

Determination and Consciousness in Marx

Author(s): Charles W. Mills

Source: *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Sep., 1989), pp. 421-445

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40231658>

Accessed: 08-01-2020 20:39 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*

*Determination and Consciousness in Marx**

CHARLES W. MILLS
University of Oklahoma
Norman, OK 73019
U.S.A.

There has been a dramatic increase over the past decade in the volume of Anglo-American philosophical writing on Marxism, with the 1978 publication of G.A. Cohen's trail-blazing *Karl Marx's Theory of History* being a convenient landmark.¹ What has come to be called 'analytical Marxism' is now well-established, and valuable clarificatory work has been done on such traditionally murky subjects as the theory of historical materialism, the nature of ideology, Marx's views on ethics, the character of Marx's epistemology, the 'scientific' status of Marxism, and the problematic interface between Marxism and normative liberal political theory.²

* This paper has gone through various incarnations, but it began its life as part of my doctoral dissertation, 'The Concept of Ideology in the Thought of Marx and Engels,' University of Toronto 1985. I would like to acknowledge the comments and criticisms of Danny Goldstick and Frank Cunningham, from which I have greatly benefitted.

1 *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978)

2 The literature has become too vast for a listing of works to be anything but a representative sampling. For an overview of the theory of historical materialism, see, for example: Cohen; John McMurtry, *The Structure of Marx's World-View* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1978); Melvin Rader, *Marx's Interpretation of History* (New York: Oxford University Press 1979); Allen Wood, *Karl Marx* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1981); Richard W. Miller, *Analyzing Marx: Morality, Power and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984); Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985). Ideology is discussed to varying extents in Cohen, McMurtry, Wood and Elster; see also Joe McCarney, *The Real World of Ideology* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press 1980). Wood and Miller offer different perspectives on Marx's ethical views (if any), and valu-

A common thread running through all of these is the relationship that Marxism (controversially) claims exists between people's consciousness and their socio-economic circumstances, a relationship encapsulated in the famous—or notorious—'base-superstructure' metaphor. The traditional conception of this relationship has been that such causation automatically invalidates the putative objectivity of superstructural ideation; factual and normative statements alike are to be viewed as epistemically suspect, manifestations of a ubiquitous illusory 'ideology.' But this claim clearly stands in need of some elucidatory philosophical attention.³ Its apparently self-undermining character, Marx's failure to provide a systematic account of the relevant determining mechanisms, and the manifest absurdity of the notion that all or most human thought has been illusory would all seem to indicate that some reformulation is necessary if the thesis is to be salvaged.

This paper attempts such an investigation. What I will try to show is that the traditional interpretation is in certain respects misleading, and that one can in fact reconstruct from Marx's writings a more modest theory of ideational determination that is both internally consis-

able discussions are also collected in Marshall Cohen, Thomas Nagel, and Thomas Scanlon, eds., *Marx, Justice, and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980) and Kai Nielsen and Steven C. Patten, eds., *Marx and Morality* (Guelph, ON: Canadian Association for Publishing in Philosophy 1981). The question of whether Marx's epistemology was realist or idealist is tackled by Wood, and also (at book length) by David-Hillel Ruben, *Marxism and Materialism: A Study in Marxist Theory of Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (1977; rpt. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press 1979). Daniel Little's *The Scientific Marx* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1986) examines the scientific pretensions of Marxism, and there are also interesting discussions in Cohen and Miller. Debates between Marxism and mainstream political theory on the issues of justice, equality, freedom and democracy can be found in the works on ethics already cited, and also in Kai Nielsen, *Equality and Liberty: A Defense of Radical Egalitarianism* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld 1985); Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jr., Jeffrey Paul and John Ahrens, eds., *Marxism and Liberalism* (New York: Basil Blackwell 1986); and Frank Cunningham, *Democratic Theory and Socialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987). Finally, all these topics, and others besides, are covered in several valuable anthologies: John Mepham and David-Hillel Ruben's four-volume *Issues in Marxist Philosophy* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press 1979-81); Terence Ball and James Farr, eds., *After Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984); and John Roemer, ed., *Analytical Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986). For an overview of some of the latest debates, see the survey articles by N. Scott Arnold, 'Recent Work on Marx: A Critical Survey,' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 24 (1987) 277-93, and Allen E. Buchanan, 'Marx, Morality and History: An Assessment of Recent Analytical Work on Marx,' *Ethics* 98 (1987) 104-36.

