

# **Marx's unfinished Critique of Political Economy and its different receptions**

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# Marx's different approaches to analyze capitalism

Economic-Philosophical  
Manuscripts (1844)

- Philosophical approach  
Theory of „Alienation“

Poverty of Philosophy (1847)  
Communist Manifesto (1848)

- Critical application of  
Classical political economy

Grundrisse (1857/58)  
Theories of Surplus Value (1861-63)  
Capital, vol.1 (1867)  
Manuscripts for vol.2 and 3  
(1864-79)

- Critique of political economy  
(Critique of conceptual  
foundations of political  
economy)

# Conclusion

You cannot combine any of Marx's writings in an arbitrary way.

„Communist Manifesto“ is not a short version of „Capital“

„Manifesto“: absolute immiseration of the workers

„Capital“: rising real wages

„Manifesto“: crises destroy capitalism

„Capital“: crises lead to a reconstruction of capitalism

We will deal only with the third period (Critique of Political Economy).

# **Karl Marx: „I am not a Marxist“**

There is a difference between Marx's own analytical approaches and the many systematizations of Marxists.

Many important works and manuscripts of Marx were unknown for a long time.

In 20th century, each generation knew a different Marx.

# Publications after Marx's death (1883)

- 1885 Capital, vol. 2 (edited by F. Engels)
- 1894 Capital, vol. 3 (edited by F. Engels)
- 1904-10 Theories of Surplus Value (edited by K. Kautsky)
- 1932 Early Writings: Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts, German Ideology
- 1939 Grundrisse
  
- 1976-82 Manuscript 1861-63
- 1992 Manuscripts for Capital, vol.3
- 2008 Manuscripts for Capital, vol. 2
- 2012 Last Manuscripts for Capital, vol. 2 and 3

# Different Receptions

Discussions about social theories are never „pure“ intellectual efforts.

They always depend on the political and economic context and on related scientific discourses.

That produces different receptions, even of the same texts.

I will give some flashlights on the conditions of different receptions.

## Influence of the „marginalist revolution“

“Capital“ criticizes the naturalization of capitalism: the economic forms (commodity, money, capital) are considered as „natural“, Marx criticizes this as „fetishism“. He provides a theory of „social forms“

Marx's *value theory* is a critic of the *labour theory of value* of classical political economy.

In early 1870s the „marginalist revolution“ started. In the conflict between labor theory of value and (marginal) utility theory of value the difference between Marx and the classical political economy was nearly completely annihilated.

## **Dominance of vol. 1 of „Capital“**

Vol. 1 of „Capital“ was published nearly 30 years before vol. 3. It dominated the reception of all three volumes of „Capital“.

Vol. 1 started with a monetary theory of value  
continues with a monetary notion of capital  
then analyzes the production of surplus value and  
accumulation in a widely non-monetary way

This produced the impression that production and its non-monetary analysis were the core of Marx's analysis of capitalism.

# Reception of Marx's Crisis Theory

Basic question until today: Are crises necessary in capitalism?

Classical and neoclassical school answer with „No“.

Marx and Keynes answer with „Yes“.

Marx's analysis of the immanent mechanism of crisis was not finished, there are quite different approaches.

During the first half of 20th century, non-monetary interpretations of Marx's crisis theory dominated.

Furthermore: a theory of „collapse“ was assigned to Marx.

## **Bastard Keynesianism vs. Simplified Marxism**

Keynes' „General Theory“ (1936) was one of the biggest achievements of economic theory in 20th century.

After World War II a simplified version dominated (IS-LM Keynesianism), which erased the strict opposition to neoclassical theory („Bastard Keynesianism“). It seemed that the core of Keynesianism is stabilizing capitalism by „deficit spending“.

Marxism (mainly the simplified versions sketched above) opposed: stabilizing capitalism is not possible.

## Discussions since late 1960s

1960s: Protests against the US-war in Vietnam and students' movements in many countries. A „new left“ (beyond Marxism-Leninism) emerged and different „new readings“ of Marx started.

„Capital“ was not any more read as an alternative „political economy“ but as a „Critique of political economy“ and as a social theory instead of a narrow economic theory.

More texts like „Grundrisse“ were used. It was recognized that „critique of political economy“ was not just given in „Capital“, but that it was to be reconstructed out of different Marxian manuscripts.

# **New texts and new discussions during the 1970s**

1976 the new MEGA (Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe) started: Papers and drafts written by Marx and Engels will be published completely and in their original form.

Also important drafts of Keynes, regarding his monetary theory of production, were published 1973 for the first time.

Monetary character of Marx's value theory instead of a „labor embodied“ theory of value.

Marx's crisis theory was not any more reduced to conditions of production.

Using approaches of Marx, theories of capitalist state and theories of the world market were developed.

## Recent issues: Critique of Political Economy as program

1992-2012: Publication of Marx's original manuscripts for vol. 2 and 3.

Marx-Engels problem: Engels as an editor intervened strongly in Marx's manuscripts. For example: Strong connection between crisis theory and the „profit rate law“ is an editorial artefact.

Marx's critic of the profit rate law in the 1970s.

Crisis theory of „Capital“ were written until 1864/65, but Marx's research continued until at least 1879: changes in later manuscripts.

„Metabolism between man and nature“ (today: ecological problems) became a prominent issue in 1870s for Marx.

Different roads of capitalist developments (USA, Russia), Marx didn't consider England any more as the „locus classicus.“