

# **Part 1: Marx**

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## **1. Marx's early writings**

There is a sense in which Marx's writings span three centuries. Although Marx was born nearly two decades after the opening of the nineteenth century, and died well before the end of it, his writings have had their greatest influence – certainly in the political sphere, and possibly even in the intellectual world – in the twentieth century. But they have their roots in the late eighteenth century, in the outburst of social and political changes stemming from the Revolution of 1789 in France. Marx's works thus draw the shattering effects of the French Revolution into the modern age, and express a line of direct continuity between 1789 and the October Revolution in Russia of almost one hundred and thirty years later.

While rather little is known of Marx's early childhood, various fragments and letters survive from his adolescent pen. The earliest of these are three short essays which Marx wrote during the course of his final school examinations. Inevitably enough, these are of little intrinsic interest or originality, but they do give an indication of the enthusiastic grandiosity which inspired many of Marx's subsequent adult works.<sup>1</sup> The most novel of the three is called 'Reflections of a young man on choosing a career', and discusses the moral obligations and the range of freedoms open to an individual who is choosing which vocation to follow in his life. 'The main principle', Marx concludes, . . . which must guide us in the selection of a vocation is the welfare of humanity, our own perfection. One should not think that these two interests combat each other, that one must destroy the other. Rather, man's nature makes it possible for him to reach his fulfilment only by working for the perfection and welfare of his society. . . History calls those the greatest men who ennobled themselves by working for the universal.<sup>2</sup>

Such an outlook eventually led Marx, as a university student, to close study of Hegel, in whose philosophy we find precisely this: a theory of the self-fulfilment, of the culmination of 'our own perfection'. A letter which Marx wrote to his father in 1837 describes how, finding the philosophy of Kant and Fichte unsatisfactory, and finally rejecting his youthful love of lyrical poetry, Marx 'dived into the ocean' of Hegel.<sup>3</sup> But even while he was first under the

<sup>1</sup> It might be noted that some commentators have attempted to discern in these essays a number of themes which were fundamental to Marx's later writings (cf. A. Cornu: *Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels* (Paris, 1955), vol. 1, pp. 65–6). But the most striking characteristic of the essays is their conventional adolescent idealism.

<sup>2</sup> *WYM*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> *WYM*, pp. 40–50.

spell of Hegel's philosophical system as a student, it is clear that Marx was at no point a blindly orthodox Hegelian. The genesis of Marx's initial attraction to Hegelianism is revealed in his description of the notes which, as a student in Berlin, he made of his readings in philosophy and law.<sup>4</sup> The Kantian dualism of what 'is' and what 'ought to be', seems to Marx – and this view he continued to maintain throughout the rest of his life – totally irreconcilable with the demands of the individual who wishes to apply philosophy to the pursuit of his objectives. The philosophy of Fichte is subject to the same objection: it separates the properties of logic and truth (such as is involved in mathematics and empirical science respectively) from the intervention of the human subject in a continuously developing world. This standpoint, therefore, has to be supplanted by one which recognises that 'the object itself must be studied in its development; there must be no arbitrary divisions; the rationale (*Vernunft*) of the thing itself must be disclosed in its contradictoriness and find its unity in itself'.<sup>5</sup>

Marx discovered himself unable to resolve these issues alone, and was thus unavoidably led to pursue in his own thought the process of evolution followed by German idealist philosophy as a whole – moving from Kant to Fichte and thence on to Hegel.<sup>6</sup> However, what first drew Marx to Hegel was neither the impressive comprehensiveness of the latter's philosophy, nor the specific content of his philosophical premises as such, but the closure which Hegel effected between the dichotomous strands of classical German philosophy which formed the principal legacy of Kant. The impact of Hegel upon Marx was mediated by two partially separate sources, each of which involved the conjunction of Hegelianism to political standpoints at variance with the conservatism of Hegel.<sup>7</sup> One of these influences is to be found in the teachings of Eduard Gans, whose lectures at Berlin made some considerable impression upon Marx. Gans seasoned Hegel with a strong element of Saint-Simonianism.<sup>8</sup> However, Marx had almost certainly been exposed to contact with Saint-Simonian ideas earlier on in his youth, and a case can be made for the view that the influence of Saint-Simon's writings over Marx in his formative years was in some respects almost as great as that of Hegel.<sup>9</sup>

The second factor conditioning Marx's acceptance of Hegel was Marx's membership of the 'Doctor's Club' in Berlin University. In this circle, Marx

<sup>4</sup> *WYM*, pp. 42–7.

<sup>5</sup> *WYM*, p. 43; *We, Ergänzungsband (Ergd)*, vol. 1, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> cf. Robert C. Tucker: *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 31–69.

<sup>7</sup> On the views of the 'young Hegel', cf. the analysis given in Georg Lukács: *Der junge Hegel* (Zurich and Vienna, 1948), pp. 27–130.

<sup>8</sup> See Hanns Günther Reissner: *Eduard Gans* (Tübingen, 1965).

<sup>9</sup> This view is stated forcefully in Georges Gurvitch: 'La sociologie du jeune Marx' in *La Vocation actuelle de la sociologie* (Paris, 1950), pp. 568–80. This chapter is replaced in the second edition (1963) by a more general discussion entitled 'La sociologie de Karl Marx'.

made the acquaintance of a heterogeneous assortment of young followers of Hegel, of whom Bruno Bauer was the outstanding figure.<sup>10</sup> The immediate problems which concerned Bauer, and the group of 'Young Hegelians' which formed around him, preserved the concern with Christian theology which was intrinsic to Hegel's own writings. Marx's doctoral dissertation, which is concerned with a comparative discussion of the philosophies of Democritus and Epicurus, shows the strong imprint of Bauer's ideas. But at about the same time as Marx submitted his doctoral thesis, Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) was published.<sup>11</sup> Engels later wrote of the impact of the book upon the Young Hegelians: 'The spell was broken: the "system" was shattered and thrown aside... Enthusiasm was general: we all became at once "Feuerbachians".'<sup>12</sup> The immediate influence of the work upon Marx's developing thought was almost certainly, in fact, more diffuse and less immediate than is described in Engels' account, written over forty years later.<sup>13</sup> Marx no more adopted Feuerbach's position in a wholesale fashion than he had that of Hegel.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, it cannot be doubted that the influence of Feuerbach among the Young Hegelians was dominant by the end of 1842. Marx's critical discussion of Hegel's philosophy of the state, written in 1843, is heavily influenced by Feuerbach: and the standpoint of the latter is basic to the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844.

In *The Essence of Christianity*, and other subsequent publications, Feuerbach seeks to reverse the idealistic premises of Hegel's philosophy, stating bluntly that the starting-point of the study of humanity must be 'real man', living in 'the real, material world'. Whereas Hegel sees the 'real' as emanating from the 'divine', Feuerbach argues that the divine is an illusory product of the real; being, existence, precede thought in the sense in that men do not reflect upon the world prior to acting in it: 'thought proceeds from being, not being from thought.'<sup>15</sup> Hegel viewed the development of mankind in terms of God having been divided against himself. In Feuerbach's philosophy, God can only exist in so far as man is divided against himself, in so far as man is alienated from himself. God is a fantasied being upon whom man has pro-

<sup>10</sup> For a recent discussion of the influence of Bauer upon Marx, see David McClellan: *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (London, 1969), pp. 48ff and *passim*; see also the same author's *Marx before Marxism* (London, 1970).

<sup>11</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach: *The Essence of Christianity* (New York, 1957).

<sup>12</sup> SW, vol. 2, p. 368.

<sup>13</sup> cf. McClellan: *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, pp. 92-7. McClellan's claim that 'Engels' description of the effect of the book is completely at variance with the facts' (p. 93), however, is exaggerated. cf. Marx's well-known statement, written in the early part of 1842, that 'there is no other way to truth and freedom but through the "river of fire"' (Feuer-Bach: lit., 'brook of fire'). WYM, p. 95.

<sup>14</sup> It might be remarked that Feuerbach's own views were characterised by a number of deep-rooted ambiguities, and underwent some definite changes, over the period from 1834 to 1843. cf. Feuerbach: *Sämtliche Werke*, vols. 1-3. (There are some errors, however, in the allocation of writings to particular years in this collection.)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. vol. 2, p. 239.

jected his own highest powers and faculties, who thus is seen as perfect and all-powerful, and in contrast to whom man himself appears as limited and imperfect.

But at the same time, according to Feuerbach, the depth of the comparison between God and man can be a positive source of inspiration to the realisation of human capabilities. The task of philosophy is to enable man to recover his alienated self through transformative criticism, by reversing the Hegelian perspective, and thus asserting the primacy of the material world. Religion must be replaced by humanism, whereby the love formerly directed towards God will become focused upon man, leading to a recovery of the unity of mankind, man for himself. 'Whereas the old philosophy said: what is not thought, has no existence, so the new philosophy says, on the contrary: that which is not loved, which cannot be loved, has no existence.'<sup>16</sup>

The effect of assimilating the ideas of Feuerbach was to turn Marx back to Hegel, in an attempt to draw out the implications of the new perspective, and especially to apply it to the sphere of politics. The aspects of Feuerbach's philosophy which attracted Marx were essentially the same as those which originally drew him to Hegel: the possibilities which seemed to be offered of fusing analysis and criticism, and thereby of 'realising' philosophy. It is usually held that Marx's early writings on alienation in politics and industry represent little more than an extension of Feuerbach's 'materialism' to spheres of society not dealt with by the latter. This is misleading, however: Marx does not accept, at any point, what Feuerbach considers to be the primary significance of his philosophy – that it provides an 'alternative' to, and thereby a *replacement of*, Hegel. Even when most imbued with enthusiasm for Feuerbach, Marx seeks to juxtapose him to Hegel. Marx thus succeeds in retaining the historical perspective which, while central to Hegel's philosophy, is, in effect if not in intention, largely abandoned by Feuerbach.<sup>17</sup>

### **The state and 'true democracy'**

Marx's critique of Hegel's philosophy of the state, written in 1843, is the first publication in which Marx's nascent conception of historical materialism<sup>18</sup> can be discerned, and forms the starting-point of the treatment of alienation which Marx set out at greater length in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* one year later. Marx proceeds via a close textual analysis of Hegel, 'inverting' Hegel in the manner of Feuerbach. 'Hegel', Marx says, 'subjectifies the predicates, the objects, but he subjectifies them in separation from

<sup>16</sup> *Sämmliche Werke*, vol. 2, p. 299.

<sup>17</sup> In a letter to Ruge of 1843, Marx also states that Feuerbach 'concerns himself too much with nature and too little with politics. But the latter is the only means whereby contemporary philosophy can be realised'. *We*, vol. 27, p. 417.

<sup>18</sup> As is well known, the phrase 'historical materialism' is not used by Marx, but first appears in the writings of Engels. It is used here with the qualification that the term perhaps suggests a greater degree of theoretical closure than Marx would be willing to admit of his studies of history.

their true subjectivity, the subject'.<sup>19</sup> The point of Marx's analysis, therefore, is to reidentify the true subject (the acting individual, living in the 'real', 'material' world), and to trace the process of his 'objectification' in the political institutions of the state.<sup>20</sup> The real world is not to be inferred from the study of the ideal; on the contrary, it is the ideal which has to be understood as a historical outcome of the real. For Hegel, civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), which includes all those economic and familial relationships which are outside the political and juridical structure of the state, is intrinsically a sphere of unrestrained egoism, where each man is pitted against every other. Men are rational, orderly beings to the degree that they accept the order inherent in the state, which is a universal sphere cutting across the egoistic interests of human actions in civil society. In Hegel's account, therefore, the state is not only presented as severed from the lives of individuals in civil society, but as logically prior to the individual. The acting individual, the real creator of history, is subordinated to the ideals of political participation embodied in the state, which thus appear as the motive-power of social development.

Feuerbach has shown, Marx continues, that in religion men participate vicariously in an unreal, fantasy world of harmony, beauty and contentment, while living in a practical everyday world of pain and misery. The state is, similarly, an alienated form of political activity, embodying universal 'rights' which are as ephemeral as is the idealised world of religion. The basis of Hegel's view is that political rights of representation mediate between the egoistic individualism of civil society and the universalism of the state. But, Marx emphasises, there is no existing form of political constitution where this connection exists in actuality; in extant states, general participation in political life is the ideal, but the pursuance of sectional interests is the reality. Thus what appears in Hegel's account to be separate from and superordinate to the particular interests of individuals in civil society is, in fact, derivative of them. 'Up to now the *political constitution* has been the *religious sphere*, the *religion* of the people's life, the heaven of their universality in contrast to the particular *mundane existence* of their actuality.'<sup>21</sup>

In the Greek *polis* every man – that is, every free citizen – was a *zoon politikon*: the social and political were inextricably fused, and there was no separate sphere of the 'political'. Private and public life was not distinct, and the only 'private individuals' were those who, as slaves, lacked public status as citizens altogether. Mediaeval Europe contrasts with this. In the Middle Ages, the various strata of civil society themselves became political agencies: political power was directly contingent upon and expressive of the division

<sup>19</sup> WYM, p. 166; We, vol. 1, p. 224.

<sup>20</sup> For a perceptive discussion of the 'Critique', see Jean Hyppolite: 'La conception hégelienne de l'Etat et sa critique par Karl Marx', in *Etudes sur Marx et Hegel* (Paris, 1955), pp. 120–41.

<sup>21</sup> WYM, p. 176.

of society into stable socio-economic orders.<sup>22</sup> 'Each private sphere has a political character, is a political sphere...' <sup>23</sup> In this form of society, the various strata become politicised, but there is still no separation between the 'private' or the 'individual', and the 'political'. The very notion of the 'state' as separable from civil 'society' is a modern one because it is only in the post-mediaeval period that the sphere of interests in civil society, especially economic interests, have become part of the 'private rights' of the individual, and as such separable from the 'public' sphere of politics. The distribution of property is now presumed to lie outside the constitution of political power. In reality, however, the ownership of property still largely determines political power – no longer in the legalised manner of mediaeval society, however, but under the cloak of universal participation in government.<sup>24</sup>

The realisation of what Marx calls 'true democracy' entails, according to his analysis, overcoming the alienation between the individual and the political community, through resolving the dichotomy between the 'egoistic' interests of individuals in civil society and the 'social' character of political life. This can only be achieved by effecting concrete changes in the relations between state and society, such that what is at present only ideal (universal political participation) becomes actual. 'Hegel proceeds from the state and makes man into the state subjectivised. Democracy proceeds from man and makes the state into man objectivised... In democracy the *formal* principle is at the same time the *material* principle.'<sup>25</sup> The attainment of universal suffrage, Marx says, is the means whereby this can be brought about. Universal suffrage gives all the members of civil society a political existence and, therefore, *ipso facto* eliminates the 'political' as a separate category. 'In *universal franchise*, active as well as passive, does civil society first raise itself *in reality* to an abstraction of itself, to *political existence* as its true universal and essential existence.'<sup>26</sup>

### **Revolutionary Praxis**

There has been some considerable dispute concerning the relevance of the views set out by Marx in the 'Critique', to the writings which he produced subsequently in 1844.<sup>27</sup> It is evident that the 'Critique' represents only a prefatory analysis of the state and politics; the manuscript is not complete, and Marx states his intention to develop certain points without in fact doing so. Moreover, the tenor of Marx's analysis is in the direction of a radical

<sup>22</sup> cf. Marx's discussion of the transformation of the feudal *Stände*. *We*, vol. 1, pp. 273ff.

<sup>23</sup> *WYM*, p. 176; *We*, vol. 1, p. 232.

<sup>24</sup> *WYM*, pp. 187–8.

<sup>25</sup> *WYM*, pp. 173–4.

<sup>26</sup> *WYM*, p. 202; *We*, vol. 1, p. 326.

<sup>27</sup> For divergent views on this question, see Lichtheim, pp. 38–40; Shlomo Avineri: *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 33–40.

Jacobinism; what is needed in order to progress beyond the contemporary form of the state is to realise the abstract ideals embodied in the 1789 Revolution. But it cannot be doubted that the 'Critique' embodies notions which Marx did not subsequently relinquish. Indeed, it supplies the key to the understanding of the theory of the state, and of the possibility of its abolition, and thus the conceptions contained within it underlie the whole of Marx's mature writings. But at this stage Marx was, in common with the other Young Hegelians, still thinking in terms of the necessity for the 'reform of consciousness', as posited by Feuerbach. Immediately prior to leaving Germany for France in September 1843, Marx wrote to Ruge expressing his conviction that all 'dogmas' must be questioned, whether they be religious or political: Our slogan, therefore, must be: Reform of consciousness, not through dogmas, but through analysis of the mystical consciousness that is unclear about itself, whether in religion or politics. It will be evident, then, that the world has long dreamed of something of which it only has to become conscious in order to possess it in actuality... To have its sins forgiven, mankind has only to declare them for what they are.<sup>28</sup>

The effects of Marx's direct contact with French socialism in Paris are evident in 'An introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law', written at the end of 1843.<sup>29</sup> Most of the points in the article are elaborations of themes already established in Marx's previous 'Critique', but Marx abandons the stress upon 'demystification', such as urged by Bauer, which informs his earlier critical analysis of Hegel. 'The criticism of religion', Marx admits, 'is the premise of all criticism'; but this is a task which has been largely accomplished, and the immediate and necessary task is to move directly to the field of politics.

The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness. The demand to abandon illusions about their real condition is a *demand to abandon a condition which requires illusions*. The criticism of religion is thus the *germ* of the *criticism of the vale of tears* of which religion is the *halo*.<sup>30</sup>

But 'criticism' in itself, Marx now goes on to say, is not enough. This is nowhere more obvious, he asserts, than in Germany, which is so retarded in its development. The abstract, philosophical 'negation' of the German political structure is irrelevant to the real demands which have to be met if Germany is to be transformed: 'Even the negation of our political present is already a

<sup>28</sup> WYM, pp. 214–15.

<sup>29</sup> Originally published in Ruge's *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher*, in February 1844. WYM, pp. 249–64. Similar ideas are also developed in Marx's other contribution to the same issue, 'On the Jewish Question', WYM, pp. 216–48. An alternative translation of the latter article is available in EW, pp. 3–31.

