
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
Summary and Outlook**

Original title: Das Konzept PRAXIS im 21. Jahrhundert.
Karl Marx und die Praxisdenker, das Praxiskonzept in der
Übergangsperiode und die latent existierende Systemalternative
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Printed Edition: Books on Demand (BoD) Norderstedt 2021
(676 S./24,80 EUR) ISBN 978-3-7534-9705-1

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-infrastructural 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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The concept of PRAXIS - Summary and Outlook

The further development of Marxism in the concept of practice

The origin of the study "The concept of PRAXIS in the 21st century" lies in a fundamental experience and insight. The orientation problems of the intellectual and scientific opposition or even of the political forces, which are connected with Marx's work and the manifold congenial currents of thinking in a practical and social manner, are rooted so deeply that one has to speak of a Gordian knot of problems. However, this knot cannot simply be cut; instead, the problem must be unrolled from deeper layers in its origin to the present, concrete social-historical situation. My contribution to this is based on several decades of in-depth studies, confrontations, field research, commitments, thought experiments and scientific elaborations.¹

The research showed that certain difficulties are already rooted in Marx's conception, that decisive deficiencies and undesirable developments already date from the beginning of the 20th century and continue into today's transitional period. The clearest expression of the problematic situation or crisis of Marxism lies in the fact that even 150 years after Marx's great attack on the capitalist formation of reproduction and social practice it has not yet been possible to present any true and concrete alternative system. A loosening or untying of the knots that are decisive for it seemed partly no longer possible. Hence, the great effort and the all-embracing character of the present work. It is about the "further development" [Fortentwicklung] (Bloch 1978: 196) of the integral practice and future thinking, which came into the world in a completely new way through Marx, and of the analytics based on it, whose elements are otherwise present and effective in manifold and contradictory ways all over the world.

After half a century of neoliberal brainwashing and a political rollback, in the face of a wide variety of Marxisms and the completely disjointed scene of left wing and alternative thinking, this work points out essential intellectual anchor points and social analyses, provides most definitive possible source references that continue to be relevant for further research. It tries to create intellectual courses through the history of thought as well as in the field of the problems of cognition and constitution of social reality. Finally,

¹ See at [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horst_M%C3%BCller_\(Philosoph\)](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horst_M%C3%BCller_(Philosoph)). Be aware: Some clarifications hereinafter are more recent. They mainly concern the basics of the philosophy of mind and the dialectics (cf. Müller 1987 u. 2020b) and the conception of the system alternative now called "social-state-economy".

it turns into the home stretch to an essentially politico-economically founded "concrete alternative" corresponding to the socio-historical situation, which is now unmistakably called "social-state-economy" [Sozialstaatswirtschaft].

As with this concept, the particular challenge is that quite a few of the conceptualizations presented break or transcend traditional habits of thought. This begins with questioning a comprehensive constitution theory of social reality and thereby decoding the problem of practice or rather *praxis*, concerns the organization of social reality in *practice perspectives* [Praxisperspektiven], leads to the system alternative already latent in modern *social capitalism* [Sozialkapitalismus], to the clarification of the *formationally contradictory transitional period* [Übergangsperiode] and today's multipolar world situation. This leads further to the approach of a necessary *fiscal revolution* [Fiskalrevolution] and to interventions, which can initiate the birth of an alternative, *social-state-economic* and *associative sociality*. To put it briefly, it is about the further development of the dialectical practice thinking that came into the world with Marx in the "concept of practice" [Praxiskonzept]. This concept presents itself as a philosophical-scientific basis and a social-practical operative as well as humanly liveable² orientation. With this exact positioning, Marx's traditional statement that he was "not a Marxist" is taken seriously for the first time. In this sense, the concept of praxis overcomes retro Marxist orientations and shall be understood as a universal approach from the root of dialectical praxis thinking. This approach sheds light on the *societal relationship to nature* [gesellschaftliche Naturverhältnisse], is historically and socio-politically situated in the transitional reality of the 21st century, and is dimensioned in terms of a world philosophy.

Practice and future thinking beyond the formation of critique

The conception of reality rooting within *dialectical practice thinking* [dialektisches Praxisdenken] states that any positive answers to the urgent questions of the time can only be found in a *definite* orientation in the present and a *resolute* orientation towards a possible, executable better future.

² Especially the section "Ethos and Perspectives of World Change" in the first main part addresses the personal, existential dimension. In short, "With this reassurance about the nature and future of social practice and the place of man in a vibrant universe, the door opens to a true philosophy of existence and the world." (Müller 2020b).

This present, in its more advanced form, has turned out to be a type of social-capitalistically formed sociality, embedded in the alienated capitalist world system and involved in a yet undecided socio-historical transition. The positive, utopian-inspired research orientation now estimated based on a methodologically well-founded practice analysis led to the discovery that this scenario of contradictory practice also contains the still more or less latent reproductive figure or developmental form of a civilizational superior sociality that is so to speak, awaiting birthing assistance.

This understanding of real-historical processuality leaves behind the traditional historical-process schema of crisis, overthrow, and buildup. It points instead to the *multidimensional* character of social reality. Further, at this point it becomes unmistakable that the activation of philosophical-scientific practice thinking means not only a transgression of traditional Marxisms, but also of neighboring, branching, critical and negatory economic and social theories, which had their high time in the 20th century. These, mainly because of their epistemic inadequacy and their limited analytical facet, cannot in any case come to the practical alternative that is inherent in the process itself. The paradigmatic profiling of *dialectical practice science* [dialektische Praxiswissenschaftlichkeit] and the examination of the constitutional aspects of state, society and history in the second main part thus also lead to the clarification of the relationship between a utopian inspired dialectical practice thinking and a theoretically and historically outdated formation of critique. The criticality of thinking is, in terms of practical logic and situation diagnosis, always only the middle link between analytics and scientific utopianism [wissenschaftliche Utopistik] (cf. Wallerstein 2002), i.e. in the run-up to concrete solutions, and can therefore at best only come up with approximate ideas for improvement and the future. On the other hand, practice and the "comprehension of practice" [Begreifen der Praxis] (MEW 3: 7) on the ground of today's alienated world and transitional societies now requires the overcoming of all barriers of thinking before the future, that is, first, before the pressing alterity inherent in the bosom of the existing.

