A

abstract labour Since a COMMODITY is both a USE VALUE and a VALUE, the labour which produces the commodity has a dual character. First, any act of labouring is 'productive activity of a definite kind, carried on with a definite aim' (*Capital* I, ch. 1); so considered, it is 'useful labour' or 'concrete labour', and its product is a use value. This aspect of labouring activity 'is a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of society; it is an eternal natural necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself' (ibid.). Secondly, any act of labouring can be considered apart from its specific characteristics, as purely the expenditure of human LABOUR POWER, 'human labour pure and simple, the expenditure of human labour in general' (ibid.). The expenditure of human labour considered in this aspect creates value, and is called 'abstract labour'. Concrete labour and abstract labour are not different activities, they are the same activity considered in its different aspects. Marx summarizes as follows:

> On the one hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power, in the physiological sense, and it is in this quality of being equal, or abstract, human labour that it forms the value of commodities. On the other hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power in a particular form and with a definite aim, and it is in this quality of being concrete useful labour that it produces use-values. (Ibid.)

And he emphasizes that 'this point is crucial to an understanding of political economy' which he was the first to elucidate and elaborate (ibid.).

However, there is considerable controversy within Marxism concerning the process of abstraction whereby Marx arrives at the nature of value-creating labour. While Marx talks of the physiological expenditure of 'human brains, muscles, nerves, hands etc.' (ibid.), whose measurement in units of time suggests that value can be interpreted as an embodied labour coefficient, he also insists that 'not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values' and emphasizes that 'commodities possess an objective character as values only in so far as they are all expressions of an identical social substance, human labour . . . their objective character as values is therefore purely social' (ibid.).

What Marx means here is that it is *only* through the exchange of commodities that the private labour which produced them is rendered social (this is one of the peculiarities of the equivalent form of value); the equalization of labour as abstract labour *only* occurs through the exchange of the products of that labour. On the face of it, these two views are not readily compatible.

Consider first the 'physiological' interpretation. With a series of quotations from Marx to support his view, Steedman writes:

> It being understood then that the object of discussion is a capitalist, commodity producing economy, 'co-ordinated' through money flows in markets, and that only socially-necessary, *abstract social* labour, of average skill and intensity is referred to, it may be said that the 'magnitude of value' is a quantity of embodied labour time. That this statement acccurately reflects Marx's position cannot be altered by pointing to the fact that Marx was much concerned with the 'form of value', with the nature of 'abstract social' labour and with the 'universal equivalent'. (1977, p. 211)

Shaikh's argument is of the same genus. He argues that the concept of abstract labour is not a mental generalization, but the reflection in thought of a real social process: the LABOUR PROCESS, which in capitalism is permeated

throughout by commodity relations. Since 'abstract labour is the property acquired by human labour when it is directed towards the production of commodities' (Shaikh 1981, p. 273), then labour in commodity production 'is both concrete and abstract from the very outset' (ibid. p. 274). Again, the implication is that embodied-labour coefficients can be calculated from examination of the capitalist production process alone and that this is what is meant by value. Further, Shaikh distinguishes the actual total labour time expended under given production conditions, which defines the total value of the product, the unit social value of the commodity, and hence its regulating price; and the total labour time that is required to satisfy expressed social need, which specifies the relationship between the regulating price and the market (ibid. pp. 276–8; see also SOCIALLY NECESSARY LABOUR).

Critics of this position argue that it has more in common with Ricardo's labour theory of value than with Marx's (see RICARDO AND MARX.) To consider value simply as embodied labour certainly renders heterogeneous labour commensurable, and hence can be used as a means of aggregation, but there is then nothing to restrict the use of the value category to capitalist society. Marx comments: 'If we say that, as values, commodities are simply congealed quantities of human labour, our analysis reduces them, it is true, to the level of abstract value, but does not give them a form of value distinct from their natural forms' (*Capital* I, ch. 1).