<sup>30</sup> EW, p. 44; We, vol. 1, p. 379. All of Marx's statements, throughout his writings, upon the 'abolition' (*Aufhebung*) of religion, the state, alienation, or capitalism as a whole, have to be understood in the light of the threefold connotation of the verb *aufheben* (to abolish, to preserve, to raise up). Thus the 'abolition' of religion involves, not its eradication in any simple sense, but its dialectical transcendence.

dusty fact in the historical lumber room of modern nations.'<sup>31</sup> The contributions of Germany to the social advancement of the European nations are limited to the realm of ideas. The Germans are 'philosophical contemporaries of the present' in lieu of being its 'historical contemporaries'. To seek, therefore, to abolish this state of affairs through philosophical criticism is futile, since this merely preserves the existing dislocation between ideas and reality. The exposure of contradictions on the intellectual level does not thereby remove them. It is necessary to proceed 'to tasks the solution of which admits of only one means - *practice (Praxis)*'.<sup>32</sup>

If Germany is to experience reform, it cannot be brought about by slow progressive advancement, but must take the form of a radical revolution: in this way, Germany can attain 'not only to the *official level* of modern nations, but to the *human level* which will be the immediate future of those nations'.<sup>33</sup> The very backwardness of the social composition of Germany can provide the circumstances whereby the country can leap ahead of the other European states. This cannot be attained, however, unless the 'theoretical' criticism of politics is conjoined to the experience of a definite social grouping whose position in society renders them revolutionary. It is here that Marx first makes mention of the proletariat. As yet, the low level of economic development of Germany, Marx points out, means that the industrial proletariat is only beginning to appear. But its further expansion, in combination with the peculiarly retarded form of social and political structure extant in Germany, will provide the requisite combination of circumstances which can propel Germany beyond the other European countries.<sup>34</sup>

Marx finds in the proletariat the 'universal character' which Hegel sought in the ideals embodied in the rational state. The proletariat is 'a class which has radical chains'; it is 'a sphere of society having a universal character because of its universal suffering and claiming no particular right because no particular wrong, but unqualified wrong, is perpetrated upon it'. The proletariat localises within itself all of the worst evils of society. It lives in conditions of poverty which is not the natural poverty resulting from lack of material resources, but is the 'artificial' outcome of the contemporary organisation of industrial production. Since the proletariat is the recipient of the concentrated irrationality of society, it follows that its emancipation is at the same time the emancipation of society as a whole:

*total loss of humanity... can only redeem itself by a total redemption of humanity... When the proletariat announces the dissolution of the hitherto existing order of things, it merely announces the secret of its own existence because it is the effective (*faktisch*) dissolution of this order... As philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy.*<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *EW*, p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> *EIV*, p. 52; *We*, vol. I, p. 385.

<sup>33</sup> *EW*, p. 52.

<sup>34</sup> *EW*, pp. 57-9.

<sup>35</sup> *EW*, pp. 58-9; *We*, vol. I, p. 391.

During the early part of 1844, Marx began an intensive study of political economy, the preliminary results of which are recorded in a set of fragments which were first published only in 1932, under the title *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. The direction of movement of Marx's thought which this stimulated led to a further divergence from the other Young Hegelians, with the notable exception of Engels, whose influence was important in directing Marx's energies towards economics. There are several reasons why the *Manuscripts* are of decisive importance for the whole of Marx's work. They form, in substance, the earliest of several drafts of *Capital* which Marx made prior to the publication of the latter work itself. The preface which Marx prepared for the *Manuscripts* outlines the framework of an ambitious project which he originally planned, but which he was never destined to complete. These plans which Marx sketched out at this relatively early stage of his intellectual career show beyond any question that *Capital*, lengthy and detailed as it eventually turned out to be, forms only one element in what Marx conceived as a much broader critique of capitalism. Marx originally intended to publish 'a number of independent brochures' covering the 'critique of law, morals, politics' separately. These diverse treatments were then to be connected together in a concluding work of synthesis.<sup>36</sup> In the *Manuscripts*, Marx set out only to cover these institutional spheres in so far as they are directly influenced by economic relationships. The work is, therefore, Marx's earliest attempt at a critique of that discipline which claims to deal with this field: political economy.

The *Manuscripts* are also of great intrinsic interest in that in them Marx deals explicitly with problems which, for varying reasons, occupied his attention less directly in his subsequent writings. Some of these issues dropped out of Marx's later works because he considered them to have been satisfactorily dealt with, given his over-riding aim of providing a theoretical critique of modern capitalism. The analysis of religion is one of these. The *Manuscripts* is the last place where Marx still devotes some considerable attention to religion. But certain of the topics which are prominent in the *Manuscripts* disappear from Marx's ensuing writings for other reasons. The most significant of these is that of the analysis of alienation, which occupies a central place in the *Manuscripts*. There can be no doubt at all that the notion of alienation continues to be at the root of Marx's mature works in spite of the fact that the term itself appears only rarely in his writings after 1844. In his subsequent writings, Marx disentangles the various threads comprised generically within the concept of alienation as used in the *Manuscripts*. Thus the term itself, which possesses an abstract, philosophical character from which Marx wished to dissociate himself, became redundant. But the explicit discussion of alienation which appears in the *Manuscripts* offers an inval-

<sup>36</sup> *EW*, p. 63.

able source of insight into the principal underlying themes of Marx's later thought.

### **Alienation and the theory of political economy**

The main suppositions informing the critique of political economy which Marx develops in the *Manuscripts* are the following. There are two principal criticisms which have to be made of the writings of the political economists. The first is in reference to their assumption that the conditions of production characteristic of capitalism can be attributed to all forms of economy. The economists begin from the premise of the exchange economy and the existence of private property. Self-seeking and the pursuit of profit are seen as the natural characteristics of man. In fact, Marx points out, the formation of an exchange economy is the outcome of a historical process, and capitalism is an historically specific system of production. It is only one type of productive system amongst others which have preceded it in history, and it is no more the final form than the others which went before it. The second fallacious assumption of the economists is that purely 'economic' relations can be treated in *abstracto*. Economists speak of 'capital', 'commodities', 'prices', and so on, as if these had life independently of the mediation of human beings. This is plainly not so. While for example, a coin is a physical object which in this sense has an existence independent of men, it is only 'money' in so far as it forms an element within a definite set of social relationships. The economists, however, attempt to reduce everything to the 'economic', and eschew whatever cannot be treated in these terms.

Political economy thus does not recognise the unemployed worker, the working man so far as he is outside this work relationship. Thieves, tricksters, beggars, the unemployed, the starving, wretched and criminal working-man, are *forms* which do not exist for political economy, but only for other eyes, for doctors, judges, grave-diggers and beadles, etc.; they are ghostly figures outside its domain.<sup>37</sup>

Any and every 'economic' phenomenon is at the same time always a social phenomenon, and the existence of a particular kind of 'economy' presupposes a definite kind of society.<sup>38</sup>

It is symptomatic of these misconceptions that the economists treat workers as 'costs' to the capitalist, and hence as equivalent to any other sort of capital expenditure. Political economy declares it to be irrelevant that the real 'objects' of analysis are men in society. It is for this reason that the economists are able to obscure what is in fact intrinsic to their interpretation of the capitalist mode of production: that capitalism is founded upon a class division between proletariat, or working class, on the one hand, and bourgeoisie, or capitalist class, on the other. These classes are in endemic conflict as regards the distribution of the fruits of industrial production. Wages on the

<sup>37</sup> *EW*, pp. 137-8; *We, Ergd*, vol. 1, pp. 523-4.

<sup>38</sup> *EW*, pp. 120-1.

one side, and profits on the other, are determined 'by the bitter struggle between capitalist and worker', a relation in which those who own capital are easily dominant.<sup>39</sup>

Marx's analysis of alienation in capitalist production starts from a 'contemporary economic fact', which is again an early statement of a theme later developed in detail in *Capital*: the fact that the more capitalism advances, the more impoverished the workers become. The enormous wealth which the capitalist mode of production makes possible is appropriated by the owners of land and capital. This separation between the worker and the product of his labour is not, however, simply a matter of the expropriation of goods which rightfully belong to the worker. The main point of Marx's discussion is that, in capitalism, the material objects which are produced become treated on a par with the worker himself – just as they are, on a purely theoretical level, in the discipline of political economy. 'The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more goods he creates. The devaluation of the human world increases in direct relation with the increase in value of the world of things.'<sup>40</sup> This involves a distortion of what Marx calls 'objectification' (*Vergegenständlichung*). Through his labour, the worker acts to modify the world of nature; his production is the result of this interaction with the external world, in so far as he fashions it. But under capitalism, the worker (the subject, the creator) has become assimilated to his product (the object).<sup>41</sup>

The process of production, objectification, thus takes the form of 'a loss and servitude to the object'; the worker 'becomes a slave of the object...'.<sup>42</sup> The alienation of the worker in the capitalist economy is founded upon this disparity between the productive power of labour, which becomes increasingly great with the expansion of capitalism, and the lack of control which the worker is able to exert over the objects which he produces. As in the case of alienation in the sphere of politics, this offers a parallel to alienation in religion. The qualities which are attributed to God in the Christian ethic are thereby removed from the control of men, and become as if imposed by an external agency. In a similar fashion, the product of the worker is 'alien to him, and... stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile

<sup>39</sup> *EW*, p. 69.

<sup>40</sup> *EW*, p. 121.

<sup>41</sup> *EW*, p. 123. On a broader epistemological level, Marx criticises Hegel for having mistaken the nature of the connection between objectification and alienation. Fundamental to Hegel's idealism, Marx points out, is the premise that 'thinghood' is the same as 'alienated self-consciousness', and consequently that objectification is only made possible by human self-alienation. The truth of the matter, Marx avers, is the other way around: the existence of alienation presupposes objectification, and is (in Marx's use of the concept) consequent upon the specific distorted form of objectification characteristic of capitalism. Many secondary writers have, unfortunately, failed to grasp this essential distinction between objectification and alienation.

<sup>42</sup> *EW*, pp. 122 & 123.

force.'<sup>43</sup> Objectification, therefore, which is a necessary characteristic of all labour (involving the transference of labour power to the object which is created by it) becomes, in capitalism, identical with alienation. The product of labour is, in other words, 'external' to the worker not only in an ontological sense but also in the much more profound yet more specific sense that 'What is embodied in the product of his labour is no longer his own.'<sup>44</sup>

The alienation of the worker from his product takes a number of distinct forms. In discussing these, Marx uses terminology which draws heavily upon Feuerbach; but it is clear that he is thinking in concrete terms of the effects of capitalism as a particular, historical mode of production. The main dimensions of Marx's discussion of alienation are as follows:

1. The worker lacks control over the disposal of his products, since what he produces is appropriated by others, so that he does not benefit from it. It is the core principle of the market economy that goods are produced for exchange; in capitalist production, the exchange and distribution of goods are controlled by the operations of the free market. The worker himself, who is treated as a commodity to be bought and sold on the market, thus has no power to determine the fate of what he produces. The workings of the market act in such a way as to promote the interests of the capitalist at the expense of those of the worker. Thus 'the more the worker produces the less he has to consume; the more value he creates the more worthless he becomes'.

2. The worker is alienated in the work task itself: 'if the product of labour is alienation, production itself must be active alienation – the alienation of activity and the activity of alienation.'<sup>45</sup> The work task does not offer intrinsic satisfactions which make it possible for the worker 'to develop freely his mental and physical energies', since it is labour which is imposed by force of external circumstances alone. Work becomes a means to an end rather than an end in itself: this is shown by the fact that 'as soon as there is no physical or other compulsion, men flee from labour like the plague'.<sup>46</sup>

3. Since all economic relationships are also social relationships, it follows that the alienation of labour has directly social ramifications. This takes Marx back to his starting-point: human relations, in capitalism, tend to become reduced to operations of the market. This is directly manifest in the significance of money in human relationships. Money promotes the rationalisation of social relationships, since it provides an abstract standard in terms of which the most heterogeneous qualities can be compared, and re-

<sup>43</sup> *EW*, p. 123. In discussing alienation in this context, Marx uses two terms: *Entfremdung* (estrangement) and *Entäusserung* (externalisation). The two are used more or less interchangeably in Marx's analysis.

<sup>44</sup> *EW*, p. 122.

<sup>45</sup> *EW*, pp. 123–4.

<sup>46</sup> *EW*, p. 125; *We, Ergd.* vol. 1, p. 514.

duced, to one another. 'He who can purchase bravery is brave, though a coward... Thus, from the standpoint of its possessor, it exchanges every quality and object for every other, even though they are contradictory.'<sup>47</sup>

4. Men live in an active inter-relationship with the natural world. Technology and culture are both the expression and the outcome of this inter-relationship, and are the chief qualities distinguishing man from the animals. Some animals do produce, of course, but only in a mechanical, adaptive fashion. Alienated labour reduces human productive activity to the level of adaptation to, rather than active mastery of, nature. This detaches the human individual from his 'species-being' (*Gattungswesen*), from what makes the life of the human species distinct from that of the animals.<sup>48</sup> Marx's discussion at this point closely echoes Feuerbach. But the import of what Marx says is quite different. Many secondary accounts of Marx's analysis of alienation in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, through assimilating Marx's position to that of Feuerbach, give Marx's discussion a more 'utopian' connotation than in fact it has.<sup>49</sup> Marx uses Feuerbachian terms in holding that man is a 'universal producer', in contrast to the animals, who only produce 'partially' and in limited contexts established by the instinctual components of their biological makeup: but his analysis is far more concrete and specific than this terminology suggests.

What distinguishes human life from that of the animals, according to Marx, is that human faculties, capacities and tastes are shaped by society. The 'isolated individual' is a fiction of utilitarian theory: no human being exists who has not been born into, and thus shaped by, an on-going society. Each individual is thus the recipient of the accumulated culture of the generations which have preceded him and, in his own interaction with the natural and social world in which he lives, is a contributor to the further modification of that world as experienced by others. 'Individual human life and species-life are not *different things*', Marx asserts '... Though a man is a unique individual ... he is equally the *whole*, the ideal whole, the subjective existence of society as thought and experienced.'<sup>50</sup> It is, then, man's membership of society, together with the technological and cultural apparatus which supports that society and which makes it possible, which serves to differentiate the human individual from the animal, which confers his 'humanity' upon him. Some animals have similar sense-organs to man; but the perception of beauty in sight or sound, in art or music, is a human faculty, a creation of society. Sexual activity, or eating and drinking, are not for men the simple satisfaction of biological drives, but have become

<sup>47</sup> EW, p. 193.

<sup>48</sup> Feuerbach: *Essence of Christianity*, pp. 1-12. Marx also makes liberal use of the term *Gattungsleben*, literally meaning 'species-life'.

<sup>49</sup> For two different instances of this, see H. Popitz: *Der entfremdete Mensch* (Frankfurt, 1967); also Tucker.

<sup>50</sup> EW, p. 158; We, Ergd, vol. 1, p. 539.

transformed, during the course of the development of society, in creative interplay with the natural world, into actions which provide manifold satisfactions.<sup>51</sup> ‘The cultivation of the five senses is the work of all previous history’; but ‘it is not simply the five senses, but also the so-called spiritual senses, the practical senses (desiring, loving, etc.), in brief, *human* sensibility and the *human* character of the senses, which can only come into being through the existence of *its* object, through *humanised* nature.’<sup>52</sup>

In bourgeois society, men are estranged, in specifiable ways, from the ties to society which alone confer their ‘humanity’ upon them. Firstly, alienated labour ‘alienates species-life and individual life’, and, secondly, ‘it turns the latter, as an abstraction, into the purpose of the former, also in its abstract and alienated form’.<sup>53</sup> In capitalism, both in theory and in practice, the life and the needs of the individual appear as ‘given’ independently of his membership of society. This finds clear theoretical expression in political economy (and, in a somewhat different way, in the Hegelian theory of civil society which Marx previously criticised), which founds its theory of society upon the self-seeking of the isolated individual. Political economy in this way ‘incorporates private property into the very essence of man’.<sup>54</sup> But not only does the ‘individual’ become separated from the ‘social’, the latter becomes *subordinated* to the former. The productive resources of the *community* are applied – in the case of the majority of the population who live in penury – to support the minimal conditions necessary for the survival of the organism. The mass of wage-labourers exist in conditions where their productive activity is governed solely by the most rudimentary needs of physical existence:

man is regressing to the *cave dwelling*, but in an alienated malignant form. The savage in his cave (a natural element which is freely offered for his use and protection) does not feel himself a stranger; on the contrary he feels as much at home as a *fish* in water. But the cellar dwelling of the poor man is a hostile dwelling, ‘an alien, constricting power which only surrenders itself to him in exchange for blood and sweat’.<sup>55</sup>

As Marx presents it, therefore, the alienation of man from his ‘species-being’ is couched in terms of his analysis of capitalism, and is, in considerable degree, *assymetrical*: in other words, the effects of alienation are focused through the class structure, and are experienced in concentrated fashion by the proletariat. The transfer of the notion of alienation from a general ontological category, which is how it is used both by Hegel and by Feuerbach, to a specific social and historical context, is the main theme of Marx’s approach in the *Manuscripts*. Marx does not hold, however, that alienation is wholly confined to the position of the wage-labourer. The

<sup>51</sup> cf. below, pp. 21–2.

<sup>52</sup> *EW*, p. 161; *We, Ergd*, vol. 1, p. 541. For further discussion of this point, in relation to Durkheim, see below, pp. 224–8.

<sup>54</sup> *EW*, p. 148.

<sup>53</sup> *EW*, p. 127.

<sup>55</sup> *EW*, p. 177.

capitalist is himself subservient to capital in the sense that the rule of private property and of money dominates his own existence. The industrialist has to be '*hard-working, sober, economical, prosaic*':

his enjoyment is only a secondary matter; it is recreation subordinated to production and thus a *calculated, economic* enjoyment, for he charges his pleasures as an expense of capital and what he squanders must not be more than can be replaced with profit by the reduction of capital. Thus enjoyment is subordinated to capital and the pleasure-loving individual is subordinated to the capital-accumulating individual, whereas formerly (in feudal society) the contrary was the case.<sup>56</sup>

The *Manuscripts* are a set of preliminary notes rather than a finished work. The discussion of alienated labour which they contain gives ample evidence of the fact that Marx was still, in 1844, groping towards the clear formulation of a distinctive perspective of his own. While the main themes of his treatment of alienation are not difficult to identify, Marx's account of them is frequently cryptic and elliptical. Where Marx is analysing the works of the economists, he writes in the language of political economy; where he discusses alienation directly, he uses the terminology of Feuerbach. It is unquestionably true that, at this stage, Marx had not successfully integrated the conceptions which he derived from these two diverse sources, and in the *Manuscripts* the two rest in uneasy relationship with each other. Nonetheless, the *Manuscripts* provide the framework of a general critical analysis of capitalism, and these fragmentary notes contain the germ of virtually all of the important ideas which Marx developed with greater precision in later writings.

It is usually assumed that, in speaking, in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, of man's 'being reduced to the level of the animals', and of man's alienation from his 'species-being' under the conditions of capitalist production, Marx is thinking in terms of an abstract conception of 'man' as being alienated from his biological characteristics as a species. So, it is presumed, at this initial stage in the evolution of his thought, Marx believed that man is essentially a creative being whose 'natural' propensities are denied by the restrictive character of capitalism. Actually, Marx holds, on the contrary, that the enormous productive power of capitalism generates possibilities for the future development of man which could not have been possible under prior forms of productive system. The organisation of social relationships within which capitalist production is carried on in fact leads to the failure to realise these historically generated possibilities. The character of alienated labour does not express a tension between 'man in nature' (non-alienated) and 'man in society' (alienated), but between the potential generated by a

<sup>56</sup> *EW*, p. 179. My parenthesis. Elsewhere Marx echoes Moses Hess, remarking: 'Private property has made us so stupid and partial that an object is only ours when we have it, when it exists for us as capital or when it is directly eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., in short, *utilised* in some way' (p. 159).