3 In the general discussions of historical materialism as a theory, McMurtry and Elster do spend some time on this issue.

tent and (given certain empirical assumptions) even plausible. Arguing for the last of these will require greater recourse to sociological literature than is customary in a philosophy essay, but in the light of the subject matter this seems justified. If many works in mainstream social and political philosophy fail to make their sociological assumptions explicit, this may be less because their assumptions are self-evidently true than because they are the framing assumptions of the dominant liberal/pluralist paradigm. It could be, in other words, that certain questions are begged right from the start.⁴

The centrality of the issue of ideational determination to Marx's claims means that any revision of the traditional conception has implications for the debates in all the areas mentioned above. While I will not have space to draw out all these implications, some idea of their range can be gathered by considering the following questions and problems in Marxist theory: Is a functional account of the dominance of certain ideas in society adequate, or does it need to be supplemented/replaced by a causal explanation? Is Marxism's theory of ideological distortion self-refuting? Is a society without ideology (in the pejorative sense) possible? Are all ethical systems ideological, and hence false? Does this mean that Marx's theory of history has no room for ethics—that it is ethically relativist, or amoral, or Thrasymachean? Does this apparent deficiency imply that there is a straight road from Marx's desk in the British Museum to the Gulag? Is Marxism's epistemology historicist or objectivist? Can Marx be legitimately invoked as a forefather of contemporary relativist sociology of science? If the workers only have 'false consciousness' while the vanguard party has 'science,' doesn't this suggest that the transition from capitalism to socialism will mean no more than the replacement of a moneyed elite by a techno-bureaucratic elite? What then remains of Marxism's boast to advance the political community beyond the merely 'formal' equality of liberal-democratic capitalism?

Thus it can be appreciated that the issue is an important one, and that the clarification of the precise claims involved has ramifications in a number of directions.

4 See Miller, chapters three and four, on the presuppositions of pluralist conceptions of political power, and Nielsen, chapter ten, on sociological points against Nozick, for examples of this kind of critique.

I

Our natural starting-point is the making clear of exactly what the statement of ideational determination amounts to. I think there are at least three crucial issues involved here: (a) the scope of the beliefs affected; (b) the nature of the effect; (c) the reasons why determination has this effect. We will proceed by way of a *via negativa*, since my claim is that Marx's original thesis has been inflated into implausibility, and some air has to be let out before it approaches more defensible dimensions.

1. To begin with, then, Marx's theory is *not* a general metaphysical view about the epistemically subversive effects of *any* type of causation on the acquisition of belief. Such a view asserts that if the formation of our beliefs is the result of necessary and sufficient causal conditions, then we can never *know* whether our beliefs are true (though—by chance—they may be), since epistemic justification requires reference to *reasons* for belief.⁵ So: (a) all caused beliefs are affected; (b) the effect is the undermining of doxastic responsibility; (c) this is due to properties of causation itself. There is an extensive debate on this subject, but there is nothing characteristically *Marxist* about the arguments involved, and Marxists who *deny* the validity of this metaphysical view (as I think they should) would simply be employing the standard critiques in the repertoire of one side of the debate, not ransacking *Capital* for quotes. What Marx means to warn us against is specific *varieties* of causation rather than causation in general, so that the Marxist thesis needs to be assessed independently of the metaphysical claim.

2. The next version we will consider is significantly scaled-down in its pretensions. Marx is now represented as saying not that all *caused* beliefs and ideas are epistemically suspect, but that all *socio-economically* caused beliefs and ideas are suspect. So we now have: (a) all socio-economically caused beliefs are affected; (b) the effect is to undermine objectivity; (c) this is due to the properties of *socio-economic* causation. Unlike the first, this version seems to capture the oft-proclaimed 'materialist' aspect of Marx's theory. What is at issue is not a transcendental claim about the characteristics of the universe at large, but an assertion about the specific effects of *social* causality (or, sometimes, the causality of *class* society in particular).

5 For a discussion, and a bibliography of some of the debate, see Stephen M. Knaster, 'How the Self-Defeating Argument Against Determinism Defeats Itself,' *Dialogue* 25 (1986) 239-44.

