

# The Economy is Only an Ideology in Marx's Sense

Jean-Pierre Voyer

1979

The most crudely false aspect of Marx's theory resides in his so-called critique of economics where, in the guise of a critic, he incessantly upholds the viewpoint of economics itself. And one hundred years after his death, this enormous as well as his most fundamental error has still not been exposed.

To be sure, Marx's bourgeois and bureaucratic enemies were not about to expose his error. They were not going to divulge the fact that their own theory of the world was present in Marx's writings! Quite the contrary, after offering purely perfunctory resistance to his ideas, they came out enthusiastically in favor of his "critique" of economics. Support from those people should have sufficed to alert the real enemies of this world and of its dominant theories that something was amiss. It is this element of Marx's theory that has attracted approving responses from conformist pundits, social-democrat professors and Stalinist torturers. It is this aspect of his theory that has been praised by all such scumbags as being a permanent and inalienable asset of the social sciences – and so on and so forth. What bullshit did Marx come up with that a pack of bourgeois, social-democratic, Stalinist and technocratic scumbags should lavish such praise on his "critique" of economics? What kind of bullshit does this "critique" harbor when on this point, and on this point only, a Guy Debord takes the same position and says the same thing, though in the service of a different goal, as the living fossils Mandel, Mendel, Fossaert, Fourastié, etc?

Economics is only a theory of the world. It is the dominant theory of the world today and today only, in the modern world, since it is this world that created it expressly for that purpose. The economy (**le prétendu objet of economics**) is only a thought and exists in no other form in this world, plays no other role in this world than as a simple thought. It is a pure Weltanschauung, a pure vision of the world, precisely one of those celebrated objects of contempt for "materialists." And when it acts in the world, when it produces effects in the world, it only acts in the way thoughts and visions act, nothing more. It produces the effects that thoughts and visions produce, nothing more. The economy is only an ideology in Marx's sense.

Now, Marx, but also the Situationists after him, considered the economy to be a moment of the world – something *other* than a pure thought (a thought, however pure, is nonetheless a moment of the world). And Marx, as well as the Situationists, adopted all of the assumptions

of the economy, beginning with the one concerning the very nature of the economy. One could even say that Marx was the fatal inventor of this assumption.

According to Marx and the Situationists, the *economy*, on one hand, is a real moment of the world, different from pure thought, while *economics*, on the other, is the theory, the thought of this real moment. According to them, the “economy” designates a moment of the world and economics the theory of this moment (this theory in any case being – we will never stop repeating – also a practical moment of the world as theory). According to them, economics is the dominant theory of the “economy” taken as a real moment of the world different from a pure thought. According to them, economics is the dominant theory of the economy. This is all pure nonsense because in reality the economy is not a real moment of the world, except as pure thought, while economics is only the dominant theory, the dominant lie about the true nature of the world, about the central part of the world, about what is real and active in the world.

However, economics is also – in a manner completely different from that conceived of by Marx and the Situationists – the dominant theory of the economy because economics, being a lie about the true nature of the world, like any self-respecting lie, it is first a lie about its own lying nature. And economics is *also* the dominant theory of *economics*, the dominant theory of the dominant theory, the dominant lie about the dominant lie. It is primarily with Marx that economics became *first of all* a theory that holds the “economy” to be the central part of the world and of society, the concrete basis of society and not just a pure thought, a pure theory of the world. Marx, who took ideas for something other than ideas, thought he was right in attacking Hegel for his frantic idealism, but Marx always forgot to criticize his own. Hegel saw ideas everywhere – and we will show that he was not all that wrong – while Marx did not see an idea where one needed to be seen.

Recently, Rafael Pallais in his *Incitation to Refute the Third World* wrote, “*the basis of history is not the economy, whatever Marxist ideologues say.*” But Pallais does not understand that if the economy is not the basis of history, it does not play any secondary role either. Pallais acknowledges that the economy does not play a central role in society, but allows that it plays a secondary role as “a particular, determined, specific mode of alienation.” However, the economy is not even that. It is purely a dominant idea about the world, about alienation. In this sense one can nonetheless say that it is a particular mode of alienation, but not in the sense that Pallais means. A false and deceitful thought like the dominant thought, like the economy, is indeed a particular mode of alienation, a particular mode of stupidity. Nothing more.