Meanwhile, disagreement and problems also remained in Marxist thought, and it became emaciated as such a "science of the future" (Bloch 1977b: 331). The situation was already reflected repeatedly in the 20th century as a "crisis of Marxism". All the more so after corresponding large-scale social experiments ultimately failed horribly and neoliberalism strode from victory to victory. The state of weakness and the crisis of any serious system opposition can still be experienced into the current progressing 21st centu-

ry. This extremely difficult, threatening situation of Marxism and the social left has been tried to be covered up so far, in a permanent interplay between capitalist success stories as well as problem and crisis productions on the one hand and on the other hand innumerable capitalism and social critique following from the left or other sides. The constant re-submission of accusations, for example against alienation and inequality, in the face of neoliberal mercilessness and the destruction of nature and the environment that is progressing in the so-called "progress" have not changed much, however, in the actual constitutional weakness of the opposition. This is essentially because a gloom of the future, which has been noticeable since the beginning of the 20th century and has been experienced repeatedly, has not really been alleviated to this day. The idea of socialism has been partly disavowed or still appears half-veiled and all too often in old clothes. Finally, all the alternatives emerging elsewhere taken together are not a full-fledged substitute for this idea or do not have the sustainable specificity that a program of social development and civilizational progress requires.

Nevertheless, hopeful thinking is alive and well in the great unrest and in a virulent future-oriented thinking in the social intellect everywhere. It is alive in countless initiatives and protests, also in the younger generation, in resistance movements, in heroic or desperate struggles of people in the neighbourhood as well as all over the world. These people have entered an experimental field of social change in search of livable alternatives. The multiple crisis phenomena and the disarming future darkness that nevertheless nests in the consciousness require even more a philosophically-scientifically highly reflective and energetically researching orientation towards the future.

On the reorganization of the field of social theory

In this sense, it was unavoidable to take recourse to far reaching theoretical and historical contexts. This resulted in a reorganization of the theoretical-historical field and a series of unfamiliar, sometimes provocative insights. These include the main aspect, that "social capitalism" [Sozialkapitalismus] (Müller 2012), which developed in the 20th century, represents a more mature formation compared to the industrial capitalist era, that already contains the sought-after alternative. This significantly changes the usual periodizations of economic and social history and the political-historical perspective. In retrospect, it became clearer that Marx's dialectical, utopian-inspired thinking of "praxis" signified the beginning of an actual intellectual and cultural historical enlightenment and the laying of

the foundation stone of a *world philosophy* [Weltphilosophie] of modernity, but that it was only *on the way* to the intended synthesis of materialism and idealism, naturalism and humanism, enlightenment and future orientation. The problem of a new and better social economy and social association that Marx had in mind and would have liked to solve, he could not solve at all because of the provisional conditions of industrial capitalism and because of certain historical-theoretical limitations at that time. Starting from a purely commodity- and industrial-capitalist social formation, the sought alternative is not recognizable or remains a non-viable, abstract negation. The ultimate failure of the experiments with centrally planned economies also reflects this. On the other hand, Marx already anticipated that the stage of the fully developed capitalist world market or world system, which for him was unforeseeable and only reached today, meant the entry into a transitional epoch. In this the new would already crystallize "in the bosom" (MEW 13: 9; MEW 42: 203) of the decadent old, manifesting itself in *transitional forms* [Übergangsformen] and *transitional tendencies*. The conclusion, in Marxist or praxis-scientific terms, can only be that the new is not based on a freehand and well-intentioned construction of the future, but must primarily be present and recognizable as something latently pressing or existing.

These dispositions open our eyes to the fact that in the 21st century a socio-historical period of "transition" (MEW 25: 274, 457; Wallerstein 2002: 43) has emerged. Social reality is now also dimensioned in a *formationally* contradictory way that is, constituted in contrary, fundamentally conflicting *perspectives of practice*. Thus, when it comes to the subject of "society" today, one can scientifically only speak of *world and transitional societies* [Übergangsgesellschaften], or remains near-sighted and accommodated. This means in turn, since the contradictory practice of social-capitalist formation in the opened new historical period is driven to the peak of a formational conflict in such a way, the dialectical, utopian practical thinking is challenged to give final shape to itself beyond the previous historical attempts and achievements as a modern, integral, practical and intervening science of reality [Wirklichkeitswissenschaft].

Practice or rather *praxis* as key problem and the universality of dialectics

For the necessary INTRODUCTION into the intellectual world of practice thinking, I have tried, in view of eminent social-theoretical obscurations and an unmanageable, incommensurable variety of Marx interpretations, to make the crucial point "Practice as Key Problem of Science and Social Real-

ty" more recognizable. This includes an Ariadne's thread through the corresponding, in the meantime half-buried theoretical-historical labyrinth of Praxis- and Marxism-thinking, but above all providing a preliminary understanding for the "constitution-theoretical" question [konstitutionstheoretische Fragestellung] guiding all explorations and discussions. This questioning is consequently assessed here for the first time and gradually turns out to be decisive for the "further development" of Marxism in the concept of praxis [Praxiskonzept], especially with the help of newly obtained enlightenments from the philosophy of mind and epistemology. All this connects with the reconsideration of dialectics. The concept of praxis is thus understood from a, in short, *praxis-ontological* basic conception, which is carried out here as a constitutional, epistemological and scientific theory or philosophy of *social praxis*.³

In this regard, the issues of dialectics play into all aspects and sections of the present work. The answers first take recourse to an epistemology of practice pre-formed by G.H. Mead and philosophy of mind implied therein, which has been rendered unrecognizable especially by Habermas' (cf. Habermas 1981) misguided interpretation of Mead (Mead 1975a). A corresponding concept of the "genesis of mind" was never developed by Marx or Marxists, hence a materialistic slant of traditional Marxism. Finally, dialectical logic is encountered in the experience or even performance of comprehending thought in the context of the emergence of the new and in practice-form change [Praxisformwandel]. Thereby, limits or the relative restriction of the forms of thinking and the doctrine of contradiction of Hegel's "Science of Logic" becomes apparent. Here, this logicalness is further thought with reference to the real "perspectivity" of the social practice and process reality as well as to the theory of categories in the context of Bloch's "concrete-utopian" approach.

