered in Chapters 5 and 6. Thereafter, the ontic problem of “intermediate” abstraction, its importance (in epistemic, political, and social terms), its

context, and its overcoming on the part of Post-Marxists are studied in exegetical terms, for example in Althusser (on economicism), Gramsci (on hegemony), Adorno (on abstraction), or Sohn-Rethel (Real abstraction) in the early twentieth century in Chapter 7 but also in more recent authors such as Postone or Cohen in the nineties, or Resnick, Wolff, and Oliva *et al.* who have written in this century. This is due to most of these post-Marxist writers return to the analysis of subjectivism but all of them made either straightforward or indirect contributions to the understanding of concreteness in Marx. The endurance of Marx's upbringing in relation to "immediate abstraction" as a methodological tenet is further clarified by passing judgment on the concrete nature of the transition from Capitalism to Socialism, the concrete implementation of Socialism, and the gist of the Marx's critique of political economy in Chapters 8, 9 and 10, respectively. Conclusions of this study evaluate the nature of the "final" stage of concrete knowledge in Marx as the utmost part of his legacy, a story related in Chapter 11.

The added value of this book consists in the provision of holistic methodological reflections about Marx's encompassing *oeuvre* especially on the theme of knowledge acquisition, formation, and application. The ultimate point to be demonstrated here is that Marx's principal contribution is epistemological. The gap covered is referred to the interlinkage of otherwise detached epistemic categories in Marx, with a sway in the branches of philosophy and political economy even those exposed in long established quarters. The idea is to produce an overarching envisagement of Marx's contribution. These approachable insights on Marx's gift to posterity in the fields of ontology, ethics, political philosophy, and political economy are thought-provoking, provided they are seen from an innovative totalising perspective. Taking everything into account, this volume puts in display the Marx's stance with respect to the great topics: Essence, consciousness, the truth, man, identity, individualism, history, the economic motive, social process, and human emancipation.

JEL Classification: A10, A12, A14, A19, A40, B10, B14, B24, B30, B31, B41, B49, B51, N13, Z1, Z10.

Key words: Hegel, Marx, Engels, Feuerbach, Proudhon, Smith, Ricardo; complexity, *SRP*, core; philosophy, method, Historical Materialism; epistemology, ontology, ethics, political and social philosophy; dialectic, abstraction, concreteness, inversion, praxis, ideology, subjectivism, structuralism, real abstraction; subject, object, essence, appearance, consciousness, inner connections, Absolute Idea, Absolute Spirit,

alienation; individualism, Utopian Socialism; political economy, labour value theory, value, money, capital, surplus value, exploitation, profit; Capitalism, Socialism, Communism; man, species being, needs; transition, struggle, evolution, revolution; acceptance, endurance, continual relevance, contradiction, epistemic breaks; reception, legacy, resonance; innovativeness, interpretation, incorporation, reassessment, restatement, generalisation, simplification, reduction, trivialisation, misappropriation.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“Abstract ideas are the source of all philosophical perplexity (Berkeley 1710, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Introduction).”

“Hegel...put in place of these fixed abstractions the act of abstraction... and...created the entire compass of abstraction as the object of criticism (1844a, 74).”

[T]“he master economist...must...touch abstract and concrete in the same flight of thought (Keynes 1924, 321-322).”

This section explains in a preliminary form the characteristics of overstated concentration on the abstract on the part of many thinkers, say David Ricardo (c. 1817), by work of a case study of knowledge acquisition placing Karl Marx (c. 1867) at the epicentre. This author considers the critique of abstractionism as the fulcrum of the breakdown of the Marx-Engels’s Scientific Research Program (SRP) under the proviso that the goal of the Marx’s project is the landing of insights. The leaving point is the chronicle of the investigation of the abstract in renowned German, French and British authors in the nineteenth century (Chapters 2-4). The first hypothesis of this volume is that the Marx’s setting is held together by the concreteness of formerly abstract categories with respect to practical action (Chapters 5-7, and 10). The second postulate is that for Marx the present is concrete and must be properly disgorged into practice, but the future remains undefined (Chapters 8 and 9). In summary, this book examines Marx’s legacy founded on the investigation about the protagonism of the “ending” concrete. By means of the demonstration of these hypotheses, this book detects the Marx’s disentanglement of selected abstract quandaries, some of them of interest outside the confines of the academy for example the potential for survival (“becoming”) on the part of Capitalism (see Chapters 7 and 10).