The economy is not, as Debord so unthinkingly wrote in *The Society of the Spectacle*, “*this central part of social life*” (thesis 123) or the “*material basis of social life*” (thesis 41), but only the illusory object of this world’s dominant theory as regards this central element. The central element of social life – and not only central but peripheral as well, everywhere and all the time – is *communication*. The present form of the central element of social life, the form of communication that dominates today, is the *commodity*. Economics is only the dominant theory of the mode of communication that dominates today. Economics is only the dominant theory of the commodity.

Marx and the Situationists always criticized economics as the dominant theory of the *economy*, never as the dominant theory of the *commodity*. They therefore never criticized economics for what it is. They therefore criticized it in appearance only. However, Marx and the Situationists were relentless critics of the commodity and they criticized it from a viewpoint radically opposed to economics, from the viewpoint of total communication, from the viewpoint of absolute wealth, and they did this by taking the commodity and the spectacle literally. But neither

Marx nor the Situationists were, despite their claims on the subject, critics of the dominant theory of the commodity. They were critics of the dominant thing and not of the theory of the dominant thing. To be sure, both Marx and the Situationists criticized the commodity. Both Marx and the Situationists contributed to the destruction of its world and to the destruction of all that its world contains, hence to the destruction of – among other things – the dominant theory of the commodity. Both Marx and the Situationists relentlessly criticized the dominant thought as long as it took a form *other* than economics, other than the dominant theory of the commodity. But both Marx and the Situationists simply *forgot* to criticize the dominant theory of the commodity, simply forgot to criticize the dominant theory when it took the form of economics. And Marx did not limit himself to passively forgetting, he forgot *methodically* since he went to the trouble of *pretending* to make this critique. Both Marx and the Situationists integrated the dominant theory of the commodity as a totally irrational belief into their critical thought of the commodity in opposition to the rational thought that finally must destroy it.

The same thing happened with economics as happened with religion: While bourgeois physicists were attacking in theory the world that makes religion necessary, their financial backers were attacking this world directly through their own actions, long before religion – that is to say long before the dominant theory of this world – was attacked *per se*. It was only when the world that required religion had totally disappeared that this dominant theory was indicted as pure thought by the erudite work of the philologist Strauss regarding the real Greek origins of Christianity, reputedly Jewish, and later by the works of Feuerbach and Marx regarding the earthly reasons, the practical causes of this thought, the practical conditions of its historical production, while economics – the new star of dominant thought – was already shining brightly in the theoretical firmament.

Although the commodity itself was immediately attacked in practice by the modern poor and in theory by Marx and the Situationists, the dominant theory of the commodity has not yet been indicted for being a pure thought, for its nature as a pure thought, a purely false idea, an appearance, an invention, an illusion. Nor have the practical conditions of its historical production been put in question. Just as the contradictions of the celestial family – commencing with its existence in thought – were to be explained by the contradictions of the terrestrial family, the fairy tales of the economy must be explained through the real dangers that must be confronted in the world by the backers of the economy. Both Marx and the Situationists always treated economics *as realistic thought*, thought that translates an economic reality of this world, certainly more or less accurately, more or less deceitfully. According to them, it is the economy, as a real thing in this world, not as a pure thought, that must be – sometimes mastered, sometimes overthrown – take your pick. It's as if atheists, instead of going after religion, after the real causes of religion, instead of studying those causes and struggling against them, continued to go after God, wanted to master God, wanted to overthrow God! This is all the more surprising since Marx, as well as the Situationists, always held the commodity, in parallel with the economy, to be the substance of the modern world. This is in fact the central contribution of Marx, and the crucial investigations concerning this substance constitute the core of the Situationists' work. Either the reality, the substance of this world, is the commodity, or this reality, this substance, is the economy. A choice must be made. And neither Marx nor the Situationists were able choose.