The abstraction which renders embodied labour abstract labour is a social abstraction, a real social process quite specific to capitalism. Abstract labour is not a way of reducing heterogeneous labours to the common dimension of time, via the commodity relations of the labour process, but has a real existence in the reality of EXCHANGE. Rubin (*1973*, ch. 14) argues that exchange here must be considered not in its specific meaning as a particular phase of the reproductive circuit of capital, but more generally as a form of the production process itself. And it is only in the exchange process that heterogeneous concrete labours are rendered abstract and homogeneous, that private labour is revealed as social labour. It is the market which does this; and so there can be no *a priori* determination of abstract labour. Colletti goes further and argues that not only does the abstraction emerge out of the reality of exchange, but also that abstract labour is alienated labour: exchange provides the moment of social unity in the form of an abstract equalization or reification of labour power in which human subjectivity is expropriated. (Colletti 1972, p. 87. For a dissenting view see Arthur 1979.)

The debate over the nature of abstract labour is at the heart of most of the controversies in Marxist economics (Himmelweit and Mohun 1981). In general, the embodied labour school focuses on the derivation of prices from labour times, and tends to see emphasis on dialectics and method as misplaced and metaphysical. The abstract labour school tends to focus on the ways in which Marx used the results of his confrontation with Hegel to break with Ricardian political economy and to determine a dialectical resolution of the difficulties in a formal logic approach to the derivation of prices. (See also HEGEL AND MARX; PRICE OF PRODUCTION AND THE TRANSFORMATION PROBLEM.)

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SIMON MOHUN

accumulation 'Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!' (*Capital* I, ch. 24, sect. 3). With these words Marx reveals what in his analysis is the most important imperative or driving force of bourgeois society. Despite the religious metaphor Marx does not see accumulation as the result of a rising Protestant ethic of

thrift, as is suggested by Weber. Nor is accumulation the result of abstinence on the part of individuals seeking to satisfy a subjective preference for future CONSUMPTION at the expense of consumption in the present, as is argued by neoclassical bourgeois economics based on utility theory. For Marx, it is of the essence of CAPITAL that it must be accumulated, independent of the subjective preferences or religious beliefs of individual capitalists.

The coercion on *individual* capitalists to accumulate operates through the mechanism of COMPETITION. Because capital is self-expanding VALUE, its value must at least be preserved. Because of competition the mere preservation of capital is impossible unless it is, in addition, expanded. At different stages of development of capitalist production, the mechanism of competition operates in different ways. Initially, accumulation takes place through the transformation of the relations of production (see PRIMITIVE ACCUMULATION) to create wage labour with methods of production remaining the same. For underdeveloped methods of production, inherited and adapted from precapitalist societies, accumulation is necessary to guarantee an expansion of the workforce, to provide it with raw materials and allow for economies of scale in the supervision of labour. For MANUFACTURE, accumulation is necessary to permit the employment of labour in the appropriate proportions in the COOPERATION and DIVISION OF LABOUR. For MACHINERY AND MACHINOFACTURE, accumulation provides for the necessary fixed capital and expanded use of raw materials and labour associated with it.

Accumulation is not, however, simply a relationship between the production and capitalization of SURPLUS VALUE. It is also a relationship of reproduction. For the CIRCULATION of capital, this is examined by Marx in *Capital* II, and to a lesser extent in *Capital* I. Reproduction is examined as embodying simple reproduction in which value and surplus value relations remain unchanged, as the basis for reproduction on an expanded scale for which the ORGANIC COMPOSITION OF CAPITAL may or may not rise. In each case, a definite proportion must be established in value and in USE VALUE terms between sectors of the economy and this is examined in the REPRODUCTION SCHEMA.

In *Capital* III, Marx analyses accumulation from the perspective of the DISTRIBUTION (and redistribution) of surplus value and capital. For early stages of development, the basis for accumulation is in the concentration of capital. At later stages of development, centralization (see CENTRALIZATION AND CONCENTRATION OF CAPITAL) is the dominant method by which the use of ever-increasing sizes of capital is organized. This presupposes an advanced CREDIT system. While the object of accumulation is productivity increase, the mechanism of achieving it is through access to credit. Consequently a divergence between the accumulation of capital in production and of capital in the financial system is created. This is the basis of fictitious capital and can lead to the intensification of ECONOMIC CRISES when accumulation fails to overcome the obstacles confronting the continuing expansion of the production of surplus value. In addition, the centralization of capital and the uneven pace of accumulation itself is to be associated with UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT of economies and societies. Accordingly the accumulation process is never simply an economic process but also involves the general development of social relations including, for example, COLONIALISM, IMPERIALISM, and changing roles for the state, as has always been stressed within the Marxist tradition.