*specific form of society* – capitalism – and the frustrated realisation of that potential. What separates man from the animals is not the mere existence of biological differences between mankind and other species, but the cultural achievements of men, which are the outcome of a very long process of social development. While the biological attributes of man are a necessary condition of these achievements, the sufficient condition is the evolution of society itself. The alienation of men from their ‘species-being’ is a social separation from socially generated characteristics and propensities.<sup>57</sup>

### Early conception of communism

The *Manuscripts* also contain Marx’s first extensive discussion of communism. The continuity is evident between this exposition and the earlier analysis of ‘true democracy’ in Marx’s critique of Hegel’s philosophy of the state. But in the discussion in the *Manuscripts*, the influence of French socialism is unmistakable, and Marx drops the term ‘democracy’ in favour of ‘communism’.<sup>58</sup> The overcoming of alienation, Marx declares, hinges upon the supersession of private property. It follows from the fact that alienation in production is basic to other forms of alienation, such as in religion or the state, that the establishment of ‘true democracy’ is not enough; what is demanded is a more thorough-going reorganisation of society, based upon the eradication of the contemporary relationship between private property and wage-labour.

Marx separates his own conception of communism from that of ‘crude communism’.<sup>59</sup> The main form of crude communism is based upon emotional antipathy towards private property, and asserts that all men should be reduced to a similar level, so that everyone has an equal share of property. This is not genuine communism, Marx asserts, since it rests upon the same sort of distorted objectification of labour as is found in the theory of political economy. Crude communism of this sort becomes impelled towards a primitive asceticism, in which the community has become the capitalist instead of the individual. In crude communism, the rule of property is still dominant, but negatively;

Universal envy setting itself up as a power is only a camouflaged form of *cupidity* which re-establishes itself and satisfies itself in a *different way*... How

<sup>57</sup> Statements such as Meyer’s that Marx ‘posited a noble and intelligent human species, whose goodness and intelligence are frustrated by the process of civilisation’ (Alfred G. Meyer: *Marxism, the Unity of Theory and Practice* (Ann Arbor, 1963), p. 57) are plainly inadequate. As Mészáros remarks: ‘There is no trace of a sentimental or romantic nostalgia for nature in (Marx’s) conception. His programme... does not advocate a return to “nature”, to a “natural” set of primitive, or “simple” needs...’ István Mészáros: *Marx’s Theory of Alienation* (London, 1970).

<sup>58</sup> Marx mentions the influence of the German socialists; but argues that ‘the original and important German works on this subject’ are limited to certain of the writings of Hess, Weitling and Engels. *EW*, p. 64.

<sup>59</sup> It is not wholly clear whom Marx has in mind here, but the reference is probably to the followers of Babeuf and Cabet. Engels discusses these groups in his ‘The progress of social reform on the Continent’, *We*, vol. 1, pp. 480–96.

little this abolition of private property represents a genuine appropriation is shown by the abstract negation of the whole world of culture and civilisation, and the regression to the *unnatural simplicity* of the *poor*, crude and wantless individual who has not only surpassed private property but has not yet even attained to it.<sup>60</sup>

Crude communism, Marx continues, has not grasped the possibility of the positive transcendence of private property. The destruction of private property is certainly a necessary condition for the transition to a new form of society. But the organising principle of the future socialist society must be centred upon 'the *positive abolition of private property*, of *human self-alienation*, and thus the real *appropriation of human nature* through and for man'; it will involve 'the return of man himself as a *social*, i.e., really human, being (*als eines gesellschaftlichen, d.h. menschlichen Menschen*) a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth of previous development.'<sup>61</sup> The recovery of the social character of human existence is integral to Marx's conception of communism, as stated in the *Manuscripts*. Communist society will be based, not upon the egoistic self-seeking which the economists assume to be characteristic of human nature in general, but upon the conscious awareness of the reciprocal dependence of the individual and the social community. The social nature of man, Marx stresses, penetrates to the roots of his being, and is by no means simply manifest in those activities which are conducted in direct association with others. Communism will not, however, deny the individuality of each person. On the contrary, the whole import of Marx's discussion is that communist society will allow, in a way which is impossible under prior systems of production, the expansion of the particular potentialities and capabilities of individuals. For Marx, there is no paradox in this. It is only through the social community that man becomes individualised, via the utilisation of the resources which are collective products.

This exciting and brilliant formula is integrated with a reiteration of the limitations of the 'critical philosophy' of the Young Hegelians. It is not enough to supersede private property in theory, to replace the 'idea' of private property with the 'idea' of communism. The actual attainment of communism 'will in reality involve a very severe and protracted process'.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> *EW*, p. 154; *We, Ergd*, vol. 1, pp. 534-5.

<sup>61</sup> *EW*, p. 155; *We, Ergd*, vol. 1, p. 536.

<sup>62</sup> *EW*, p. 176; *We, Ergd*, vol. 1, p. 553.

## 2. Historical materialism

The first fruit of Marx's association with Engels was the heavily polemical *The Holy Family*, which was begun in the latter part of 1844, and was published towards the end of 1845. The bulk of the book is the work of Marx, and it documents Marx's final break with the rest of the Young Hegelians. It was followed shortly afterwards by *The German Ideology*, written in 1845–6, also primarily a critical work, but one in which Marx for the first time outlines a general statement of the tenets of historical materialism. From this time onwards, Marx's general outlook changed little, and the rest of his life was devoted to the theoretical exploration and the practical application of the views set out in this latter work.

The full text of *The German Ideology* was not published in the lifetime of Marx or Engels. In 1859, looking back to the period at which *The German Ideology* was written, Marx wrote that he and Engels were not disappointed that they could not get the work published: they 'abandoned the work to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly', since the main purpose – 'self-clarification' – had been achieved.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, Marx explicitly refers to his 'Critique' of Hegel, and to the year 1844, as marking the most significant line of demarcation in his intellectual career. It was the analysis of Hegel's philosophy of the state, Marx wrote in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, which led him to the conclusion 'that legal relations as well as forms of State are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called general development of the human mind (*Geist*), but rather are rooted in the material conditions of life'.<sup>2</sup>

Engels later remarked of *The German Ideology* that the exposition of the materialistic conception of history presented therein 'proves only how incomplete our knowledge of economic history still was at that time'.<sup>3</sup> But, although Marx's knowledge of economic history was indeed thin at this period – the scheme of 'stages' of the development of productive systems set out there was subsequently considerably overhauled – the account of historical materialism which is given in the work accords closely with that later portrayed by Marx on other occasions. All precise dividing lines are arbitrary; but while *The German Ideology* is sometimes regarded as part of Marx's

<sup>1</sup> SW, vol. 1, p. 364. For Engels' subsequent appraisal of the significance of the early writings, up to and including *The German Ideology*, see A. Voden: 'Talks with Engels', in *Reminiscences of Marx and Engels* (Moscow, n.d.), pp. 330ff.

<sup>2</sup> SW, vol. 1, p. 362; We, vol. 13, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> SW, vol. 2, p. 359.

'early' period, it is more appropriate to regard it as the first important work representing Marx's mature position.

Debate over the relevance of Marx's writings of 1843 and 1844 to his mature conception of historical materialism has simmered continuously since their publication in 1929–32. The controversy has obvious ramifications of a directly political nature, and it is difficult to suppose that the points at issue are likely to be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties involved. But in fact the main lines of continuity between the 'Critique' of Hegel, the 1844 *Manuscripts*, and Marx's mature thought, are evident enough. The most important themes which Marx developed in the early writings and embodied within his later works, are the following:

1. The conception, for which Marx was heavily indebted to Hegel, of the progressive 'self-creation' of man. As Marx expresses it in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, 'the whole of what is called world history is nothing but the creation of man by human labour...'.<sup>4</sup>
2. The notion of alienation. One reason why Marx largely dropped the term 'alienation' from his writings after 1844 was certainly his desire to separate his own position decisively from abstract philosophy. Thus in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Marx writes derisively of the 'philosophical nonsense' of the German philosophers who write of the 'alienation of the human essence'.<sup>5</sup> The main implication of the views which, although they were substantially present in the *Manuscripts*, were not fully worked out until the writing of *The German Ideology*, is that alienation must be studied as an historical phenomenon, which can only be understood in terms of the development of specific social formations. Marx's studies of the stages of historical development trace the growth of the division of labour and the emergence of private property, culminating in the process of the alienation of the peasantry from control of their means of production with the disintegration of European feudalism. This latter process, the creation of a large mass of propertyless wage-labourers, is portrayed in *Capital* as a necessary precondition for the rise of capitalism.<sup>6</sup>
3. The kernel of the theory of the state, and its supersession in the future form of society, as set out in Marx's 'Critique' of Hegel's philosophy of the state. While Marx had, at the time of the writing of the 'Critique', only a rudimentary conception of the sort of social order which he hoped and

<sup>4</sup> EW, p. 166. On Marx's concept of 'labour', see Helmut Klages: *Technischer Humanismus* (Stuttgart, 1964), pp. 11–128.

<sup>5</sup> CM, p. 168; We, vol. 4, p. 486.

<sup>6</sup> The view that Marx eliminated the concept of 'alienation' from his later writings, and therefore that there is a major break in continuity between Marx's early and later works, is expressed by Louis Feuer: 'What is alienation? The career of a concept', *New Politics*, 1962, pp. 116–34; and by Daniel Bell: 'The debate on alienation', in Leopold Labedz: *Revisionism* (London, 1963), pp. 195–211. For a comparable statement, but from an opposed political perspective, cf. Louis Althusser: *For Marx* (London, 1969), pp. 51–86 and *passim*.

expected would replace capitalism, the thesis that the abolition of the state can be achieved through the elimination of the separate sphere of the 'political' remains intrinsic to his later views upon this issue.

4. The main rudiments of historical materialism as a perspective for the analysis of social development. In spite of the fact that Marx frequently writes in the language of Hegel and Feuerbach in his early works, it is very clear that Marx's emergent standpoint constitutes a decisive epistemological break with these writers, and especially with Hegel. It is not a new philosophy which Marx seeks to substitute for the older views; Marx repudiates philosophy in favour of an approach which is social and historical. Thus Marx already stresses in the 1844 *Manuscripts* that capitalism is rooted in a definite form of society, the main structural characteristic of which is a dichotomous class relation between capital and wage-labour.

5. A summary conception of the theory of revolutionary *Praxis*. Marx's comments on Strauss and Bauer (that they substitute 'the "self-consciousness" of abstract man for the substance of "abstract nature"') anticipate the views stated at length in *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology*, that critical philosophy is irrelevant to anything but the very early stages of a revolutionary movement. Only by the union of theory and practice, by the conjunction of theoretical understanding and practical political activity, can social change be effected. This means integrating the study of the emergent transformations potential in history with a programme of practical action which can actualise these changes.

The crux of the transition between the 1844 *Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology* is to be found in the short set of critical propositions on Feuerbach which Marx wrote in March 1845, and which have since become famous as the *Theses on Feuerbach*.<sup>6</sup> Marx makes several criticisms of Feuerbach. In the first place, Feuerbach's approach is unhistorical. Feuerbach conceives of an abstract 'man' prior to society: he not only reduces man to religious man, but fails to see 'that "religious feeling" is itself a social product and that the abstract individual he analyses belongs to a particular form of society'.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, Feuerbach's materialism remains at the level of a philosophical doctrine, which simply regards ideas as 'reflections' of material reality. There is, in fact, a constant reciprocity between the consciousness and human *Praxis*. Feuerbach, in common with all previous materialist philosophers, treats 'material reality' as the determinant of human activity, and does not analyse the modification of the 'objective' world by the 'subject', i.e., by the activity of men. Marx also makes this extremely important point

<sup>6</sup> *EW*, p. 195.

<sup>7</sup> The *Theses on Feuerbach* were first published in 1888 by Engels, who remarks that they contain 'the brilliant germ of a new world outlook' (*SW*, vol. 2, p. 359). Here I quote from the translation in *WYM*, pp. 400-2.

<sup>8</sup> *WYM*, p. 402.

in another way. Feuerbach's materialistic doctrine, he states, is unable to deal with the fact that revolutionary activity is the outcome of the conscious, willed acts of men, but instead portrays the world in terms of the 'one-way' influence of material reality over ideas. However, Marx points out, 'circumstances are changed by men and... the educator must himself be educated...'.<sup>10</sup>

In Marx's eyes, Feuerbach has made a contribution of decisive importance in showing that 'philosophy [i.e., Hegel's philosophy] is nothing more than religion brought into thought and developed by thought, and that it is equally to be condemned as another form and mode of existence of human alienation'.<sup>11</sup> But, in so doing, Feuerbach sets out a 'contemplative' or passive materialism, neglecting Hegel's emphasis upon 'the dialectic of negativity as the moving and creating principle...'.<sup>12</sup> It is this dialectic between the subject (man in society) and object (the material world), in which men progressively subordinate the material world to their purposes, and thereby transform those purposes and generate new needs, which becomes focal to Marx's thought.

### The materialist thesis

The general conception of historical materialism which is established in *The German Ideology* and subsequent writings is hence very different from that of Feuerbach, and from earlier traditions of philosophical materialism. As Marx employs it, 'materialism' does not refer to the assumption of any logically argued ontological position.<sup>13</sup> Marx undoubtedly accepts a 'realist' standpoint, according to which ideas are the product of the human brain in sensory transaction with a knowable material world; ideas are not founded in immanent categories given in the human mind independently of experience. But this definitely does not involve the application of a deterministic philosophical materialism to the interpretation of the development of society. Human consciousness is conditioned in dialectical interplay between subject and object, (in which man actively shapes the world he lives in at the same time as it shapes him). This can be illustrated by Marx's observation, developing a point made in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, that even our perception of the material world is conditioned by society. Feuerbach does not see that sensory perception is not fixed and immutable for all time, but is integrated within a phenomenal world which is:

<sup>10</sup> *WYM*, p. 401.

<sup>11</sup> *EW*, p. 197, my parenthesis.

<sup>12</sup> *EW*, p. 202. For an expanded treatment of the significance of this point, see below, pp. 403-6.

<sup>13</sup> Which is not to say, of course, that Marx's position does not imply definite ontological assumptions, cf. H. B. Acton: *The Illusion of the Epoch* (London, 1955). For a convincing refutation of the view that Marx is a 'materialist' in the traditional sense, see Alfred Schmidt: *Der Begriff der Natur in der Lehre von Marx* (Frankfurt, 1962); also Z. A. Jordan: *The Evolution of Dialectical Materialism* (London, 1967).

an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing further its industry and its intercourse, modifying its social order according to the changed needs. Even the objects of the simplest 'sensuous certainty' are only given him through social development, industry and commercial intercourse.<sup>14</sup>

For Marx, history is a process of the continuous creation, satisfaction and re-creation of human needs. This is what distinguishes men from the animals, whose needs are fixed and unchanging. This is why labour, the creative interchange between men and their natural environment, is the foundation of human society. The relation of the individual to his material environment is mediated by the particular characteristics of the society of which he is a member. In studying the development of human society, we must start from an empirical examination of the concrete processes of social life which are the *sine qua non* of human existence. As Marx expresses it in a passage worth quoting at length:

This method of approach is not devoid of premises. It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and rigidity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions. As soon as this active life-process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts as it is with the materialists (themselves still abstract), or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealists.

Where speculation ends – in real life – there real, positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Talk about consciousness ceases, and real knowledge has to take its place. When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses its medium of existence. At most its place can be taken by a synthesis of the most general results, that may be abstracted from observation of the historical development of men. Separated from actual history, these abstractions have in themselves no value whatsoever. They can only serve to facilitate the ordering of historical materials, to indicate the sequence of its separate layers. But they by no means provide a recipe or scheme, as does philosophy, for neatly trimming the epochs of history. On the contrary, the difficulties only first begin when we set about the observation and the arrangement – the real depiction – of the materials, whether it be of a past epoch or of the present.<sup>15</sup>

In this resonant phraseology, Marx proclaims the need for an empirical science of society which will be founded upon the study of the creative and dynamic interaction between man and nature, the generative process whereby man makes himself.

Marx's conception of the main 'stages' in the development of society, in common with several other basic areas within his works, has to be reconstructed from fragmentary materials. Apart from the scheme given in *The German Ideology*, Marx nowhere makes an integrated exposition of the main types of society which he distinguished. Nevertheless the general

<sup>14</sup> *GI*, p. 57; *We*, vol. 3, p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> *GI*, pp. 38–9; *We*, vol. 3, p. 27.

principles which inform Marx's interpretation of social development are clear. Each of the various types of society which Marx identifies has its own characteristic internal dynamics or 'logic' of development. But these can only be discovered and analysed by *ex post facto* empirical analysis. This is emphasised both as a broad theoretical principle and more specifically in tracing the process of development from one type of society to another. 'History is nothing', Marx affirms, 'but the succession of the separate generations, each of which exploits the materials, the capital funds, the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus, on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity.'<sup>16</sup> It is simply a teleological distortion to attribute 'goals' to history, such that 'later history is made the goal of earlier history'.<sup>17</sup>

Marx expresses the same views when, commenting upon the assertion that a capitalist stage is a necessary prerequisite to the establishment of communism in every modern society, he rejects a unilinear standpoint. Taking an earlier period of history as illustrative, he cites the case of Rome. Certain of the conditions which were to play an essential role in the formation of capitalism in western Europe at a later period already existed in Rome, but instead giving rise to capitalist production, the Roman economy disintegrated internally. This shows 'that events of a striking similarity, but occurring in different historical contexts, produced quite different results'. This can be understood, Marx continues, if one studies these situations separately, 'but we shall never succeed in understanding them if we rely upon the *passe partout* of a historical-philosophical theory whose chief quality is that of being supra-historical'.<sup>18</sup>

Marx's typology of society is based upon tracing the progressive differentiation of the division of labour. As he states in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, the expansion of the division of labour is synonymous with the growth of alienation and private property. The formation of class society out of the original undifferentiated system of communal property is, of course, contingent upon specialisation in the division of labour; and it is the division of labour which by identifying men with their particular occupational specialisation (e.g.,

<sup>16</sup> GI, p. 60. cf. also *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Critique* (Moscow, 1956), p. 125.

<sup>17</sup> GI, p. 60. Marx makes the same criticism in reference to Proudhon's use of Hegel's dialectic. Proudhon simply substitutes economic categories for the Hegelian succession of ideas, and thus is absolved from studying historical development in detail. 'M. Proudhon considers economic relations as so many social phases engendering one another, resulting from one another like antithesis from thesis, and realising in their logical sequence the impersonal reason of humanity.' *The Poverty of Philosophy* (London, n.d.), p. 93.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to the editor of *Otyechestvenniye Zapiski*, translation after T. B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel: Karl Marx: *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (London, 1963), p. 38.

