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**Horst Müller**

**The concept of PRAXIS  
in the 21st century**

Karl Marx and the praxis thinkers  
The concept of praxis in the transitional period  
The latently existing system alternative

Special Print  
**Preface**

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Karl Marx und die Praxisdenker, das Praxiskonzept in der  
Übergangsperiode und die latent existierende Systemalternative  
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## **Abstract**

The crises of the 21st century signal the entry into a transitional period in which the capitalist formation of social life and the economic growth imperative continue to lead to socio-ecological problems and human catastrophes.

Why is the system alternative still missing 150 years after Marx? It is mainly due to the emaciation of the philosophical-scientific foundations, the misrecognition of the novel character of social capitalism, and a critique of political economy that lacks the positive dimension.

To counter this, Marx's dialectical practical thinking and significant 20th century practice thinkers are activated, and questions of philosophy of mind and dialectics are deepened. Integral praxis studies transcends all critical social theories and stands in the horizon of a world philosophy.

To clarify the situation, the development from industrial to social capitalism and neoliberal globalisation as well as the world scene with China, Europe and the USA are illuminated. An incipient setback for globalisation favours possible social emancipation:

The socio-economic analysis of reproduction is based on the trinodal structure of social-infrastructureal social capitalism and uncovers new value relations and a system alternative that already exists latently. Their release requires a fiscal revolution and empowerment of the welfare state.

The unifying perspective for social forces lies in a welfare state economy and associative sociality freed from the pressure of growth. The political character of this emancipation movement is that of a kick-start for this impending and more concretely emerging renewal.

Horst Müller, April 2021

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More information on the author's website

[https://www.praxisphilosophie.de/welcome\\_to\\_visitors\\_113.htm](https://www.praxisphilosophie.de/welcome_to_visitors_113.htm)

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**ERSTER HAUPTTEIL  
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**DRITTER HAUPTTEIL**

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## The concept of PRAXIS - Preface to the completely revised and supplemented 2nd edition

After several decades of neoliberal globalisation, multiple crisis phenomena and existential problems are becoming apparent in all social and world relations. At the same time, profound problems or even a *crisis of Marxism and the social left are emerging*: an erosion of the philosophical-scientific foundations, loss of direction and marginalisation in the political field, the lack of a political-economically proven and trustworthy alternative, everywhere organizational fragmentation and, last but not least, elementary orientation problems in the inexorably changing social-historical reality.

This situation confirms the path of *renewal from the ground up*, the "further development" [Fortentwicklung] (Bloch 1978: 196) of praxis and Marxist thought in the "praxis concept". With this identifier, the consequence is drawn from the recorded statement of Marx, that he himself was "not a Marxist". All of this is also the result of a fundamental confrontation with older and newer *critical social theories* that had their heyday in the 20th century. Due to the formation of *dialectical practical thinking*, which was brought into the world by Marx, as an *integral practical science* [Praxiswissenschaftlichkeit], and due to a *political-economic practical analysis* that is newly adapted to today's conditions, it was possible to build a bridge to the concept of a *welfare state economy* [Sozialstaatswirtschaft] as a concrete alternative system.

The newly revised second and now main edition of the basic work contains numerous and essential improvements, additions and clarifications, which extend to contributions from the years 2020/21 and the current world situation. In order to encourage study and debate, I would like to cursorily address some of the most important aspects in advance. As with any real science, one cannot learn or really comprehend anything without serious engagement with textual, categorical conceptualisations. In this respect, there are some challenges:

This work is the *first* to attempt a consistent elaboration of the *constitutional-theoretical question* concerning *social reality* and *social truth*, starting from the key concept of practice [Praxis]. This integral concept of practice includes all natural relations and also leads to the elucidation of the constitutional questions of human *identity* or *subjectivity*. Clarification of the understanding of "practice and understanding of practice" (MEW 3: 5-7) ulti-

mately implies aspects of the philosophy of mind and epistemology for which there is no inner-Marxist solution. Due to the developed deep *logos concept*, the eminent importance of the category of *perspectivism* for the *multidimensional conception of reality* of dialectical practice thinking is discovered, in addition to the *contradictory nature* of practice.