This unabbreviated dialectic confirms itself in the *comprehension of practice* [Begreifen der Praxis] and, from considerations of philosophy of mind and nature, also proves to be the constituting principle of material reality, that is, in a "dialectic of nature" (cf. Sayers 2020). An essential aspect of this is the understanding of nature as a "hearth of producing" (Bloch 1977n: 261; 1977b: 805). This further leads to a fundamental critique of the "alienated physicalism" (Nagl 2019; Müller 2020b: 10, 16) of modern natural science

³ In the basic idea of "social practice", that is at the same time always "contradictory practice", all material or natural relations as well as the future dimension, which is always constitutive for social reality, are included.

and to the task of re-shaping societal relationship to nature, thereby including all human and ecological aspects. Overall, the common fixation on the line Hegel-Marx in questions of dialectics shows as insufficient, and dialectics can and must be taken up again and developed further in the context of the epistemology and constitutional theory of practice.⁴

The legacy and renewal of dialectical praxis thinking

In the FIRST MAIN PART, "Karl Marx and the Practical Thinkers" the aim was to recover the authentic approach and the widely suppressed, vast heritage of thought from Marx's roots with substantial reference to outstanding authors and their works. The intention was to bring the historical conditionality as well as the forward-looking contents of the great articulations of a practical and Marxist thinking back into the field of vision and to work on them constructively from the perspective of the present situation.

This was unavoidable, because the general perception or identification of the dialectical thinking about practice and the conception of reality associated with it, which was virulent everywhere in this line of thought, had been blocked for too long. Various circumstances contributed to the obscuring of the "intellectual revolution" (Labriola 1974: 318 f.) or the intellectual-historical novum (Bloch 1977b: 310 ff.). Ideological wars and complicated theoretical-historical entanglements of the past century, the still persisting irritating divisions in the thought of Marxism, praxis, and society, or even simple conceptual incompetence and narrow-mindedness in the relevant scientific field. From about the 1980s onward, an ideological rollback was added to this, combined with massive tendencies toward a clouding of the social intellect and a decline in scientific and moral standards (Crouch 2015). Here and now and against all this, the dialectical practical thinking is worked out and the progressing theoretical reflections lead to the paradigm of a contemporary philosophy and science of social practice. This step was necessary, because the concentration on the political and economic Marx has hidden for too long that his work actually means the decisive intellectual and cultural historical turn and enlightenment: the foundation of a new kind of practical science and world philosophy.

⁴ The problems of understanding and acceptance concerning the "dialectics" can only be solved by serious study and the intellectual-practical appropriation and training in the practice-logically more versed, superior modality of thinking. The terms, thought processes and some digressions presented here shall contribute to this.

In the first place, "The Novum of Praxis Thinking" has to be explained. It is about the integral type of cognition in the sense of *comprehending practice* that came into the world with Marx, inspired by dialectics, or the conception of *social practice* [gesellschaftliche Praxis] as the human-social reality that also includes the natural relations and future horizons (MEW 3: 5 ff.). The constitutional human universality corresponds to the universal, forward-open horizon of this self-conscious, intelligent form of life. In order to collect arguments increasingly for this the concentrated and discursive passage through the series of the important practical thinkers was necessary.

Decisive inspirations initially grew out of Marx's early writings and the "Grundrisse" (MEW 42), that still insufficiently received, perhaps most far-reaching philosophical-scientific self-understanding of Marx *before* the unfinished work of *Das Kapital*. The quintessence lies in the recognition of the practice-analytical, alienation-critical, and transformation-theoretical status of Marx's *entire oeuvre*. In its context, the title "Critique of Political Economy", the work "*Das Kapital*", as extensive and fragmentary it is, denotes a main and intermediate stage. Herbert Marcuse enthusiastically welcomed the Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, rediscovered initially 1932, at that time: "The publication ... must become a decisive event in the history of Marx research" (Marcuse 1932: 509). Throughout his life, Marcuse remained a creative and Ernst Bloch-like exponent of the current of praxis thinking.

Then Bloch's concept of a "Praxis of Concrete Utopia" came into view. Marx also decisively inspired Bloch, like Marcuse. His interpretation of Feuerbach's theses in "The Principle of Hope" was the most profound to date (Bloch 1977b: 288-334). Bloch's practice-logical, concrete-utopian reflected categorial system (Bloch 1977n), his thinking about practice, nature, the future, and ethos corresponded with thoughts of German and other European thinkers on practice, especially the formerly powerful Yugoslavian philosophy of practice. This includes Henri Lefebvre's practice or metaphilosophical ideas and his concept of revolutionizing the everyday or urban life and culture. Bloch expanded Marx's basic idea of "praxis" as the "reality" of human-historical being into a worldview that reaches into the depths of natural relations as well as into the most distant horizons of the future.

In the circle of pioneers in the whole school of thought, I have characterized G. H. Mead as the missing link, so to speak, of Marxism and practice thinking. With the Hegelian-inspired, reform-minded thinker and especially due to his concept of "social action", the social-theoretical basic and contro-

versial question: "Intersubjectivity or practice?" could be answered unambiguously and conclusively against Habermas, against his Mead interpretation and in favour of the integral position inaugurated by Marx. Mead's conception of the genesis and manner of the presence of the spiritual in the world, his explanations of the role of human "identity" and intelligence, and of the always-meaningful social reality play a special role. This is about a Marxist philosophy of mind and epistemology of praxis that was never consistently developed, thus contributing decisively to theoretical advancement: a certain Marxist autism not only blocked this significant theoretical assimilation. To the fundamental aspect of the "contradictoriness" of all social reality of practice and process is added through Mead that aspect inspired by Whitehead: the disruptive idea of an "objective reality of perspectives" (Mead 1969: 213 ff.) or now the concept of "perspectives of practice" [Praxisperspektiven].⁵

In the controversial field of modern social sciences, Bourdieu's "science of practical actions" or committed "praxeology" showed to what extent a more developed thinking about practice transcends the most diverse varieties of common social theory and puts them in their place. Bourdieu prefaced his foundational work, "Outline of a Theory of Practice", with the first Feuerbach thesis. He came back to the ground of materially conditioned human reality, that is, to social practice with its countless fields, problems and its relative openness to the future. His own "habitus" and his life's work demonstrated the importance of a paradigmatic shaping of praxis thinking and the necessity of its realization in a collaborative or institutional context – otherwise still lacking. In the economic questions, however, the social theorist clearly encountered limits and unintentionally demonstrated: without references to the achievements of the science of political economy founded by Marx, blind spots and misalignments of social theory always remain.