Straightforwardly, the line of reasoning of this book is that Marx’s substitution of the “final” abstract in place of the “intermediate” abstract¹

¹ The step undertaken between crude concrete observation and the elaborated concrete. The dialectical sequence in Hegel is abstract-negation-concrete (see our Chapter 2).

is at the hub of his grasping of the world which is ultimately targeted to the practical solving of human needs. The ensuing Chapters progressively exhibit the logical argument for the demonstration of this ascertainment so that this volume is a contribution to the investigation of Marx's epistemic slant. It is interesting to learn the counterintuitive fact that abstraction is a simplicity as compared to the over-determined concrete. As a response to this kind of enigma, this book aims at informing why and how Marx's uneasiness on abstractionism goes ashore as a reconceptualization of the "terminal" abstract and the highlighting of elaborate concreteness. These disquietudes do not arise from a soliloquy on the part of this writer: [T] "his process from the empirical to the abstract to the concrete is found in one of Marx's few methodological texts...[but]...Marx identifies neither these levels of abstraction in *Capital* nor how to get from one level to the next² (Samuels *et al.* 2003)."

By and large the Marx's bequeath is indiscernible without the clarification of his abstractions along with those of his predecessors and continuators, meaning that no *oeuvre* is understandable in the absence of the identification of epistemic roots and motivations. The *raison d'être* of this volume is hence to explain how Marx and Engels got rid of those historical riddles such as the real meaning of either value or emancipation formerly explained by spiritual notions (see Chapter 2 about the march of the Spirit in Hegel), which should only be "intermediate" abstractions. Let's take a pilot bird's view of Marx's milieu as related to the starring role of concreteness in what follows, which is fully broken down in Chapter 5.

A preliminary glance at abstraction in Marx

How can the triumph of Marx's dialectic be put in display? The significance of Marx's dialectic is discussed by many philosophers, interpreters, and social scientists as explained not only by the description of classical scholars say either Kant in Chapter 2 or Hess in Chapter 3, but also those of modern thinkers or researchers as Lenin (1908 [1972]), Berlin (1938 [1978]), Althusser (1970), Murray (2016, 2019), or Oliva *et al.* (2020) in Chapter 7. The hypothesis undertaken here is that the hub of Marx's upbringing lies in his realistic method and the entrenched lesson may be that realistic knowledge must lead to application. But realism

² This work offers an *overt* multi-dimensional but objective interpretation of the significance and pathway of the abstract chiefly by means of a nineteenth-century perspective.

assumes that there is concreteness not abstractness in consciousness. The assumption to be tested here is thus that Marx defied the inkling that the “terminal” abstract is the major stride in respect to knowledge creation. As Marx wrote in another context: The clash [*is*] “against the gods of heaven and of earth who do not recognize man's self-consciousness as the highest divinity (1841, quoted in Rosen 1998, 1).” So far so good, but concreteness goes beyond consciousness. This epistemic vantage point is tried out right way through this book first and foremost by disintegrating the footings of Marx's method. Posteriorly, Marx's concrete judgement on mankind is recognised by proceeding from the study of his influence on the fields of ontology (concern with reality), epistemology, ethics, political philosophy, aesthetics, linguistics, anthropology, and literature.

