

geddon upon the Bible; it is quite another to deduce this event from allegedly scientific laws. Setting forth the specifics of this engine of history was to occupy Karl Marx for the rest of his life.

Although Marx found Feuerbach indispensable for adopting a thoroughgoing atheist and materialist positions, Marx soon found that Feuerbach had not gone nearly far enough. Even though Feuerbach was a philosophical communist, he basically believed that if man forswore religion, then his alienation from his self would be over. To Marx, religion was only one of the problems. The entire world of man (the *Menschenwelt*) was alienating, and had to be radically overthrown, root and branch. Only apocalyptic destruction of this world of man would permit true human nature to be realized. Only then would the existing 'un-man' (*Unmensch*) truly become man (*Mensch*). As Marx thundered in the fourth of his 'theses on Feuerbach', 'one must proceed to destroy [the] 'earthly family' [as it is] 'both in theory and in practice'.<sup>27</sup>

In particular, declared Marx, true man, as Feuerbach had argued, is a 'communal being' (*Gemeinwesen*) or 'species being' (*Gattungswesen*). Although the state as it exists must be negated or transcended, man's participation in the state operates as such a communal being. The main problem comes in the private sphere, the market, or 'civil society', in which un-man acts as an egoist, as a private person, treating others as means, and not collectively as masters of their fate. And in existing society, unfortunately, civil society is primary, while the state, or 'political community', is secondary. What must be done to realize the full nature of mankind is to transcend the state and civil society by politicizing all of life, by making all of man's actions collective. Then real individual man will become a true and full 'species being'.<sup>28</sup>

But only a revolution, an orgy of destruction, can accomplish this task. And here, Marx harkened back to the call for total destruction that had animated his vision of the world in poems of his youth. Indeed, in a speech in London in 1856, Marx was to give graphic and loving expression to this goal of his 'praxis'. He mentioned that in Germany in the Middle Ages there existed a secret tribunal called the *Vehmgericht*. He then explained: 'If a red cross was seen marked on a house, people knew that its owner was doomed by the *Vehm*. All the houses of Europe are now marked with the mysterious red cross. History is the judge – its executioner the proletariat'.<sup>29</sup>

Marx, in fact, was not satisfied with the philosophical communism to which he and Engels had separately been converted by the slightly older Left Hegelian Moses Hess (1812–75) in the early 1840s. To Hess's communism, Marx, by the end of 1843, added the crucial emphasis on the *proletariat*, not simply as an economic class, but as destined to become the 'universal class' when communism was achieved. As we have indicated above, Marx actually acquired his vision of the proletariat as the key to the communist revolution

from the 1842 work of Lorenz von Stein, an enemy of socialism, who interpreted the socialist and communist movements as rationalizations of the class interests of the proletariat. Marx discovered in Stein's attack the 'scientific' engine for the inevitable coming of the communist revolution. The proletariat, the most 'alienated' and allegedly 'propertyless' class, would be the key.

Marx had now worked out the outline of his secular messianic vision: a material dialectic of history, with the final apocalyptic revolution to be achieved by the proletariat. But how specifically was this to be accomplished? Vision was not enough. What scientific laws of history could bring about this cherished goal? Fortunately, Marx had a crucial ingredient for his attempted solution close at hand: in the Saint-Simonian concept of human history as driven by an inherent struggle among economic classes. The class struggle along with historical materialism was to be an essential ingredient for the Marxian material dialectic.

### **11.6 Marx as utopian**

Despite Marx's claim to be a 'scientific socialist', scorning all other socialists whom he dismissed as moralistic and 'utopian', it should be clear that Marx himself was even more in the messianic utopian tradition than were the competing 'utopians'. For Marx not only sought a future society that would put an end to history: he claimed to have found the path towards that utopia inevitably determined by the 'laws of history'.

But a utopian, and a fierce one, Marx certainly was. A hallmark of every utopia is a militant desire to put an end to history, to freeze mankind in a static state, to put an end to diversity and man's free will, and to order everyone's life in accordance with the utopian's totalitarian plan. Many early communists and socialists set forth their fixed utopias in great and absurd detail, determining the size of everyone's living quarters, the food they would eat, etc. Marx was not silly enough to do that, but his entire system, as Thomas Molnar points out, is 'the search of the utopian mind for the definitive stabilization of mankind or, in gnostic terms, its reabsorption in the timeless'. For Marx, his quest for utopia was, as we have seen, an explicit attack on God's creation and a ferocious desire to destroy it. The idea of crushing the many, the diverse facets of creation, and of returning to an allegedly lost unity with God began, as we have seen, with Plotinus. As Molnar sums up:

In this view, existence itself is a wound on nonbeing. Philosophers from Plotinus to Fichte and beyond have held that the reabsorption of the polichrome universe in the eternal One would be preferable to creation. Short of this solution, they propose to arrange a world in which change is brought under control so as to put

an end to a disturbingly free will and to society's uncharted moves. They aspire to return from the linear Hebrew-Christian concept to the Greco-Hindu cycle – that is, to a changeless, timeless permanence.