The same problem is evident in another lucid, progressive spirit. Piketty's ambitious draft of a "participatory socialism" proves to be ignorant of political economy and ultimately loses itself in speculative dimensions of a "global social federalism" and "transnational democracy" (Piketty 2020a: 1255 ff.). Nevertheless, both intellectuals, Piketty with his sharp critique of

⁵ In order to underline the importance of this aspect and to make it insuperable, I have spoken tentatively of a "relativity theory of the social universe". In it, in Marx's sense, the "theoretical opposites" of materialism and idealism are suspended (MEW 40: 577).

the democratic-capitalist prevailing "inequality regime" and Bourdieu with works such as "Neoliberalism as Conservative Restoration - The Misery of the World, the Scandal of Unemployment and a Remembrance of Ernst Bloch's Social Utopia" (Bourdieu 2005) have marked their empirical-analytical practical thinking and their social-evolutionary sense of true course quite clearly and academically uncomfortably.

The study and discussion of the pioneering thinkers aimed at the foundation of a definitively integral, no longer subject-split or expert-idiotic, dialectically qualified theory of practice. Habermas showed himself unable to satisfy these questions, for his work is based mainly on the splitting of "praxis". His ideas, treated here under the heading "New Dualisms and Normativism," the intersubjectivity-theoretical conceptualizations and affirmative interventions pretentiously presented by him cannot withstand a critical review. In confrontation with more developed, engaged praxis thinking, whether with Mead or Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1979; Mead 1975a) or with corresponding critics (Mouffe 2007), none of this withstands. In particular, the idea of dialectical "contradictoriness" or an indispensable "perspectivity" of the social world is completely incompatible with Habermas's discourse or consensus theory of truth. Perhaps for this reason, the last significant exponent of the Frankfurt School simply omitted Hegel's dialectic in the context of his recent historiography of philosophy (Habermas 2019).

The practice concept in the continuing transition period

On the way of thinking outlined above, also through original statements of the pioneers, it was possible to deepen the understanding of the historically conditioned as well as tendency universal nature of the dialectical practical thinking. This has the consequence that finally one has to ask for its appropriate form today. This turn leads to the considerations in the middle SECOND MAIN PART, which forms a central axis of the whole train of thought. First, it is about an integrative, paradigmatic profiling of the "concept of practice in the 21st century" and, in the further part, about "The socio-historical situation of transition", i.e. the present historical space of precisely this thinking or understanding.

What is now called "practice concept" is no less a reflected sociological "practice theory": It contains the quintessence of the preliminary achievements of the thinkers on practice and Marxism and is presented as a position capable of social analysis and diagnosis of the times. This unites a coherent conception of reality, cognition and science and has a distinctive conceptual and methodological instrument at its disposal. With this ap-

proach, a firm stand is taken in the otherwise fragmented and ideologized field of social science.

The underlying practical-dialectical constitutional theory refers to a whole spectrum of formative moments and dimensions of social reality, including the central, sustaining and all-pervasive level of social reproduction. Its nature and historical form as a social praxeology cannot be understood in terms of action theory or systems theory, nor in economic or mathematical terms. In the modern, social capitalist formation, the economy is essentially mediated to the society by the fiscal, legal, and social state. Thus, the institutionality of the state and, more generally, questions about higher organized, institutional practice also come up. This includes the aspect of juridification and the specific, historical legal forms of social, historical practice. If one asks, for example, about the law and the constitution of the whole, one would first have to ask which mass of social relations and practices are the subject to the jurisdiction. This thought works against an unrealistic normativism, legal absolutism or constitutional idealism and leads to the question in how far a new "legal horizon" [*Rechtshorizont*] (MEW 19: 21) now opens up, beyond "democratic capitalism".

Further investigations concern the basic concept of "society", especially its shaping as a modern economic society [*Wirtschaftsgesellschaft*] and, in terms of political philosophy, its constitution as a sovereign sociality. In this context, the role of nationhood is controversial or is also simply and erroneously identified with "nationalism" (cf. Wahl 2017). A core part of the term national meant here lies in the relative political-economic self-referentiality of the "trinodal" structured and processing social-capitalist formation of practice. This structuring can potentially be shaped by an appropriately developed world, cultural, and transitional society as an abutment in relation to neoliberal globalization. This confirms and strengthens the arguments that nationhood is a constitutive element of modern, cosmopolitan sociality and its possible emancipation.

Overall, "basic features of a dialectical practical science" are profiled, which corresponds to the practice-logical type of cognition and cultivates it categorially and methodologically. The correlating, extended conception of reality is concentrated in a multidimensional *conception of reality as contradictory and perspectival social practice*. This practice is always to be understood in its existentially necessary reproductive basic movement.⁶ All *social synthesis*

⁶ "This reproduction, however, is at the same time a new production and destruction of the old form" (MEW 42: 401 ff.).

of *praxis perspectives* [Praxisperspektiven] (Müller 1986a: 138 ff.) thus presents itself in the change of *historical, economic-social and political formations*: By revealing the still dominant, alienated character of the social-capitalist formation of practice, theory itself is entangled in a "struggle for social truth" [soziale Wahrheit] and a superior civilization.