'wage-labourer') negates their range of capacities as 'universal' producers. Thus: 'The various stages of development in the division of labour are just so many different forms of ownership; i.e., the existing stage in the division of labour determines also the relations of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument, and product of labour.'<sup>19</sup>

### Pre-class systems

Every form of human society presupposes some rudimentary division of labour. But in the simplest type of society, tribal society, this is minimal, involving a broad division between the sexes: women, being largely occupied with the rearing of children, play a lesser productive role than men. Man is at first a wholly communal being; (individualisation is a historical product, associated with an increasingly complex and specialised division of labour. A progressively more complicated division of labour goes hand in hand with the capacity to produce a surplus over and above what is necessary to satisfy basic wants. This in turn entails the exchange of goods; exchange in its turn produces the progressive individualisation of men – a process which reaches its apex under capitalism, with the development of a highly specialised division of labour, a money economy, and commodity production. Men thus only become individualised *through* the process of history: '[Man] originally appears as a *species-being*, a *tribal being*, a *herd animal*. . . Exchange itself is a major agent of this individualisation.'<sup>20</sup> Property is also at first communal; private property does not derive from a state of nature, but is the outcome of later social development. It is nonsense, Marx asserts, to conceive of human society as originally existing in conditions where separate individuals, each owning his little piece of private property, at some date came together to form a community through some kind of contractual agreement. 'An isolated individual could no more possess property in land than he could speak. At most he could live off it as a source of supply, like the animals.'<sup>21</sup> An individual's relation to the land he works, Marx emphasises, is mediated *through* the community. 'The producer exists as part of a family, a tribe, a grouping of his people, etc. – which assumes historically differing forms as the result of mixture with, and opposition to, others.'<sup>22</sup>

The simplest form of tribal society is that which follows a migratory existence, involving either hunting and gathering, or pastoralism. The tribe is not settled in any one fixed area, and exhausts the resources in one place before moving on to another. Men are not settled as part of their nature; they only become so when at a certain stage the nomadic group becomes a stable agricultural community. Once this transition has occurred, there are many

<sup>19</sup> GI, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations* (London, 1964), p. 96; Gru, pp. 395–6.

<sup>21</sup> *Economic Formations*, p. 81.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 87; Gru, p. 389.

factors which influence how the community henceforth develops, including both the physical conditions of the environment, and the internal structure of the tribe, the 'tribal character'. Further differentiation in the division of labour develops through the related processes of population increase, conflicts between tribes thus forced into contact, and the subjugation of one tribe by another.<sup>23</sup> This tends to produce an ethnically-based slavery system, part of a differentiated stratification system involving 'patriarchal family chieftains; below them the members of the tribe; finally slaves'.<sup>24</sup> Contact between societies stimulates trade as well as war. Since 'different communities find different means of production, and different means of subsistence in their natural environment',<sup>25</sup> exchange of products develops, stimulating further specialisation in the occupational sphere, and providing the first origin of the production of commodities: that is, products intended for sale on an exchange market. The first commodities include such things as slaves, cattle, metals, which are originally exchanged in direct barter. As such exchanges proliferate, and as they encompass a wider variety of commodities, the use of some form of money begins to occur. Exchange relations thus set up promote the interdependence of larger units, and thus make for societies of an expanded size.

While in Marx's earlier works a single line of development is portrayed, simply using historical materials from Europe, from tribal society to ancient society (Greece and Rome), Marx later distinguishes more than one line of development out of tribalism. This includes particularly oriental society (India and China), but Marx also distinguishes a specific type of tribal society, the Germanic, which in conjunction with the disintegrating Roman Empire formed the nexus out of which feudalism developed in western Europe.

Marx's views on the nature of the 'Asiatic mode of production' (oriental society) underwent some change. In his articles in the *New York Daily Tribune*, beginning in 1853, Marx places considerable stress upon factors of climate and geography which made centralised irrigation important in agriculture, and thus led to strong central government, or 'oriental despotism'.<sup>26</sup> However, Marx's later view is that this is rooted in more integral characteristics of this type of society, generic to the local community itself. Oriental society is highly resistant to change; this tendency to stagnation does not derive solely from the rigid despotic control of the centralised agency of government, but also (and primarily) from the internally self-sufficient character of the village commune. The small village community is 'entirely self-sustaining and contains within itself all conditions of production and surplus production'.<sup>27</sup> The historical origins of this phenomenon are not at

<sup>23</sup> cf. *Cap*, vol. 1, pp. 87-9. The similarity to Durkheim may be noted.

<sup>24</sup> *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, pp. 122-3.

<sup>25</sup> *Cap*, vol. 1, p. 351.

<sup>26</sup> *The American Journalism of Marx and Engels* (New York, 1966); *Articles on India* (Bombay, 1951); *Marx on China 1853-60* (London, 1968).

<sup>27</sup> *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, p. 70..

all clear, but however this came about originally, the result is a 'self-sustaining unity of manufactures and agriculture', which leads to no impetus to further differentiation.

Population increase in oriental society tends only to produce 'a new community . . . on the pattern of the old one, on unoccupied land'.<sup>28</sup> An essential factor in this is the lack of private property in land. Where private ownership of landed property does develop, as in parts of Europe and particularly in Rome, population growth leads to increasing pressure for proprietorship and consequently a constant tendency to expansion. However, in oriental society the individual 'never becomes an owner but only a possessor'. This type of society is not necessarily despotic; small village communes may exist as a segmentalised loosely associated grouping. However, the communities may devote part of their surplus product, often under the inspiration of religion, the 'imagined tribal entity of the god', as tribute to a despot. But the unity of the ruler with his subjects is not based upon an integrated society bound together by extensive economic interdependence; it remains a society composed basically of segmental units connected by a religious affiliation to the person of the despot.

The self-sufficient character of the local village communities definitely limits the growth of cities, and the latter never came to play a dominant role in either India or China.<sup>29</sup> In the type of society represented by Greece and Rome, on the other hand, the city becomes of central importance. Marx lays considerable stress upon the growth of urbanisation generally as marking the clearest index of differentiation within the division of labour. 'The opposition between town and country begins with the transition from barbarism to civilisation, from tribe to state, from locality to nation, and runs through the whole history of civilisation up to the present day . . .'.<sup>30</sup> The division of city and country provides the historical conditions for the growth of capital, which first begins in the city, and its separation from landed property. In the cities we find the 'beginning of property having its basis only in labour and exchange'.<sup>31</sup>

Ancient society, a city-based civilisation, is the first definite form of class society. Although the Asiatic societies show a certain development of state organisation, they are not regarded by Marx as involving a developed class system, since property remains wholly communal at the local level.<sup>32</sup> Classes

<sup>28</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 1, p. 358. The structure of the Asian mode of production is eventually undermined by the impact of western colonialism.

<sup>29</sup> This is a point later made by Weber, with reference to both India and China.

<sup>30</sup> *GI*, p. 65; *We*, vol. 3, p. 50.

<sup>31</sup> *GI*, p. 66.

<sup>32</sup> Wittfogel has argued that Marx 'failed to draw a conclusion, which from the stand-point of his own theory seemed inescapable—namely, that under conditions of the Asiatic mode of production the agro-managerial bureaucracy constituted the ruling class'. Karl A. Wittfogel: *Oriental Despotism* (New Haven, 1957), p. 6. Since Marx refers to Russia as a 'semi-Asiatic' society, the class character of the 'Asian

only come into existence when the surplus of privately appropriated wealth becomes sufficient for an internally self-recruiting grouping to be clearly set off from the mass of the producers. Even in ancient society – and particularly in Greece – private property is still overshadowed by ‘communal and public property’.

### The ancient world

Ancient society results ‘from the union of several tribes into a city, either by agreement or conquest’.<sup>33</sup> Unlike in the East, the city is an economic whole. The original tribes composing the city-states were aggressive and warlike. The cities were first organised around the military, and throughout their history both Greece and Rome preserved an expansionist character. Marx’s analysis of ancient society concentrates upon the case of Rome. While Rome is an urban society, it is by no means completely separated from the influence of landed property. The private landed proprietor is at the same time an urban citizen. Marx describes this as ‘a form in which the agriculturalist lives in a city’.<sup>34</sup> The ruling class is founded, during all periods of Roman history, upon ownership of landed property. Precisely because of this, population growth produces pressure for territorial expansion; and this is the main source of change in Roman society, the main ‘contradiction’ built into its structure: ‘While . . . this is an essential part of the economic conditions of the community itself, it breaks the real bond on which the community rests.’<sup>35</sup> Population expansion, and the militaristic adventures which this promotes, serve to produce an extension of slavery and an increasing concentration of landed property. The wars of conquest and colonisation lead to the emergence of more sharply drawn lines of social differentiation, causing a swelling of the ranks of the slaves.<sup>36</sup> The slaves come to bear the full brunt of the productive labour, while the patrician landlords emerge as an increasingly separate ruling class monopolising public funds and the organisation of warfare. ‘The whole system . . . was founded on certain limits of the numbers in the population, which could not be surpassed without endangering the conditions of antique civilisation itself.’ This caused the pressure to what Marx calls ‘compulsory emigration’, in the shape of the periodical setting-up of colonies, which ‘formed a regular link in the structure of society’.<sup>37</sup>

The pressure deriving from shortage of land is so strong because there is

mode of production’ has considerable political ramifications. Wittfogel gives an (unsympathetic) account of the debate on Asian society among Russian scholars (*ibid.* chapter 9). cf. George Lichtheim: ‘Marx and the “Asiatic mode of production”’, *St Anthony’s Papers*, No. 14, 1963, pp. 86–112.

<sup>33</sup> *GI*, p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, pp. 79–80.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 83.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 92–3.

<sup>37</sup> *American Journalism of Marx and Engels*, p. 77.

no motivation to increase productivity from existing resources. There exists no ideology which would 'push' toward an interest in maximising profits: Wealth does not appear as the aim of production, although Cato may well investigate the most profitable cultivation of fields, or Brutus may even lend money at the most favourable rate of interest. The enquiry is always about what kind of property creates the best citizens. Wealth as an end in itself appears only among a few trading peoples...<sup>38</sup>

Wealth is not valued for its own sake, but the 'private enjoyment' it brings; commerce and manufacture are thus looked upon by the ruling class with suspicion and even scorn. Moreover, labour in general is regarded with contempt, and as not worthy of free men.

By the end of the Republic, the Roman state is already founded on 'the ruthless exploitation of the conquered provinces',<sup>39</sup> a process which is regularised openly under the emperors. Class conflict inside Roman society centres around a struggle between patricians and plebeians. The former exploit the plebeians shamelessly, primarily through usury, which reaches a high development in Rome although never forming part of a general process of capital accumulation. In discussing the role of usury, in the third volume of *Capital*, Marx indicates that while usurers' capital plays an important part in the development of capitalism in combination with other conditions, without these conditions it serves only as a debilitating influence in the economy. This is what happens in Rome; usury exerts an undermining influence upon the small peasantry, since, instead of replenishing the real needs of the plebeians who are continually facing ruin through being forced to serve in wars, the patricians lend money at exorbitant rates of interest. 'As soon as the usury of the Roman patricians had completely ruined the Roman plebeians, the small peasants, this form of exploitation came to an end and a pure slave economy replaced the small peasant economy.'<sup>40</sup>

Slavery as an institution passes through various stages in Roman history. Beginning as a patriarchal system where slaves assist the small producers, the increasing depression of the plebeians themselves into slavery leads to the growth of large estates, the *latifundiae*, where agricultural production for a market is practised on a large scale. But the failure of commerce and industry to develop beyond a certain point, combined with the exploitative depression

<sup>38</sup> *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, p. 84. Marx notes that the outlook prevailing in the ancient world, although existing in alienated form – in terms of a 'narrowly national, religious, or political' world-view – still places man very much at the centre of things as compared to *bourgeois* society, where human ends become subordinated to production and the accumulation of wealth. But Marx continues: 'In fact, however, when the narrow *bourgeois* form has been peeled away, what is wealth, if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers, etc., of individuals, produced in universal exchange?' Thus while the 'childish world of the Ancients' is in one aspect superior to the modern world, it is so only in terms of a relatively narrow range of human potentialities. *Ibid.* pp. 84–5.

<sup>39</sup> The phrase is Engels', *SW*, vol. 2, p. 299.

<sup>40</sup> *Cap.* vol. 3, p. 582.

of the majority of the population into poverty, means that the *latifundiae* eventually themselves become uneconomical. A further decline in trade sets in, together with the decay of the towns. What commerce survives is reduced to ruin by the taxation imposed by state officials seeking to prop up a disintegrating state. Slavery itself begins to be abolished, and the large plantations are broken up and leased to hereditary tenants in small farms. Small-scale farming against becomes predominant.

Thus Rome, at its height a great empire producing a concentration of enormous wealth, eventually decays; while a considerable development of productive forces is attained, the internal composition of the society prevents growth beyond a certain point. The expropriation of large numbers of peasants from their means of production – a process upon which Marx lays great stress in discussing the origins of capitalism – does not lead to the development of capitalist production, but instead to a system based on slavery, which eventually disintegrates from within.

### **Feudalism and the origins of capitalist development**

The barbarian onslaught upon Rome, therefore, was only the precipitating condition of the fall of the ancient world: the real causes derive from the internal development of Rome itself. Marx apparently does not regard ancient society as a *necessary* stage in the development of feudalism;<sup>41</sup> but in western Europe at any rate the disintegration of the Roman Empire forms the basis for the emergence of feudal society. Marx nowhere discusses the early phases of feudalism in any detail. But it is probable that he would accept the substance of the views set out by Engels in his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, according to which the barbarians, faced with the task of administering the territories they have acquired, are forced to modify their own system of government and adopt elements of the Roman legacy. This new social order centres upon the dominant position of the military commander, and eventuates in the transformation of military leadership into monarchy.<sup>42</sup> A new nobility thus forms itself around a personal retinue of military retainers, and supplemented by an educated elite drawn from Romanised officials and scholars. Several centuries of continual warfare and civil disorder in western Europe lead to the permanent impoverishment of the free peasant farmers, who make up the core of the barbarian armies, and to their consequent enslavement to local noble landlords. By the ninth century selfdom becomes predominant. Marx does say in one place, however, that throughout the feudal period a substructure of the old barbarian (Germanic) form of social organisation remains, evinced

<sup>41</sup> *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, p. 70.

<sup>42</sup> Marx does in one place refer briefly to the system following Rome in Europe as a 'synthesis' in which 'two systems mutually modified each other'. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Chicago, 1904), p. 288.

concretely in the survival of communal property on the local level. This sub-structure 'remained throughout the Middle Ages the unique stronghold of popular liberty and popular life'.<sup>43</sup>

Marx has no great interest in delineating the characteristics of feudal society, concentrating more of his attention upon the process of transition from feudalism to capitalism – although even here there are large gaps and obscurities in his treatment. What can be gleaned of Marx's view of the mature period of feudal society in Europe follows the standard conceptions in the economic history of his day. The basis of feudal economy consists in small-scale peasant agriculture involving the bonded serf; this is supplemented by domestic industry and by handicraft production in the towns. But the feudal system is basically a rural one: 'If Antiquity started out from the town and its little territory, the Middle Ages started out from the country.'<sup>44</sup> In serfdom, although the worker must surrender a certain amount of his produce to the lord, there is only a low degree of alienation between the producer and his product. The serf is his own proprietor, by and large producing for the needs of himself and his family. 'The lord does not try to extract the maximum profit from his estate. He rather consumes what is there, and tranquilly leaves the care of producing it to the serfs and tenant farmers.'<sup>45</sup> The history of the early stages of capitalism is, for Marx, very largely a history of the progressively increasing alienation of the small producer from control of his product: in other words, of his expropriation from his means of production, and his consequent dependence upon the sale of his labour on the market.

The disintegration of feudalism, and the early development of capitalism, is bound up with the growth of towns. Marx emphasises the importance of the emergence of the municipal movements in the twelfth century, which had a 'revolutionary character', and as a result of which the urban communities eventually secure a high degree of administrative autonomy.<sup>46</sup> As in Antiquity, the development of urban centres goes hand in hand with the formation of mercantile and usurers' capital, and a monetary system in terms of which they operate, which act as a force undermining the system based upon agricultural production.<sup>47</sup> While a few towns probably did persist from the period of the Roman Empire, the development of urban centres into wealthy

<sup>43</sup> *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, pp. 144–5. (From the third draft of Marx's letter to Zasulich.)

<sup>44</sup> *GI*, p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> *EW*, p. 115.

<sup>46</sup> Marx quotes Thierry to the effect that the word *capitalia* first appears with the rise of the autonomous urban communes. Letter from Marx to Engels, July 1854, *Selected Correspondence* (London, 1934), p. 72.

<sup>47</sup> Dobb has argued that the primary factor producing the decay of feudalism 'was the inefficiency of feudalism as a system of production, coupled with the growing needs of the ruling class for revenue...'. Maurice Dobb: *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (London, 1963), p. 42. For a discussion of Dobb's book, see Paul M. Sweezy: *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London, 1954).

commercial and manufacturing centres only really begins in the twelfth century; these are populated mainly by freed serfs. The growth of commerce stimulates an ever-widening extension of the use of money, and consequently of commodity exchange, into the formerly self-sufficient rural feudal economy. This facilitates the growth of usury in the towns, stimulates a decline in the fortunes of the land-owning aristocracy and allows the more prosperous peasant to discharge his obligations to the lord in monetary form, or to free himself from the latter's control altogether. In England, by the conclusion of the fourteenth century, serfdom has virtually disappeared. Whatever their feudal title, the vast mass of the labouring population in that country are by that date free peasant proprietors. The fate of serfdom, of course, varies greatly in different parts of Europe, and in some areas serfdom undergoes periods of 'revival'.<sup>48</sup>

Although as early as the fourteenth century we find 'the beginnings of capitalist production' in Italy,<sup>49</sup> and in the fifteenth century in England, these are very restricted in scope. The towns are dominated by strong guild organisations which strictly limit the number of journeymen and apprentices whom a master may employ, and the guilds keep themselves separate from mercantile capital, 'the only form of free capital with which they came into contact'.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, there is no possibility of capitalism developing while the majority of the labouring population consists of independent peasantry. The process of 'primary accumulation'<sup>51</sup> – that is, the initial formation of the capitalist mode of production – involves, as Marx stresses many times, the expropriation of the peasant from his means of production, a set of events which 'is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire'.

This process occurs at divergent periods, and in various ways, in different countries, and Marx concentrates upon the example of England, where it appears in 'classic form'. In England, the transformation of independent peasant into wage-labourer begins in earnest in the late fifteenth century.<sup>52</sup> By this time, the great feudal wars have sapped the resources of the nobility. The first 'mass of free proletarians' is thrown onto the market through the disbanding of retainers by the impoverished aristocracy, and the declining position of the feudal aristocracy is hastened by the growing power of the monarchy. The land-owning aristocracy is increasingly drawn into an ex-

<sup>48</sup> A phenomenon to which Engels gives some attention, speaking of the rise of a 'second serfdom' in eastern parts of Europe in the fifteenth century. Letter to Marx, December 1882, *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 407–8.

<sup>49</sup> Marx mentions that, in Italy, where the earliest development of capitalist production occurs, 'the dissolution of serfdom also took place earlier than elsewhere'. *Cap.* vol. 1, p. 716.

<sup>50</sup> *Cap.* vol. 1, p. 358.

<sup>51</sup> The phrase is usually rendered 'primitive accumulation'. Here I follow Sweezy (p. 17) and others in translating *ursprünglich* as 'primary', which avoids the potentially misleading implications of the usual rendering.