This retreat in pretensions is an advance in defensibility, but obvious difficulties still remain. To begin with, the problem of self-refutation – a problem of the first view – would seem to raise its head again, albeit in a different guise. If socio-economic causation undermines objectivity, then how does Marxist theory itself escape this fate? One critic, Martin Seliger, poses the dilemma as follows:

[Marx] maintained in principle that in societies as we know them, the dependence of ideas on the relation between economic and social conditions affects adversely the truth-value of ideas.... To be conditioned is to be barred from comprehensive objective knowledge. This opinion and the unquestioned exemption of their own theory from this rule exemplify the irreconcilable poles in Marx and Engels' teachings.⁶

One solution to this problem might be to claim that some beliefs and theories in society are *not* socio-economically caused, and that Marxism itself falls into this fortunate category. But it is understandable if critics are likely to view such conceptual gymnastics with a somewhat cynical eye. By what non-circular rationale does Marxist theory justify its levitation by its own bootstraps into the intellectual heaven of 'science' while simultaneously denying to rival theories this capacity to rise above vulgar socio-economic determination? The simple, unqualified statement of socio-economically derived cognitive deficiency seems to lead to the dilemma of self-refutation or self-serving exceptionalism.

This is one problem area. But there is another. The exact mechanism by which society is supposed to produce this pernicious effect on belief is often left fuzzy, so that it sometimes seems to be no more than a secularized version of the metaphysical claim. And where specific determining mechanisms are cited, there is a surprising range of views as to precisely what is supposed to be at work. H.B. Acton gives one traditional opinion: 'According to Marx and Engels, "ideologies" were false thinking determined by class interests.'⁷ Nicholas Abercrombie, on the other hand, sketches a more ambiguous picture: he suggests that in Marx's views on the 'sociology of knowledge' there is a 'systematic tension' between 'two separate doctrines, each with a distinctive starting point in Marx's writings,' the base-superstructure model

6 *The Marxist Conception of Ideology: A Critical Essay* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1977), 19-21

7 *The Illusion of the Epoch: Marxism-Leninism as a Philosophical Creed* (London: Cohen and West 1955), 132

and the class determination model.⁸ Michael Levin goes even further; he states that in the Marxist approach to ideational determination, there are 'three major theories [my emphasis] on the formulation of consciousness, those of class position, ruling interests and ordinary perception.'⁹ So there is obvious confusion about the processes ostensibly involved.

I suggest, then, that as it stands this version is not satisfactory either.

II

We come now to my recommended conception. I am proposing that we can solve both of the above sets of problems by distinguishing between different *types* of socio-economic causation, some tending to hinder a scientific outlook, but others being neutral, or even tending to promote it. In other words, I suggest that in the same way that the compatibilist determinist differentiates between coercive and non-coercive varieties of causality, Marx would argue that different kinds of socio-economic determinants have different epistemic consequences. Thus it would no longer be a case of trying to escape socio-economic causality in general, but of avoiding particular *kinds* of socio-economic causality. In this spirit, Richard Miller refers to 'truth-distorting' and 'truth-producing' social processes (273), and David Miller observes: 'All ideas, true as well as false, have causal origins, and Marx clearly thinks that there can be a sociology of science just as well as there can be a sociology of religion.'¹⁰ The difficulties arising from representing socio-economic causation as ineluctably distortional – self-refutation, epistemological relativism, or implausible exceptionalism – can therefore be simply side-stepped, while the apparent problem within the texts of competing *theories* of determination resolves itself into the positing of different determinants in *one* theory. Thus we have finally: (a) all socio-economically caused beliefs are affected; (b) the effect is heterogeneous; (c) this is the consequence of the different characteristics of the specific mechanisms at work, which need to be looked at individually.¹¹

8 *Class, Structure and Knowledge: Problems in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York and London: New York University Press 1980), 11-12

9 'Marx and Working-Class Consciousness,' *History of Political Thought* 1 (1980) 507

10 'Ideology and the Problem of False Consciousness,' *Political Studies* 20 (1972) 435

11 At this point, crucially, the critic might contend that Marx's (apparently) pejorative conception of all 'ideology,' most notably in *The German Ideology*, logically precludes such a non-distorting view of socio-economic causation. However, I

