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Topic #4: Marx

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In the interest of interpreting Historical Materialism as it relates to Communism as the final state of human interactions and societal orientation it is necessary to preface that with a sketch of the preceding steps of Historical Materialism and how the internal contradictions of Capitalism, in Marx's view, necessarily beget Communism to be followed by a potential pitfall of Historical Materialism.

Marx begins by asserting the means of production in the development of human societies as the focal point <sup>from which</sup> of human history <sup>develops</sup> and its eventual *dénouement* <sup>into</sup> of the Communist revolution. The first form of ownership is tribal ownership wherein "a people lives by hunting and fishing, by the rearing of beasts, or, in the highest stage, agriculture." (German Ideology 178) whose social structure is "an extension of the family; patriarchal family, chieftains, below them the members of the tribe, finally slaves." (G.I. 178) It can be inferred that a system of tribal ownership corresponds to a social structure with localized small-scale divisions and a relative absence of alienation. The second form of ownership – the city state – comes about when <sup>→ good, but you haven't explained alienation yet</sup> "several tribes [merge] into a city by agreement or by conquest" (G.I. 178) However, unlike in a tribe whose members may occupy several occupational niches at once and are in close geographic proximity with each other, alienation is already manifest as in the city-state one can -

find the antagonism of town and country; later the antagonism between those states which represent town interests and those which represent country interests, and inside the towns themselves the antagonism between industry and maritime commerce (G.I. 178)

The third state, feudalism, at least as far as Europe is concerned is rooted in "Roman conquests and the spread of agriculture at first associated with it" (G.I. 179). The Feudal society

like that of the preceding city-state and tribal one is hierarchical "landownership, and the armed bodies of retainers, gave the nobility power over the serfs." (G.I. 179) However, unlike the preceding two, the Feudal structure bore the guild – a kind of proto-communal organization of industrial production which stood athwart <sup>nia</sup> the awesome productive capacity of the rolling estates of the noblemen. The guild enabled the accumulation of capital and wealth creation independent to that of the despotic kings or chieftains who'd amass wealth either by threat or outright force. Ever greater production and exchange of goods from the guilds necessarily exacerbates

alienation; profit maximization requires economies of scale and the atomization of the worker  
↳ perhaps, but you'll have to explain 'alienation', or the point will be lost.  
whose job it becomes to produce in greater quantity fewer distinct parts to the whole.

✓ you're putting it very well!!

↳ ... and so? spell it out!

Communism is borne out of the alienation which necessarily results from the division of labor that capitalism demands for the continual accumulation of profit through economies of scale. Alienation is twofold: Marx describes it as the synthesis of the continual division of labor <sup>Ah!</sup> and the widening gulf of wealth between worker and owner both as wages slide to their absolute minimum above bare subsistence (the Iron Law of Wages) as the quantity and quality of production continues to improve.

Further, the division of labour implies the contradiction between the interest of the separate individual or the individual family and the communal interest of all individuals who have intercourse with one another. (G.I. 185)

It is from the alienation resultant of the division of labor – the dissonance between Man's dreams to be something more than a cog in a machine and his hapless current state - which class conflict emerges. Political struggles, be they over democratic, aristocratic, or monarchical systems of governance serve as a sort of window dressing over the true struggle of class conflict and the conflicting ideologies of wealth-creation. Just as the guild-master became the bourgeoisie and supplanted the estate-owner and feudal master as the driver of power and accumulator of wealth

nicer!

so too when the alienation – a natural byproduct of Capitalism – becomes too much to bear will  
(itself?)  
the proletariat seize the means of production and liberate himself from the tyranny of the  
capitalist and the numbing effects of alienation.

According to Marx, Communism is “the only society in which the original and free  
development of individuals ceases to be a mere phrase” (G.I. 207). The communalization of  
productive forces to the masses is a necessary condition for this continual development.

Communist society, while the most revolutionary (in the context of the total reorientation of  
Man’s *telos* well put from material aggregator to self-improver) purports to be the most stable.

Revolutions occur as a means of rectifying social ills; societies free of alienation and class  
conflict is one, as noted above, in which the development of individuals continues without  
failure. A Communist society is simultaneously the most radical and staid organization of man.