Is in this context that the philosophical anatomy of abstraction acquires importance. Abstraction simply and temporarily reproduces reality in thought (cf. Musto (Ed.) 2008). But when thought does not necessarily lead to action, the message is that the abstract must be prevailed over. For that purpose, the outcome of knowledge ought to be ordered and refined in terms of singularity, completeness, depth, and practicality. Consequently, the hypothesis expressed all through these pages is that observation is the take-off point of knowledge, but on top of that that its follow-up step, abstraction, must only be the preparatory step for the landing of inquiry into new concrete knowledge. Under this vein, this book is dedicated to the investigation of why some authors detain at the stage of abstraction imagining that abstraction is a “terminal” entity within the analysis of humane issues. Inside out for Marx man was a historical – social – and hence concrete sensuous being immersed into an evolutionary process (see Gioia 2019), though other authors notably John Stuart Mill (1860) entertain similar concerns. In this scaffold, the main postulation of this volume is that the comprehension of Marx's concreteness ensures the understanding of his philosophy which reaches its apex in the making of his concrete political economy based on humane concerns. This is the *leitmotif* of this book.

Going deeper, Marx's philosophy can be understood by grasping the essence of his method in relation to dialectic. Originally, Marx despoiled Hegel's “original” dialectic of its preternatural –abstract– form through the consideration of a peculiar materialist strand (see Chapter 2). During the process, Marx's combatted abstract categories and prefigured the gist of ideology. Hegel was the personification of the a-priori transhistorical German Idealism. On the other side of the spectrum, British empiricism arose as a resource for targeting the a-posteriori sustainment of

hypotheses. The point is that Marx went beyond those outermost strands by creating a universe set for the transcendence of the substance of abstract categories. Indeed, concreteness for Marx comprises the structure of both reason and knowledge and is a central issue in social science (see Chapter 5). Then again, these are only pre-emptive insights as regards Marx's visualisation on epistemological procedures, which discernibly require to be demonstrated.

Objectives and means for the obtaining of knowledge in this volume on the abstract

[T]“hat knowledge can shake off its abstract philosophical (metaphysical) entrapment... (Amariglio and Ruccio 2017, 40).”

Marx's top subjects (c. 1844) such as the achievement of a new leading-edge method, the quest for the essence of contradiction, and the interrogation on the proper use of abstraction are all related to dialectic which is placed at the core of his construction: Historical Materialism (c. 1845). Reportedly the role of the former two broad groupings of concern in Marx has been extensively studied, but the character of abstraction has been investigated or even mentioned to a much lesser extent, with such allowances as Ilyenkov (1918), Lukács (1923), Adorno (1962), or Sohn Rethel (c. 1940, 1960). Most of them, conversely, do not assert that Marx's legacy secures a solely epistemic character. But Marx's legacy can be categorised as one having a profound epistemological character. Under this postulation, the aspiration of this essayist is the identification of prominent accounts and interpretations as regards “terminal” abstraction in the primary and secondary literatures on Marx's and others' *oeuvres* (both by pre-Marxists and post-Marxists) under the proviso that “closing” abstraction is a cognisant hurdle. The author's ambition is thus to assess Marx's usage of “final” concretion to weigh up his (and others') donation to humankind.

So far, as this author knows, the misunderstanding of the place of abstraction as a “final” epistemic resource restricts scientific awareness in the social realm by turning a position into speculative. Furthermore, nebulous misapplication brings about real-world negative consequences such as the creation of erroneous categories or the freezing of epochal (or regional or place-level) insights. These affirmations are conjectures at this point, but this volume is aimed at their demonstration. Alternatively stated, the mainstay of this book is the analysis of the consequences of innovative concretion in Marx's theory, practice, and ideology underpinned in the de-

abstraction of his categories and notions. It is all about practicality in Marx's theory. This being so, the distinctiveness of this book lies in the setting down of the epistemic message³ of Marx's *oeuvre*. Let's undertake an initial elaboration of this point. According to Dafermos (2021), Marx uses dialectic to look to the route leading to human emancipation departing from congealed -abstract- objects. This is what makes Marx to establish the pre-foundations of Critical Theory (see Aguirre-Rojas 2020; our Chapter 7) so that his method entails the discovery of a concrete transformative societal resource (our Chapters 8 and 9).