This conception, then, is multi-causal rather than monocausal. It is also predicated on laws of tendency rather than exceptionless regularities, a recognition of the existence of multiple determinants. Here I am following those theorists (e.g. David-Hillel Ruben, Daniel Little) who urge that the most sensible way to understand Marx's claims about social 'laws' is in tendential terms: 'A law of tendency is a statement to the effect that, holding other background conditions fixed, condition C tends to give rise to pattern P.'¹² Thus one has to take account of background *ceteris paribus* conditions as well as the existence of *countervailing* tendencies in any prediction one may be making about ideational patterns.¹³

What are these determinants? I suggest that *four* extra-ideational variables are—in one text or another—identified by Marx as having a significant influence on human ideation. They are: (a) class domination; (b) societal appearance; (c) class interest; (d) class position. It is Marx's failure to systematically work out the dynamic of this interaction that, I think, has encouraged the interpretation that he is actually advancing different *theories* of determination, rather than itemizing different determinants in one theory. But a plausible pattern of interaction can be fairly easily reconstructed, as I shall attempt to show.

III

1. *Class domination.* To begin with, there is the ideational influence that arises out of the fact of class domination. What is involved here is the familiar Marxist claim that, in class societies, a certain group of human beings will have effective economic control of the major productive resources of the society, which will, in Marx's opinion, make them a 'ruling class,' thus putting them in a strategic position to influence the main patterns of social ideation.

argue elsewhere that the univocal pejorative interpretation of 'ideology' in Marx—another well-established tradition—is *also* a mistake: for the evidence, see my survey paper, "'Ideology" in Marx and Engels,' *The Philosophical Forum* 16 (1985) 327-46, and my follow-up revision (co-authored with D. Goldstick), 'A New Old Meaning of "Ideology,"' forthcoming in *Dialogue*. Thus I am sympathetic to Joe McCarney's 'epistemologically neutral' conception of 'ideology' (see McCarney, chapter three), though my own strategy for explaining apparently contrary passages in Marx and Engels is a different one.

12 Little, 27. See also David-Hillel Ruben, 'Marxism and Dialectics,' in Mephram and Ruben, vol. 1, 69-71.

13 Little, 24-9

The classic statement of this view is in *The German Ideology*:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, *so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it*. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas.¹⁴ (Original emphasis removed; my emphasis added)

This view has a very long pedigree within Marxist commentary. Lenin tacitly endorses it in *What Is To Be Done?*, when he says that the explanation of 'the domination of bourgeois ideology' is the fact (*inter alia*) that 'it has at its disposal *immeasurably* more means of dissemination.'¹⁵ Gramsci's analysis of 'hegemony,' the Frankfurt School's description of the 'culture industry,' Althusser's notion of 'ideological state apparatuses'—all in different ways draw their inspiration from this central concept.¹⁶ Michael Levin identifies it as one of Marx's 'three major theories': 'It seems that the bourgeoisie "naturally" acquire the ideas appropriate for the defence of their class, which are then further reinforced by the means available to those in possession of state power' (507). Similarly, John McMurtry points to 'the supervisory prominence of ruling-class members in legal, political, and ideological agencies' as a key factor in enabling the 'blocking' of unwanted superstructural developments (162).

That a ruling class exists is a crucial, and obviously controversial, premise for this claim, the debate over which cannot be entered here.¹⁷

14 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (New York: International Publishers 1976), 59

15 V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (Moscow: Progress Publishers 1961), 386

16 See: Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers 1971); Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (1944; rpt. New York: Seabury Press 1972); Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York and London: Monthly Review Press 1971) 127-86.

17 For some statements of the view from the left, see, for example: Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (New York: Basic Books 1969); Richard C. Edwards, Michael Reich and Thomas E. Weisskopf, eds., *The Capitalist System: A Radical Analysis of American Society*, 2nd ed. (1972; rpt. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall 1978); Michael Parenti, *Democracy for the Few*, 5th ed. (1974; rpt. New York: St. Martin's Press 1988); Richard Miller, ch. 3 and 4.

What we need to do is to see how, granted this premise, a plausible case could be made for how such an influence would be transmitted.