Thus, also with reference to Hegel's dialectical logic and Bloch's concrete-utopian mode of recognition, a *practice-logical and practice-analytical conceptuality* emerges and the *universal validity of dialectics* is confirmed (Müller 2020b: 10 Fn.24, 16 ff.). Social reality, completely embedded in natural conditions, reveals itself as a *contradictory, perspective dimensioned synthesis and formation of practice perspectives* [Praxisperspektiven], as a historically shaping and form-creating, forward-open practice and process reality with a *universal horizon*. The intention in all of this is to rehabilitate *dialectical practice thinking* - and beyond simplistic notions of Marx's work - to paradigmatically elaborate a humanly and socially responsible *integral practice science*. The primacy of this science also for the economic life is self-evident, insofar as it is constituted as political-economic *practice* and not as "action" or "system".

Marx's utopian-inspired *science of political economy* demonstrated the *alienated status and civilising tendencies* of historical *capitalist practice formation*. This insofar affects today's "democratic capitalism" (Streeck 2013) and the capitalist world system in transition (Wallerstein 2002). At the same time, this opened up the perspective of a liberating transition *towards a higher civilisation aka socialism*. If one compares this philosophical-scientific conception of reality and critical-revolutionary *conceptualisation of the human-historical development process* " with modern Western philosophy and contemporary theories of social development", or looks at the existing, unspeakable world conditions and threatening abysses, it becomes clear that it continues to mark the "uncrossable horizon of meaning of our epoch" (Yang Geng 2018: 406). Therefore, the misrecognition and disregard of the intellectual-historical turn and actual enlightenment represented by the dialectical practical thinking and its analytics that came into the world with Marx signifies a fundamental, momentous deficit in the scientific, social and political intellect.

Another main aspect of the present research lies in the revision of common political-economic and historical periodisations through the concept of *trinodally structured, latency-containing social capitalism* [latenzhaltiger Sozialkapitalismus]. Marx could not have known this practice formation,

since its typology first emerged in the 20th century. The three nodes of this urban socio-economic formation are industrial commodity production, the department of social-infrastructure or *social-economic services* as a theoretically and historically new formation of the economy, and the fiscal, legal, social and national state mediating and governing between the two. This configuration means a *transgression of traditional reproduction schemes* and a fundamentally new modelling of socio-economic relations.

The developed approach requires a turn away from the mere *reading of "Das Kapital"* and *traditional schemes of interpretation* towards a new approach to *value, reproduction and practice analysis*, Marx's actual research method. In this way, the roots and consequences of the *systemically irreversible growth imperative* are uncovered and new *laws of value* can be identified within the social capitalist formation. It is shown how "in the bosom" (MEW 42: 203) of the modern fiscal, legal and social state, below the level of an economic, fiscal and social policy that is as effective as it is pseudo-concrete, a *systemic alternative* is already *crystallising*. The relative economic *self-reference* of the *trinodal social capitalist formation* points to the modern *welfare state* and a *national constitution* as essential *constitutional aspects* of today's and a future, emancipated sociality.

As far as de-growth, transformation, post-growth and socialism discussions are detached from all of this, they cannot be productive in the end. Without a renewal of the philosophical-scientific foundations under the sign of dialectics and a positively oriented, methodologically instructed practical science of political economy it will not work or rather, it is abstract utopianism as Ernst Bloch called it (Bloch 1978: 224). In this sense, an already latently existing and urging alterity is assumed. It follows that its possible release requires a veritable *fiscal revolution* (Piketty 2014a: 662), or more precisely a "capital (transfer) tax" [Kapitaltransfersteuer] (cf. Müller 2019d). Unlike the income and wealth taxes that have been repeatedly and rightly demanded, this tax would tackle a central *node of capitalist system conditions*. This fiscal operation can free the welfare state from the grip of the capital and financial economy and initiate a far-reaching change in the sphere of the commodity as well as social economy. The decisive aspect is the *emancipation of social economy services* [sozialwirtschaftliche Dienste] from the austerity imposed by the capital economy. This concerns all administrative, social-infrastructure and cultural, increasingly also ecological productions and services for the community and the citizens, thus above all the immediate reality of life in the space of communally constituted urban practice.