With the goal of illustrating the above, we shall re-examine some of the 178 economic crudisms contained in *The Society of the Spectacle*. Reader, rest assured, we shall not employ the patient approach used by Marx in *The German Ideology* and shall not inflict upon you all 178 corrections

in our *English Ideology*. In the succeeding chapter, we shall treat the same subject, focusing instead on Marx and proceeding in an even more expeditious manner. This case has been waiting one hundred years to be made, and cannot wait an instant more.

---

If it is true that the economy, as pure thought, depends on the society that produces it (as do all ideas), it is perfectly false that it depends on it because “*society discovers that it depends on the economy*” (thesis 52). If society discovers this, here in the person of Debord, it is simply one more false discovery, one more pure appearance. Now, if it is true that society depends – though in a different sense than Debord understood – on the economy, it is only to the extent that all societies depend on the ideas that its members have of it. Now, the world is not false because men create false ideas about it. On the contrary, men create false ideas about the world because the world is false. But it is quite clear that the world will remain false as long as men create false ideas about it.

“*The production of commodities*” could not have “*seized the total domination of the economy*” wherever “*it encountered the social conditions of large-scale trade and capital accumulation*” (thesis 40), because in no society, in no era, in no location has something like “the economy” existed that could be dominated by the commodity – except in our own society as a pure illusion. Only modes of communication can be seized and destroyed by the commodity. Similarly, “*the domination of the commodity*” cannot manifest itself “*in an occult manner over the economy*” (thesis 41) but only over means of communication different from and predating the commodity, because nowhere and at no time did an “economy” ever exist over which the commodity could hold sway, in an occult manner or otherwise, except in our society as the dominant illusion.

The spectacle cannot be “*the victory of the autonomous economy*” (thesis 51) any more than it can be “*the economy developing for itself*” (thesis 16) or “*the economy moving for itself*” (thesis 32), because the economy being a pure idea – do we have to remind ourselves after Marx? – it has no independent history. Marx, who first pointed out this characteristic of ideas in general and of ideologies in particular, simply forgot to point it out regarding the ideology referred to as the economy. Likewise, this “*victory of the autonomous economy*” stands no chance of becoming “*at the same time its defeat*” or the defeat of the world that requires the economic lie, because this so-called victory of the so-called autonomous economy is a pure appearance of dominant thought that we see here dominating the thinking of Debord.

The bourgeoisie is not the “*class of the developing economy*” (thesis 88) but the class of the developing commodity; it was not “*the development of the economy*” that was “*the cause and the consequence of its capture of society*” (thesis 87) but the development of the commodity; nor was it within the economy that the bourgeoisie “*was already in power*” when it built its “*partial ideological consciousness*” (thesis 123) but within the commodity.

The spectacle cannot subjugate living people “*to the extent that the economy has already subjugated them totally*” (thesis 16). Being a purely false idea, the economy can only subjugate the *minds* of people, and even then people must be practically subjugated already by the commodity and the State, by the reigning forms of alienated communication. The spectacle is not “*the image of the reigning economy*” (thesis 14). The economy is already itself an image and only an image: it is the dominant image of the reigning form of communication, or more precisely, the reigning form of alienated communication. Social life is not totally occupied by “*the accumulated results*

of the economy” (thesis 17) but by those of the universal alienation of communication. Finally, there can be no “subordination of the economy to historical consciousness” (thesis 176) since the economy is purely a lie about the true nature of the world and – far from wanting to subordinate this lie – historical consciousness can only want to destroy it and destroy the world that makes it necessary.

---

Fortunately, what “closely links Marx’s theory to scientific thought” is not any so-called “rational understanding of the forces actually at work in society” (thesis 81). Luckily, the science of history, history as science, did not have to be “itself historically founded with the economy” (thesis 82). If indeed, like everything else, the science of history had to be historically founded (although that which exists can very well exist without being founded, but if it is founded, it can only be historically founded – Heil Hegel!), it was so founded with the development of a certain mode of alienated communication. And – thanks be to Hegel – economics is not the “historical science par excellence” (thesis 84) but rather the ideology par excellence of the era that saw the birth of history as a science. Happily, it is not “history that discovered its basis in political economy,” (thesis 141) but only the illusions about history and about the true nature of the economy that have their intellectual basis in political economy.