(i) First of all, then, it needs to be emphasized that this is not (as it is sometimes caricatured) a *conspiracy* theory of ideological domination, in which the ruling class and its hired intellectuals get together to work out the best way of fooling most of the people most of the time. As Jon Elster points out: 'Ideologists ... must believe in what they are doing in order to have any efficacy. They may welcome the assistance of the ruling class, but typically they cannot change their views at a moment's notice if that class expresses dissatisfaction with them' (472). In general these views are promulgated in good faith, with no conscious intention to deceive. Where particular conspiracies do exist, it is usually at the level of the interpretation of *specific* events rather than the characterization of the *general* features of the capitalist system. Thus the exposure of the mythical character of such well-publicized menaces of the 1980s as the 'international terrorist threat' posed by Nicaragua and Grenada, the 'Bulgarian connection' in the 1981 assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II, and the 'yellow rain' chemical warfare in South-East Asia does strongly suggest that in their original creation deliberate 'disinformation' played a crucial role.¹⁸

(ii) The channels usually cited by Marxists as the most important for this dissemination of ruling-class perspectives are the educational system and the mass media.¹⁹ State supervision of the former and corporate ownership of the latter provide the ingress for this influence. The claim is not that a single monolithic view is being disseminated

18 See: Edward S. Herman, *The Real Terror Network: Terrorism in Fact and Propaganda* (Boston: South End Press 1982); Wayne S. Smith, 'Lies About Nicaragua,' *Foreign Policy* 67 (1987) 87-103; Noam Chomsky, *The Culture of Terrorism* (Boston: South End Press 1988); Gordon K. Lewis, *Grenada: The Jewel Despoiled* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1987); Edward S. Herman and Frank Brodhead, *The Rise and Fall of the Bulgarian Connection* (New York: Sheridan Square Press 1986); Grant Evans, *The Yellow Rainmakers: Are Chemical Weapons Being Used in Southeast Asia?* (London: Verso 1983); Julian Robinson, Jeanne Guillemin and Matthew Meselson, 'Yellow Rain: The Story Collapses,' *Foreign Policy* 68 (1987) 100-17; Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality: The Politics of the News Media* (New York: St. Martin's Press 1986).

19 See: Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (New York: Basic Books 1976); Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1979) and *Education and Power* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1982); Parenti, *Democracy, Parenti, Reality*; Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon 1988).

via these agents of socialization, but that amidst the apparently vertiginous choice of cultural products—books, magazines, newspapers, comics, TV shows, movies, videos—the range of opinion on *certain* issues shrinks dramatically; the millions of voices suddenly coalesce into a chorus of one or two notes. It is not that there is no debate, but that debate takes place largely within a framework of common, pro-capitalist assumptions, with heretical opinions being cast into the outer darkness of (at best) the non-slick, low-circulation, left-wing weekly or monthly that nobody but the converted reads.

(iii) Particular conspiracies aside, the machinery at work generally produces its effects by what Daniel Little calls an ‘institutional logic’ rather than the conscious aiming at an ideological target (33-7). ‘Such an explanation proceeds from a description of the conditions under which individual participants make their choices, and arrives at a conclusion about the overall consequences which follow from these conditions for the system as a whole’ (Little, 34). In many cases, for example, it is simple commercial considerations which tend to produce ideological conformity. Most of the cultural products mentioned above will be commodities which have to compete for a share of the market. Those at the upper levels of organizational hierarchies who actually make the decisions as to which stories to accept or reject, which ideas and approaches look promising and which do not, will be guided—quite apart from their own (usually conservative) political views—by their sense of what will *sell*, and a left-of-centre political perspective tends to diminish marketability, to be seen as ‘unsafe,’ ‘controversial.’ Correspondingly, the aspiring writer soon learns after one or two rejections where the boundaries of acceptable dissent are located.

One strand of the ruling class’s influence on ideas will therefore itself be ideational in nature: those socialized in such a setting will be prone to take for granted that the familiar spectrum of debate covers all respectable views, so that the ideas they themselves go on to develop will tend to reproduce this framework of assumptions. Thus to a significant extent, the pattern of belief is maintained by self-sustaining, ‘internal’ processes rather than by direct external determination. I think that the bafflement and incredulity many philosophers feel when they hear Marxist claims about the ‘economic determination’ of ideas is due partly to their envisaging the ‘economy’ as the Marxist version of a theistic God, which is constantly intervening to keep our thoughts running along the appropriate capitalist lines. The obvious absurdity of this picture, and its incongruity with our own phenomenological experience of working out the implications of an idea, seem to confirm the ridiculousness of the Marxist thesis. But if a religious analogy is appropriate, it is the more remote deistic God who should be invoked, who sets up the system and then basically

leaves it to run itself. Once people accept certain fundamental presuppositions about the nature of society, the secondary variations in their beliefs are not likely to endanger its continuation.

