

tion (law of value) and the immediate phenomena, or phenomenal forms, in which this law finds its expression (prices, profits, interest, rent, etc.). When Marx noted that 'all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided' (III, p. 797), he was by implication rejecting the entire method which lay at the foundation of Ricardo's work. We are here insisting that the 'mistakes' in Ricardo's analysis were not isolated questions which Marx corrected or attempted to correct. Ricardo's false understanding of the relationship between value and price for instance (the transformation of values into prices) arose from the fact that the immediate, day-to-day expressions of bourgeois production relations (in this case prices) were allowed to stand in the way of his presentation of the law of value.

The structure of Marx's work

In connection with these last points, it certainly can be considered no accident that the structure of Marx's work is not merely different from Ricardo's, but in essence is its very opposite. Whereas in the case of Ricardo all the historically developed economic relations of 'modern society' are dealt with at the very start of his work, quite the reverse is true in the case of *Capital*. Marx, in this work, shows not in an opening chapter, but over three entire volumes, how all the economic relations of bourgeois economy grow – and this growth is both logical and historical – out of the relations of simple commodity production. And in a fourth volume (*Theories of Surplus Value*) the theoretical reflection of this contradictory process in the work of all the leading political economists is examined. Thus Marx is aiming to demonstrate that the essence of all the contradictions of bourgeois economy (which to the reformist or the liberal appear to be a series of isolated 'problems' to be tackled independently of each other) has a common source within the commodity relation itself; but at the same time the *growth* and *development* of this, the fundamental contradiction, has to be demonstrated. Thus while it would certainly be wrong to think that all relations of bourgeois economy (let alone of politics, ideology, etc.) can be explained by direct reference to Marx's opening chapter, it would be equally erroneous to believe that these more

complex relations can be considered in isolation from Marx's analysis of the commodity. Lenin sums up the point at issue when he writes:

In his *Capital*, Marx first analyses the simplest, most ordinary and fundamental, most common and everyday *relation* of bourgeois (commodity) society, a relation encountered billions of times, viz. the exchange of commodities. In this very simple phenomenon (in this 'cell' of bourgeois society) analysis reveals *all* the contradictions (or the germs of *all* the contradictions) of modern society. The subsequent exposition shows us the development (*both growth and movement*) of these contradictions, and of the society in the summation of its individual parts, from its beginning to its end. (LCW, vol. 38, pp. 360–1)

Thus in the first volume of *Capital* Marx investigates the genesis of capital, revealing that its origins lie in simple commodity production and exchange, and the further development of simple commodity production in the form of money. Having demonstrated that 'capital' is a historically formed social relation (and not something to be assumed as given, as with Ricardo) Marx goes on to deal with the general nature of the relationship between wage labour and capital. In the second volume he is concerned with the turnover of capital and the way in which this and other factors modify the analysis already made. Having completed these tasks, *only now* is Marx able (in the third volume) to deal with the surface phenomena of bourgeois economy and the reflection of these phenomena in the consciousness of the agents of production as well as in political economy. In this way Marx is able to show that the appearances of bourgeois economy are not 'natural' but a product of definite historically formed social relations and, second, that the consciousness of these relations is also not arbitrary – not merely a 'false consciousness' in this sense – but is itself an objective product of these social relations. This tracing of the contradictory connection between 'social relations' on the one hand and 'social consciousness' on the other was precisely what was needed to demonstrate the validity of historical materialism, the 'testing out' of which Lenin considered to be the real task of *Capital*. But at the same time it was the essence of Marx's 'critique'