With this equally materialistic and utopian view of the human world and its processing reality, an ethos in concrete action and an enlightened thinking of progress, a substantial social sense of true course [Richtungssinn] is connected. The corresponding contents of life and goals do not have to be conjured out of an academic hat or a pope's cap. They make up an "axial" field, which grows out of practice-philosophical self-assurance of social being and brings together the best thoughts of the human history of struggle and desire. Consequently, what is to be done and what is to be omitted cannot be grasped in any trans-historical or imperative canon, but is always up for comprehension and decision in the horizon of the concrete human and social situation on the spot.

The conceptualization of the historical situation as a transition

Overall, it is about "The Socio-Historical Situation of Transition." This basic assumption or conceptualization also demands to reconstruct more intensively from the perspective of the present the past and the formational development with its phases and in its different dimensions. The corresponding "historization" [Vergeschichtlichung] extends from the time of industrial capitalism across two centuries to the present-day entanglement of all societies in the world market and the capitalist world system. Central to the formational periodization is the notion of the trinodal core structure of modern sociality, the typology of "social capitalism" that developed in the 20th century (Müller 2012). This comprises the dimension of industrial-economic commodity production, the complementary department or formation [Formbildung] of *social-economic services*, and as mediating central instance the modern legal, fiscal, financial, social, and national state. In the currents of thought of traditional "critique of political economy" this change in the formation of reproduction and its fundamental consequences were not comprehended. The thesis is that, in relation to the industrial capitalist era, "social capitalism" is a higher, more mature formation. Even after that, in the 21st century, this basic form of modern economic and cultural societies still represents the real starting point for any further development, be it positive, emancipative, or negative, civilizational regressive.

The most surprising result is that the alternative sought is more or less latently preconfigured in the existing, *social-capitalist formation of practice*. It processes along with and thus exists as a political-economic "latency" [Latenz] (Bloch 1978: 259 f.), Marxically and metaphorically speaking "in the bosom" of the existing. The contradiction between the old reproductive order and the underlying new value relations and necessities manifests itself first and foremost in inevitably increasing national debt and leads to the awareness of a fundamental misalignment of the modern tax system. It is one-sidedly linked to income figures and underestimates the role of investment capital, functioning in society as a whole and especially in the modern tripartite structure. The research for a positive, concrete system alternative, if you will the socialism discussion, is put on a real basis with this deep practice analysis. The turn from capital readings and traditional interpretative schemes to a new approaching value and reproduction analytics gives still other insights. The "central contradiction" of capitalism has traditionally been tied to Marx's "great discovery," to the "unveiling of the secret of capitalist production by means of surplus value" (MEW 20: 26, 189). Latterly, one recognized in it the "terrifying" tendency toward rising "inequality" (Piketty 2014a: 786) or an existing "regime of inequality" (Piketty 2020a: 1273). This is one part of the truth and already the first no-go area for the co-ruling economic and social sciences. For them, a barrier to knowledge lies in front of the other system criterion that is actually decisive for the historical processuality of social formation. The *systemically irrevocable*, all driving and entraining growth compulsion anchored in the economic calculation [ökonomisches Kalkül] of the capital economy. Even in the discussion about various economic alternatives, about degrowth, transformation or post-growth, this problem, which is anchored in the innermost of the "growth imperative economy" [Wachstumszwangswirtschaft] (Müller 2021), is not sufficiently reflected and consequently the necessary consequences are not drawn from it.

The characteristic of the transitional period is determined by the fact that this intrinsic growth compulsion drives further and further into glaring contradictions, into world catastrophes and into a finalizing stage, while nevertheless "in the bosom" an alternative crystallizes. According to this, finally the main contradiction of this time, which also overlaps all class relations and other social lines of conflict, is the *formational contradiction* [formationeller Widerspruch]. With it the definitely highest developed contradiction is designated, which exists between an outlived, decadent practice formation, which wants to hold itself in the decline *at any price*, and an already

latently existing, pushing new one. To be provocative, I have spoken of a "proximity of socialism" with regard to this latency, albeit still as if "behind armoured glass" (Müller 2015). Seen in this light, the future orientation of the science of political economy in the sense of integral practical and future science is indispensable.

The multipolar world and a different perspective for Europe

The primary topic of such a "science of political economy" in the 21st century is, beyond all "critique", the "overcoming of capitalism" or identification of a superior shaping of the economy of society "beyond capitalism" (cf. Krätke 2006; Ropic 2020). Of course, this socio-historical perspective must also make sure of the real social, political and global situation: It is the "present in which alone reality exists" (Mead 1969: 229 ff.). As a result of the historical becoming and change, in the course of globalization, the now polycentric or multipolar world emerges, networked in the capitalist world system. This shows very different conditions in all world regions and world societies and especially three large centres of movement: The USA as a capitalist great and hegemonic power, which aggressively struggles against its decline, the countries of Europe in alliance with the self-imposed liberalist Eurocracy, and the Asia-Pacific grouping of states including the People's Republic of China. The most populous country in the world shows itself to be a new kind of political-economic formation that positions itself as a world power in accordance with its size and culture and in the course of its tumultuous, contradictory and incomplete development.

The concept of economic and transitional societies with social-capitalist basic structures and a national constitution also illuminates the complex scenery and institutionality of the European Union. As a socially detached "multi-level regime" (Streeck 2013a), it is designed and determined by treaties to form a large and free space for the forces of the market, capital and finance economy and thus to position itself in the world context as an economic-political bloc, increasingly with military capacities, also due to the monetary union of the euro countries. Behind the proclamation of unification, progress, freedom and peace lies, in the main, a modernization and "liberalization machine" (Streeck 2013a: 148 ff.), which persistently works against the still existing patterns of a primarily socially responsible, democratically self-determined, and thus sovereign society. In this way, it suppresses the emancipation potentials existing in the countries involved. It is, ever more blatantly, the subjugation of socio-culturally rich economic and cultural societies to the imperatives of the alienated economy and the deep-

ening of divisions and tensions in the continental space once imagined as the "House of Europe."

