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Essay 1

What initially began in the British Museum, led arguably to one of the most “ruthless criticisms” of capitalism in the eighteenth century. Marx believes criticism must maintain a ruthless demeanor in two senses: It should not be afraid of the solutions that arise from its analysis, nor should criticism fear the conflict with authority that will likely surface due to the nature of itself. By recognizing the conditions that gave rise to Marx’s critique of political economy, as well as analyzing the initial steps of Marx’s “Value Theory” located in Volume 1 of *Capital,* we are able to make sense of Marx’s critique and differentiate it from mainstream economists view of capitalism.

Marx draws from three conventional sources of his time when writing his critique of political economy. Through these bodies of thought, we are able to establish the conditions for his critique. Marx’s analysis of classical political economy establishes both economic and cultural reasons for his criticism, namely the capitalists’ exploitation of human labor and the human tendency to believe in the absolute authenticity of historical events as corresponding to human nature. Additionally, Marx’s ties with socialism gave rise to a political cause to write his critique, mainly revolving around class struggles, and their eventual social overthrow of capitalism. Lastly, the influence of German philosophy on religion and human existence inspired Marx with a theoretical motive to write a “ruthless criticism”. As a result of Hegel’s view on existence and Feuerbach’s view on religion, Marx set out to critique the world from a materialistic point of view. Marx’s and Engels hint at this when they summarized the materialist approach of their book “The German Ideology” in two quotes.

Drawing from classical political economy, Marx, along with Joyce Appleby, refused to accept the theory mainstream economists cite for the emergence of capitalism. Though Adam Smith believed capitalism was the result of our innate human desire to better ourselves and therefore emerged through sequence of progressive steps over time, neither Joyce nor Marx accepted this theory. They both picked up on the incredible alacrity with which industrialization spread through Europe. Though both agree capitalism was a unique event, they differed on the cause of it. While Marx indicated in his critique that the coercion of tenant farmers by their farsighted landlords led to the movement of old agrarian order towards capitalism, Appleby disagrees. She holds that the reverse is true; the new social relations were the consequence, not the source of the transformation of English farming. In other words, Appleby claims that capitalism started with the tenet farmers.

Through the increase in productivity of agriculture, many inhabitants were able to leave the countryside and move towards cities without fear of starving. Appleby argues that it was this labor surplus that led to an increase in the number of entrepreneurs, inventors, and wage laborers. The result was a new social class. Obtaining new levels of financial achievement, this rising class was able to upend the old agrarian order and secure policies that favored its own interests. With these policies in mind, our second condition that gave rise to Marx’s critique comes into play. Having obtained new levels of political power, capitalists were able to secure favorable labor laws that enabled them to exploit the production capabilities of the wage laborers.

As Marx’s began to analyze texts of socialists such as Fourier and Owen he noticed that the socialist philosophers only covered “one side” of critiquing the political economy, and he likened this to current philosophers merely looking at the “reality of the true human essence” rather than also analyzing the “theoretical existence of man.” Citing a strong desire to affect his fellow German citizens who were currently fighting for a socialist movement, Marx realized that he needed to start with politics, a predominant interest in Germany. For this reason, Marx felt compelled to concern himself “just as much with the other side”, as philosophers did when evaluating the other side of human existence: the theoretical existence of man. Through the analysis of the political state his Marx felt obligated to write his critique in order to point out the practical class struggles that he believed would result in an upending of the capitalists superstructure.

Finally, German philosophers such as Hegel and Feuerbach initiated the inspiration for Marx’s theoretical condition for writing a critique of political theory. Marx took from Hegel a passion to understand history. From this desire, he then turned “Hegel’s dialects upside down” and argued for his own materialistic approach to history over Hegel’s ideological approach. The quoted text displayed at the beginning of the prompt best explains Marx and Engels materialistic approach in their book, “The German Ideology”. Furthermore, Marx took an interest in Feuerbach’s critique of religion that included a theory that God simply originated from a false sense within our consciousness. For just as the political state is the catalogue of its practical struggles so to is “religion the catalogue of the theoretical struggles of mankind”. Only after the influence of these German philosophers did Marx sit down and write to Arnold Ruge, stating his desire to compose a “ruthless critique of everything that existed”.

Marx’s *Capital* was written as a critique of Political Economy that served to reveal the capitalist mode of production, as well as the “specific conditions and consequences of the class dimensions of a society” in which this mode of production exists. He begins where classical economists leave off: wealth in the form of commodities. Through Marx’s ability to: simplify the dual roles of commodities, explain how commodities exchange as well as the fetishisms that go with this exchange, and delve into the characteristics of money, we are able to make sense of his critique.

In *Capital,* Marx describes the products of human labor as commodities, which have simultaneously both a use-value and an exchange-value. Their exchange-value equals the socially necessary labor time invested in it. Through this exchange system, Marx can assume that society has a culture “congruent with the ‘fetishisms of commodities’” by proving the existence of four rights of owners: freedom, equality, property, and Bentham. Supported with the information of capitalists desire to amass wealth, the inevitability of capitalism’s ability to initiate class struggle becomes clear.

According to Marx and Appleby, history indicates that capitalists generally fail to compensate workers for the full value of the commodities they produce. Laborers, on average, receive compensation solely for the labor necessary to subsist, while capitalists profit by extracting the value above the cost of labor power, known as a surplus value. This is a central theme of Marx’s critique. It is only by understanding chapters one and two that one is able to make sense of this part of critique.

In chapter three, Marx introduces his theory of Money, a universal equivalent for commodity exchange. Despite all of Money’s benefits, Marx argues it has the ability to violate Sayes Law and possibly destabilize an economy. Since capitalism is laced with the effects of class struggles, “tremendous social dislocations and acute crises” will inevitably arise within a capitalist society. These crises, allowed by moneys ability to violate Sayes Law, may eventually lead to the social overthrow of Capitalism.

Finally, it is important to note that through analyzing the conditions that gave rise to Marx’s critique as well as how they pertain to the first three chapters of *Capital* we are able to understand how Marx critique undermines the mainstream economists belief in capitalism as the premier economic system.

**Word Count**: 1245