The triumph of unity over diversity means that, for the utopians, including Marx, 'civil society, with its disturbing diversity, can be abolished'. Molnar then makes the interesting point that when Hayek and Popper rebut Marxism by demonstrating

that no mind – not even that of a Politburo equipped with supercomputers – can overview the changes of the marketplace and its myriad components of individuals and their interactions, they miss the mark. Marx agrees with them. But, he wants to abolish the marketplace and its economic as well as intellectual ('legal, political, philosophical, religious, aesthetic') components, so as to restore a simple world – a monochrome landscape. His economics is not economics but an instrument of total control.<sup>30</sup>

All well and good, but, as the history of communist countries has shown, there are not many followers of Marx who are willing to settle for a world where no economic calculation is possible, and therefore where production collapses and universal starvation ensues.

Substituting in Marx for God's will or the Hegelian dialectic of the world-spirit or the absolute idea, is monist materialism, in its central assumption, as Molnar puts it, 'that the universe consists of matter plus some sort of one-dimensional law immanent in matter'. In that case, 'man himself is reduced to a complex but manipulable material aggregate, living in the company of other aggregates, and forming increasingly complex super aggregates called societies, political bodies, churches'. The alleged laws of history, then, are derived by scientific Marxists as supposedly evident and immanent within this matter itself.

The Marxian process towards utopia, then, is man acquiring insights into his own true nature, and then rearranging the world to accord with that true nature. Engels, in fact, explicitly proclaimed the Hegelian concept of the man-God: 'Hitherto the question has always stood: What is God? – and German [Hegelian] philosophy has resolved it as follows: God is man...Man must now arrange the world in a *truly* human way, according to the demands of his *nature*'.<sup>31</sup>

But this process is rife with self-contradictions; for example, and centrally, how can mere matter gain insights into his (its?) nature? As Molnar puts it: 'for how can matter gather insights? And if it has insights, it is not entirely matter, but matter *plus*'.

In this allegedly inevitable process, of arriving at the proletarian communist utopia after the proletarian class becomes conscious of its true nature, what is supposed to be Karl Marx's own role? In Hegelian theory, Hegel

himself is the final and greatest world-historical figure, the man-God of man-Gods. Similarly, Marx in his view stands at a focal point of history as the man who brought to the world the crucial knowledge of man's true nature and of the laws of history, thereby serving as the 'midwife' of the process that would put an end to history. Thus Molnar:

Like other utopian and gnostic writers, Marx is much less interested in the stages of history up to the present (the egotistic *now* of all utopian writers) than in the final stages when the stuff of time becomes more concentrated, when the drama approaches its denouement. In fact, the utopian writer conceives of history as a process leading to himself since he, the ultimate *comprehensor*, stands in the center of history. It is natural that things accelerate during his own lifetime and come to a watershed: *he* looms large between the Before and the After.<sup>32</sup>

The achievement of the Marxist utopia is, moreover, dependent upon leadership and rule by the Marxian cadre, the possessors of the special knowledge of the laws of history, who will proceed to transform mankind into the new socialist man by the use of force. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the existence of evil is accounted for by the free will of the individual. In monist, determinist systems, on the other hand, all history is supposed to be determined by fixed laws, and therefore evil can only be *apparent*, while really acting in a deeper sense as a servant of the higher good. All apparent evil must be truly good, and serve some sort of determined plan, whether it be the unfolding of the God-man or an atheistic version thereof. Coercing people by a cadre in order to create a new socialist man cannot be evil or unacceptable in a just society. On the contrary, it is the duty of the Marxist vanguard, they who are the servants of the next inevitable stage of history, to impose such a regime. This is a duty to history, that alleged entity to which the cadre are in service, and who (which?) is destined to judge the actions of the past, to judge them as moral or immoral, as either advancing the birth of the allegedly inevitable historical future, or of thwarting such birth. In short, history or the cadre has the privilege and duty of judging any person or movement as being either 'progressive' (i.e. advancing the determined march of history) or 'reactionary' (retarding that inevitable march).