Special attention must be given to thesis 84 as it is an example of a *false critique of Marx*. “The scientific-determinist side of Marx’s thought” is not “the gap through which the process of ideologization penetrated” into Marx’s thought during his lifetime. This gap was Marx’s belief in the postulates of economics – perfectly determinist, positivist, utilitarian assumptions after all – and this as early as the *Manuscripts of 1844*. That gap consists in the recycling – without real testing, without real testing followed by real results – of economic thought. All in all, Hegelian assumptions are better than those of Marx. Just as, according to Hegel, Kant regressed in relation to Spinoza, Marx regressed in relation to Hegel in his choice of assumptions, because he admitted the very ones that Hegel was combating.

It’s easy for Debord to scold Marx for having been *too concerned* about the economy. But if, like Marx and Debord, one believes in the economy – if one believes that the economy is something real and active in the world, not only as a thought but as a thing – one can hardly go on thinking and acting without paying it any attention at all. And this leads to that sterile and century-old discussion about how much or how little attention one should pay to “this thing.” Should one “patiently study economic development and, with Hegelian tranquility, accept the suffering it imposed,” or should one leave this accursed development sulking in a corner and devote oneself to more attractive pursuits? Believers in werewolves who are as cowardly as social-democrats avoid going out at night, while those with Situationist courage go forth armed with a rifle. But in either case such precautions are quite useless – though not useless for everyone, if you consider who profits from the error – and appropriate to a time supposedly more superstitious than our own.

This thesis of Debord’s, which contains all the aspects of a critique of “economism,” is nonetheless completely orthodox as regards the economist creed; it is itself perfectly economist. It directs our attention to that pinch of determinism that taints Marx’s thought, all the more easily to avoid any reference to the strong box of the economy that encumbers his theory. And there is no crude form of economism that can be opposed to a more refined one: economism is nothing other than

the belief in the economy. Contrary to what is asserted in thesis 89, which is another example of a false critique of Marx, “*the intellectual basis for the illusions of economism*” does not consist in expecting too much from scientific predictions but in expecting anything at all from the predictions of a false science. This sort of expectation is itself the basis for the majority of possible illusions. And contrary, again, to what is asserted in this thesis, it is not Marx who created the intellectual basis for the illusions of economism. This basis is economics itself and is therefore a creation of the ruling class. Marx only failed in his attempt to overthrow it. Perhaps he contributed to reinforcing this basis by proclaiming its overthrow a done deal. And, be it said in passing, the basis of economism is and could be nothing other than intellectual, since economics is nothing other than an intellectual thing, a pure thought. Frankly, economics is not only the basis of economism, it is economism itself to the extent that economics is above all propaganda on behalf of the economy, to the extent that economics is a lie about its own nature as a lie. And contrary, again, to what is asserted in this thesis, if Marx did not create the basis for the illusions of economism, he succumbed to those illusions just as Debord did, because they both believed in the reality of the economy. If our correspondent has in mind critiques of Marx and of economics that, according to him, we would be wrong to ignore, I hope they are more serious.

The denunciation of economism, the denunciation of the *excessive* claims of economic science – as opposed to a denunciation of *all* of the claims of economic science – is economics’ best and last defense. The notion that only the excessive claims of economic theory are criticizable implies that economics also makes claims that are not excessive and, therefore, justified. This implies that economics is a science with a real object in the world. Now, all the claims of economics are unjustified, beginning with its claim to existence as a simple thought. Like religion, economics is a total phantasmagoria, but – as we shall soon see – without any of religion’s revelatory aspects. It is purely a damper. The denunciation of the excesses of economic theory as economism, as an abuse of the purported science of economics, is the ultimate economic illusion, dominant thought’s ultimate ruse, *its last line of defense*. And since we are led to discuss the so-called “critique of economism,” this spectacle of the critique of “economics” as theory, let’s not forget the spectacular critique of the purported economic “thing.” Let’s not forget in passing to lift our legs on the current crowd of “anti-economist” sluts like Rosanwhore, Vivashit, Gorzette, and Illitch who, in guise of combating the noxious “effects” of the economy, have as their only goal to reinforce the dominant illusions about the existence of the economy. In attributing to the economy, this chimera, the calamities that engulf the world, these hermetic saints accredit the supposed existence of this chimera and thereby give credence to the supposed necessity of its “self-management,” which is their specialty – some as writers in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, others as members of the absurd Socialist Party or the Cidoc, etc. – thus also accrediting the necessity of their respective jobs. But above all they distract attention – they think they do – from the *real causes* of the world’s misery and even from the real nature of this misery. In a way, they do the same thing that Marx and Debord also did, but their goal is obviously altogether different and, above all, that’s all they do. They therefore have none of the excuses that Marx and Debord have.