<sup>52</sup> *Cap.* vol. 1, pp. 718ff.

change economy. The result is the enclosure movement, to which the rise of Flemish wool manufacture, leading to a sharp rise in the price of wool in England, gives a further impetus. In 'defiant opposition to King and Parliament' the feudal lords uproot large numbers of the peasantry, forcibly driving them from their land. Arable land is turned into pasture, which only requires a few herdsmen. This whole process of expropriation receives in the sixteenth century 'a new and frightening impulse' from the Reformation; the extensive church lands are handed out to royal favourites or sold cheaply to speculators who drive out the hereditary tenants and consolidate their holdings into large units. The expropriated peasantry are 'turned *en masse* into beggars, vagabonds, partly from inclination, in most cases from stress of circumstances'.<sup>53</sup> This is met with fierce legislation against vagrancy, by which means the vagabond population is subjected to 'the discipline necessary for the wage system'.<sup>54</sup>

By the early period of the sixteenth century then, there exists in England the beginnings of a proletariat – a stratum of dispossessed peasants who are a 'floating', mobile group, separated from their means of production, and thrown onto the market as 'free' wage-labourers. Marx notes scornfully that political economists interpret this in a purely positive light, speaking of the liberation of men from feudal ties and restrictions, neglecting altogether the fact that this freedom entails 'the most shameless violation of the "sacred rights of property" and the grossest acts of violence to persons'.<sup>55</sup>

In themselves, however, these events cannot, Marx indicates, be regarded as sufficient conditions for the rise of capitalism. At the turn of the sixteenth century, the decaying remnants of feudalism are poised between further disintegration and a movement into a more advanced productive form: capitalism. A factor of some importance in stimulating the latter development is the rapid and vast expansion of overseas commerce which develops as a result of the startling geographical discoveries made in the last part of the fifteenth century. These include principally the discovery of America and the rounding of the Cape, which 'gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development'.<sup>56</sup> The rapid influx of capital deriving from this mushrooming trade, plus the flood of precious metals coming into the country following the discovery of gold and silver in America, cuts through the existing social and economic arrangements in England. New manufacturers become established at the sea-ports, and at inland centres outside the control of the older corporate towns and their guild organisations. The former undergo rapid growth, in spite of 'an embittered struggle of the corporate towns against these new industrial nur-

<sup>53</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 1, pp. 718, 721 & 734; *We.*, vol. 23, pp. 746, 748 & 762.

<sup>54</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 1, p. 737.

<sup>55</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 1, p. 727.

<sup>56</sup> *CM*, p. 133; *GI*, p. 73.

series'.<sup>57</sup> Modern capitalism thus begins away from the older centres of manufacture, 'on the basis of large-scale maritime and overland trade'.<sup>58</sup> Organised manufacture does not originate in the craft industries controlled by the guilds, but in what Marx calls the 'rural subsidiary operations' of spinning and weaving, which need little technical training. While rural society is the last place where capitalism develops in its 'purest and most logical form', the initial impetus is located there.<sup>59</sup> Not before this stage is reached is capital a revolutionary force. While the previous development of mercantilism beginning in the eleventh century acts as a major factor in dissolving feudal structures, the towns which develop are essentially dependent upon the old system, and play an essentially conservative role once they attain a certain level of power.

The ascendancy of those who control capital, the emergent bourgeoisie, develops progressively from the opening of the sixteenth century onwards. The influx of gold and silver produces a sharp increase in prices. This acts to offer large profits in trade and manufacturing, but is a source of ruination to the great landlords, and swells the number of wage-labourers. The fruit of all this in the political sphere is the first English revolution, which is one moment in a rapid extension of state power. The developing mechanisms of centralised administration and consolidated political power are used 'to hasten, hot-house fashion, the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition'.<sup>60</sup>

Not a great deal is known, even today, of the specific origins of the first capitalists, and Marx has little in the way of concrete historical material to offer on this matter. He does indicate, however, that there are two contrasting historical modes of progression into capitalist production. The first is where a segment of the merchant class moves over from purely trading operations to take a direct hand in production. This occurred in the early development of capitalism in Italy, and is the main source of recruitment of capitalists in England in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. However, this form of capitalist formation soon becomes 'an obstacle to a real capitalist mode of production and declines with the development of the latter'.<sup>61</sup> The second avenue of capitalist development is, according to Marx, 'the really revolutionary way'. Here individual producers themselves accumulate capital, and move from production to expand the sphere of their activities to include trade. They therefore from the very beginning operate outside the guilds and in conflict with them. While Marx gives only a few hints of how this second mode of development occurs in manufacture, he

<sup>57</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 1, p. 751.

<sup>58</sup> *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, p. 116.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* p. 116. Marx adds: 'Hence the ancients, who never advanced beyond specifically urban craft skill and application, were never able to achieve large-scale industry' (p. 117).

<sup>60</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 1, p. 751.

<sup>61</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 3, p. 329.

does specify some aspects of the process as it occurs in farming in England. By the middle of the seventeenth century much of the land is owned by capitalist farmers employing wage-labour and producing for a commodity market. Their property is considerably augmented by their forcible usurpation of those common lands which still survive from the feudal period. But this latter process is an extended one, not completed until the second half of the eighteenth century. Its completion is contemporaneous with the final disappearance of the independent peasantry, 'incorporating land as capital' and creating for the industries of the town 'the necessary supply of an outlawed proletariat'.<sup>62</sup>

Marx distinguishes two broad stages of productive organisation in the capitalist period. The first stage is dominated by manufacture. The distinctive characteristic of this form is that it involves the breaking-down of craft skills into various specialised tasks carried out by a number of workers, who accomplish collectively what one skilled man would do under the guild system. Manufacture is more efficient than handicraft production, not because of any technical advances, but because the division of labour it involves makes it possible to produce more units per man-hour. This form of production, which is predominant from the sixteenth century until the concluding part of the eighteenth in England, has definite limitations. The expansion of markets by the end of the eighteenth century is so great that manufacture is insufficiently productive to meet the demands placed upon it. As a consequence, a strong pressure builds up to create technically more efficient means of production; 'the development of machinery was a necessary consequence of the needs of the market'.<sup>63</sup> The result is the 'industrial revolution'.<sup>64</sup> Mechanisation henceforth dominates the capitalist mode of production. There is set in motion the constant impetus towards technological modification which becomes a hallmark of capitalism. The development of increasingly more complicated and expensive machinery is a primary factor in the centralisation of the capitalist economy upon which Marx lays so much stress in *Capital* in discussing the predicted dissolution of capitalism.

<sup>62</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 1, p. 733; *We.*, vol. 23, p. 761.

<sup>63</sup> Letter to Annenkov, quoted in *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 156.

<sup>64</sup> Engels used this term before Marx. See the former's *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 9-26. There is some dispute over the origin of the term 'industrial revolution'. cf. Dobb, p. 258.

### 3. The relations of production and class structure

According to Marx, the development of society is the result of the continual productive interaction between men and nature. Men 'begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence...'.<sup>1</sup> The 'production and reproduction of life' is both an exigency dictated by the biological needs of the human organism and, more importantly, the creative source of new needs and capabilities. Thus productive activity is at the root of society in both an historical and an analytical sense. Production is 'the first historical act'; and 'the production of material life... is... a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life'.<sup>2</sup> Every individual, in his day-to-day actions, recreates and reproduces society at every moment: this is both the source of what is stable in social organisation and the origin of endless modification.

Every kind of production system entails a definite set of social relationships existing between individuals involved in the productive process. This is at the root of one of Marx's most important criticisms of political economy and of utilitarianism generally. The conception of the 'isolated individual' is a construction of the bourgeois philosophy of individualism, and serves to conceal the social character which production always manifests. Marx refers to Adam Smith as the 'Luther of political economy' because he, and after him the other economists, have correctly identified labour as the source of man's own self-creation.<sup>3</sup> But what the economists have obscured is that the self-creation of man through production entails a process of *social* development. Human beings never produce simply as individuals, but only as members of a definite form of society. There is no type of society, therefore, which is not founded upon a definite set of relations of production.<sup>4</sup>

In production, men not only act on nature but also on one another. They produce only by cooperating in a certain way and mutually exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations with one another and only within these social connections and relations does their action on nature, does production, take place.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> GI, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> GI, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> EW, p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> The term usually employed by Marx (*Produktionsverhältnisse*) has, in fact, a double meaning in English, and can refer both to 'conditions' and to 'relations' of production. On the use of the term 'relations of production' in Marx's writings, see Louis Althusser *et al.*: *Lire le Capital* (Paris, 1967), vol. 2, pp. 149-59.

<sup>5</sup> SW, vol. 1, p. 89.

In every form of society there exists 'a sum of productive forces, an historically created relation of individuals to nature and to one another, which is handed down to each generation from its predecessor...'.<sup>6</sup> Marx does not attempt to construct any sort of general theory of what brings about expansion in the forces of production (*Produktionskräfte*). This can only be explained by concrete social and historical analysis. Thus the modifications of the productive forces involved in the transition from feudalism to capitalism can be explained in terms of a convergent set of historical events. Moreover, there are cases of societies where the forces of production become quite highly evolved, but where other elements of the social organisation retard any further advance. Marx quotes the instance of Peru, which in certain respects had a developed economy, but was held back by the lack of a monetary system. The failure to develop a monetary system was largely contingent upon the isolated geographical position of the country, which inhibited the expansion of trade.<sup>7</sup>

### **Class domination**

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According to Marx, classes emerge where the relations of production involve a differentiated division of labour which allows for the accumulation of surplus production that can be appropriated by a minority grouping, which thus stands in an exploitative relationship to the mass of producers. In discussing the relationships between classes in society, Marx usually employs the terms *Herrschaft* and *Klassenherrschaft*. In English versions of Marx's writings, it is customary to translate these as 'rule' and 'class rule'. But these terms suggest rather more of a deliberate imposition of power than is necessarily implied in the German terminology. Consequently it is more appropriate to use the term 'domination' rather than 'rule'.<sup>8</sup>

Marx's various analyses of class domination are all primarily directed towards the end of explicating the characteristic structure and dynamics of bourgeois society, and conceptual precision is secondary in importance to this overriding focus of attention. Consequently, Marx often uses the term *Klasse* in a somewhat cavalier fashion, and he did not feel compelled, until quite near the end of his intellectual career, to confront the problem of spelling out the concept of class in a precise fashion.<sup>9</sup> As with the concept of 'rationalisation' in Max Weber's thought, the notion of class is so fundamental to Marx's writings that, in his most important works, he takes its

<sup>6</sup> *GI*, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> *Gru*, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> cf. W. Wesolowski: 'Marx's theory of class domination: an attempt at systematisation', in Nicholas Lobkowicz: *Marx and the Western World* (Notre Dame, 1967), pp. 54-5. On the problem of *Herrschaft* in Weber's writings, see below, p. 156.

<sup>9</sup> 'no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society, nor yet the struggle between them.' Letter to Weydemeyer, March 1852, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 57. cf. Stanislaw Ossowski: *Class and Class Structure in the Social Consciousness*. London, 1963, pp. 69-88 and *passim*.

meaning for granted. It is an irony which has frequently been noted that the manuscripts which Marx left at his death should have broken off at the point at which he was entering upon a systematic analysis of the concept of class.<sup>10</sup> Here, for the first time in his writings, he explicitly poses the question, 'what constitutes a class?' But what Marx says, before the manuscript ends, is mainly negative. Class must not be identified with either source of income or functional position in the division of labour. These criteria would yield a large plurality of classes: doctors, who receive their income from treatment of the sick, would be a separate class from farmers, who derive theirs from cultivation of land, etc. Moreover, use of such criteria would cut across the position of groupings of individuals in the productive process: two men may, for instance, both be builders, but one may be the propertyless employee of a large firm, while the other owns a small business of his own.

Marx's emphasis that classes are not income groups is a particular aspect of his general premise, stated in *Capital*, that the distribution of economic goods is not a sphere separate to and independent of production, but is determined by the mode of production. Marx rejects as 'absurd' the contention made by John Stuart Mill, and many of the political economists, that while production is governed by definite laws, distribution is controlled by (malleable) human institutions.<sup>11</sup> Such a view underlies the assumption that classes are merely inequalities in the distribution of income, and therefore that class conflict can be alleviated or even eliminated altogether by the introduction of measures which minimise discrepancies between incomes. For Marx, then, classes are an aspect of the relations of production. The substance of Marx's conception of class is, in spite of the variability of his terminology, relatively easy to infer from the many scattered references which Marx makes in the course of different works. Classes are constituted by the relationship of groupings of individuals to the ownership of private property in the means of production. This yields a model of class relations which is basically dichotomous: all class societies are built around a primary line of division between two antagonistic classes, one dominant and the other subordinate.<sup>12</sup> In Marx's usage, class of necessity involves a conflict relation. On more than one occasion, Marx makes this point by linguistic emphasis. Thus, discussing the position of the peasantry in nineteenth-century France, Marx comments:

The small-holding peasants form a vast mass, the members of which live in similar conditions but without entering into manifold relations with one another. Their mode of production isolates them from one another instead of bringing them into mutual intercourse... In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their

<sup>10</sup> The section on 'The classes', placed at the end of the third volume of *Capital* (edited by Engels) (*Cap.*, vol. 3, pp. 862-3), is a mere fragment.

<sup>11</sup> *Gru.* p. 717.

<sup>12</sup> cf. Ralf Dahrendorf: *Class and Class Conflict in an Industrial Society* (Stanford, 1965), pp. 18-27.

culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class.<sup>13</sup>

In another context, Marx makes a similar point with reference to the bourgeoisie: capitalists form a class only to the degree that they are forced to carry on a struggle against another class. Otherwise capitalists are in economic competition with each other in the pursuit of profit in the market.<sup>14</sup>

### **Class structure and market relationships**

It is important to emphasise that the dichotomous class conception appears in Marx's writings as a theoretical construct. Only bourgeois society – as Marx projects its future development – approximates closely to this picture. All historical class societies show a more complicated system of relationships which overlaps with the dichotomous axis of class structure. Thus in bourgeois society, these complicating groupings are of three sorts:

1. Classes which, although they play an important economic and political role in the extant form of society, are marginal in the sense that they derive from a set of relations of production which are either being superseded or, conversely, are in the ascendant.<sup>15</sup> An instance of the first is the case of the free peasantry, which although still strong in France and Germany, is becoming drawn into dependence upon capitalistic farmers, or is being forced to join the urban proletariat.<sup>16</sup>

2. Strata which stand in a relationship of functional dependence upon one of the classes, and which consequently tend to identify politically with that class. Those whom Marx calls the 'officers' among administrative workers in industry – the higher managerial staff – fall into this category.<sup>17</sup>

3. Finally, there are heterogeneous clusters of individuals in the *Lumpenproletariat* who stand on the margins of the class system because they are not wholly integrated into the division of labour. These are composed of 'thieves and criminals of all kinds, living on the crumbs of society, people without a definite trade, vagabonds, people without a hearth or home'.<sup>18</sup>

The degree to which a class constitutes a homogeneous entity is historically variable: 'subordinate gradations' exist in all classes.<sup>19</sup> In *The Class Struggles in France* Marx analyses the conflict between financial and in-

<sup>13</sup> SW, vol. 1, p. 334.

<sup>14</sup> GI, p. 69.

<sup>15</sup> cf. Donald Hodges: 'The "intermediate classes" in Marxian theory', *Social Research*, vol. 28, 1961, pp. 241–52.

<sup>16</sup> SW, vol. 1, p. 217.

<sup>17</sup> cf. Cap, vol. 3, pp. 376ff. Marx also refers to 'savants, lawyers, doctors, etc.', as the 'ideological representatives and spokesmen' of classes. SW, vol. 1, p. 140.

<sup>18</sup> SW, vol. 1, p. 155.

<sup>19</sup> CM, p. 132.

dustrial capitalists between 1848 and 1850. This is an empirical example of a persistent subdivision within the bourgeoisie as a whole; like other subdivisions of the same sort, it is founded upon divergent interests of a definite kind: 'it is because profit can be divided into two sorts of revenue. These two sorts of capitalists express nothing other than this fact.'<sup>20</sup> According to Marx, the ordering of classes and the nature of class conflict change considerably with the emergence of successive forms of society. Pre-capitalist societies are overwhelmingly localised in their organisation. To generalise from a metaphor Marx applies to the French peasantry, it can be said that every pre-capitalist society 'is formed by the simple admixture of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes'.<sup>21</sup> Economic relationships do not, in such forms of society, manifest themselves as purely market relationships; economic domination or subordination is fused with personal ties between individuals. Thus the domination of the feudal landowner operates through personal connections of bondage and the direct payment of tithes. Moreover, the serf preserves a large measure of control over his means of production in spite of the fact that he has to cede a part of his product as tribute to a master. It is only with the advent of capitalism, which depends upon the expropriation of a mass of labourers who have nothing save their labour-power to offer in exchange for the means of obtaining a livelihood, that naked market relationships appear as the determinant of human productive activity. Bourgeois society 'has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors", and has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment" . . . In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.'<sup>22</sup> In bourgeois society, therefore, class relationships become simplified and universalised. The progressive development of capitalism, once it is established, more and more tends toward the creation of two great classes in direct opposition on the market: bourgeoisie and proletariat. The other classes – landowners, petty bourgeoisie, and peasantry – are transitional classes, which are increasingly swallowed up by one or other of these two major class groupings.

In Marx's conception, classes form the main linkage between the relations of production and the rest of society, or social 'superstructure' (*Überbau*). Class relationships are the main axis around which political power is distributed, and upon which political organisation depends. For Marx, economic and political power are closely, although not inseparably, linked. Again, however, this theorem has to be placed in an historical dimension. The form of the political agency is closely related to the mode of production, and hence to the degree to which market relationships are of primary significance in

<sup>20</sup> *Gru*, p. 735.

<sup>21</sup> *SW*, vol. 1, p. 334.

<sup>22</sup> *CM*, p. 135.

the economy. Private property as such first emerges in the ancient world, but remains confined to restricted segments of economic life. In the Middle Ages, property moves through several stages, from feudal landed property, to corporative moveable property, eventually giving rise to capital invested in manufacture in the towns. In both ancient society and in the Middle Ages, property continues to be bound largely to the community, and thus so also do relationships of class domination. This means that the operations of political power are still primarily conducted in a diffuse fashion in the *communitas*. Modern capitalism, however, is 'determined by big industry and universal competition, which has cast off all semblance of a communal institution'.<sup>23</sup>

The modern state emerges in conjunction with the struggle of the bourgeoisie against the remnants of feudalism, but is also stimulated by the demands of the capitalist economy.

To this modern private property corresponds the modern state, which, purchased gradually by the owners of property by means of taxation, has fallen entirely into their hands through the national debt, and its existence has become wholly dependent on the commercial credit which the owners of property, the bourgeois, extend to it, as reflected in the rise and fall of state funds on the stock exchange.<sup>24</sup>

The particular form of the state in bourgeois society varies according to the circumstances in which the bourgeoisie has gained the ascendancy. In France, for example, the alliance of the bourgeoisie with the absolute monarchy has stimulated the development of a strongly established officialdom. In Britain, by contrast, the state represents 'an archaic, timeworn and antiquated compromise between the landed aristocracy, which *rules officially*, and the bourgeoisie, which in fact *dominates* in all the various spheres of civil society, but *not officially*'.<sup>25</sup> The specific process which has given rise to this political order in Britain has minimised the importance of bureaucratic elements in the state.