The objective of this writer is consequently the reinsertion of the work of outstanding authors on abstraction into the Marx's discourse on concreteness for testing the epistemic quality of Marx's *oeuvre* whilst recovering its substance. The purpose of this book is thus the illumination of the apparently unclear -or frequently distorted- vision of the method of study in Marx's research. The means is the unification of formerly detached abstract concepts, the great goal -expounded in our Chapter 11- being the demonstration that abstraction is either a short-lived representation or a subjective intermediate device speciously aimed at the acquisition of "final" knowledge in political economy. Therefore, it will be tried here whether abstraction⁴ is a detour with respect to the road towards temporary misguided perception. Instead, the final correct step -elaborated concretion- straight-forwardly offers order, completeness, determination, and explanatory power. This hypothesis is launched here presupposing that wholeness, depth, veracity, and lucidity are the epistemic virtues of Marx's method.

Going over, Marx's role as a first-rate epistemologist has been widely debated for a long time, as demonstrated by the appearance of numerous writings on the subject. The motivation of this writer is to show off a dichotomy in Marx, that existing between the abstract and the concrete taking place within the dialectical sequence. The spotlight of this writer is the narration on how Marx worked out an analysis of political economy based on the criticism of the abstract discourse of previous philosophers, notably Hegel. The question to be responded is whether the comprehension of man essence is misleading due to its mystical character, whose response is interwoven all through the Chapters. But the ultimate puzzle is why "intermediate" abstraction survives at all. The intention of this author is the identification of new approaches on abstractness with corresponding *state-of-the-art* solutions arising from a non-traditional cognisant setback.

³ Unity as the object of philosophy is related to the unveiling of essence.

⁴ Lacking nuances.

The author is a heterodox economist. He is another *connoisseur* of Marx's work, political economy, and philosophy with experience on the real world who has lived in a reflective way in regions of Latin America and parts of the Anglo-Saxon world.

Method in this book

“Nothing is more serious than its method (Robinson 1931).”

“...in Capital Marx applies a particular systematic method for outlining these interconnections, by way of moving in stages from abstract to concrete categories. There is, however, disagreement on the...mode of progression from one stage to the other (Sweezy 1942, quoted in Reuten 2024, Ch. 4, 2).”

The former citation is about the in-depth insights related to the method used in *Das Kapital* (1869). According to it the interactions among concepts and categories in many fields of social knowledge are studied, an example being the substance of Capitalism. Under this light, this study is grounded on the extension of Marx's methodological foresight on the analogies and -feasibly irreconcilable- divergences between the abstract and the concrete. The objective is to grasp the intricacies of any kind of social science. Why bother? At this stage, this writer only intuitively feels that abstract models generate numinous results. This being the case, the issue dealt with in this book is the comparative exegesis of relevant texts on the historical functioning of the “terminal” abstract. Of course, Marx's stance on concreteness is the reference point. This effort is comprised of narrations about historical philosophical routes, for example in Hegel (our Chapter 2). It also includes alternate methodologies on endogenous dynamics, such as Lakatos's *SRPs*. It incorporates an analysis of the abstractionism of certain figures such as Kant (Chapter 2), Proudhon (Chapter 3), Adam Smith (Chapter 4), Engels (Chapter 6), Lukács, or Sohn-Rethel (Chapter 7). The pertinence of the theme of the abstract is twofold. The criticism of “final” abstraction may be the panacea to be used for the inspection of the Marx's epistemological donation. Also, this writing constitutes a protestation against the penchant for the “final” abstract perception which may block our concrete visualisation. We only assume at this stage that concretion is the recipe for problem resolution in the social realm as regards knowledge acquisition and processing.

Product differentiation, audience, and international appeal

The selection of a topic may seem arbitrary to the reader at the beginning of a book, but the rationale of the author is slowly but surely discerned by means of the acquisition of empathy with the latter's mission. This book is neither a biography nor an account of Marx's intellectual development. It is neither a treatise on Marx's philosophy nor an analysis of either Marx's individual works or Marxist isolated themes such as surplus value. This is a book in the fields of economic philosophy and political economy as regards the role and consequences of the appropriate use of abstraction by Marx and other key figures. The book expounds a critique of the use of the "terminal" abstract across history with the purpose of offering an explanatory account of the origins, functioning, and the Marx's envisagement on the foundations and reach of practical knowledge. This story of the dichotomy abstraction-concretion bears a relationship with the specific upward pathway of humanity that departs from Hegel (c. 1807). It ends up with the post-Marxists (c. 1950-2020), in whose chronicle the topic of the accomplishment of emancipation is vital.