And if it is indeed because “*the exposition of Marx’s theory was put forth on the terrain of dominant thought*” that Marx’s thought became ideological, this happened not because Marx developed his thought further there “*in the form of critiques of particular disciplines,*” but rather because, having been drawn onto such a terrain, Marx was incapable of *really* and successfully criticizing these particular disciplines, incapable of refuting them or of overthrowing them. The real project of surmounting the economy is none other than that of overthrowing a chimera. And

this requires nothing other than to overthrow it in thought, because that is where chimeras live. But then the chosen terrain must not be that of the chimera itself. Both Marx and the Situationist International achieved theoretical success only when they chose their own terrain: the terrain of total communication, the terrain of history. Unlike Marx, the Situationists never took on dominant thought on the latter's terrain. But they confirmed the sovereignty of this thought over its territory by taking Marx's theoretical defeat for a victory. In theory as in war, some victories are worse than a defeat.

---

There is no *economic reality* for which *economic theory* provides a more or less precise, more or less true, more or less complete understanding, and which theory must consequently be criticized before we can finally understand, master or overthrow *the economic thing* of which this theory is the imperfect and partial understanding. The world does not have an economic reality any more than it had a religious reality in the era of religion or than there is a socialist reality in Moscow. The only religious reality in the world consisted in religion and in its guarantor, the King of Prussia. The only economic reality in the world consists in the reality of the dominant thought called economics and in this thought's practical power of illusion at the hands of its guarantors: States, ruling classes and their leftist intellectual valets. There is only a fundamental, reigning lie about the reality of this world, and this lie is the only thing that is really economic in the world. If the economy is the central part of anything, it is only the central part of dominant thought, the central part of the dominant lie. It is this fundamental, reigning lie that must be overthrown, among other things, which must be refuted and annihilated in order to attain an understanding of the reality of this world – or more precisely to attain an understanding of how little reality it has—and above all to attain the practice of reality.

The real “*project of surmounting the economy*” (thesis 82) is a purely theoretical one – having nothing to do with the senseless practical project discussed by Debord – because it consists in overthrowing, in refuting, a false theory. But, fatally, Debord's understanding of “*the project of surmounting the economy*” espouses the very essence of the economic lie referring to itself. *Economics does nothing else than endlessly propose to surmount the economy*, thereby postulating that the economy is a practical moment of the world. It thus does nothing other than to lie indefinitely about its true nature as a lie, while at the same time lying about the true nature of the world.

There is no such thing as a “*class of the owners of the economy*” (thesis 143) in the sense that Debord understands it, though the class that owns alienated communication also owns the illusions about communication and its alienation, and thus owns “the economy,” which constitutes the central part of these illusions. Nothing more. “*The root of the spectacle*” cannot be “*within the terrain of the abundant economy*” (thesis 58), because the abundant economy can be nothing other than an abundance of economic rehash produced by such dried up academic laggards as Fourastié, Mendel, Fabra, Marek, or an abundance of economic crudisms in the text of Debord, the abundance of an illusion. “*The contemplation of the movement of the economy in the dominant thought of present-day society*” (thesis 80) can occur, but then this would only be the contemplation of dominant thought by dominant thought, the contemplation by all the above-mentioned hacks of their own economic turds and their mutually congratulatory scribblings. Now, it is quite

true that the belief in the practical domination of the world by *the idea* “economy” is “*the non-inverted legacy of the non-dialectical part of the Hegelian attempt to create a circular system*”.