### Ideology and consciousness

The dissipation of the community, and the expansion of private property which brings this about, underlies the origins of civil law. The codification of such a body of law occurs for the first time in Rome, but has no lasting consequences because of the internal disintegration of manufacture and commerce in Roman society. With the emergence of modern capitalism, a new phase in the formation of law occurs: Roman law was taken over in the early centres of capitalism in Italy and elsewhere, and made the source of civil law. In civil law, authority is based upon rationalised norms rather than upon the religious prescriptions which are predominant in traditional communities.<sup>26</sup> The modern legal system and judiciary is a principal ideological

<sup>23</sup> *GI*, p. 79.

<sup>25</sup> *We*, vol. 11, p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> For Weber's treatment of this issue, see *ES*, vol. 2; cf. also Durkheim: *DL*, pp. 142ff.

<sup>24</sup> *GI*, p. 79.

support of the bourgeois state. But it is only the contemporary expression of the fact that, in all class societies, the dominant class develops or takes over ideological forms which legitimise its domination. 'The class which has the means of *material* production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of *intellectual* (*geistig*) production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of intellectual production are subject to it.'<sup>27</sup>

According to Marx, consciousness is rooted in human *Praxis*, which is in turn social. This is the sense of the statement that 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness'.<sup>28</sup> Much calumny has been heaped upon Marx for this observation. But the operative term here is *social* being, and there can be little objection to the generalisation that consciousness is governed by human activity in society. The case of language, Marx points out, gives a concrete example of this. Language, Marx says, 'is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well...'.<sup>29</sup> The expression of ideas, and indeed the very existence of anything beyond mere sensation, is conditional upon the existence of language. But language is a social product, and it is only in virtue of his membership of society that the individual acquires the linguistic categories which constitute the parameters of his consciousness.

Marx's conception of the role of particular forms of ideology in class societies follows directly from these more general considerations. The main defect of idealism in philosophy and history is that it attempts to analyse the properties of societies by inference from the content of the dominant systems of ideas in those societies. But this neglects altogether the fact that there is not a unilateral relationship between values and power: the dominant class is able to disseminate ideas which are the legitimations of its position of dominance. Thus the ideas of freedom and equality which come to the fore in bourgeois society cannot be taken at their 'face value', as directly summing up social reality; on the contrary, the legal freedoms which exist in bourgeois society actually serve to legitimise the reality of contractual obligations in which propertyless wage-labour is heavily disadvantaged as compared to the owners of capital. The import of this is that ideology must be studied in relation to the social relationships in which it is embedded: we must study both the concrete processes which give rise to various types of ideas, together with the factors which determine which ideas come into prominence within a given society. While ideologies obviously show continuity over time, neither this continuity, nor any changes which occur, can

<sup>27</sup> *GI*, p. 61; *We*, vol. 3, p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> *SW*, vol. 1, p. 363. See below, pp. 208-223ff, for further treatment of this matter, in relation to Weber and Durkheim.

<sup>29</sup> *GI*, p. 42.

be explained purely in terms of their internal content. Ideas do not evolve on their own account; they do so as elements of the consciousness of men living in society, following a definite *Praxis*: 'Whilst in ordinary life every shopkeeper is very well able to distinguish between what somebody professes to be and what he really is, our historians have not yet won even this trivial insight. They take every epoch at its word concerning what it says and imagines about itself.'<sup>30</sup>

There are two related emphases in Marx's treatment of ideology which it is important to distinguish: both have already been mentioned above. The first is that the social circumstances in which the activity of individuals occurs condition their perception of the world in which they live. This is the sense in which language forms the 'practical consciousness' of men. The second theorem concerns the *diffusion*, as well as the creation, of ideas: this is Marx's generalisation that, in class societies, the ruling ideas of any epoch are the ideas of the ruling class. It follows from this latter proposition that the dissemination of ideas is heavily dependent upon the distribution of economic power in society. It is in this latter sense that ideology constitutes part of the social 'superstructure': the prevalent ethos at any given time is one which provides legitimation of the interests of the dominant class. Thus the relations of production, via the mediation of the class system, compose 'the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness'.<sup>31</sup> Marx does not postulate an unvarying connection between these two modes in which consciousness is moulded by social *Praxis*. An individual or group may develop ideas which are partially at variance with the prevalent views of his age: but these ideas will not come into prominence unless they articulate with interests held by the dominant class, or with those of a class which comes in a position to challenge the existing authority structure.<sup>32</sup> Thus many of the ideas which were used in constructing machines in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had been known for many years: but their rapid application and spread only occurred when the expansion of capitalism generated the need for capitalists to augment production over and beyond what was possible through handcraft manufacture.

Acceptance of the role of class domination against the background of a dialectical conception of the relationship between social activity and consciousness resolves some of the apparent dilemmas concerning the connections between the relations of production and the ideological 'superstructure' in any given society.<sup>33</sup> The productive activity of individuals, in inter-relationship with one another and with nature, involves a continual

<sup>30</sup> *GI*, p. 64; *We*, vol. 3, p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> *SW*, vol. 1, p. 363.

<sup>32</sup> cf. *GI*, pp. 472-3.

<sup>33</sup> cf., for example, John Plamenatz: *Man and Society* (London, 1968), vol. 2, pp. 279-93.

and reciprocal interaction between social behaviour and consciousness: the ideas which are thus generated are conditioned in their diffusion or acceptance by the structure of class domination. Hence the dominant ideology always comprises 'partly . . . an elaboration or consciousness of domination, partly . . . a moral means for this domination'.<sup>34</sup> The 'real foundation' of society, upon which the 'superstructure' arises, is always constituted of the relationships of active, willing individuals, and thus always involves both the creation and application of ideas. The main point about the 'superstructure' is not that it embodies ideas, whereas the relations of production do not, but that it is comprised of a system of social relationships (especially in the shape of politics, law and religion) which order and sanction a system of class domination.

The problem of the relativity of historical knowledge is disposed of by Marx without much difficulty. It is certainly the case that all forms of human consciousness, including the most highly complex kinds of ideologies, are rooted in definite sets of social conditions. But this does not preclude the retrospective understanding of history in terms of rational principles. Thus there are certain characteristics which are shared by all class societies: but these could not be until the advent of the conditions for the emergence of scientific knowledge of society, generated by capitalism. Marx illustrates this by analogy. The anatomy of man, the more developed creature, supplies us with the key to the understanding of the anatomy of the ape: similarly, understanding the structure and process of development of bourgeois society allows us to use the same categories to explain the social development of the ancient world. Using the concepts formulated by the political economists, it is possible to apply notions such as 'labour' and 'production' in a very general way, to apply to characteristics shared by societies at all levels of complexity. But these concepts have only emerged with the rise of capitalist production. '*Production in general* is an abstraction, but a justified abstraction. . .'.<sup>35</sup>

The theories developed by the political economists contain very important elements of truth which can be applied to all societies; but the fact that the writings of the economists are heavily linked to the structure of bourgeois class domination means that they are unable to discern the limited and one-sided character of their formulations. Like the German historians and philosophers, they share the 'illusion of the epoch';<sup>36</sup> but this in no way implies that the whole of their ideas are 'illusory' in an epistemological sense. The dominant modes of thought will not wholly shed their ideological character

<sup>34</sup> *GI*, p. 473; *We*, vol. 3, p. 405. See Karl Korsch: *Marxismus und Philosophie* (Leipzig, 1930), pp. 55–67.

<sup>35</sup> *Gru*, p. 7. This, of course, is basically a transmuted Hegelian standpoint. As Lukács remarks, for Marx 'the present must be correctly understood in order for the history of previous times to be adequately grasped . . .', *Der junge Hegel*, p. 130.

<sup>36</sup> *GI*, p. 52.

until 'class domination in general ceases to be the form in which the social order is organised, that is to say, as soon as it is no longer necessary to represent a particular interest as general or the "general interest" as ruling'.<sup>37</sup>

Every dominant class lays claim to the universality of the ideology which legitimates its position of domination. But, according to Marx, this does not entail that the social changes effected by the rise of a new revolutionary class to dominance are equivalent in different types of society. While Marx does set out an overall schema in terms of which every process of revolutionary changes shares common characteristics, he also holds that the forms of revolutionary transformation found in history differ in certain crucially important respects. The overall schema which Marx employs in the analysis of revolutionary social change runs as follows. In any relatively stable society, there exists an equilibrium between the mode of production, the social relations which are integral to that mode of production, and the 'superstructure' which, through the medium of class domination, is tied in with it. When progressive changes occur in the sphere of productive activity – such as happened in Rome with the emergence of manufacture and commerce within a predominantly agrarian economy – a tension is set up between these new productive forces and the existing relations of production. The existing relations of production then increasingly form barriers to the emergent forces of production. These 'contradictions' become expressed as overt class conflicts, terminating in revolutionary struggles fought out in the political sphere, and manifest ideologically as a clash between competing 'principles'. The outcome of these struggles is either 'the common ruin of the contending classes', as in Rome, or 'a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large', as occurred in the supersession of feudalism by capitalism.<sup>38</sup> The class engaging in a revolutionary struggle for power fights in the name of absolute human rights, presenting its ideas as 'the only rational, universally valid ones'.<sup>39</sup> While only one subordinate class stands to gain from the revolutionary overthrow of the existing dominant class, it may invoke the aid of others to assist its movement to power: the French bourgeoisie, for instance, made its revolution in 1789 with the aid of the peasantry. Once the revolutionary class has acceded to power, its erstwhile revolutionary character becomes transposed into a defence of the existing order, i.e., of its own hegemony:

it is in the interest of the ruling section of society to sanction the existing order as law and to perpetuate its habitually and traditionally fixed limits as legal ones. Aside from all other matters, this comes about of itself in proportion as the continuous reproduction of the foundation of the existing order of the relations corresponding to it gradually assumes a regulated and orderly form. And such regulation and order are themselves indispensable elements of any mode of pro-

<sup>37</sup> *GI*, p. 63; *We*, vol. 3, p. 48.

<sup>38</sup> *CM*, p. 132.

<sup>39</sup> *GI*, p. 62.

duction, provided that it is to assume social firmness and an independence from mere accident and arbitrariness.<sup>40</sup>

Thus the ascendance of the new class to power inaugurates another period of relative stability, eventually generating a repetition of the same pattern of change.

This general conception would be a wholly positivistic one were it not for the fact that Marx relates the occurrence of revolutionary change to the historical process as a whole. 'Every new class', Marx states, 'achieves its domination only on a broader basis than that of the previously dominant class, whereas the opposition of the non-dominant class against the new ruling class later develops all the more sharply and profoundly.'<sup>41</sup> The effect of the rise to power of the bourgeoisie is to introduce profound changes in the character of class relationships as compared to those extant in feudalism. Bourgeois society makes for a far broader realisation of human productive capacities than was feasible in previous periods of history. But this is only rendered possible by the formation of an increasingly numerous class of propertyless wage-labourers: bourgeois society universalises class relationships around a single class division, between bourgeoisie and proletariat. It is this which, in fact, provides for the fundamental difference between bourgeois society and the other forms of class society which have preceded it. Whereas previous revolutionary classes, once they have acquired power, have 'sought to protect the position they have acquired by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation', the proletariat cannot come to a position of domination 'except by abolishing [its] own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation'.<sup>42</sup>

According to Marx, the rise to power of the working-class culminates the historical changes wrought by bourgeois society. The development of bourgeois society fosters an extreme dislocation between the accomplishments of human productive powers and the alienation of the mass of the population from the control of the wealth which they have thus created. The supersession of capitalism, on the other hand, provides the circumstances in which it will be possible for man to recover his alienated self within a rational order which has freed itself from class domination. The economic presuppositions of this process are detailed in *Capital*.

<sup>40</sup> *Cap*, vol. 3, pp. 773-4; *We*, vol. 25, p. 801.

<sup>41</sup> *GI*, p. 63; *We*, vol. 3, p. 48.

<sup>42</sup> *CM*, p. 147.

## 4. The theory of capitalist development

### The theory of surplus value

Although much of *Capital* is concerned with economic analysis, Marx's overriding interest in the work is always in the dynamics of bourgeois society: the primary object of *Capital* is to disclose the 'economic law of motion' of this society, through an examination of the dynamics of the productive foundation upon which it rests.<sup>1</sup>

Capitalism, as Marx emphasises on the first page of *Capital*, is a system of commodity production. In the capitalist system producers do not simply produce for their own needs, or for the needs of individuals with whom they are in personal contact; capitalism involves a nation-wide, and often an international, exchange-market. Every commodity, Marx states, has a 'two-fold' aspect: its use-value on the one hand, and its exchange-value on the other. Use-value, which 'is realised only in the process of consumption', has reference to the needs which the properties of a commodity as a physical artifact can be employed to cater to.<sup>2</sup> An object can have use-value whether or not it is a commodity; while to be a commodity a product must have use-value, the reverse does not hold. 'Exchange-value' refers to the value a product has when offered in exchange for other products.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to use-value, exchange-value presupposes 'a definite economic relation', and is inseparable from a market on which goods are exchanged; it only has meaning in reference to commodities.

Now any object, whether it is a commodity or not, can only have value in so far as human labour power has been expanded to produce it: this is the core proposition of the labour theory of value which Marx takes over from Adam Smith and Ricardo.<sup>4</sup> It follows from this that both exchange-value and use-value must be directly related to the amount of labour embodied in the production of a commodity. It is clear, Marx says, that exchange-value cannot be

<sup>1</sup> Only the first volume of *Capital* was published in Marx's life-time, but Marx worked on all three volumes simultaneously. Volumes 2 and 3 were edited and published by Engels in 1885 and 1894 respectively. In the preface to the first volume, Marx speaks of a projected fourth volume, to deal with 'the history of theory'. Notes for this work were published by Kautsky between 1905 and 1910, as *Theorien über den Mehrwert*. Sections from this have been translated into English as *Theories of Surplus Value*, ed. Bonner & Burns (London, 1951). Two volumes of a full English translation have appeared (London, vol. 1, 1964; vol. 2, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Whenever Marx speaks of 'value' without qualification, he means 'exchange-value'.

<sup>4</sup> For an account of the development of the labour theory of value, see Ronald L. Meek: *Studies in the Labour Theory of Value* (London, 1956).

derived from use-value. This can be shown by the example of the exchange-value of two commodities such as corn and iron. A given quantity of corn is worth a specifiable quantity of iron. The fact that we can express the worth of these two products in terms of each other, and in quantified form, shows that we are using some common standard which is applicable to both. This common measure of value has nothing to do with the physical properties of corn or iron, which are *incommensurate*. Exchange-value must then rest upon some quantifiable characteristic of labour. There are obviously many differences between specific kinds of labour: the actual tasks involved in the work of growing corn are very different from those involved in manufacturing iron. Just as exchange-value abstracts from the specific characteristics of commodities, and treats them in abstract quantitative ratio, in the derivation of exchange-value we have to consider only 'abstract general labour', which can be measured in terms of the amount of time expended by the worker in the production of a commodity.

Abstract labour is the basis of exchange-value, while 'useful labour' is the basis of use-value. The two aspects of commodities are simply an expression of the dual character of labour itself – as labour *power*, the physical expenditure of the energy of the human organism, something common to all forms of productive activity; and as a definite kind of labour, a specific set of operations into which this energy is channelled, something peculiar to the production of particular commodities for specific uses.

On the one hand all labour is, speaking physiologically, an expenditure of human labour power, and in its character as similar or as abstract human labour it creates the value of commodities. On the other hand, all labour is the expenditure of human labour power in a special form and with a definite aim, and in this, its character of concrete useful labour, it produces use-value.<sup>5</sup>

'Abstract labour' is an historical category, since it is only applicable to commodity production. Its existence is predicated upon what are, for Marx, some of the intrinsic characteristics of capitalism. Capitalism is a far more fluid system than any which preceded it, demanding that the labour force should be highly mobile, and adaptable to different kinds of work; as Marx puts it, "'labour in general", labour *sans phrase*, the starting-point of modern political economy, becomes realised in practice'.<sup>6</sup>

There is an obvious problem which presents itself if abstract labour is to be measured in terms of units of time as the mode of calculating exchange-value. It would appear to follow from this that an idle worker, who takes a long while to produce a given item, would produce a more valuable commodity than an industrious man completing the same task in a shorter time.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Cap.* vol. 1, p. 47; *We*, vol. 23, p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 299.

<sup>7</sup> Skilled labour also offers a source of difficulty. Marx holds, however, that all skilled labour can be reduced to time units of unskilled or 'simple' labour. A skill normally represents the results of a certain period of training; to convert skilled labour

Marx stresses, however, that the concept applies not to any particular individual worker, but to the 'socially necessary' labour time. This is the amount of time required for the production of a commodity under the normal conditions of production, and with the 'average degree of skill and intensity' prevalent at a given time in a particular industry. The socially necessary labour time can be fairly readily determined, according to Marx, through empirical study. A sudden technological improvement can reduce the amount of socially necessary labour time required to produce a particular commodity, and will therefore lead to a corresponding diminution in its value.<sup>8</sup>

This whole analysis, including Marx's discussion of surplus value described below, is set out in the first volume of *Capital*.<sup>9</sup> It should be emphasised that Marx's treatment of value and surplus value at this point is deliberately phrased on a highly abstract level. Marx sets out to 'disregard all phenomena that hide the play' of the 'inner mechanism' of capitalism. Failure to appreciate this has given rise to numerous misconceptions, including the one that Marx allows no role at all to demand. For most of his discussion in volume 1 Marx assumes a situation in which supply and demand are in equilibrium. Marx does not ignore the importance of demand; but it follows from the labour theory of value that demand does not determine value, although it can affect prices.<sup>10</sup> For Marx, demand is most significant in relation to the allocation of the labour force to different sectors of the economy. If the demand for a certain commodity becomes particularly high, then producers of other goods will be stimulated to move into the production of that commodity. The increase in price following the heightened demand will then become reduced in the direction of its value.<sup>11</sup> But demand is not the independent variable some economists make of it: 'supply and demand presuppose the existence of different classes and sections of classes which divide the total revenue of a society and consume it among themselves as revenue, and, therefore, make up the demand created by revenue.'<sup>12</sup>

It follows from the analysis of exchange-value discussed above that products exchange at their values: that is, according to the amount of socially

into simple labour, it is necessary to assess the amount of labour (expended on his own part and by those who train him) which goes into the training procedure. But, in Marx's view, capitalism eventually tends to do away with skilled labour in any case, through progressive mechanisation. cf. Paul M. Sweezy: *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (New York, 1954), pp. 42-4.

<sup>8</sup> As an example of the impact of technological change in this direction, Marx cites the case of the English clothing industry. Here the introduction of power looms reduced by something like fifty per cent the labour time necessary to weave yarn into cloth. Of course a hand weaver still needed the same amount of time as before. 'but the product of one hour of his individual labour represented after the change only one-half an hour's social labour, and consequently fell to one-half its former value'. *Cap.*, vol. 1, p. 39; *We.*, vol. 23, p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 1, pp. 508ff.