This volume might possess international appeal due to its inspection of Marx's place in Western philosophy as a pioneer in the investigation of the future of Capitalism. The book is addressed to those readers interested on the sociology, economics, history, and history of the culture about key intellectual episodes of the nineteenth century with the side benefit of offering a reading of non-Marxist assessments on Marx's *oeuvre*. The volume also tracks the crucial non-Marxist influences on Marx's work. Of importance for this account of Marx's concrete *oeuvre* are the author's interpretations of the works of certain interlinked personalities pertaining to the *longue durée*⁵, such as Kant, Mill, Comte, Hess, Luxemburg, Trotsky, Gramsci or Sohn-Rethel. Before I forget, this author writing on the work of such giants of political economy as John Stuart Mill, John Maynard Keynes or Milton Friedman also writes texts on the history of philosophy specifically about such thinkers as Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Friedrich Nietzsche. He mainly writes about selected Western European thinkers who lived in the bright nineteenth century.

⁵ This notion is taken from Braudel (1958) [1980]. It is fitting for both the use of transcendental concepts in sociology and the detection of the relevance of watersheds in history or in economics.

Overview. A general introduction to Chapters content

“Kant and Fichte soar to heavens...I [but] seek to grasp... that which—in the street I find (‘Epigram on Hegel’, II 3).”

Chapter 1 defines the abstract and its overcoming by providing the corresponding theoretical framework. The use of the abstract is a long-standing cognizant concern in many quarters as these pages will make evident. Then comes Part I which has a say on a period of both the European History and the history of the culture during the nineteenth century. The idea is dealing with pre-Marxist Western wisdom (c. 1817-40) for the deciphering of the message of Marx’s predecessors on the abuse of the abstract as a “terminal” resource. Its Chapter 2 is about the genesis of abstractions of all kinds in the realm of the history of Western philosophy. It is focused on Hegel, for whom the abstract is in practice the supreme analytic principle. Chapter 3 is on prior social philosophy -with respect to Marx’s though- lucubrating about the Utopian Socialists *apropos* their notion of abstraction, mainly about Proudhon the dreamer of out-of-the-ordinary social worlds. Likewise, Chapter 4 is on the British political economists, placing the spotlight on David Ricardo’s⁶ somewhat obscure philosophical stance and influential stand point on political economy.

Part II outlines Marx’s viewpoint on abstraction and contributes an analysis of Marx’s overcoming of the “definitive” status of the abstract between 1843 and 1883 by means of a literature review. The assumption taken all over is Marx became conscientious that the stopping at the abstract turned explanations of the world incomplete. Because of that discernment, Chapter 5 recounts the manner on how the decrying of Marx about “final” abstractionism was conceived, after the identification of it as both part of consciousness and preliminary leap for application. The Chapter explains during the process why history was for Marx the interplay of concrete forces. Chapter 6 is about the ancillary Engels’s perspective on abstraction and its accompanying process of de-abstraction. Both Chapters intend to verify the postulation that concreteness founds Marx-Engels’s Scientific Research Program (see Appendix 1.1).

But the story of abstractionism obviously comprehends another Chapters. Part III is modernistic not less for being more pluralistic. To begin with, Chapter 7 deals with the conceptualising writings of post-Marxist scholars

⁶ [T]“he unrealistic abstractions of Ricardo (Keynes 1936 [1964], 340).” This Keynes’s warning against abstractionism in economics is significant and non-biased as he was an anti-Marxist thinker.