For Marx, the accumulation process would never be a smooth, harmonious or simple expansion. At times it would be interrupted by crises and recessions. But the barriers to capital accumulation are never absolute but are contingent upon the intensification of the contradictions of capitalism which may be temporarily resolved to allow a new phase of expansion. The analysis of the development of such an intensification of contradictions is studied at the economic level by Marx in terms of the law of the tendency of the FALLING RATE OF PROFIT; this is itself associated with the law as such (based on the rising organic composition of capital) in contradiction with its counteracting influences. Here Marx distinguishes himself from Ricardo for whom a falling profitability depends upon declining productivity in agriculture, and from Smith for whom a limited extent of the market is crucial.

Marx devotes a considerable part of his economic analysis to the effects and forms of the accumulation process, drawing upon logical

and empirical study. He develops laws for the LABOUR PROCESS itself, distinguishing between different stages of development of the methods of production. He also examines the effects of accumulation upon the working class. With machinery and machinofacture, other methods of production are coerced into extreme forms of EXPLOITATION to remain competitive. Machinery and machinofacture itself creates a RESERVE ARMY OF LABOUR and with it, the General Law of Capitalist Accumulation; namely, that a section of its stagnant layer increases in size as the officially pauperized. Otherwise the working class is subject to deskilling and the dictates of machinery even as it is increasingly organized in strength to resist accumulation through the formation of trade unions.

In the Marxist tradition the necessity of capital accumulation has been stressed by those who, like Lenin, argue that monopoly is the intensification of and not the negation of competition. Otherwise, writers have tended to emphasize one or more aspects of the accumulation process at the expense of a complex totality. Underconsumptionists stress a tendency to stagnation and have seen monopoly as displacing competition and the coercion to invest. Accordingly, deficiencies in market levels of demand become the focus of attention (as is the case for Keynesian theory). Luxemburg is most frequently cited in this context although she also emphasized the role of militarism. Baran and Sweezy are more recent representatives of this line of thought. Others in the neo-Ricardian or Sraffian tradition follow Marx by taking accumulation as axiomatic, but have left this unexplained by neglecting to incorporate a compulsion to accumulate within their analysis. Competition merely serves to equalize rates of profit and wages. Wages are then taken as the focus in determining the pace of accumulation which is threatened when wages rise and reduce profitability in the absence of productivity increase.

BEN FINE

Adler, Max Born 15 January 1873, Vienna; died 28 June 1937, Vienna. After studying jurisprudence at the University of Vienna Adler became a lawyer, but devoted most of his time to philosophical and sociological studies, later teaching in extra-mural and university courses, and to his activities in the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ). In 1903, with Karl Renner and Rudolf Hilferding, he established a workers' school in Vienna; and in 1904, with Hilferding, he founded the *Marx-Studien*. From the time of the first world war he associated himself with the left wing of the SPÖ, strongly supported the workers' COUNCILS movement, and was a frequent contributor to *Der Klassenkampf* (the journal of the left wing of the German Social Democratic Party) from its first publication in 1927. Adler's principal contribution to Austro-Marxism was his attempt to establish the epistemological foundations of Marxism as a sociological theory, in which he was strongly influenced by neo-Kantian ideas in the philosophy of science, and by the positivism of Ernst Mach. But he also wrote widely on other subjects, and published interesting studies on revolution, the changes in the working class after the first world war, intellectuals, and law and the state (criticizing Kelsen's 'pure theory of law'). (See also AUSTRO-MARXISM.)