### 11.7 Notes

1. On alienation in Marx as rooted in exchange and the division of labour, and not simply in the capitalist wage-relation, see Paul Craig Roberts, *Alienation and the Soviet Economy* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1971); and Paul Craig Roberts and Matthew A. Stephenson, *Marx's Theory of Exchange, Alienation, and Crisis* (2nd ed., New York: Praeger, 1983).
2. In extreme variants, such as the gnostic heretics of the early Christian era, the creation of matter was itself pure evil, an act by the Devil, or Demiurge, with spirit remaining divine.
3. Robert C. Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 39.

4. Ibid., p. 41. These and other early essays by Hegel were first published as a collection of *Early Theological Writings* in 1907.
5. Ibid., pp. 53–4.
6. Quoted in Raymond Plant, *Hegel* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 120.
7. Hegel was also influenced by Stuart's great rival, Adam Smith, but unfortunately in the wrong direction. From the *Wealth of Nations* Hegel concluded that the division of labour had brought man the misery of specialization, alienation, etc. More interestingly, from Smith's friend the Rev. Adam Ferguson's famous line on events that are 'the product of human action but not of human design', Hegel got the idea of each individual agent of the world-soul's pursuing the world-soul's purposes without conscious intent. This is Hegel's famous concept of the 'cunning of reason' at work through history.  
 Ferguson, in turn, arrived at his famous phrase, not by analysis of the free market, as Hayek implies, but from an attempt to show that the revolt in Scotland in 1745, which almost succeeded in bringing the dread Catholic Jacobites to power, was unconsciously pursuing God's benevolent purpose of shaking Scottish Presbyterians – assumed of course to be God's true Church – out of their religious apathy. In short, the Scottish Catholics, though consciously pursuing evil ends, were unwittingly carrying out God's designs. Out of apparent evil, good. Similarly, when Hegel later hailed Napoleon as the 'world-historical' man, he saw Napoleon as intending to pursue evil but unconsciously furthering God's benevolent design. See Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 40–44.
8. Plant, op. cit., note 6, p. 96.
9. See ibid., pp. 122, 123, 181.
10. Tucker, op. cit., note 3, pp. 54–5. E.F. Carritt points out that, for Hegel, 'freedom' is 'desiring above all things to serve the success and glory of their State. In desiring this they are desiring that the will of God should be done...'. If an individual thinks he should do something which is *not* for the success and glory of the state, then, for Hegel, 'he should be "forced to be free".' How does a person *know* what action will redound to the glory of the state? To Hegel, the answer was easy. Whatever the state rulers demand, since 'the very fact of their being rulers is the surest sign of God's will that they should be'. Impeccable logic, indeed! See E.F. Carritt, 'Reply' (1940), reprinted in W. Kaufmann, (ed.), *Hegel's Political Philosophy* (New York: Atherton Press, 1970), pp. 38–9.
11. Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (5th ed., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), II, pp. 30–31.
12. Ibid., p. 31.
13. Ibid., p. 33.
14. In 1867. See ibid., p. 34.
15. Ibid., p. 33.
16. Ibid., pp. 27, 30. For an explanation of what Popper refers to as the 'scherzo-style' of his chapter on Hegel, see ibid., pp. 393–5.
17. M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971). Milton's depiction of the Fall and the Second Advent is truly eloquent and stirring. On the loss of Eden: 'Farewell happy Fields/Where Joy forever dwells...'. And on the Second Advent: 'Time will run back and fetch the age of gold', 'And then at last our bliss/Full and perfect is,/But now begins...'
18. On the influence of Schiller's views of organicism and alienation on Hegel, Marx and later sociology, see Leon Bramson, *The Political Context of Sociology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 30n.
19. See Abrams, op. cit., note 17, p. 311.
20. B.F. Trentowski, *The Relationship of Philosophy to Cybernetics* (Poznan, 1843), in which the author also coined the word 'cybernetics' for the new, emerging form of rational social technology which would transform mankind. See James H. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 231.
21. On Machajski, see Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 10–11.