However, this is not the whole story. The other ('external'), more vulgarly material strand of influence also needs to be mentioned, for it constitutes a second barrier to be overcome by those individuals whose particular upbringing, or differential social circumstances, have led them to develop ideas that question the legitimacy of the social order. Quite simply, one has to live to ideate. The need to find the means to ensure one's personal survival is likely to have a continuous, ongoing effect on the ideas and values one chooses to proclaim publicly—and, inevitably, on the private beliefs one has also. As Richard Miller sardonically observes: '[I]n any class-dominated society, attacking the ruling class is not, for any significant number of people, a means of making a living, though it does jeopardize one's living' (256). In the repressive capitalist dictatorships of the Third World, this is true in the most literal sense: since World War II, tens of thousands of trade-unionists, left-wing activists and human-rights workers have been killed in Latin America alone, often after systematic torture *pour encourager les autres*.²⁰ In the liberal-democratic capitalist states of the industrialized West, the choice is more likely to be one between living well and living badly (police surveillance and harassment, diminished employment and promotion opportunities, etc.), but for many people the threat of the latter prospect will be almost as effective a deterrent of anti-capitalist activism.²¹

On the 'microfoundational' level of rational individual choice,²² then, there will be a natural tendency to tailor one's advertised beliefs to the realities of politico-economic power. The aggregative effect of such choices is obviously highly functional for the ruling class since self-censorship is, after all, the most effective kind, and has, from the public relations point of view, the additional virtue of being invisible. Thus Marx's statement about the 'ruling ideas' should not be seen as a 1984-like speculation about the ruling-class's capacity to oversee some

20 See Herman, *Real Terror Network*, and also Noam Chomsky, *Turning the Tide: U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Struggle for Peace* (Boston: South End Press 1985).

21 See: David Caute, *The Great Fear* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1978); Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press 1986); Ward Churchill and James Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression* (Boston: South End Press 1988).

22 See Elster.

kind of cerebral monitoring of the subject population, but, as John McMurtry stresses, as 'a plausible empirical claim' about the control of ideas that 'reach the public stage.' The 'epistemological weaknesses' attendant upon the inflation of this view into 'a claim about the nature and causation of ideas in general' can therefore simply be avoided (129-30).

(iv) Finally, I want to point out some of the problems that have resulted from the mistake of taking this as the *single* ideational determinant: the attribution to Marx of the view that all human thought will be determined solely by the contents of the ruling ideology, and that this ideology is wholly or largely illusory. This interpretation seems to suggest that human beings can be brought to believe *any* arbitrarily constructed set of false propositions—no matter how divergent from reality—so long as they are appropriately disseminated. The anti-commonsensical implications of this should be obvious, yet they have been embraced. Karl Mannheim, for example, glosses the notion of 'false consciousness' as 'the problem of the totally distorted mind which falsifies everything which comes within its range,'²³ neglecting to explain how a human being possessing such a mind could ever *survive* in a world placing definite demands on the cognitive apparatus of its inhabitants. Less dramatically, but equally mistakenly, in my opinion, Martin Seliger argues that in writing *Capital*, Marx 'did not practice what he preached. He relied exclusively for his data on bourgeois literature, press and government publications, and accepted many of their evaluations' (53). This 'refutation' can only mean that Seliger takes Marx to be saying that 'bourgeois' government inspectors (presumably blinded by 'ideology') will be incapable of objectively perceiving even simple empirical facts about wage-rates, factory conditions, the length of the working-day, the adulteration of food, etc.

I think that such views rest, either implicitly or explicitly, on the assumption that Marx's epistemology is an idealist one, so that, as in Thomas Kuhn's influential formulation, different 'paradigms'/'ideologies' generate different 'worlds.'²⁴ Social reality would therefore itself impose few independent constraints on the kinds of ideas that can be successfully disseminated about it. By contrast, I would follow Allen Wood, David-Hillel Ruben, and other writers in assuming that Marx takes the commonsense objectivist view that the world is independent

23 *Ideology and Utopia*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (Bonn, 1929; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World 1968), 62

24 *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (1962; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1970), ch. 10

of our perception of it.²⁵ If this is correct, then, if the ruling ideology is in crucial areas false and misleading, epistemological realism would lead us to expect that these areas are at least superficially in correspondence with the way the world seems. Class domination alone, then, would not be a sufficient condition for achieving ideological hegemony; the character of the ideas disseminated will also be an important and relevant variable.