What this Europe now "probably lacks most" is not an economic government with socially disconnected powers, i.e., a centrally administered capital and financial economy, which is given the widest possible scope of power through financial sovereignty and free trade. What is missing is a "theoretically founded utopianism" or work on the "collective blueprint of a social utopia" (Bourdieu 1998b: 9). In this sense, the emancipation perspective of European countries, beyond the fundamentally failed construct of Lisbon, would lie in a social-state-economic reorganization and the development of a corresponding inter-societal cooperative of a new type (cf. Streeck 2013b; 2017). Such an economic-social transformation meets not only manifold and growing internal contradictions of the prevailing practicality, but also something like a setback of globalization that has been initiated worldwide and is also noticeable in Europe.

An incipient setback of neoliberal globalization

The tendency toward neoliberal globalization and the supremacy of capitalist forms and powers are now being countered and challenged. In fact, the expected backlash, that is, an inversion or implosion of neoliberal globalization, is already underway. The Corona crisis and future pandemics also reinforce tendencies toward "deglobalization" and "relocalization." Modern transitional societies therefore face the practical problem of reconstructing their reproductive and social order increasingly for the purpose of "relative self-reference" [relative Selbstbezüglichkeit]. What needs to be reformed on the ground is precisely, in its more advanced form, nothing other than the trinodal social capitalist configuration. Moreover, the approach of a concrete analysis of value, reproduction and transformation led to the realization that in this context a concrete system alternative has already crystallized and fundamentally comes within reach. Thus, tendencies like that setback of globalization come in the way of initiatives or the perspective of a social transformation. On the one hand, forces are at work for a "Reviving and Restructuring the Corporate Sector Post-Covid" (G30) and a new start in the sense of the "Great Reset" (cf. Franz 2020). On the other hand, it is likely that the current crisis signals a due "turning point in history" (Bello 2005 and 2013; Gray 2020; Ramseyer 2020).

One of the most difficult questions that arises refers to "The Modern Economic Society in the World System", i.e. the relationship between social-capitalistically formed economic societies, which have the inherent potential

for systemic change, and the as unavoidable as alienated practicality of the co-determining, seemingly predominant capitalist world system or even reactionary and aggressive powers that continue to operate in its sense. These are problems that cannot be answered with "cosmopolitan illusions" (Mouffe 2007) or even with the help of Piketty's overshooting ideas of a "new world organization" (Piketty 2020a: 1261). These questions, of course, have a geopolitical dimension. In the search for answers, however, reference must first be made to the specialized competence of the science of political economy.

The science of political economy a.k.a. socioeconomics

The science of political economy founded by Marx cannot remain untouched due to the developed practice-analytical conception. Based on the identified social-capitalist core structure, it should be possible to fathom more deeply the contradictory transitional situation only vaguely anticipated by Marx. This means now, in the semi-virtual space of a complete socio-historical change of form of practice that is underway, to penetrate as far as possible to the decisive question of a concrete system alternative. This movement expresses the whole, positive dialectic of practice. It is the subject of the THIRD MAIN PART "Transformational Analysis and System Alternative".

Due to the far-reaching nature of the question, a preliminary understanding of the practical nature of the modern "economy of society" was necessary. It is a very specific practice, mediated and peculiarly structured by certain economic forms and practical ideas, coactive *on the scale of society as a whole* and *alienated* with regard to its basic social character. This *practice-scientific foundation* [praxiswissenschaftliche Grundlegung] of economic science simultaneously points to its home in an integral, historical social science (Wallerstein 2008). In this working perspective and due to the extended epistemological consolidation of the concept of practice, it emerged that the fundamental category of exchange value expresses an objectively real [objektiv-real] implication of meaning within [Sinnimplikation] the capital-economically reproductive formation of practice. This meaning actually underlies Marx's *conception of economic value*, value forms and value laws. This controversial doctrine of value, which he repeatedly tried to explain, is thus brought back to its origin and confirmed.⁷ It could be dis-

⁷ In the dispute between the competing theories of value, for instance between the classical labour theory of value and the modern utility theory, the following ques-

placed and negated in the history of theory only at the price of a loss of ground and substance, which led into today's morass of capital-scientific vulgar and functional economics and to a speculatively overstimulated capital and financial economy always in danger of crashing.

The contrasting political-economic approach, which is based on practical science, means the overdue transgression and turn from capital readings and traditional theories of capital and crisis to a new, researching and advancing analysis of value, reproduction and practice. With its positive orientation, it stands against the mainstream, in which neoliberal and Keynesian conceptualizations or a growth-fixated policy mix prevails. The need for a fundamental reorientation beyond Hayek and Keynes, on the other hand, is indicated by the currents of a plural, partly Marxist or even heterodox economics. According to the view developed here, this involves the development of a powerful "science of political economy" that is also operative in economic and sociopolitical terms, a "dialectical socioeconomics" [dialektische Sozioökonomie], if you will, a "socioeconomy project". This struggle for a political economy of the future is part of the struggle that has been examined here in the section "History and the Struggle for Social Truth". Consequently, it is time to confront the affirmative mainstream and reactionary think tanks decisively.

This requires, beyond "Lire le Capital" a *collaborative and integrative* research orientation expanded in the sense of scientific utopianism.⁸ Finally, if one understands that this very orientation constituted the innermost motive, the logicity and the horizon of thought of Marx himself, it becomes obvious: the problem of *traditional political economy* fixed in capital theory consists in a *historical lag in the positive*, which should have become conspicuous at the latest in the early 20th century. The remark that "socialism" is above all "anti-capitalism" (Korsch 1912) is still not entirely wrong. The lag is based on, apart from the protracted basic-theoretical problems of a dialectical analysis of practice, above all the unrecorded latency or potentiality of the social-capitalist formation.

tion or task should be used to decide: Which conception of economic value enables the conception and realization of a system of reproduction that is no longer capitalist but economically and in terms of civilization superior?

⁸ In an all-encompassing probe on "emancipation-theoretical thinking," the possibility of a "fruitful dialogue" between the "praxis-philosophical current and the New Marx Reading" also resonates (Hoff 2016: 304 ff., 341).

The concrete practice analytics and many-voiced alternative thinking

After the philosophical-scientific verification and foundation as well as with the gained prospective orientation, a "problem exposition and analytics of the system transformation" should be possible.