- sity Press, 1967), pp. 102–6. Machajski's preferred solution to the problem of domination by the intellectuals was scarcely convincing. Machajski called for a secret organization of revolutionary workers, The Workers' Conspiracy, presumably headed by himself, which would lead the proletarian revolution, and establish a 'classless' society shorn of the evil distinctions between mental and manual labour.
22. Billington, op. cit., note 20, p. 225.
  23. It is to Bauer that the world owes the terms 'critical' and 'criticism', which Marxists have long employed as endlessly repeated slogans ever since; e.g., 'Critique of Critical Theory', 'Critical Legal Studies', etc.
  24. According to Schumpeter, moreover, Marx was virtually a co-author of the *Anti-Dühring*. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1942), p. 39n.
  25. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, cited in Ludwig von Mises, *Theory and History* (3rd ed., Auburn, Ala.: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1985), p. 105. Also see the sardonic commentary on this passage by Alexander Gray, *The Socialist Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green, 1946), p. 300n. Gray also notes Marx's summary of the dialectic in the *Poverty of Philosophy*, which he comments is 'not without entertainment value': 'The yes becomes no, the no becomes yes, the yes becomes at the same time yes and no, the no becomes at the same time no and yes, the contraries balance, neutralize, and paralyze each other'. (My own translation from Gray's French quote.)
  26. Marx to Engels, 16 Jan. 1861 and 19 Dec. 1860. See Gary North, *Marx's Religion of Revolution: Regeneration Through Chaos* (2nd ed., Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 89n–90n.
  27. Tucker, op. cit., note 3, p. 101.
  28. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
  29. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
  30. Thomas Molnar, 'Marxism and the Utopian Theme', *Marxist Perspectives* (Winter 1978), pp. 153–4. The economist David McCord Wright, while not delving to the religious roots of the problem, stressed that one group in society, the statisticians, seek 'the achievement of a fixed ideal static pattern of technical social organization. Once this ideal is reached, or closely approximated, it need only be repeated endlessly thereafter'. David McCord Wright, *Democracy and Progress* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 21.
  31. Molnar, op. cit., note 30, pp. 149, 150–51.
  32. *Ibid.*, pp. 151–2.

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## 12 The Marxian system, I: historical materialism and the class struggle

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### **12.1 The Marxian strategy**

Marx desperately sought a materialistic dialectic of history, a dialectic that would account for all basic historical change and would lead inevitably to communist revolution. Lacking a Boehmeian 'nisus' or mystical inner drive to serve as motor of the dialectic, Marx had to fall back on class conflict embedded in historical materialism. But it was characteristic of Marx that this crucial area of the Marxian system, along with other important discussions, was presented, not systematically, but in the course of fugitive paragraphs or even passages, here and there throughout the writings of Marx and Engels. The system has to be constructed out of these widely separated passages. As a result, or perhaps from the inherently grave weakness of the argument, Marx's terminology is invariably vague and fuzzy, and his allegedly law-like linkages of the dialectic virtually non-existent. Often they are mere unsupported assertion. As a result, the Marxian system is not only a tissue of fallacies, but of flimsy fallacies and linkages as well.

No economic or social theory is obliged to come up with correct predictions, in the sense of forecasts of the future. But the Marxian doctrine is different. Like pre-millennial pietists who are forever predicting an imminent Armageddon, Marx claims to come up with 'laws of history' which, according to him, are 'scientific' rather than mystical. Well, if he knows the laws of history, then Marx had better come up with correct predictions of such allegedly determined laws. Yet all his predictions have proved utterly wrong. At this point, Marxists invariably fall back on changing the prediction, or pointing to some offsetting factor (seen only in hindsight) that temporarily delayed the prediction from coming true. Thus, as we shall see further below, one of Marx's predictions, crucial to the inevitable workings of the road to socialism, was that the working class would suffer increasing poverty and immiseration. When the working classes, in contrast, obviously continued to gain spectacularly in living standards in the western world, Marxian apologists fell back on the assertion that Marx meant only poverty 'relative to' the capitalist class. It is doubtful, however, whether bloody revolution will be waged by a proletariat for having only one yacht while capitalists have a dozen each. 'Relative' misery is a very different kettle of fish. The Marxists then came up with the view that western workers' standards of living were rising because of a 'temporary' delay brought about by western imperialism, enabling western workers to be 'capitalists' relative to the exploited Third World. The fact that Marx and Engels were themselves in favour of western, particularly German, imperialism, as a progressive force, is usually passed over in silence by Marxian writers.