Everything dominant thought considers to be real is, in fact, as Hegel affirmed, the ultimate of unreality, of nothingness, or else it is pure phantoms, pure appearances, pure illusions, pure nightmarish dreams within this dominant thought, or else manifestations, moments, inessential aspects of reality, manifestations of unreal moments because arbitrarily isolated not only in thought but also in the world by the world and, therefore, devoid of any kind of reality, not only in thought but in the world. In saying this I call to witness my fellow wage slaves, as I shall frequently do in this book. Everyday we experience the bitter proof of the dearth of reality in what we’re supposed to call life, of the dearth of reality in what is considered real by dominant thought, of the dearth of reality – not in the thought of Hegel but in the world – in the moments of this reality with which we are confronted. Generally speaking, the reality of this world, the only reality in this world, the only “thing-in-itself” in this world is communication, and everything that claims to be a *thing*, reality, in this world of alienation is only an inessential moment, an inessential and unreal manifestation of this reality, tainted with the nothingness specific to all that pretends to be finite. And it is not only dominant thought that “presents / posits” these moments as finite, as sufficient and real, it is these moments themselves that present themselves as such, they themselves refuse to obey [comply with reality]. The reality of this sad world has always been right up to today the reality of alienated communication, because this alienation is the only “thing” that blithely lays claim to its infinity. And the history of the world until now has been nothing but the history of the concrete forms of this alienation: hierarchy and money, the commodity and the State.

The reality of this sad world, the dominant mode of communication in this sad world, is the commodity. And the commodity is not economic. On the contrary, it is anti-economic. It is the commodity that renders all economy – in the etymological sense of the word, i.e. all management of the household – impossible. It creates the necessity for all those grotesque and laughable economic treatises at the very time when all economic power, all power of sovereign management of the household, all absolute power of the State has disappeared or sees its days threatened by that which tolerates no limits: the commodity.

---

In the confrontation between the two rival modes of communication, the State and the commodity, economics has a fitting name as “political economy.” *Economics is the theory of the commodity from the point of view of the State.* Economics is the State’s theoretical response – a collection of recipes about communication – as it faces the danger presented by its rival mode of communication, the commodity. Remember: *delenda Carthago*. Yet never to this day has this theory succeeded in properly resolving, from the State’s viewpoint, the threat the commodity has continually posed. Today, the new Carthage, the most recent problem posed by the commodity to the State, is the creation of the modern proletariat in the form of salaried workers. And if Carthage did not, strictly speaking, have a permanent army – unlike pillaging Rome – this new Carthage is, itself, a permanent army. The State and its eco-valets will no doubt succeed in creating green commodities. And if we give it enough time, the State will no doubt even be successful, with the help of its vanguard consumer valets, in replacing the automobile as star commodity



with another – the commodity “culture” for example – even going so far as to produce an edible commodity “meat.” But it will never be able to create a commodity without the modern poor.

The “*industrialization of the Stalinist era*” (thesis 104) does not reveal “*the bureaucracy’s true nature*” but that of economics. We have seen that economics is the State’s insane attempt to dominate the commodity without realizing it, and that this project hides within an even crazier one, that of “surmounting the economy.” In attempting to realize this project *totally* (the survival of this project, by the way, is ensured only because of the guesswork and incoherence that characterize it), the Stalinist bureaucracy reveals in fact the reality of the project of State management it contains. Rather than the economy producing the need for money, as Marx incorrectly proposed, rather than the economy producing the spectacle, as Debord incorrectly proposed, when the economy produces something, when this thought produces something, this something is the Stalinist State. And this is not “*the proof of the independent economy that dominates society to the point of recreating for its own goals the class domination it requires,*” but the proof of the independence of two modes of alienated communication, the South of the State against the North of the commodity, that fight to maintain and to reinforce their independence vis-a-vis society through an impossible *modus vivendi*, as well as the proof of their complicity, of their need for each other. When things do not take a radical turn as they did with Stalin or Hitler, an incessant, pragmatic debate goes on among the dominant scumbags and their servants as to whether more State and less commodities, or less State and more commodities, are required for the world to function well. And we see a succession of periods characterized by the alternation of these two parties, a succession that results in fact with more State and more commodities.