<sup>10</sup> *SW*, vol. 1, pp. 84ff.

<sup>11</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 3, pp. 181-95. cf. *Meck.*, p. 178.

<sup>12</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 3, p. 191.

necessary labour time embodied in them.<sup>13</sup> Marx rejects the notion that capitalists derive their profits from any sort of dishonesty or deliberate underhand dealing. Although in actual buying or selling transactions a particular capitalist might make money by taking advantage of the vagaries of the market, such as a sudden increase in demand for his product, the existence of profit in the economy as a whole cannot be explained in this way. On the average, Marx holds, the capitalist buys labour, and sells commodities, at their real value. As he puts it, the capitalist 'must buy his commodities at their value, must sell them at their value, and yet at the end of the process must withdraw more value from circulation than he threw into it at starting'.<sup>14</sup>

This apparent paradox is resolved by Marx with reference to that historical condition which is the necessary basis of capitalism, the fact that workers are 'free' to sell their labour on the open market. What this signifies is that labour power is itself a commodity, which is bought and sold on the market. Thus its value is determined like that of any other commodity, by the labour time socially necessary for its production. Human labour power involves the expenditure of physical energy, which must be replenished. To renew the energy expended in labour, the worker must be provided with the requirements of his existence as a functioning organism – food, clothing, and shelter for himself and his family. The labour time socially necessary to produce the necessities of life of the worker is the value of the worker's labour power. The latter's value is, therefore, reducible to a specifiable quantity of commodities: those which the worker requires to be able to subsist and reproduce. 'The worker exchanges with capital his labour itself . . . he *alienates* it. The price he receives is the value of this alienation.'<sup>15</sup>

The conditions of modern manufacturing and industrial production allow the worker to produce considerably more, in an average working day, than is necessary to cover the cost of his subsistence. Only a proportion of the working day, that is, needs to be expended to produce the equivalent of the worker's own value. Whatever the worker produces over and above this is surplus value. If, say, the length of the working day is ten hours, and if the worker produces the equivalent of his own value in half that time, then the remaining five hours' work is surplus production, which may be appropriated by the capitalist. Marx calls the ratio between necessary and surplus labour the 'rate of surplus value' or the 'rate of exploitation'. The rate of surplus value, as with all of Marx's concepts, has a social rather than a biological reference. The labour time necessary to 'produce labour power' cannot be defined in purely physical terms, but has to be ascertained by reference to culturally expected standards of living in a society. 'Climatic and physical conditions' have an

<sup>13</sup> This statement is only true given the simplified model Marx employs in volume 1 of *Capital*; in the real world there is often considerable divergence between values and prices.

<sup>14</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 1, p. 166.

<sup>15</sup> *Gru.* pp. 270–1.

influence, but only in conjunction with 'the conditions under which, and consequently on the habits and degree of comfort in which, the class of free labourers has been formed'.<sup>16</sup>

Surplus value is the source of profit. Profit is, so to speak, the visible 'surface' manifestation of surplus value; it is 'a converted form of surplus value, a form in which its origin and the secret of its existence are observed and extinguished'.<sup>17</sup> The analysis which Marx offers in the first volume of *Capital* sets out to remove this disguise, and does not discuss the actual relationship between surplus value and profit, which in the empirical world is a complicated one. The amount the capitalist has to spend on hiring labour is only one part of the capital outlay he has to make in the productive process. The other part consists in the machinery, raw materials, maintenance of factory fittings, etc., necessary for production. That segment of capital laid out on such matters is 'constant capital', while that spent on wages is 'variable capital'. Only variable capital creates value; constant capital 'does not, in the process of production, undergo any quantitative alteration of value'.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the rate of surplus value, which is the ratio of surplus value to variable capital ( $s/v$ ), the rate of *profit* can only be calculated with reference to both variable and constant capital. The ratio of constant to variable capital constitutes the 'organic composition' of capital; since the rate of profit depends upon the organic composition of capital, it is lower than the rate of surplus value. The rate of profit is given by the formula  $p=s/c+v$ : the lower the ratio of expenditure on constant capital to that on variable capital, the higher the rate of profit.<sup>19</sup>

In the third volume of *Capital*, Marx relates the simplified theory of surplus value presented in volume 1 to actual prices. It is clear that, in the real world, the organic composition of capital varies widely from industry to industry. In some sectors of production, the amount of constant capital involved is far higher in relation to variable capital than in other sectors: for example, annual capital outlay on machinery and plant equipment in the iron and steel industry is much greater than it is in the clothing industry. Following the simplified model advanced in the first volume of *Capital*, this would lead to widely divergent rates of surplus value, and if profit were directly correlative to surplus value, would lead to marked variations in profits between different sectors of the economy. But such a state of affairs, except on a short-term basis, would be incompatible with the organisation of the capitalist economy in which capital always tends to flow into those channels which offer the highest levels of profit.

<sup>16</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 1, p. 171.

<sup>17</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 3, p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 1, p. 209.

<sup>19</sup> Marx assumes here that no rent is being paid by the capitalist to a landlord. As Marx puts it: 'landed property is taken as =0.' Marx moves on to the problem of ground-rent in the third volume of *Capital*.

Setting aside the assumptions made for analytic purposes in volume 1, therefore, Marx concludes that commodities do not generally sell at their values, but according to what he calls their 'prices of production'.<sup>20</sup> The total amount of profit in the economy is determined by the amount of surplus value created within it, but the share which each individual capitalist takes from this total is not proportionate to the rate of surplus value realised within his own enterprise. Capitalists share the total surplus value in proportion to their capital invested, not in ratio to the organic composition of that capital. 'Prices of production', in other words, the real prices of commodities, can be calculated on the basis of a division of the total social capital into the total surplus value. The price of production is equal to the 'cost price', or sum of expenditure actually incurred in production (the amount of constant capital used up in producing a commodity, together with capital expended on wages), plus the average rate of profit on the capital employed.

What are the influences which make commodities sell at their prices of production, and not at their values? Marx devotes a substantial part of volume 3 of *Capital* to discussion of this problem. Before the advent of capitalism, commodities do tend to sell at their values, but the competitive structure of capitalism breaks this down. 'Average profit' develops historically with the development of capitalism itself. If one sector of production, having a higher rate of variable to constant capital, creates a very high rate of surplus value and profit, then

... capital withdraws from spheres with low rates of profit and invades others which yield a higher profit. By means of this incessant outflow and inflow, in short, by its distribution among the various spheres in relation to a rise of the rate of profit here, and its fall there, it brings about a ratio of supply to demand such that the average profit in the various spheres of production becomes the same; values are converted into prices of production. This equilibration is accomplished by capital more or less perfectly to the degree that capitalist development is advanced in a certain nation: in other words, to the extent that conditions in the respective countries are adapted to the capitalist mode of production.<sup>21</sup>

There are two conditions which facilitate this process: fluidity of capital, and labour mobility. The first demands 'complete freedom of trade in the interior of society', and the eradication of feudal monopolistic privilege. It is further stimulated by the development of the credit system, which serves to concentrate capital instead of allowing it to remain in the hands of individual capitalists. The second condition, involving mobility of labour, rests upon a familiar set of circumstances: the 'freeing' of labour from proprietary and localised relations to the means of production, and the reduction of craft

<sup>20</sup> It is upon the relationship between values and prices that most criticism of Marx's economics has centred. cf Paul Sweezy: *Böhm-Bawerk's Criticism of Marx* (New York, 1949). Two recent discussions of Marx's economics are Murray Wolfson: *A Reappraisal of Marxian Economics* (New York, 1964); and Fred M. Gottheil: *Marx's Economic Predictions* (Evanston, 1966).

<sup>21</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 3, p. 192; *We.*, vol. 25, p. 206.

skills to unskilled work which allows workers to move from job to job without difficulty. The development of the average rate of profit is thus intrinsically bound up with the economic structure of capitalist production.

Marx continues to stress that the theory of surplus value presented in the first volume of *Capital* underlies the analysis given in volume 3. However complicated the relationship between prices and value may be, the former nevertheless rest upon the latter, and any increase or decrease in the total surplus value will affect prices of production. Most of the subsequent criticism of Marx's position offered by economists has centred upon the fact that prediction of prices is extremely difficult using Marx's theory, since the connection between values and prices is so convoluted. But it must be emphasised that, from Marx's standpoint, such prediction is of secondary importance: the whole weight of his theory is towards setting out the principles which underlie the operation of the capitalist economy. Marx's analysis moves upon the level of an attempt to undercut the influence which physical categories such as prices, rents, or rates of interest have in the theory of political economy, in order to expose the social relationships which lie at the root of them. As he expresses it,

The social character of activity, the social form of the product, and of the participation of the individual in production, appear as alienated, reified (*sachlich*) in relation to the individual... Universal exchange of activities and products, which has become the condition of existence of, and the mutual connection between, particular individuals, take the form of a thing, alienated from and independent of themselves.<sup>22</sup>

Marx's theory of capitalist development is founded upon the nature of capitalist expropriation as set out in the theory of surplus value. The general tenor of Marx's argument is that, while capitalism is originally structured around a free-market system in which commodities are allowed to 'find their own values' on the basis of individual entrepreneurial initiative, the immanent tendency of capitalist production undermines the empirical conditions upon which the capitalist economy is based.

### **The economic 'contradictions' of capitalist production**

In Marx's view, the search for profit is intrinsic to capitalism; 'the aim of capital is not to minister to certain wants, but to produce profit...'.<sup>23</sup> But at the same time there is rooted in the capitalist economy a structural tendency for the rate of profit to decline. Most of the classical economists accepted this notion; Marx's contribution, as expressed in his formulation of the 'law of the falling tendency of the rate of profit', derives from the integration of this theory with his analysis of the organic composition of capital, and the relation of the latter to surplus value. The total amount of profit in the capitalist

<sup>22</sup> *Gru.* p. 75. See below, pp. 228-9.

<sup>23</sup> *Cap.* vol. 3, p. 251.

economy depends upon the surplus value created within it: the ratio of constant to variable capital in the economy as a whole determines the average rate of profit. The rate of profit thus stands in inverse proportion to the organic composition of capital.

Since capitalism is founded upon the competitive search for profit, technological improvement, including above all the increasing mechanisation of production, is a major weapon of each capitalist in the battle for survival on the market, whereby an individual entrepreneur can increase his share of the available profit by producing at a cheaper rate than his competitors. But his success in obtaining increased profits leads other capitalists to follow suit by introducing similar technical improvements, thus producing a new (although equally temporary) equilibrium where, however, each capitalist has a higher ratio of capital expenditure on constant capital than before. Hence the overall consequence is a rise in the organic composition of capital, and a fall in the average rate of profit.

Of course, this does not necessarily entail a decline in the absolute total of profit in the economy; this may increase even though the *rate* of return falls. Moreover, there are various factors which Marx distinguishes as countering the tendency of the rate of profit to decline. These are those which either retard the relative increase of constant capital or, what is the other side of the coin, increase the rate of surplus value. A rise in expenditure on constant capital frequently goes along with an increase in the productivity of labour, which therefore effectively reduces the proportionate unit value of the constant capital, and thereby may keep the rate of profit stable or even raise it: 'with respect to the total capital, the value of the constant capital does not increase in the same proportion as its material volume. . .'.<sup>24</sup> Another mode of offsetting the declining rate of profit is via the feeding in of cheap materials through foreign trade, the result of which is to increase the rate of surplus value if these are used to supply the subsistence needs of workers, and to lower the value of constant capital. But Marx lays most stress upon those countervailing forces to the falling rate of profit which involve the intensified exploitation of labour. These include the expansion of the working-day, and the depression of wages below their value. Other things being equal the lengthening of the working-day, which was a definite empirical phenomenon during the early years of the nineteenth century, raises the rate of surplus value. The productivity of labour relative to constant capital can also be augmented, and the rate of surplus value increased, through making more intensive use of existing machinery – by, for example, speeding up its operation, or by utilising it for twenty-four hours a day through some kind of shift-work system. Enforced depreciation of wages is normally only a temporary expedient, and has no long-term effects upon the rate of profit. While employers treat wages as part of their costs, and will tend to pare them whenever pos-

<sup>24</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 3, p. 230. cf. also Sweezy: *Theory of Capitalist Development*, pp. 98ff.

sible, it follows from Marx's general analysis that wages are basically determined by marked forces, not by coercive restrictions on the part of capitalists.

The periodic crises which regularly occur in capitalism are, for Marx, the most evident manifestation of the internal 'contradictions' of the capitalist system. Marx did not, however, write a systematic discussion of the nature of crises, taking the view that crises are the end-result of various possible combinations of factors, and are not to be explained in terms of any simple causative process. He makes no attempt to trace the multiple chains of causation which actually precipitate crises: such a task could only be accomplished against the background of the general movements of capitalist production.<sup>25</sup> Marx's analysis is thus limited to an account of the basic factors in the capitalist economy which underlie its propensity to regular crises.

Where commodity production exists in forms of society prior to capitalism, particularly before the widespread use of money, it involves fairly direct bartering between individuals or groups who were generally aware of each other's needs, and who produced for those needs. In primitive forms of commodity production, in other words, exchange is controlled in the interests of use-values, and knowledge of wants furnishes a source of regulation connecting supply and demand. But as commodity production becomes more and more widespread, that is, as capitalism develops, this regulative tie is broken. The use of money plays an important part in this, allowing the parties to exchange transactions to act autonomously to a far greater degree than is possible in barter. Capitalism is thus in an important sense an 'anarchic' system,<sup>26</sup> because the market is not regulated by any definite agency relating production to consumption. It is also an intrinsically expanding system, the basic motor of which is the restless search for profit. Since the profit motive is dominant, any state of affairs involving a pronounced imbalance between the volume of commodities produced and their saleability at the average rate of profit, constitutes a crisis for the system. Capitalism is the first system in human history where a large volume of overproduction is possible. This is, of course, only overproduction in terms of the requisites of the capitalist economy, overproduction in terms of exchange-values and not use-values: the commodities which are 'unsaleable' could normally be made use of. But whenever a sufficient level of return on investment is not made, the *modus operandi* of capitalism is undermined. Production becomes restricted to a fraction of its potential in spite of the fact that 'not enough is produced to satisfy, in a decent and humane fashion, the wants of the great mass'.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Theories of Surplus Value*, ed. Bonner & Burns, pp. 376-91.

<sup>26</sup> This does not mean there is not 'order' in the operations of the market, but simply that the principles which govern the market operate outside of men's own conscious control, as if regulated by, in Adam Smith's famous phrase, 'an invisible hand'.

<sup>27</sup> *Cap*, vol. 3, p. 252; see also Marx's note on the 'contradictions' between the worker's position as producer, and his position as consumer. *Cap*, vol. 2, p. 316. Marx rejects the more naïve 'underconsumptionist' theories of his day. See his remarks on Rodbertus, *cap*, vol. 2, pp. 410-11.

A crisis is simply an expansion of production beyond what the market can absorb and still return an adequate rate of profit. Once overproduction occurs, even only in one segment of the economy, it can set into motion a vicious circle of reactions. As the rate of profit falls, investment declines, part of the labour force has to be laid off, which further diminishes consumer purchasing power, producing another decline in the rate of profit, and so on. The spiral continues until unemployment has increased to such a degree, and the wages of those still in work has been forced down to such a level, that there exist new conditions for the creation of an increased rate of surplus value, and thereby a stimulus to the resumption of investment. During the crisis, some of the less efficient enterprises will have gone out of business; those remaining can therefore take over their share of the market, and are in a position to begin a new period of expansion. Thus the cycle is renewed, and another upward phase gets under way.

Crises therefore do not represent a 'break-down' of the capitalist system, but on the contrary form the regulating mechanism which enables the system to survive the periodic fluctuations to which capitalism is subject. The effect of a crisis is to restore equilibrium, and make further growth possible. As Marx expresses it, crises are 'momentary and forcible solutions of the existing contradictions. They are violent eruptions which for a time restore the disturbed equilibrium.'<sup>28</sup> Since the tendency of the rate of profit to decline is ever present, there is in any case a pressure upon profits at all stages of capitalist development. The effect of a crisis is to further the centralisation of capital, temporarily consolidating the system.<sup>29</sup> Crises are endemic in capitalism, because while the whole impetus of capitalist production is towards 'an unconditioned development of the productive forces of society', the relations of production, founded upon an exploitative class relationship, are organised around the expansion of capital alone. Thus Marx reaches his famous conclusion:

The *real barrier* of capitalist production is *capital itself*. It is that capital and its self-extension appear as the starting and closing point, as the motive and the purpose of production ; that production is merely production for *capital*, and not vice versa, the means of production the means for a constant expansion of the life-process of the *society* of producers.<sup>30</sup>

### The 'pauperisation' thesis

It has sometimes been assumed that Marx conceives the final dissolution of capitalism as taking the shape of an enormous crisis from which the system cannot recover. While Marx notes in *The Communist Manifesto* that crises 'in their periodic recurrence ever more threateningly place the existence of the whole of bourgeois society in question', a final ruinous crisis is nowhere

<sup>28</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 3, p. 244.

<sup>29</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 2, pp. 75-7.

<sup>30</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 3, p. 245; *We.*, vol. 25, p. 260.

specifically predicted in his writings.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, such a prediction is difficult to reconcile with the conception of the re-equilibrating function of crises. While Marx certainly believed that capitalism could not perpetuate itself indefinitely, the nature of its dissolution depends both upon the laws which govern its development and upon specific historical circumstances which cannot themselves be known beforehand. Crises do, however, play an important role in fostering revolutionary consciousness, because they make dramatically evident the common class situation of the proletariat, the more so because they tend to occur as a sharp recession following a period of relative prosperity for the working class during which unemployment is low and wages are high.<sup>32</sup>

It is only rarely in the capitalist economy that conditions of near full employment prevail. The existence of a group of chronically unemployed, the industrial 'reserve army', is necessary to capitalism. Marx has shown that it is an essential feature of capitalism that labour-power is itself a commodity; but labour-power clearly differs from other commodities in that there is no obvious factor which prevents a wide divergence of its price from its value. If the price of a commodity of the ordinary kind goes up, then capital will tend to flow into the production of that commodity, and will bring it down in the direction of its value.<sup>33</sup> But no one can 'produce' more labour if its price goes up. It is here that Marx introduces the concept of the reserve army, or as he sometimes calls it, the 'relative surplus population'. The industrial reserve army, whose ranks are filled mainly by workers who become redundant through mechanisation, acts as a constant depressant upon wages. During periods of prosperity, when the demand for labour increases, part of the reserve army becomes absorbed into the labour force, and thus holds wages down; in other times, it provides a potential source of cheap labour which inhibits any attempt of the working class to improve their lot. The reserve army is 'the lever of capitalistic accumulation', and is 'a condition of existence of the capitalist mode of production'.<sup>34</sup>

The analysis of the position of the reserve army of surplus labour is closely related to Marx's discussion of the physical poverty in which a considerable segment of the working class is condemned to exist in capitalism. Much controversy has centred round the so-called 'pauperisation' or 'emiseration' thesis, and this has formed the focus of many critical attacks upon Marx's prognosis of the future of capitalism.<sup>35</sup> In analysing this question, there are

<sup>31</sup> *CM*, p. 33; *We*, vol. 4, pp. 467-8. The nearest Marx comes to this is in *Gru*, p. 636.