This possibility is to be substantiated by an analysis of the specific value relations and formations, labour and property relations of a "welfare state economy" freed from the capitalist growth imperative. In principle, this is a *formally* so-called *simple* and *basically economical* form of economic activity, an open development system of social labour, reproduction and practice.

The concept of latency-containing social capitalism and a social-historical transition requires far-reaching assurance. The situation in the 21st century, after the full manifestation of the world market and neoliberal globalisation, presents itself as a *period of crisis* and still half-open *transition*. The new section on today's *multipolar world situation* applies to this "transitional period" (Wallerstein 2002). To this end, the development from industrial capitalism to social capitalism and neoliberal globalisation as well as the current polycentric constellation will be examined, among other things with a look at the contradictory development of China, the neoliberal regime of the European Union and the decline of the USA. For the crucial question of a system alternative to the liberalist-capitalist formation that threatens to ruin the substance of human sociality and the planetary living environment, an *implosive tendency* or the *backlash of globalisation* that has begun is significant. Beyond producing ever new problems and crises, this pushes towards the possible change in the wake of immanently crystallising, welfare-state economic conditions. The seemingly attainable alternative "mode of production and form of society" (MEW 42: 188) is initially conceived, with a view to the diversity of today's world societies and the contradictions of the world situation, as a form of *associative, civilizational higher sociality*.

The concept of latency-containing social capitalism and the struggle in an epochal transitional reality has significant political consequences. The main contradiction that has become acute within the existing transitional societies and on a world scale is now the *formational contradiction* between the old and an urgent new formation of social practice. This comprises all class relations and other social conflict lines and problem dimensions. The agitated, multifaceted forces of resistance and change of our time can therefore only associate themselves and *give birth to the alternative* if this is also positively and concretely in view: Hence the enormous consequences of corresponding failures of political economy, the roots of which go back a good 100 years. The solution to these problems requires the *sublation of traditional critique* in an operative *dialectical socio-economics*. This requires collective efforts to develop it as an economic theoretical paradigm beyond Keynesianism, neoliberalism and newer economic mixtures and programmes: The liberating perspective lies first of all in the movement and programme

for a social constitution that is transformed by the targeted welfare state economy, and not in redistributions on the ground of a digitalised green capitalism.

All these questions and problems go far beyond what individuals can achieve. Therefore, the work presented here is also to be understood in the context of a co-active work in progress. It can stimulate focused research efforts in a systematic context. The interwoven citations and bibliographical references serve to consolidate the theoretical basis and to mark connecting points for further deepening and discussion. The references contain many direct links to text sources. With all this, this work is aimed especially at a new generation of studious, inquiring and open-minded thinkers. It aims to convey the quintessence of an enormous, often suppressed spiritual world and thoughts from the foremost social-historical frontlines of our time.

The page numbers of the first edition can be found in curly brackets {123} in the text. In addition to a commercially available print version of the title, an *OpenAccess* publication is available via KOBRA (Kasseler OnlineBibliothek, Repository und Archiv), the document server of the University of Kassel: This means that all search options are available. There, the "Perspectives of a Philosophy of Practice" were a core theme of the "IAG Philosophical Basic Problems" as early as 1978-2006. On the 200th anniversary of Marx's birth, an anthology was published in the "Kasseler Philosophische Schriften" (Novkovic 2018; Müller 2018b). Thus, the "concept PRAXIS" in the *combination of print and free digital medium* offers a platform for education, study, further research and can also serve as information for a consistent policy. The portal [praxisphilosophie.de](http://praxisphilosophie.de) provides a systematically structured documentation and reference medium for this purpose.

Horst Müller, April 2021

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