It is a matter of advancing as far as possible to the conceptualization of an alternative, higher reproductive order and economic-social rationality in order not to leave vague the "economic possibilities for our grandchildren" (Keynes 2007). The starting point was a modelling of the trinodal social capitalist reproduction scenario mediated and moderated by the social state. Crucial here is the role of *social-economic services* [sozialwirtschaftliche Dienste] as a complementary economic form [Formbildung] in relation to the capitalist *commodity form and production*, on which Marx alone had concentrated. In the course of the 20th century, decisively in the course of the development of the modern "infrastructure society" (Van Laak 2018: 10, 282 ff.), the social-economic services emerged as a second main department of the reproduction process.

First, the examination of the social-capitalist reproduction scenario revealed five critical aspects. These include the systemically irreversible "accumulation and growth compulsion" anchored in the economic calculus of the valorisation economy and, due to the overarching capital economy, the "bounding of social economic services" at an austerity level or even their privatization alien to their specific purpose. In addition, there is the "tendency toward growing public debt" rooted in a one-sided, wrongly polarized, income-oriented tax system, as well as the "degradation of society as a workbench" for the expansive, global capital and competitive economy. That with all this "the destruction of the natural bases" goes along, is meanwhile obvious and on record. However, without seeing the intrinsic root of the growth compulsion and therefore definitely necessary system overcoming, beyond all criticism of and manifold curative measures.

The decisive research question, which ties in with the social-capitalist reproductive order, is then: To what extent is an initially latent, but value- and reproduction-theoretically graspable, completely different figuration inherent in this scenario, and can it perhaps be released? Accordingly, the path to solving the system question does not simply lie in inventive and expectant projections for a better tomorrow, but first in a value-, reproduction-, and practice-analytical exploration of the latent system alternative already pressing "in the bosom" of the existing today. Indeed, implicitly crystallized new value relations and value laws, a fundamental flaw in the

existing tax system and an outdated property regime, a crucial fiscal node and point of attack in the system relations could be identified along this path. Above all, the implementation of a capital tax or rather "capital transfer tax" [Kapitaltransfersteuer] would lead to far-reaching consequences, could bring about a "re-tuning" [Umstimmung] of the entire system and, overall, could amount to the socio-economically novel type of a "social-state-economy." [Sozialstaatswirtschaft]

In contrast, a negatorically or antithetically grounded social and systemic critique, curative measures, ecological modernizations or even normativistic wishful projections cannot lead to any corresponding results at all. Without political-economic, transformation-theoretical assistance the effective nodal or attack points of an "anti-hegemonic intervention" (Mouffe 2008) and systemic retuning cannot be grasped. Finally, no networking of islands of alternative economy or individual resistance movements in the sea of the capitalist world system can bring about a reformatting of the social-capitalist core structure, and lift the *true* "invisible hand" of economic events, the intrinsic accumulation and growth compulsion, and put into force an economic calculation that is economical in its basic tone and represents a superior economic rationality. This also means: In principle, only such an idea of social renewal can acquire trust, orient a many-voiced social practice and become operative in economic as well as socio-political terms, which is politico-economically or socio-economically founded. In this way, it can have a critical-constructive and synergetic effect with regard to the diverse search movements, initiatives and ideas for social alternatives.

On the Politics of the Transformation into the Social-State-Economy

Finally, it is possible to outline more concretely a "politics and perspectives of social emancipation". Through the in-depth analysis of value, reproduction and transformation, it was possible to identify a decisive nodal point of social-capitalist system relations. Through a "fiscal revolution" [Fiskalrevolution] (Goldscheid 1976: 280, Piketty 2014a: 662), through which a "capital transfer tax" related to the real functioning capital is placed alongside income-oriented taxation, a fundamental reversion or retuning of economic and social practice can be achieved. This tax reform or *double fiscal revolution* brings with it changed value relations, new socio-economic forms and processual contexts. With this, the containment of the capitalist exploitation and growth compulsion comes into reach. The transformation of capitalist surplus value into a form of societal savings is perhaps the most important post-growth effect.

The alternative outlined could be paraphrased as a *democratic economic society* [demokratische Wirtschaftsgesellschaft] based on *socio-economic reorganization and regulation*. The appropriate, more concrete term is "social-state-economy": a concept of political economy that is both immediately operational and strategic. The new term refers to essential differences in relation to the so-called free or social market and capital economy, in relation to earlier ideas of economic democracy and market socialism, and in relation to a state planned economy. Due to the integrated, trinodal process structure, it is a different, openly developable "development system of social labour, reproduction and practice".

The solution to the basic problem of the pressure of exploitation and growth [Verwertungs- und Wachstumszwang] lies in the changed formation of the overall economic process, which tends to take on the form of a "simple reproduction" [einfache Reproduktion] – a term familiar from capital analysis – now on a higher level in economic history. This mode of "simple" reproduction, which is nevertheless capable of expansion and development, implies a controllable dynamic of economic activity on the basis of balanced value relations.

On this basis, there would be significant changes and positive effects in terms of employment, social security and societal needs. In the attempt to define constitutive aspects of the new system alternative in more detail, a whole range of issues were addressed. First and foremost, the achievable parity position of social-economic labour and a possible unfolding of the administrative, social-infrastructural, cultural and probably also ecologically relevant social-economic services and benefits that are decisive for the level of civilisation. In addition, there is the abolition of enforced public debt and an end to the factually and socially unacceptable privatisation of "public services" in the broadest sense of the word. In conjunction with rational economic accounting, the overall socio-economic process can be made more transparent. The activated new laws of value imply an overturning of the basic property rights relations and open up corresponding possibilities to shape the company and enterprise constitutions in a collaborative way and to implement elements of social representation and responsibility in the process. Within this framework, competitive and market relations continue to exist, but at the same time, there are integrative institutionalities of the economy as a whole or the social state.

Finally, the "communally constituted urban practice" [kommunal verfasste urbane Praxis] as a "self-similar" structured basis of modern, trinodal societality shaped by the social state plays a fundamental, intensified role as

a primary living space and field of experimentation of social development. Thus the question of a different municipal constitution arises, not only with regard to the future of built and inhabited, essentially socially-infrastructurally constituted urban life or "everyday life in the modern world" (Lefebvre 1972a, Harvey 2008). It is also about the institutionalisation of direct democratic participation and expanded possibilities of individual expression of life in the housing or medium of this basic practice.