On theoretical matters, the strategy of Marxists is similar. Increasingly, as crucial Marxian doctrines become evidently too absurd to be held seriously, e.g. technological determinism of all life, or the labour theory of value, they

are abandoned by the Marxist, who then proceeds to maintain stubbornly that he is still a 'Marxist', and that Marxism essentially still holds true. But this is the attitude of a mystical religious adept rather than of a scientific or even a rational thinker.

One crucial weapon wielded often by Marxists and by Marx himself was 'the dialectic'. Since the dialectic allegedly means that the world and human society consist of conflicting or 'contradictory' tendencies side by side or even within the same set of circumstances, *any* prediction can then be justified as the result of one's deep insight into whichever part of the contradictory dialectic might be prevailing at any given time.<sup>1</sup> In short, since either A or non-A can occur, Marxians can safely hedge their bets so that no prediction of theirs can ever be falsified. It has been said that Gerry Healy, the absolute leader of the left-wing British Trotskyite movement until scandal brought him down in recent years, was able to maintain his power by claiming the power of exclusive insight into the mysterious workings of the dialectic. And an outstanding example of hedging one's bets by Marx himself was described in a letter to Engels. Marx writes to Engels that he has just forecast something in his column for the *New York Tribune*. He adds cynically and revealingly: 'It is possible that I may be discredited. But in that case it will still be possible to pull through with the help of a bit of dialectic. It goes without saying that I phrased my forecasts in such a way that I would prove to be right also in the opposite case'.<sup>2</sup>

## 12.2 Historical materialism

There is no place in his system where Marx is fuzzier or shakier than at its base: the concept of historical materialism, the key to the inevitable dialectic of history.

At the base of historical materialism and of Marx's view of history is the concept of the 'material productive forces'. These 'forces' are the driving power that creates all historical events and changes. So what are these 'material productive forces'? This is never made clear. The best that can be said is that material productive forces mean 'technological methods'. On the other hand, we are also faced with the term 'mode of production', which seems to be the same thing as material productive forces, or the sum of, or systems of, technological methods.

At any rate, these material productive forces, these technologies and 'modes of production', uniquely and monocausally create all 'relations of production' or 'social relations of production' independently of people's wills. These 'relations of production', also extremely vaguely defined, seem to be essentially legal and property relations. The sum of these relations of production somehow make up the 'economic structure of society'. This economic structure is the 'base' which causally determines the 'superstructure', which

includes natural science, legal doctrines, religion, philosophies, and all other forms of 'consciousness'. In short, at the bottom of the base is technology which in turn constitutes or determines modes of production, which in turn determines relations of production, or institutions of law or property, and which finally in turn determine ideas, religious values, art, etc.

How, then, do historical changes take place in the Marxian schema? They can *only* take place in technological methods, since everything else in society is determined by the state of technology at any one time. In short, if the state of technology is  $T$  and everything else is the determined superstructure,  $S$ , then to Marx,

$$T_n \rightarrow S_n$$

where  $n$  is any point of time. But then, the only way in which social change can take place is via change in technology, in which case

$$T_{n+1} \rightarrow S_{n+1}$$

As Marx put it in the clearest and starkest statement of his technological determinist view of history, in his *Poverty of Philosophy*:

In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production, and in changing their mode of production, their means of gaining a living, they change all their social relations. The hand mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam mill society with the industrial capitalist.

The first grave fallacy in this farrago is right at the beginning: Where does this technology come from? And how do technologies change or improve? Who puts them into effect? A key to the tissue of fallacies that constitute the Marxian system is that Marx never attempts to provide an answer. Indeed he cannot, since if he attributes the state of technology or technological change to the actions of man, of individual men, his whole system falls apart. For human consciousness, and individual consciousness at that, would then be determining material productive forces rather than the other way round. As von Mises points out:

We may summarize the Marxian doctrine in this way: In the beginning there are the 'material productive forces', i.e., the technological equipment of human productive efforts, the tools and machines. No question concerning their origin is permitted; they are, that is all; we must assume that they are dropped from heaven.<sup>3</sup>

And, we may add, any changes in that technology must therefore be dropped from heaven as well.

Furthermore, as von Mises also demonstrated, consciousness, rather than matter, is predominant in technology:

a technological invention is not something material. It is the product of a mental process, of reasoning and conceiving new ideas. The tools and machines may be called material, but the operation of the mind which created them is certainly spiritual. Marxian materialism does not trace back 'superstructural' and 'ideological' phenomena to 'material' roots. It explains these phenomena as caused by an essentially mental process, viz. invention.<sup>4</sup>

Machines are embodied ideas. In addition, technological processes do not only require inventions. They must be brought forth from the invention stage and be embodied in concrete machines and processes. But that requires savings and capital investment as well as invention. But, granting this fact, then the 'relations of production', the legal and property rights system in a society, help determine whether or not saving and investment will be encouraged and discouraged. Once again, the proper causal path is *from* ideas, principles, and the legal and property rights 'superstructure' *to* the alleged 'base'.