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TOM BOTTOMORE

Adorno, Theodor Born 11 September 1903, Frankfurt; died 6 August 1969, Visp, Switzerland. From secondary school onwards Adorno developed interests in both philosophy and music. After receiving his doctorate in 1924 for a work on Husserl he studied composition and piano with Alban Berg and Eduard Steuermann in Vienna. In 1931 he began teaching philosophy at the University of Frankfurt, but with the advent of National Socialism he left Germany for England. Four years later he

moved to the USA where he joined the Institute of Social Research (see FRANKFURT SCHOOL). In 1950 he returned with the Institute to Frankfurt, received a professorship and became a director of the Institute. While Adorno was one of the most prominent representatives of the Frankfurt School, his work was in a great many respects unique. At first glance some of his views on contemporary society seem bizarre. He suggested that we live in a world completely caught in a web spun by bureaucracy, administration and technocracy. The individual is a thing of the past: the age of concentrated capital, planning and mass culture has destroyed personal freedom. The capacity for critical thinking is dead and gone. Society and consciousness are 'totally reified': they appear to have the qualities of natural objects – to possess the status of given and unchanging forms (see REIFICATION).

But Adorno's thought cannot be fully comprehended if content is considered at the expense of form. Through 'provocative formulation', 'startling exaggeration' and 'dramatic emphasis', Adorno hoped to undermine ideologies and to create conditions through which the social world could once more become visible. His extensive use of the forms of essay and aphorism (best seen in *Minima Moralia*) reflects directly his concern to undermine what he saw as closed systems of thought (Hegelian idealism, for example, or orthodox Marxism) and to prevent an unreflected affirmation of society. He presented his ideas in ways which demand from the reader not mere contemplation but a critical effort of original reconstruction. He wanted to sustain and create capacities for independent criticism, and receptivity to the possibility of radical social change.

The scope of Adorno's work is astonishing. His collected works (now being published in a standard edition) amount to twenty-three large volumes (1970–). They include writings within, and across the boundaries of, philosophy, sociology, psychology, musicology and cultural criticism. Among his achievements are a provocative critique of all philosophical first principles and the development of a unique materialist and dialectical approach (1966), a major analysis (with Max Horkheimer) of the origin and nature of instrumental reason (1947), a philosophy of aesthetics (1970), and many original studies of culture, including analyses of such figures as Schönberg and Mahler (1949) and discussions of the modern entertainment industry (1964).

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DAVID HELD

aesthetics There is no systematic theory of art to be found in the writings of Marx and Engels. Both writers had an early, and lifelong, interest in aesthetics and the arts, however, and their various brief discussions of such questions have formed the basis for numerous attempts, particularly in the last few decades, to produce a specifically Marxist aesthetics. The scattered statements of Marx and Engels on the arts have been collected in recently edited volumes, and referred to in books surveying the development of Marxist thought on aesthetics (Arvon 1973; Laing 1978). Not surprisingly, the fragmentary nature of these comments has produced a variety of emphases and positions in the work of later writers. This entry begins by briefly identifying some of these starting-points in the work of Marx and Engels and the way in which they have proved suggestive for various authors. It then looks at some central themes in the history of Marxist aesthetics and in recent work in this field.

Aesthetics in the work of Marx and Engels

A humanist aesthetics has been constructed from Marx's comments on the nature of art as

creative labour, no different in quality from other (non-alienated) labour (Vázquez 1973). When Marx talks (*Capital* I, ch. 5, sect. 1) about the essentially human character of labour, comparing the architect and the bee, it is significant that the architect is invoked merely as an example of a human worker and not as a privileged category of artist. The notion that *all* non-alienated labour is creative, and hence intrinsically the same as artistic labour, provides the basis for a humanist aesthetics which successfully demystifies art by encouraging us to look at its historical development and separation from other activities (see ALIENATION).

A corollary of this view is the recognition that under capitalism art, like other forms of labour, increasingly becomes *alienated labour*. Art itself becomes a commodity, and the relations of artistic production reduce the position of the artist to one of an exploited labourer, producing surplus value. As Marx says (*Theories of Surplus Value*, pt. I, Appendix on 'Productive and Unproductive Labour') 'capitalist production is hostile to certain branches of spiritual production, for example, art and poetry'. He goes on to clarify the transformation of artistic labour under capitalism:

> Milton, who did the *Paradise Lost* for five pounds, was an *unproductive labourer*. On the other hand, the writer who turns out stuff for his publisher in factory style, is a *productive labourer*. . . . The literary proletarian of Leipzig, who fabricates books . . . under the direction of his publisher, is a *productive labourer*; for his product is from the outset subsumed under capital, and comes into being only for the purpose of increasing that capital. A singer who sells her song for her own account is an *unproductive labourer*. But the same singer commissioned by an entrepreneur to sing in order to make money for him is a *productive labourer*; for she produces capital.