Seen as a whole, modern economic and social life has an essentially self-referential character because of "the second hand of social labour", the productions or services of the social-economic services, despite all internationalisation and globalisation tendencies. Through this aspect, the importance of social spatiality and national reference becomes unmistakable for social existence and emancipation in the contradictory, globalised world and difficult transitional period.

The real force and true course of social emancipation

The starting point for the possible fundamental turnaround lies in the developmental form [Entwicklungsform] of a different, economical-historical superior kind of economy and the associated social and cultural constitution, which arises from the existing status-quo. This acute formational contradiction, i.e. the main contradiction of the epoch, runs through all fields and dimensions of social practice, even right through its social state institutionalities, which today represent (an) almost "infinitely differentiated federal structure(s)" (Goldscheid 1976: 264, 315).

The socially alienated, relatively independent practicality of the capitalist world system has an effect everywhere in this highly complex formation of practice and seems to make attempts to break out and a new order impossible. Does not every social emancipation movement in the 21st century ultimately risk failing because of this? The thesis on this difficult and socio-politically decisive question for the social left is the following. A consistent policy in the sense of the formulated *socio-economic reorganisation and regulation*, which builds on the self-referential core of the initially still social-capitalist reproduction and develops it consistently, can lead to a freer and more conscious, associative sociality that is considerably relieved of the growth compulsion. This formation can *relatively consolidate* and assert itself in a one way or another regulated relationship to the capitalist world system. This principle applies to all world societies or states that have at least a halfway pronounced social-capitalist structuring capable of development.

None of this has anything to do with a stationary economy or with autarky. However, they were counter-campaigns against "liberalism" as a "global geo-culture" (Wallerstein 2002a: 56), which was conflated with the capital economy. At its heart is a modern "proprietaryism", an ideology of property "in the age of big business, international financial markets and today the digital economy" (Piketty 2020a: 1192). These agencies seek to assert themselves extremely tenaciously and literally "at all costs" against the looming and pressing higher level of real socialisation and social productivity, conscious humanisation and human natural relations. On the other hand, the unifying perspective of social forces lies in the establishment of a *socio-economically domestic*, concretely defined *social-state-economic form of reproduction* [sozialstaatwirtschaftliche Reproduktionsform] as the core structure of economic life and the central, sustaining structure of a social life freed from many evils. What else, beyond the economy in the narrower sense, moves in social praxeology and in the cultural fields in the "invariant course towards a life worthy of human beings" (Bloch 1978: 208) could also come together with this concept: It implies the creation of individually and socially available *disposable time* (MEW 42: 603) and the necessary spaces and means for more peaceful and free human life activity.

Thus, what was originally sought under the title of "bursting productive forces" and intended in the 20th century as "concrete utopia" (Bloch 1977b: 226) and in attempts at social liberation can be conceived differently than assumed on the fundamentally contradictory terrain of modern transitional societies, in the opened historical period, and brought to bear as counteraction against an old world that still seems overpowering but is decaying. In this respect, the propagation of a digitalised, greenwashed New Deal, the surrogate figure for failed historical reformism that conceptually borrows from an 'organised capitalism' tried and tested a century ago, is particularly deceptive. Instead, what is needed is an unambiguous, decisive programme for a socio-economically changed social constitution, which in this way makes it possible for a dialectical-practical reason to gain acceptance in the social intellect and also for the multi-dimensional human and social natural relations to be restored or developed further.

In this perspective, the formational contradictory constellation of *social capitalism* points to the fact that corresponding social changes and upheavals basically correspond to a birth assistance and do not simply present themselves like a storming of the Bastille or a palace revolution. The impending new, still unclear in some respects, is already present, partly openly, but mostly hidden, in all dimensions and in all fields of social prac-

tice. So hopefully it can be identified more closely and released. Accordingly, the *main contradiction* [Hauptwiderspruch] of the epoch, beyond all the glaring social contrasts and also beyond the ecological problems, is that *between the old and the new formation*. Consequently, the turning force against the overwhelming power and tremendous destructive force of the still badly existing cannot be constructed appealingly, classically, politically or morally, but is to be found in an alternative overall configuration of social practice and the corresponding social forces capable of association. This means that the forces of the social left and of social upheaval must constitute themselves through a common reference to a latently pressing, higher formation of reproduction and praxis and thus push towards concrete institutionalisations.

In the acute transitional period full of struggles, suffering and threatening exterminist potentials, these forces cannot find each other, exist in the long term and act successfully without certain preconditions. These include the acquisition of dialectical-practical scientific foundations of thought and educational offers, communicative networking and the building of scientific working capacities. They also include individually lived personal life plans and initiatives, the formation of organisations and communities as well as solidarity in social action, consistent orientations in politics and, last but not least, in view of the extreme confusion and contradictoriness of what is happening, the shaping of a directionally conscious conceptual capacity for reflection and global vision.

In the end, it is clear: the practice concept and the perspective of a socio-economic system transformation are outlined and present sharp theses that can enliven the discussion. However, of course, this outline is designed for further enquiry and collaborative research efforts. Students and intellectuals, committed people and scholars who are troubled by the "inwardly desperate poverty that forms the basis of bourgeois wealth and its science" (MEW 42: 155), who want to go beyond protesting against misery production and world destruction and who are looking for more concrete alternatives, may feel addressed. I am convinced that only in the course of new collective efforts can the "social truth" or that "prius of theory" be brought to bear that gives meaning and future to a "primacy of praxis" (Bloch 1977n: 250).

Horst Müller, April 2021

Citation

Horst Müller: Das Konzept PRAXIS im 21. Jahrhundert. Karl Marx und die Praxisdenker, das Praxiskonzept in der Übergangsperiode und die latent existierende Systemalternative. Vollständig überarbeitete und ergänzte 2. Auflage. Books on Demand, Norderstedt 2021.

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