There can be no “*totalitarian management of the economy by a State bureaucracy*” (thesis 56) if not in the form of totalitarian management of dominant economic thought by Stalin, the author of instruction manuals on the economy and dialectical materialism. In contrast, it is possible for Stalin and Louvois to attempt the totalitarian management of the commodity, that is to say to attempt the total realization of the project of State management of the commodity, which is what economics is really all about. In thesis 87 we see Debord approaching the theoretical solution to this problem while at the same time reintroducing, of course, the same fundamental error about the true nature of the economy and, therefore, about the true nature of the world. It is here that he correctly uses the term “economy” in the etymological sense. “*The economic role of the State*” (which Marx neglected, and for good reason) in managing the commodity corresponds to both the reality and the content of the economic project: the theory of the domination of the commodity by the State and the corresponding practice by the State.

If economics is indeed “*the fundamental science of bourgeois society*” (thesis 84), neither Marx nor Debord were able to grasp the real object of this science (the domination of the commodity) and its real backer (the State). The dominant reality of this sad world is the commodity, and economics is only the dominant theory of that reality from the viewpoint of the State. It must finally be criticized, then, for what it is: a thought and only a thought. And furthermore, a thought of the State. As for the viewpoint of the commodity, the economy is the spectacle itself, this “materialized ideology.”

---

Finally, if the critique of economics is indeed both departure point and prerequisite for all critique of this world (as in other times religion was, another dominant theory of another dom-

inant mode of communication), it is not, as Marx and Debord thought, because the economy is the central part of social life, but because economics is the dominant theory of this central part, the dominant lie about this central part. And it is not the economy that must be overthrown, this so-called central part of the present world – leave that windmill to the sorry-faced knights of the left – but only economics, the dominant lie about this central part, and already a tall order judging from the duration of this lie’s unchallenged reign. If economics is indeed the departure point for the critique of the commodity – as in other eras the critique of religion was the departure point for the critique of the State – it is because economics is the dominant theory of the commodity, the dominant lie about the commodity. And if what must be overthrown in thought – among other things – is only economics, the dominant theory of the commodity, what must be overthrown in the world is the commodity itself. Of course, as dominant thought, economics is a thing of the world and must be overthrown *in* the world because it is in the world that thoughts exist. But it is in the world only as a thought and as action of a thought, while the commodity is the world itself, the world that contains the dominant theory of the world. And if to overthrow in thought the dominant theory, which is economics, a general theory of communication will suffice, to overthrow the world of alienated communication, which required among other things this dominant theory, total communication itself is necessary. And what must be mastered in the world is not the economy, as Marx and the Situationists thought. The economy as a false thought is only to be destroyed. What must be dominated and mastered in the world is the world’s substance, *communication*, of which the commodity is only an alienated form.

To refute economics, to refute the dominant theory of the world, to refute the utilitarian and positivist theory of the world, is nothing other than to reveal what is real in the world, what acts in the world, what is world in the world. It is to reveal what economics aims to conceal and what, nevertheless, has always been in action and what – unlike economics – the theory of Hegel aimed to uncover. Refuting a lie is to reveal what the lie aims to conceal and what, in a certain way, the lie itself reveals through the very care it takes to conceal it.

Marx’s merit and advantage over Hegel, who spoke endlessly about the world of the commodity, about its logic and the logic it *revealed*, without ever being able for a single instant to identify his object, is to have been the first to identify the true object of Hegel’s theory. But Marx’s merit stops there. Unlike Hegel, Marx as well as the Situationists – and until now, who hasn’t done the same thing? – have continually confused the thing and the dominant theory of the thing. They have continually confused the commodity with the dominant theory of the commodity. They have continually confused what is really happening in the world – of which, unlike the intellectually submissive, they have practical and certain knowledge, as testified by their lives and revolutionary positions – and what the dominant theory says is happening in the world.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)  
Anti-Copyright



Jean-Pierre Voyer  
The Economy is Only an Ideology in Marx's Sense  
1979

Retrieved 06/08/2023 from [leuven.pagesperso-orange.fr](http://leuven.pagesperso-orange.fr)  
First Published in France in 1979 in *Report on the State of Illusions in Our Party Followed by  
Revelations Concerning the Principle of the World*

[usa.anarchistlibraries.net](http://usa.anarchistlibraries.net)