This analysis of the distortion of artistic labour and of cultural products under capitalism is the premiss of later critiques of the 'culture industry' (for example by Adorno and Horkheimer) in which regulation by the law of value and the transformation of cultural products into commodities are said to reduce culture and the arts to the status of conformist, repetitive, worthless things, whose function is to ensure political quietude. From Marx's general theory of commodity fetishism, the Marxist aesthetician, Lukács, developed a theory of art. In his major philosophical work, *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács described the reified and fragmented nature of human life and experience under capitalism, analysing the impact of commodity fetishism on consciousness. Reified thought fails to perceive the totality of social and economic relations. The whole of the rest of Lukács's life was devoted to work on literature and aesthetics, in which the concept of 'totality' remains central. In Lukács's view, great literature is that which manages to penetrate beyond surface appearances, to perceive and expose the social totality, with all its contradictions.

Related to this is the theory of realism in art. In Lukács's opinion, good 'realist' literature portrays the totality through the use of 'typical' characters. This notion of realism receives support from other writings by the founders of Marxism, and in particular from two important letters written by Engels in the 1880s to aspiring women novelists. In these letters Engels firmly rejects so called 'tendency-literature' – literature which carries an explicit political message – in favour of the 'realist' text, out of which a correct political analysis may still emerge. 'The more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art. The realism I allude to may crop out even in spite of the author's opinions' (letter to Margaret Harkness, April 1888, in Marx and Engels *On Literature and Art* (*1973*), p. 116). He goes on to give the example of Balzac, who presents 'a most wonderfully realistic history of French "Society" ', despite the fact that he is a legitimist, whose 'sympathies are all with the class doomed to extinction'. The notion of realism, as the accurate portrayal of a society and its structural (class) conflicts, through the use of 'types', has been a central one in Marxist aesthetics.

More broadly, theories of the relationship between art or literature and the society in which it arises are indebted to Marx's formulation, in the 1859 Preface to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, of the metaphor of base and superstructure, in which the aesthetic is explicitly cited as part of the superstructure, and as one of the 'ideological

forms' in which class conflict is carried out. An early formulation of this view of art as the ideological expression of its age is found in the work of Plekhanov, for whom 'literature and art are the mirror of social life' (Arvon 1973, p. 12). At its crudest, such an account reduces art to nothing more than a reflection of social relations and class structure, automatically produced out of these material features. More complex accounts of art as ideology can be found in the work of more recent writers, for example, Goldmann.

Lastly, a rather different tradition in Marxist aesthetics emphasizes the revolutionary potential of art, and the question of commitment for the artist. As Engels's comments on realism make clear, he himself placed more importance on objective description than on overt partisanship. Nevertheless, Marxists have extracted a theory of radicalism in the arts from the writings of Marx and Engels. Lenin recommended that the writer should put his art at the service of the party (1905 (*1970*) pp. 22–7). (Those who have used this as evidence of his philistinism, however, ignore his other essays on art and literature, in particular his studies of Tolstoy (ibid. pp. 48–62).) From the Marxist notion that 'men make their own history', and that consciousness plays a crucial role in political transformation, aestheticians and artists from Mayakovsky, Brecht and Benjamin to present-day film-makers such as Godard and Pasolini have drawn a programme for revolutionary aesthetic practice.