Similarly, machines will not be invested in, unless there is a division of labour of sufficient extent in a society. Once again, the social relations, the cooperative division of labour and exchange in society, determine the extent and development of technology, and not the other way round.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to these logical flaws, the materialist doctrine is factually absurd. Obviously, the hand mill, which ruled in ancient Sumer, did *not* 'give you' a feudal society there: furthermore, there were capitalist relations long before the steam mill. His technological determinism led Marx to hail each important new invention as *the* magical 'material productive force' that would inevitably bring about the socialist revolution. Wilhelm Liebknecht, a leading German Marxist and friend of Marx, reported that Marx once attended an exhibition of electric locomotives in London, and delightedly concluded that electricity would give rise to the inevitable communist revolution.<sup>6</sup>

Engels carried technological determinism so far as to declare that it was the invention of fire that separated man from the animals. Presumably the group of animals to whom fire somehow arrived were thereupon determined to evolve upward; the emergence of man himself was simply a part of the superstructure.

Even granting Marx's thesis momentarily for the sake of argument, his theory of historical change still faces insuperable difficulties. For why can't technology, which somehow develops as an automatic given, simply and smoothly change the 'relations of production' and the 'superstructure' above it? Indeed, if the base at each moment of time determines the rest of the superstructure, how can a change in the base *not* smoothly determine an

appropriate change in the rest of the structure? But, again, a mysterious element enters the Marxian system. Periodically, as technology and the modes of production advance, they come into conflict, or, in the peculiar Hegelian-Marxian jargon, in 'contradiction' to the relations of production, which continue in the conditions appropriate to the past time period and past technology. These relations therefore become 'fetters' blocking technological development. Since they become fetters on growth, the new technology gives rise to an inevitable social revolution that overthrows the old production relations and the superstructure and creates new ones that have been blocked or fettered. In this way, feudalism gives rise to capitalism, which in turn will give way to socialism.

But if technology determines social production relations, what is the mysterious force that delays the change in those relations? It couldn't be human stubbornness or habit or culture, since we have already been informed by Marx that modes of production impel men to enter into social relations apart from their mere wills.

As Professor Plamenatz points out, we are merely *told* that the relations of production become fetters on the productive forces. Marx merely asserts this point, and never even attempts to offer a cause, material or otherwise. As Plamenatz puts the entire problem:

then, all of a sudden, without warning and without explanation, he [Marx] tells us that there nevertheless arises inevitably from time to time an incompatibility between them [the productive forces and the relations of production] which only social revolution can resolve. This incompatibility apparently arises because the dependent variable [the relations] begins to impede the free operation of the variable on which it depends. [The material productive forces.] This is an astounding statement, and yet Marx can make it without even being aware that it requires explanation.<sup>7</sup>

Professor Plamenatz has shown that part of the deep confusion is both generated, and camouflaged, by Marx's failure to define 'relations of production' adequately. This concept apparently includes legal property relations. But if legal property relations were at fault in this dialectical delay in adjustment, thus setting up the 'fetters', then Marx would be conceding that the problem is really legal or political rather than economic. But he wanted the determining base to be *purely economic*; the political and the ideological had to be merely part of the determined superstructure. So 'social relations of production', allegedly economic, were the fetters; but this can only make sense if this means the property rights or legal system. And so Marx got out of his dilemma by being so fuzzy and ambivalent about the 'relations of production' that these relations could be taken either as *including* the property structure, as *identical* with that structure, or else the two might be totally *separate* entities.

In particular, Marx accomplished his obscurantist purpose by asserting that the property rights system was part of the 'legal expression of' the 'relations of production' – thus somehow being able to be part of the superstructure and yet of the economic 'relations of production' at the same time. 'Legal expression', needless to say, was not defined either. As Plamenatz summed up, the entire concept of 'relations of production', so necessary to the Marxian thesis of material or economic determinism, serves Marx as a 'ghost battalion closing a vital gap in the front of Marxian theory'.<sup>8</sup> Yet in all this there is no way that the concept of 'relations of production' can make economic determinism intelligible, and there is no way by which these relations can either be determined by the modes of production *or* can in themselves determine the property rights system.