As noted in the section ‘Communism and History’, the friction caused by power relations  
(machinery and money) strain the proletariat “a class which forms the majority of all members of  
society”. (G.I. 195), revolutions such as the communist one Marx envisions is necessarily  
oriented towards the “class, which till then has been in power.” (G.I. 195). What characterizes  
the Communism as the final stage of eschatological development where one can “hunt in the  
morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner... without ever  
becoming hunter, fisherman, cowherd, or critic.” (G.I. 185) from all preceding historical stages is  
those revolutionary shifts dealt with the distribution of Capital - a *quantitative* matter – not the  
outright seizure of the means of production and permanent destruction of all hierarchy by  
exalting egalitarianism as the greatest good – necessarily *qualitative*. Such a radical shift in  
power relations – the most radical Marx would argue – necessitates a shift in consciousness from  
a Capitalistic one orientated towards the maximization of profits and the ever increasing

yes, I think  
that's important  
to bring it all  
together  
with the  
transition it  
implies



efficiency of production to the Communist conception of the total liberation of Man. It is only through the purification of one's mind and the ablution of one's soul by eschewing 'materialism for materialism's sake' for the liberation of humanity as a whole that the free development of individuals – actualization in every sphere of human genius – may begin.

*you've almost got me convinced ... waiting for the "but"...*

The Marxian march of Historical Materialism – ever upward towards excelsior – recognizes as the enemy only the owners of the means of production, be they the tribal chieftain, city-state King or bourgeoisie. The resultant univocal conception of 'the means of production' as the source of all conflict is challenged "by the appearance of irreducibly different struggles, such as those of feminism and of oppressed national or cultural minorities." (Metapolitics 27) The reorientation of class-conflict from issues ~~(from issues)~~ of the economic to identity politicizes what "a certain type of Marxism had defended in the past." (M. 27) Ironically, a Marxist revolution must adopt a decidedly anti-liberal stance against identity politics and theories of intersectionality which posit some proletariat more oppressed than others and therefore more deserving or some proletariat as complicit in the oppression of their kinfolk for their own ends.

Otherwise, "that class struggle first unleashed [will be] subsequently pursued by other political subjects as well [as] contribut[ing] to the relativization of class struggle itself." (M. 27)

*✓ You have a great ability to bring complex ideas down to their core!*

While it may seem obvious, the only way for Marx to defend his ideas as an existential threat to the existing power structure (the capitalist mode) and not as a means by which genuine revolutionary energies are neutralized by being redirected towards an ideological dead-end is the success of the Communist revolution in liberating man from the power relations which fetter him. This is one part ideological (shift in consciousness) and one part physical (the seizure of the means of production). Barring this, the historical materialist conception of history and the (always!) ever-approaching Communist revolution exist as a kind of false consciousness for the

*→ high bar*

proletariat – a channel through which the *actual* revolutionary impetus be rendered benign complimented by the proletariat legitimizing their own oppression by indulging in the opium of communist solidarity. After all, if the final revolution is always just around the corner why expropriate those who control the means of production if they will be ~~(will be)~~ dispossessed through a kind of divine intervention – the spectre of communism?

Sources:

1. Karl Marx *Selected Writings*:  
[https://wiki.zirve.edu.tr/sandbox/groups/economicsandadministrativesciences/wiki/ad713/attachments/1a247/Karl\\_Marx\\_Selected\\_Writings.pdf?sessionID=2f78617d94f0913a79812dcb5690927bedc199f4](https://wiki.zirve.edu.tr/sandbox/groups/economicsandadministrativesciences/wiki/ad713/attachments/1a247/Karl_Marx_Selected_Writings.pdf?sessionID=2f78617d94f0913a79812dcb5690927bedc199f4)
2. Carl Schmitt's *Metapolitics*:  
<https://lirias.kuleuven.be/bitstream/123456789/305582/3/Carl+Schmitt%27s+Metapolitics.pdf>

Eric,

A (97%)

Well, this is certainly among the best student papers I have read at Baruch or anywhere, really. Your overall characterization of Hist. Mat. is very economical (no pun) and your criticisms at the end – though I'd love to hear it spelled out more – sounds right on target. Perpetual revolutionary promise is certainly an opiate all its own!