as regards abstraction via the critical breakdowns of value-form theory, dialectic, and polity, but with subjectivism at the midpoint, prominent amongst them being the works of Trotsky, Mandel, Lukács, Gramsci, Althusser (based on economicism though), or Sohn-Rethel as well as those of more recent interpreters, say John Roemer. This part searches for clues on excessive abstraction and explains lapses of ignorance or inaction while dealing with the implementation of the *M-E's SRP* on the part of interpreters of Marx's *oeuvre* by putting to use an interdisciplinary approach based on subjectivity and culture. Its follow-up Chapter 8 constitutes an inquisition on the substance of transition giving a rough idea on the problems faced by key twentieth-century Marxists as associated to the timely and spatial execution of the *M-E's SRP*, taking account of Marx never cleared up this issue. Chapter 9 is on the concrete transition from Socialism to Capitalism in the form of transformation of both man and the system mainly through economic and organisational -managerial- terms but with a bearing on man essence. Marx's notion of concrete labour is at the heart of the qualification of the distinction between current Capitalism and upcoming Socialism (see Hudis 2019) to dimension the controversy on the consequences of implementation.

The gigantic but polemic presupposition is that Capitalism must be irremediably replaced (see Fromm 1961, in another context) since Marx's non-speculative philosophy drew in his mind the renewal of political economy. Chapter 10 thus relates the supreme arrival of Marx at concretion: The analysis of the starting point and reach of new economic categories with the objective of explaining and remedying inequality, implicitly discussing the role of both organic matter and practice in continuous motion. Chapter 11 the backmatter comprising Part IV offers the synopsis of an anti-abstractionist story -passing judgment on the artificiality of its "final" mode-, an insight wielded all through the previous Chapters.

INTRODUCTION TO THE NOTION OF THE ABSTRACT IN MARX

Chapter 1 comprising the introductory section of the book is about the definition of the abstract in a wide array of variants and manifestations of the notion in question. This Chapter elucidates in an academic formal style the background, definitions, role, and underscoring of both the substance and the alternation of the epistemic entities: The abstract and the concrete. It is the basis for the subsequent investigation on the relevance of the rigid “final” abstract across certain historic episodes, whose substance is here hypothesised to be an epistemic error since knowledge must end up in concrete terms for the undertaking of action. To be more accurate, this Chapter is directed to the provision of conceptual insights on abstraction as the foundation of a progressive understanding of the Marx’s epistemology, mainly undertaken in Chapters 2-6. The two initial appendices are all-embracing in character, describing both the Marx’s Scientific Research Program and his complex system. The third addendum offers dictionary definitions of abstraction.

CHAPTER 1

DEFINITION AND OVERCOMING OF THE ABSTRACT

“People are governed by abstractions (1857-8 [1873], 64).”

[*The*] “mutual completion and exchange of the activity...appears as *division of labour*, which turns man...into an abstract being (1844a).”

“*Logic*...is...thinking which abstracts from nature and from real man (1844a).”

[*H*]“is attacks on abstract principles...” (Berlin 1978, 61).”

“Abstract definitions...conceal a determined historical and hence concrete basis (‘Marx to Engels’ 1858, April 2).”

The objective of this book in the fields of the history of economic thought and economic philosophy -mainly on epistemology- is the investigation of the starring role of the adequate placing of abstraction as an intermediate entity in Marx’s method, marking his imprint in cultural history. The role of abstraction in the acquisition, treatment and use of knowledge is a longstanding theme dealt with by many researchers but only partially or incidentally, notably Schumpeter (1954). Other exceptions regarding the scarce concentration on the “impressionistic” abstraction, which is pictured all through these pages, are Hegel 1807 (Chapter 2), Ilyenkov 1936 (Appendix 1.4); Sohn-Rethel 1940-1970 (Chapter 7); or Oliva *et al.* 2020 (Chapter 7), among others, and of course Marx and Engels themselves 1844-1869 (Chapters 5, 6 and 10). This book exposition is grounded on a one-of-a-kind perspective on the part of Marx for being focused on the analysis of the progressive themes of the “terminal” abstract and its overcoming. As said before, this task is undertaken through a historical-analytical overarching interpretative approach in the broad themes of philosophy and political economy centred upon a dissection of his dialectic method and its alternation between the abstract and the concrete. The latter epistemic dyad is of interest as it goes beyond apriorism and deductive reasoning, as logical way of proceeding, as well as simple