The only possible coherent chain of causation, in contrast, is the other way round: from ideas to property rights systems to the fostering or crippling the growth of saving and investment, and of technological development.

Twentieth century Marxists, from Lukacs to Genovese, have often tried to save the day from the embarrassment of the technological determinism of Marx and his immediate followers. They maintain that all sophisticated Marxists know that the causation is not unilinear, that the base and the superstructure really influence each other. Sometimes, they try to torture the data to claim that Marx himself took such a sophisticated position. Either way, they are characteristically obfuscating the fact that they have in reality abandoned Marxism. Marxism is monocausal technological determinism, along with all the rest of the fallacies we have depicted, or it is nothing, and it has demonstrated no inevitable or even likely dialectic mechanism.<sup>9</sup>

### 12.3 The class struggle

Even assuming that the unexplained incompatibility between the productive forces and the relations of production exists, why shouldn't this incompatibility continue forever? Why doesn't the economy simply lapse into permanent stagnation of the technological forces? This 'contradiction', so to speak, was scarcely enough to generate Marx's goal of the inevitable proletarian communist revolution.

The answer that Marx supplies, the motor of the inevitable revolutions in history, is inherent class conflict, inherent struggles between economic classes. For, in addition to the property rights system, one of the consequences of the relations of production, as determined by the productive forces, is the 'class structure' of society. For Marx, the fetters are invariably applied by the privileged 'ruling classes', who somehow serve as surrogates for, or living embodiments of, the social relations of production and the legal property system. In contrast, another, inevitably 'rising' economic class somehow embodies the oppressed, or fettered, technologies and modes of production.

The 'contradiction' between the fettered material productive forces and the fettering social relations of production thus becomes embodied in a determined class struggle between the 'rising' and the 'ruling' classes, which are bound, by the inevitable (material) dialectic of history to result in a triumphant revolution by the rising class. The successful revolution at last brings the relations of production and the material productive forces, or technological system, into harmony. All is then peaceful and harmonious until later, when further technological development gives rise to new 'contradictions', new fetters, and a new class struggle to be won by the rising economic class. In that way, feudalism, determined by the hand mill, gives rise to middle classes when the steam mill develops, and the rising middle classes, the living surrogates of the steam mill, overthrow fetters imposed by the feudal landlord class. Thus, the material dialectic takes one socio-economic system, say feudalism, and claims that it 'gives rise' to its opposite, or 'negation', and its inevitable replacement by 'capitalism', which thus 'negates' and transcends feudalism. And in the same way electricity (or whatever) will inevitably give rise to a proletarian revolution which will permit electricity to triumph over the fetters that capitalists place upon it.

It is difficult to state this position without rejecting it immediately as drivel. In addition to all the flaws in historical materialism we have seen above, there is no causal chain that links a technology to a class, or that permits economic classes to embody either technology or its 'production relations' fetters. There is no proffered reason why such classes must, or even plausibly might, act as determined puppets for or against new technologies. Why must feudal landlords try to suppress the steam mill? Why can't feudal landlords invest in steam mills? And why can't capitalists cheerfully invest in electricity as they already have in steam? Indeed, they have in fact happily invested in electricity, and in all other successful and economical technologies (as well as bringing them about in the first place). Why are capitalists inevitably oppressed under feudalism, and why are the proletariat equally inevitably oppressed under capitalism? (On Marx's attempt to answer the latter question, see below.)

If, finally, class struggle and the material dialectic bring about an inevitable proletarian revolution, why does the dialectic, as Marx of course maintains, at that point come to an end? For crucial to Marxism, as to other millennial and apocalyptic creeds, is that the dialectic can by no means roll on forever. On the contrary, the chiliast, whether pre- or post-millennial, invariably sees the end of the dialectic, or the end of history, as imminent. Very soon, imminently, the third age, or the return of Jesus, or the Kingdom of God on earth, or the total self-knowledge of the man-God, will effectively put an end to history. Marx's atheist dialectic, too, envisioned the imminent proletarian revolution, which would, after the 'raw communist' stage, bring

about a 'higher communism' or perhaps a 'beyond communist' stage, which would be a classless society, a society of total equality, of no division of labour, a society without rulers. But since history is a 'history of class struggles' for Marx, the ultimate communist stage would be the final one, so that, in effect, history would then come to an end.