2. *Societal appearance.* This brings us to the second major ideational determinant we will consider: the 'appearance' of society. This is not a metaphysical contrast of a Platonic kind, but an anticipation by Marx of contemporary distinctions in the philosophy of science, where a shallow inductivist empiricism is rejected as methodologically inadequate in favour of a realist epistemic penetration to underlying structural mechanisms.²⁶

Marx thinks that this distinction is a hallmark of the scientific method in general: 'But all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided.'²⁷ However, it is especially important that *social* scientists keep this methodological dictum in mind, because the structure of capitalism, Marx believes, is *inherently* apt to produce such phenomenal distortions (unlike earlier, more 'transparent' class societies, such as slavery and feudalism, where the political subordination of the exploited classes is obvious). Thus it is in his own major investigation of this structure, *Capital*, that this theme is most often emphasized, in his repeated criticisms of 'vulgar' economy, 'which deals with appearances only.'²⁸

The important point, then, is that capitalism *itself* generates misleading categories and beliefs in the minds of those involved in its structure, quite *apart* from any efforts by ruling-class intellectuals. In Jon Elster's terminology, drawn from the vocabulary of cognitive psychology, Marx is implicitly relying on the distinction between 'hot' and 'cold' mechanisms of belief-formation: 'The hot mechanisms include motivationally based processes, such as wishful thinking.... The cold mechanisms rest on purely cognitive processes and biases, unrelated to

25 See: Wood, chapter twelve; Ruben, *Materialism*; Frank Cunningham and Dan Goldstick, 'Marxism and Epistemological Relativism,' *Social Praxis* 6 (1979) 237-53.

26 Russell Keat and John Urry's *Social Theory as Science*, 2nd ed. (1975; rpt. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1982) develops this theme at length.

27 *Capital*, vol. 3 (New York: International Publishers 1967), 817

28 *Capital*, vol. 1 (New York: International Publishers 1967), 81, n. 1

motivation' (19). Societal appearance acts as a 'cold' mechanism, like a mirage. Unlike class domination, then (which is in principle neutral, since a proletarian ruling class would theoretically not need to employ ideological mystification), this determinant *does* have intrinsic epistemic consequences for the resulting ideas and beliefs, since the appearance is, *ex hypothesi*, illusory in nature.

Not all of the many currents in Marxist commentary acknowledge this variable. Lenin and Gramsci, for example, have little to say about it, resting their analysis more on ruling-class domination. But it is very prominent in recent Anglo-American discussions of Marx. Michael Levin classifies this as the second of Marx's 'three major theories,' the theory of 'ordinary perception' (504). John Mepham says that, 'Ideology arises from the opacity of reality,'²⁹ and G.A. Cohen and Daniel Little, among many others, emphasize Marx's 'essentialist' approach to the study of social phenomena, which requires the transcendence of immediate appearance.³⁰ As before, then, we need to look at some of the ramifications of this view.

(i) To start with, then, the point made at the close of the previous section is underlined: the dominance of the 'ruling ideology' is to be attributed not merely to ruling-class control over society's ideational apparatuses, but to the fact that the ideas disseminated *do* largely seem to correspond to the actual workings of capitalism. (Recall Marx and Engels' specification in the passage from *The German Ideology* quoted above [see n. 14] that 'The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations.') In some cases this correspondence is real, in others only apparent, but in both sets of cases there are necessary epistemological constraints on the ideas involved for them to successfully 'resonate' with people's experience. As John Mepham puts it: 'Bourgeois ideology dominates because, within serious limits, *it works*, both cognitively and in practice' (166).

(ii) But if societal appearance itself is the (major) ultimate source of misleading categories and beliefs, it may be wondered whether the differential dissemination of these ideas throughout society by the ruling class is not a causal redundancy, a case of 'overdetermination' (in the original, pre-Althusserian sense). Mepham, for example, criticizes Lenin for his explanation of ideological hegemony in terms of capitalist domination of ideational channels, and seems to suggest that appearance *alone* can account for this hegemony, since the 'phenomenal

29 John Mepham, 'The Theory of Ideology in *Capital*,' in Mepham and Ruben, vol. 3, 148

30 Cohen, appendix I; Little, ch. 4

forms of social life' generate ideologies in which 'real social relations' are 'structurally excluded from thought' (141-3; 152).