Major themes in Marxist aesthetics

The concept of *realism* has remained central for a good deal of Marxist aesthetics, including its variants of socialist realism (whether official Soviet or Chinese versions, or those of Western Marxism; see Laing 1978 and Arvon 1973). It has also been the focus of two kinds of attack. The first goes back to an early debate between Lukács and Brecht (Bloch 1977; see Arvon 1973), in which Brecht argues that classical nineteenth-century realist literature is no longer appropriate for twentieth-century readers or audiences, and in particular that it has no power to radicalize. Clearly, the issue now becomes one of the evaluation of art or literature either in terms of its accurate, and critical, portrayal of society, or primarily in terms of its revolutionary potential. The present-day version of this debate counterposes the avant-garde and the formally innovative to the more traditional narrative forms in art, literature and drama, proponents of the former arguing that the latter encourage passive and uncritical viewing, however radical the content of the work. The second attack on realism is related to this argument. It maintains that traditional realism, based as it is on a unified and coherent narrative, obscures real contradictions and oppositions in what it reflects, and projects an artificial unity in its representation of the world. The modernist text, on the other hand, is able to capture the contradictory, and to allow the hidden and the silenced to speak, by techniques of textual fragmentation and interruption. This tendency has been influenced by the work of Pierre Macherey, a collaborator of Althusser, and also by French semiologists such as Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva.

The theory of *art as ideology* has been greatly refined and modified in recent work, particularly in Western Marxism, but also in East Germany and the USSR. Art, though still understood as ideological in an important sense, is not dismissed as mere reflection of social life, but is seen as expressing ideology in mediated form. In particular, the forms and codes of representation have been given their due, as central processes and conventions through which ideology is produced in literary and artistic form. The influence of STRUCTURALISM and semiotics has been important, as has the revival of interest in the work of the Russian Formalists (Bennett 1979). The institutions and practices of the arts are similarly increasingly regarded as essential to an understanding of the production and nature of texts – for example, the role of mediators such as publishers, galleries, critics, and so on. The latter, however, have so far only been taken seriously by a few writers, many of them Marxist sociologists of the arts or the media. Last, the role of audiences and readers has been recognized as partly constitutive of the work of art itself, often by authors citing in support Marx's comment in the introduction to the *Grundrisse* that 'consumption produces production'. Hermeneutic theory, semiotics, and reception-aesthetics – most of them not themselves within the Marxist tradition – have

provided insights and tools for the analysis of the active role of recipients in producing cultural works and their meanings. That is to say, the 'meaning' of a work is no longer regarded as fixed, but is seen as dependent on its audience.

The question of *aesthetics and politics* continues to be central to contemporary Marxist aesthetics (Baxandall 1972). It is linked to the debates about realism discussed above. A revival of interest in the work of Benjamin has given rise to a focus on the possibility of revolutionizing the means of artistic production as a political act and strategy, rather than concentrating entirely on questions of radical content or even the form of cultural products. Another aspect of the present-day debate is an examination, for example by socialist playwrights, of the question whether radical ideas are most usefully expressed on television, with its potential mass audience as well as its scope for technical innovation and 'Brechtian' devices, or in the theatre, with its relative freedom from structural, professional, and, in the case of community or street theatre, ideological constraints, but its far smaller audiences. Finally, concomitant with the development of a feminist critique of Marxism itself (see FEMINISM), there has recently grown up a socialist-feminist cultural practice and theory, in which patriarchal themes in the arts and patriarchal relations in the theatre and other cultural institutions are subjected to criticism and reversal, in conjunction with a central emphasis on questions of class and ideology.

Last, the development of a Marxist aesthetics has thrown into question the notion of *aesthetic value*. The recognition that not only the arts themselves, but also the practices and institutions of art criticism, must be construed as ideological and interest-related, exposes the relative and arbitrary nature of the conferral of value on works of art. Until recently this was not thought by Marxist aestheticians to be a problem, and writers such as Lukács managed to preserve a 'great tradition' in literature, perhaps surprisingly close to the great tradition of mainstream bourgeois criticism, by invoking certain political-aesthetic criteria. The question of the relation between 'high' and popular art, like that of the partial perspective of the critic, was rarely addressed. The problem of value is currently confronted by Marxists in a number of ways, ranging from a willing acceptance of the relativist implications of the critique of ideology to an attempt to reassert absolute standards of beauty and value on the basis of supposed human universals of an anthropological or psychological kind (see also ART; CULTURE; LITERATURE).