Critics of Marx, from Bakunin to Machajski to Milovan Djilas, have of course pointed out, both prophetically and in retrospect, that the proletarian revolution, whichever its stage, would not eliminate classes, but, on the contrary, would set up a new ruling class and a new ruled. There would be no equality, but another inequality of power and inevitably of wealth: the oligarchic élite, the vanguard, as rulers, and the rest of society as the ruled.

In order to round out his system, Marx was interested in the dialectical workings of the past, the passages from oriental despotism or the 'Asiatic mode of production' to the ancient world, thence to feudalism, and from feudalism to capitalism. But his main interest, understandably, was in demonstrating the precise mechanism by which capitalism was supposed to give way, imminently, to the proletarian revolution. After working out this broad system, the rest of Marx's life was largely devoted to demonstrating and developing these alleged mechanisms.

#### **12.4 The Marxian doctrine of 'ideology'**

Even Marx must dimly recognize that not 'material productive forces', not even 'classes', act in the real world, but only individual consciousness and individual choice. Even in the Marxian analysis, each class, or the individuals within it, must become conscious of its 'true' class interests in order to act upon pursuing or achieving them. To Marx, each individual's thinking, his values and theories, are all determined, *not* by his personal self-interest, but by the interest of the class to which he supposedly belongs. This is the first fatal flaw in the argument; why in the world should each individual ever hold his class higher than himself? Second, according to Marx, this class interest determines his thoughts and viewpoints, and *must* do so, because each person is only capable of 'ideology' or false consciousness in the interest of his class. He is not capable of a disinterested, objective search for truth, nor of pursuit of his own interest or of that of all mankind. But, as von Mises has pointed out, Marx's doctrine pretends to be pure, non-ideological science, and yet written expressly to advance the class interest of the proletariat. But, while all 'bourgeois' economics and all other disciplines of thought were interpreted by Marx as false by definition, as 'ideological' rationalizations of bourgeois class interest, the Marxists

were not consistent enough to assign to their own doctrines merely ideological character. The Marxian tenets, they implied, are not ideologies. They are a fore-



taste of the knowledge of the future classless society which, freed from the fetters of class conflicts, will be in a position to conceive pure knowledge, untainted by ideological blemishes.<sup>10</sup>

Dr David Gordon has aptly summed up this point:

If all thought about social and economic matters is determined by class position, what about the Marxist system itself? If, as Marx proudly proclaimed, he aimed at providing a science for the working class, why should any of his views be accepted as true? Mises rightly notes that Marx's view is self-refuting: if all social thought is ideological, then *this* proposition is itself ideological and the grounds for believing it have been undercut. In his *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx cannot contain his sneering at the 'apologetics' of various bourgeois economists. He did not realize that in his constant jibes at the class bias of his fellow economists, he was but digging the grave of his own giant work of propaganda on behalf of the proletariat.<sup>11</sup>

Von Mises also raises the point that it is absurd to believe that the interests of any class, including the capitalists, could ever be served better by a false than by a correct doctrine.<sup>12</sup> To Marx, the point of philosophy was only the achievement of some practical goal. But if, as in pragmatism, truth is only 'what works', then surely the interests of the bourgeoisie would not be served by clinging to a false theory of society. If the Marxian answer holds, as it has, that false theory is necessary to justify the existence of capitalist rule, then, as von Mises points out, from the Marxian point of view itself the theory should not be necessary. Since each class ruthlessly pursues its own interest, there is no need for the capitalists to justify their rule and their alleged exploitation to *themselves*. There is also no need to use these false doctrines to keep the proletariat subservient, since, to Marxists, the rule or the overthrow of a given social system depends on the material productive forces, and there is no way by which consciousness can delay this development or speed it up. Or, if there are such ways, and the Marxists often implicitly concede this fact, then there is a grave and self-defeating flaw in the heart of Marxian theory itself.

It is a well-known irony and another deep flaw in the Marxian system that, for all the Marxian exaltation of the proletariat and the 'proletarian mind', all leading Marxists, beginning with Marx and Engels, were emphatically bourgeois themselves. Marx was the son of a wealthy lawyer, his wife was a member of the Prussian nobility and his brother-in-law Prussian minister of the interior. Friedrich Engels, his lifelong benefactor and collaborator, was the son of a wealthy manufacturer, and himself a manufacturer. Why were not *their* views and doctrines also determined by bourgeois class interests? What permitted *their* consciousness to rise above a system so powerful that it determines the views of everyone else?