<sup>32</sup> *Cap*, vol. 2, p. 411.

<sup>33</sup> This analysis, given in volume 1 of *Capital*, is in terms of the simplified model of value.

<sup>34</sup> *Cap*, vol. 1, p. 632.

<sup>35</sup> It is an undeniable fact that living standards for the great majority of the working population have risen in the capitalist societies of western Europe and the USA over the past one hundred years. There is a theoretical point here of some importance, which has been noted by various critics. According to Marx's own theory,

two themes in Marx's discussion which have to be distinguished, and it is the tendency to assimilate these into a single 'prediction' concerning the living standards of the working class which underlies the common misreading of Marx on this matter. One of these themes concerns the theory that the course of capitalist development is characterised by increasing relative disparity between the earnings of the working class and the income of the capitalist class; the second is that the development of capitalism produces a larger and larger reserve army, the majority of which are forced to live in extreme poverty. These two trends are bound up with one another, since it is the existence of the 'relative surplus population' which prevents wages from rising far above their value. But the confusion of the two has led to the quite unwarranted conclusion that Marx believed that the whole body of the working class would increasingly become depressed into increasingly severe physical poverty. Marx speaks of the 'increasing exploitation' of the worker as capitalism proceeds, but it is clear that the rate of exploitation (rate of surplus value) can increase without necessarily entailing any change in the real wages of the majority of the working class.<sup>36</sup> With regard to the increasing relative disparity between the earnings of labour and capital, Marx's main thesis is simply, in accord with the general theory of surplus value advanced in *Capital*, that while the capitalist class accumulates more and more wealth, the wages of the working class can never rise far above subsistence level.<sup>37</sup> What Marx does specify as the consequences of capitalism for the working class as a whole in *Capital* involves reference to the alienating effects of the division of labour, which serve to 'mutilate the worker into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy the content of work by his agony, and alienate (*entfremden*) him from the spiritual potentialities of the labour-process...'.<sup>38</sup>

It is, however, the increase in the 'relative mass of the industrial reserve army' which produces an extension of chronic pauperism; Marx calls this the 'absolute general law of capitalist accumulation', noting that 'like all other laws it is modified in its working by many circumstances'. Pauperism is the 'hospital of the active labour-army and the dead weight of the industrial re-

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profits show a tendency to decline; now if it happens that the rate of surplus value remains the same, rising productivity must produce an increase in the real wages of labour. Robinson argues: 'Marx can only demonstrate a falling tendency in profits by abandoning his argument that real wages tend to be constant.' Joan Robinson: *An Essay on Marxian Economics* (London, 1966), p. 36.

<sup>36</sup> If productivity increases. But see note 35, above.

<sup>37</sup> Marx makes the point that, even under those conditions of rapid capitalist expansion which are most favourable to the working class, increases in wages never do more than parallel increased profits; thus even when standards of living of the working class rise during a period of boom in the economy, those of the capitalist class rise equally, maintaining the differential. *SW*, vol. 1, pp. 94-8.

<sup>38</sup> *Cap*, vol. 1, p. 645; *We*, vol. 23, p. 674.

serve army'.<sup>39</sup> Most of the worst forms of material exploitation are concentrated in this latter group, among whom there develops an 'accumulation of misery, agony of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutality, moral degradation...'.<sup>40</sup> Thus the contradictory character of capitalism manifests itself in the accumulation of wealth 'at one pole', and of poverty and misery at the other.

### **Concentration and centralisation**

The rising organic composition of capital which takes place as capitalism proceeds is intimately connected with a trend towards the centralisation and concentration of capital. 'Concentration' refers to the process whereby, as capital accumulates, individual capitalists succeed in expanding the amount of capital under their control. Centralisation, on the other hand, refers to the merging of existing capitals, 'a change in the distribution of capital already to hand'.<sup>41</sup> The effect of both is to lead to larger and larger productive units. The competitive character of capitalism entails that producers must constantly strive to undercut the prices of their rivals. Those capitalists controlling the larger organisations enjoy various advantages over the small producer which allow them, by and large, to triumph over the latter. The greater the resources at the command of an individual entrepreneur, the more efficiently he can produce, since he can introduce economies of scale, and can more easily withstand set-backs such as those which follow from temporary contractions of the market. Thus as a general rule, the larger units tend to drive smaller ones out of business and to absorb their capital.

Centralisation is further promoted by the credit system, the most important sector of which is banking. A bank both centralises the money-capital of the lenders and also makes for centralisation of the borrowers, while the banks themselves also tend to become linked to form a single financial system. This whole process 'is finally transformed into an enormous social mechanism for the centralisation of capitals'.<sup>42</sup> The expansion of the credit system, while forming 'one of the most effective vehicles of crises and swindle' within the capitalist system, at the same time removes the distribution of capital from the hands of individual capitalists. The credit system 'does away with the private character of capital and thus contains in itself, but only in itself, the abolition of capital itself'. By introducing various forms of circulating credit which serve instead of money, the banking system shows that 'money is in reality nothing but a particular expression of the social character of labour and its products...'. As it exists, the credit system is itself a capitalistic enterprise, since it is organised on the basis of private profit, which comes from

<sup>39</sup> *Cap*, vol. 1, p. 644. Capitalism 'overworks a part of the labouring population and keeps the other part as a reserve army, half or entirely pauperised'. *Theories of Surplus Value*, ed. Bonner & Burns, p. 352.

<sup>40</sup> *Cap*, vol. 1, p. 645; *We*, vol. 23, p. 675.

<sup>41</sup> *Cap*, vol. 1, p. 625.

<sup>42</sup> *Cap*, vol. 1, p. 626.

interest levied on loans; but because it develops the ground for the centralised co-ordination of the economy, the credit system 'will serve as a powerful lever during the transition from the capitalist mode of production to the mode of production of associated labour...'.<sup>43</sup>

The expansion of the credit system goes hand in hand with a particular form of centralisation of corporate capital: that represented in the development of joint-stock companies. This is the type of industrial organisation, according to Marx, which is most compatible with large-scale centralisation, and it represents 'the ultimate development of capitalist production'. The joint-stock company, which serves to effect a separation between the individual capitalist and the productive organisation, represents 'the abolition of the capitalist mode of production within the capitalist mode of production itself'.<sup>44</sup> The separation between the owners of capital and the managers demonstrates the superfluousness of the former group, who now play no direct part in the productive process. In the joint-stock company, the social character of production has become apparent, and hence exposes as a 'contradiction' the fact that a few individuals are able, through their own ownership of capital, to appropriate much of the wealth that is produced. Nevertheless, the joint-stock company is only a transitional form since, as it is still connected with interest-bearing capital, it continues to be 'ensnared in the boundaries of capitalism'. Moreover, the development of very large companies of this sort can lead to monopoly control of particular sectors of industry, creating a basis for various kinds of new exploitative relationships.<sup>45</sup>

*Capital* shows in detail that, as in the case of the society which preceded it in western European history, capitalism is an inherently unstable system, built upon antagonisms than can only be resolved through changes which eventually undermine it. These contradictions derive first of all from its class character: from the asymmetrical relationship between wage-labour and capital. The operation of the capitalist mode of production inevitably drives the system towards its dissolution. Here again Marx speaks of the *Aufhebung* of capitalism; the historical tendency towards the 'abolition' of the capitalist mode of production must not be thought of as the wholesale destruction of capitalism, so that socialism has to 'start anew'. On the contrary, the imminent trend of movement of the capitalist system generates the social conditions which provide for its dialectical transcendence.

In these terms, the question of the 'inevitability' of the revolution poses no 'epistemological' (as opposed to 'practical') problems. The process of

<sup>43</sup> The preceding four quotations are all from *Cap.*, vol. 3, p. 593.

<sup>44</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 3, p. 429.

<sup>45</sup> In the shape of 'a new financial aristocracy, a new variety of parasites in the shape of promoters, speculators and simply nominal directors; a whole system of swindling and cheating by means of corporation promotion, stock issuance, and stock speculation'. This is 'private production without the control of private property'. *Cap.*, vol. 3, p. 429.

development of capitalism engenders the objective social changes which, in inter-relationship with the growing class-awareness of the proletariat, creates the active consciousness necessary to transform society through revolutionary *Praxis*.<sup>46</sup> The relative poverty of the mass of the working class, the physical misery of the 'reserve army', and the rapid diminution in wages and upsurge of unemployment which occur in crises, all provide a growing reservoir of revolutionary potential. The industrial system itself provides a source of perception of community of interest, and a basis for collective organisation, since the factory concentrates large numbers of workers together in one place. Workers' organisations begin on a local level, but eventually merge to form national units. The self-consciousness of the proletariat expands progressively along with the undermining of the position of the entrepreneurial capitalist by the centralisation and concentration of capital. The conjunction of these circumstances makes possible the achievement of socialist society.

The whole corpus of Marx's writings contains no more than fragmentary or passing references to the nature of the society which will supplant capitalism. In separating his own position from that of 'utopian' socialism, Marx refuses to offer a comprehensive plan for the society of the future. The new social order, as the dialectical transcendence of capitalism, will be organised according to principles which can only be vaguely glimpsed by those who live in the present form of society. The construction of detailed plans of the future society is an enterprise which relapses into philosophical idealism, because such schemes have no reality save in the mind of the thinker. Consequently, most of what Marx does have to say about the new society concerns the stage of its initial formation, in which it is 'still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges'.<sup>47</sup>

### **The transcendence of capitalism**

The main sources from which insight into Marx's views on socialist society may be derived, embrace two widely separated points in his career. The first occurs in the 1844 *Manuscript*, the second in the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme', written in 1875. The terminology of the second is more direct and down to earth, but in outline the views expressed in the two writings are similar.<sup>48</sup> The first stage of socialism, Marx emphasises, is one in which the *latent* characteristics of bourgeois society are made *manifest*: in other words, in which the emergent properties of capitalism detailed in *Capital* are brought to their fullest development. Thus the socialisation of production, already

<sup>46</sup> See Georg Lukács: *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (Berlin, 1932), pp. 229ff.

<sup>47</sup> SW, vol. 2, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> cf. Avineri, pp. 220-39. However, it is a mistake to identify too closely, as Avineri does, Marx's early discussion of 'crude communism' with the later treatment of the transitional stage in the abolition of bourgeois society. Marx's discussion of the transitional stage is prospective, whereas 'crude communism' is identified in a retrospective fashion as characteristic of the early stages of socialist *theory*. Crude communism is not the theory of the transitional stage.

implicit in capitalism in the shape of the growing centralisation of the market, is completed by putting an end to private property. In this phase, property becomes collectively owned, and wages are distributed according to a fixed principle. Out of the total social product, certain amounts are allocated to cover collective needs of the administration of production, the running of schools, health facilities, and so on; while each worker

receives back from society – after the deductions have been made – exactly what he gives to it . . . He receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such and such an amount of labour (after deducting from his labour for the common funds), and with this certificate he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as costs the same amount of labour.<sup>49</sup>

Such a social reorganisation, however, still preserves the underlying principles of bourgeois society, since it continues to assess human relationships in terms of an objective standard. In other words, it preserves the treatment of labour as an exchange value, but instead of this being confined to a class group (the proletariat), this now becomes universalised. At this stage, men are still 'regarded *only as workers* and nothing more is seen in them, everything else being ignored':<sup>50</sup> 'The role of *worker* is not abolished, but is extended to all men. The relation of private property remains the relation of the community to the world of things.'<sup>51</sup> This stage preserves a society in which the subject is dominated by the object, in which alienation is still confused with objectification.

What is true of production also holds for the sphere of politics. Here again, Marx's most important discussions span the whole length of his career: the analysis given in the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme' complements that developed in the early critical evaluation of Hegel's treatment of the state. That the substance of Marx's views is the same in both of these sources is indicated by his attack upon the call for the 'freeing of the basis of the State' embodied in the Gotha Programme. Marx's criticism here takes the form of a repetition of the main point made over thirty years earlier in relation to Hegel. The state is already almost perfectly 'free' in Germany, Marx points out: the objective of the workers' movement must not be to 'free' the state from society, but on the contrary to convert the state 'from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it. . .'.<sup>52</sup> However, the transitional phase following the initial abolition of capitalism will again involve the full realisation of the principles only partially or imperfectly developed in bourgeois society itself. The 'dictatorship of the proletariat' constitutes this intermediate stage, and represents a concentration of the political power which already exists in a more diffuse manner in bourgeois society. This makes possible the implementation of the programme of the centralisation of production and distribution outlined previously: 'The proletariat will use

<sup>49</sup> SW, vol. 2, p. 23.  
<sup>51</sup> EW, p. 153.

<sup>50</sup> SW, vol. 2, p. 24.  
<sup>52</sup> SW, vol. 2, p. 32.

its political domination to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the dominant class, and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible.'<sup>53</sup>

'Political' power only disappears when this stage has been completed. The abolition of the state, for Marx, does not, of course, involve a sudden 'reversal' in social organisation whereby the concentrated form of the state described above is subsequently eradicated. Rather, the dialectical transformation of the state is accomplished by the subordination of state to society in such a way that the administration of public affairs is mediated through the organisation of society as a whole. Marx discerns a framework for this process in the optative structure of the Paris Commune. The relevant features are several: the Commune was to be composed of councillors selected on the basis of universal suffrage, and 'was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time'; police, judiciary and other officials were similarly 'to be elective, responsible, and revocable'.<sup>54</sup> Such a form of social organisation is predicated upon the disappearance of the class character of the state, which in turn makes possible the disappearance of the state itself as an entity separate to civil society. It should be evident how far removed this viewpoint is from anarchism, with which, *quid pro quo*, it is frequently identified. In anarchist theory, the state as such is evil, and is to be literally dismantled, since it expresses the coercive authority of some men over others. Marx's attitude towards the state is integrated with his views upon capitalist society generally; the bourgeois state, in spite of its coercive character, is a necessary element in providing the social foundation for the realisation of the form of society which will transcend capitalism. Nor is Marx's standpoint to be equated with the utilitarian theory of the state, according to which the state has no function except for the regulation of economic contracts.<sup>55</sup> According to Marx, such a conception simply perpetuates the 'war of all against all' in civil society. For him, the abolition of the state is only one aspect of a broad, and extended, transformation of society.

The transitional phase of the new society, since it involves the universalisation of the inherent tendencies of bourgeois society, can be prospectively described in at least some degree of detail. The same does not apply to the society which has fully transcended capitalism, and consequently Marx only sketches in broad strokes the characteristics of the second stage of communism. In its transitional stage, the society which replaces the bourgeois form is already a classless society, since private property is eliminated. But the rule of material goods over human life as a whole, and thus the overcoming of alienation, can only be achieved by the abolition of the division of labour as

<sup>53</sup> *CM*, p. 160; *We*, vol. 4, p. 481.

<sup>54</sup> *SW*, vol. 1, pp. 519-20.

<sup>55</sup> cf. Durkheim's treatment of this matter in *Soc*, pp. 52ff.

it exists in bourgeois society. The society of the future, Marx says in *Capital*, will replace the worker of today 'by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labours'.<sup>56</sup> This will overcome the various dualities which, according to Marx, are the outcome of the differentiation entailed by the division of labour: between town and country, and between intellectual and manual labour. This is the background to the famous passage in *The German Ideology*:

for as soon as the division of labour begins to come into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can be accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for one to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.<sup>57</sup>

The predominantly agrarian occupations which Marx uses by means of illustration appear to give this vision a wholly unrealistic connotation when juxtaposed with the facts of industrial production. But Marx retains the notion of the *Aufhebung* of the division of labour in all of his writings which mention the future society, and, in fact, conceives this to be possible through the *expansion* of mechanised production. Again, this represents a transposition of tendencies already extant in capitalism, in the shape of automated production, which releases men from the present requisites of the division of labour:

In proportion to the development of large-scale industry, the creation of real wealth depends less upon labour-time and the quantity of labour expended than upon the power of the technique employed during the labour-time. . . Human labour then no longer appears as circumscribed by the production process; rather, man relates himself to this process merely as a supervisor and controller.<sup>58</sup>

The abolition of the division of labour is both the prerequisite to and the expression of the transcendence of alienation. In socialist society, social relationships are no longer held under the sway of the objects which are the result of human creation.<sup>59</sup>

In this most basic aspect as in others, socialist society is predicated upon the historical development of capitalism. This vital aspect of Marx's thought has often been obscured. The paeans which *The Communist Manifesto* offers

<sup>56</sup> *Cap.*, vol. 1, p. 488.

<sup>57</sup> *GI*, p. 45; *We*, vol. 3, p. 33.

<sup>58</sup> *Gru*, p. 592; cf. also *Poverty of Philosophy*, p. 121: 'What characterises the division of labour in the automatic workshop is that labour has there completely lost its specialised character. But the moment every special development stops, the need for universality, the tendency towards an integral development of the individual begins to be felt.'

<sup>59</sup> *EW*, p. 155.

to the bourgeoisie are well known: 'It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals...'<sup>60</sup> The point of this, however, is not the sheerly technological accomplishment of capitalism: rather, the technological expansion of capitalism is symptomatic of the 'universal tendency'<sup>61</sup> of bourgeois society which distinguishes it from all previous social formations. Bourgeois society replaces the relatively autonomous local communities characteristic of prior types of society by a division of labour which draws the disparate cultural and even national groupings which formerly existed into the same social and economic system. At the same time as it expands the range of human interdependence, the spread of bourgeois society sweeps away the particular cultural myths and traditions under which men have lived from the beginning of time. Ultimately, bourgeois society brings the whole of mankind, for the first time in history, within the purview of a single social order, and is genuinely 'world-historical'.

But this is only achieved through the action of the market and the transformation of all personal ties of dependence (such as existed in feudal bonds of fealty) into exchange-value. Seen in this light, it is easy to understand why much of the controversy over the value-price problem between volumes 1 and 3 of *Capital* is essentially irrelevant to the objectives of the work as a whole, which are to document this metamorphosis of human relationships into phenomena of the market. The analysis given in the three volumes of *Capital* examines in detail the alienative effects of the progressive development of capitalism, and shows how the universalisation of social relationships achieved by bourgeois society is only accomplished by their transmutation into class relationships: 'The limitation of capital is that this whole development takes place in a contradictory manner, and that the elaboration of the productive forces, of universal wealth, science, etc., appears as the *alienation* of the individual worker from himself...'.<sup>62</sup>

Since its very core is founded upon an antagonistic relationship between capital and wage-labour, which by its very operation universalises the worker *only in a condition of alienation*, capitalism contains within it forces which both propel it towards its own demise and prepare the way for its transcendence.

<sup>60</sup> CM, p. 135.

<sup>61</sup> Gru, pp. 438-41. As Mandel remarks: 'The socialisation of production under the capitalist system is the most important and progressive effect of the generalisation of the capitalist mode of production.' Ernest Mandel: *Marxist Economic Theory* (London, 1968), vol. 1, p. 170.

<sup>62</sup> Gru, p. 440.