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JANET WOLFF

agnosticism Laborious efforts to disprove the existence of God Engels seems to find not only unconvincing, but a waste of time (*Anti-Dühring*, pt. 1, ch. 4). To him and Marx religion, except as a historical and social phenomenon, was not much better than an old wives' tale; and the agnostic's position, of keeping an open mind on the subject, or admitting God as an unproved possibility, was not one which they were likely to take seriously. They looked upon the Reformation as 'revolutionary' because it represented the challenge of a new class to feudalism, and also, in the longer run, because the overthrow of the old Church opened the way to a gradual secularization of thought among the literate classes, with religion coming to be viewed more and more as a purely private concern.

From the Reformation onwards, Marx wrote in 1854 in an essay on 'The Decay of Religious Authority', the literate 'began to unfasten themselves individually from all religious belief'; in France as well as the Protestant countries by the eighteenth century, when philosophy held sway in its place. Deism was in Marx's eyes much the same as agnosticism, a convenient way of jettisoning outworn dogmas. By alarming the upper classes the French Revolution had brought about a big but super-

ficial change, an outward alliance between them and the Churches, which the troubles of 1848 revived; but this was precarious now, and governments acknowledged ecclesiastical authority only so far as was convenient. Marx illustrated this situation by pointing out that in the Crimean War, which broke out in 1854 with Britain and France on the side of Turkey, Protestant and Catholic clergy were being obliged to pray for infidel victory over fellow Christians; this he thought would make the clergy still more the creatures of the politicians in the future.

Educated foreigners settling in England in mid century were astonished, according to Engels, at the religious solemnity they found among the middle classes; but now cosmopolitan influences were coming in and having what he called a civilizing effect (*On Historical Materialism*). The decay of faith which poets like Tennyson and Arnold lamented in pathetic accents struck him in a comic light. Agnosticism was now nearly as respectable as the Church of England, he wrote in 1892, and a good deal more so than the Salvation Army; it was really, to use a Lancashire term, 'shamefaced' materialism (Introduction to *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*). Engels went on to discuss agnosticism in its philosophical sense of uncertainty about the reality of matter, or causation; and it is in this way that the term has most often been used by later Marxists. Lenin in particular, in his polemic against empirio-criticism (1908), was at great pains to maintain that the novel ideas of Mach and his positivist school were really no different from the old ideas stemming from Hume, which Engels had attacked as harmful agnosticism. To admit that our sensations have a physical origin, but to treat it as an open question whether they give us correct information about the physical universe, is in Lenin's view mere playing with words (op. cit. ch. 2, sect. 2). (See also PHILOSOPHY.)

Reading

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V. G. KIERNAN

agrarian question The notion of the 'agrarian question' has acquired different layers of meaning since it was first identified by Marxists in the late nineteenth century. Each connotation continues to be an important part of present-day Marxist discourse. Each relates to economic backwardness.

An unresolved agrarian question is a central characteristic of economic backwardness. In its broadest meaning, the agrarian question may be defined as the continuing existence in the countryside of a poor country of substantive obstacles to an unleashing of the forces capable of generating economic development, both inside and outside agriculture. Originally formulated with respect to incomplete *capitalist* transition, and certain political consequences of that incompleteness, the agrarian question is now part, also, of the debate on possible *socialist* transition in poor countries.

In the late nineteenth century, the notion of an agrarian question bore a particular connotation. It is from that initial rendering that our present broader usage has developed. Three distinct senses of the agrarian question may be distinguished: (a) the Engels sense, (b) the Kautsky-Lenin sense, and (c) the Preobrazhensky sense.

The initial formulation derived from an explicitly political concern: how to capture political power in European countries where capitalism was developing but had not yet replaced pre-capitalist social relations as the overwhelming agrarian reality, with the expected stark opposition of capitalist farmer and wage labour. Had capitalism done its work, a strategy similar to that pursued in urban areas, and geared to the rural proletariat, would have been suggested. There was, then, an 'agrarian question'. This was the sense in which Engels viewed the matter in his 'The Peasant Question in France and Germany', written in 1894 and first published in 1894–5. For Engels, and other Marxists of his time, the 'agrarian question' was the 'peasant question': the continuing existence throughout Europe of large peasantries. Central to that 'peasant question', and its accompanying political difficulties, were peasantries which were differentiated, and subject to forces that were hastening differentiation (see PEASANTRY and RURAL CLASS STRUCTURE). The agrarian/peasant question, then, became one of deciding which sections or strata of the peasantry could be won over. That was a

critical matter for immediate, careful analysis and was a subject of intense political debate (Hussain and Tribe 1981, vol. 1). It continues to be a critical issue in present-day poor countries. The ultimate resolution of the agrarian question, however, was seen in the development and dominance of capitalist agriculture, and its accompanying fully developed capitalist relations of production, with a rural proletariat free in Marx's double sense – free of the means of production and free to sell its labour power.

In 1899, there appeared two full-scale and remarkable Marxist analyses of the agrarian question: Kautsky's *The Agrarian Question* and Lenin's *Development of Capitalism in Russia*. With Kautsky and Lenin we see the agrarian question break into its component parts, which was to bring a shift of meaning as one of the component parts became the clear focus of attention. The concern becomes the extent to which capitalism has developed in the countryside, the forms that it takes and the barriers which may impede it. This rendering of the agrarian question is now detached from the more explicitly political sense used by Engels, and becomes central. It is the one most widely accepted today. But, as with Engels, the agrarian question was the peasant question. The fact of a differentiated and differentiating peasantry was crucial. It looms large in Kautsky. It lies at the very heart of Lenin's treatment. For Lenin, it is the key to understanding the nature of the agrarian question in Russia. The agrarian question in this sense is a matter of great concern and prolonged debate in today's poor countries: see, for example, on the Indian debate, Patnaik 1990; on Latin America, de Janvry 1981; on Africa, Mamdani 1987.

Lenin distinguished two broad paths of agrarian capitalism: capitalism from above (the Prussian path), where the class of capitalist farmers emerges from the feudal landlord class; and capitalism from below (the American path), where the source is a differentiated peasantry. The historical diversity of such agrarian capitalism has, in fact, been considerable, and has taken some surprising forms (Byres 1991).

The third sense derived from the socialist experience. In the Soviet Union, in the aftermath of the Revolution, the essence of the agrarian question continued to be a differentiated and differentiating peasantry, with attention directed towards the possibly disruptive role of the kulak (the rich peasantry). This had important political implications: an Engels sense of the agrarian question in the socialist context. The agrarian question also had a Kautsky-Lenin reading: the manner and forms of, and the obstacles to, the development of socialism in the countryside. But it was not limited specifically to the development of socialism in agriculture. This new preoccupation derived from the needs of *overall* socialist transformation: needs dictated by difficulties in securing accumulation outside of agriculture. In particular, this related to the accumulation required by socialist industrialization. The countryside was cast as an essential source of the necessary surplus. The agrarian question became, in part, a question of the degree to which agriculture could supply that surplus, the means by which the fledgling socialist state might appropriate such surplus, and the speed and smoothness of transfer. The most cogent and sophisticated exponent of this position was Preobrazhensky, whose celebrated work, *The New Economics*, appeared in 1926. This new layer of meaning is now a central part of discourse on the agrarian question and the transition to socialism. But it has also broadened, fruitfully, the notion of the agrarian question as that relates to capitalism. In the socialist case, COLLECTIVIZATION has been seen as a way of resolving the agrarian question in each of the three indicated senses (on socialist transition see Saith 1985, especially Saith's own excellent essay).

The *broad* sense of the agrarian question, then, in both the capitalist and the socialist cases, encompasses urban/industrial as well as rural/agricultural transformation. By an agrarian transition thus broadly construed one envisages those changes in the countryside of a poor country necessary to the *overall* development of either capitalism or socialism and the ultimate dominance of either of those modes of production in a particular national social formation. This is not to abandon either the Engels or the Kautsky-Lenin renderings. On the contrary, it remains essential to explore, with the greatest care, the agrarian question in each of these senses. But we should note the important possibility that, in the capitalist case, the agrarian question in this broad