However, I think that both accounts are one-sided, and that in fact both demonstrate the hazards of representing *one* determinant as telling what is actually a more complex story. For while societal appearance is a strong ideational influence, there are also other influences at work, some tending to undermine it. As David-Hillel Ruben points out, in opposition to fatalistic analyses of ideological determination, 'it is not necessary that men take those appearances for reality, although it is natural that they should tend to do so.'³¹ The way that class domination contributes significantly to the maintenance of ideological hegemony is by giving an authoritative theoretical backing to these appearances, thereby underwriting the illusory aspects of the inchoate belief-systems people develop about the social structure. By providing the clearly defined and well-articulated matrices of the 'legitimized' ideational patterns, and by conceptually blocking and diverting the development of others, the ruling ideology reinforces and crystallizes what would otherwise be only one tendency among various ideational possibilities. As Marx says in the *Grundrisse*, commenting on idealist interpretations of the development of social relations:

This error was all the more easily committed ... as this reign exercised by the relations ... appears within the consciousness of individuals as the reign of ideas, and because the belief in the permanence of these ideas ... is of course *consolidated, nourished and inculcated by the ruling classes by all means available*.³² (My emphasis)

Class domination, therefore, should not be seen as an otiose determinant, for it buttresses societal appearance. The two, in fact, are really complementary, neither being capable on its own of supporting a long-term ideological hegemony.

(iii) Finally, we should look briefly at some specific instances of these 'illusions' that Marx claims are generated by the structure of capitalism. One very important example is the illusion of the 'wage-form,' which is theoretically central to liberalism as a political philosophy, since, in Marx's view, it 'forms the basis of all the juridical notions of both labourer and capitalist,' and all the corresponding 'illusions as

31 Ruben, *Materialism*, 113. See also Kathryn Russell's critique of Mepham in Mepham and Ruben, vol. 3, 185-96.

32 Trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage Books 1973), 164-5

to liberty.³³ Marx's point is that the freedom with which the labourer chooses to contract or not to contract with an individual capitalist is aggregatively undercut by the capitalist *class's* effective domination of the society's means of production. Thus proletarian choices will in certain respects be forced, so that the social ontology assumed by this ideological representation of the transaction—a universe of free and equal atomic individuals—is really fundamentally misleading.³⁴ Even if one is not convinced, then, one can at least see how the case would be made, and appreciate that it does not rely on any mysterious Hegelian jargon, but on fairly straightforward, if controversial, claims about the constraints actually narrowing human choice.

But there are other examples, more clearly and uncontentionally illusive, where Marxist critics would actually share a great deal of common ground with their liberal colleagues. Marx's notion of 'fetishism,' for example, has been variously interpreted, but one way of seeing it is as a warning against the conflation of the social (variable) with the natural (fixed).³⁵ Generalizing from an inadequate data base, people tend to take the more prominent correlations of their own social environment for natural necessities. Thus Marx observes that: 'The advance of capitalist production develops a working-class, which by education, tradition, habit, looks upon the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident laws of Nature.'³⁶ A politically disastrous fatalism about the social system is obviously likely to be the result. Other examples of this kind of 'naturalization' are the theories of what has been called 'biological determinism': the view, in the words of Stephen Jay Gould, that 'social and economic differences between human groups—primarily races, classes, and sexes—arise from inherited, inborn distinctions and that society, in this sense, is an accurate reflection of biology.'³⁷ Again, the perceptual processes by which people arrive at these generalizations can easily be reconstructed, involving a naturalistic reading of the actual empirical distribution of racial,

33 *Capital*, vol. 1, 540, 176

34 For a discussion, see G.A. Cohen, 'The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 12 (1983) 3-33 and Andrew Levine, *Arguing for Socialism* (1984; rpt. London and New York: Verso 1988), ch. 1.

35 *Capital*, vol. 1, 71-83; Cohen offers an account in *History*, ch. 4 and 5.

36 *Capital*, vol. 1, 737. For an attempt at a diagrammatic treatment of this ideological phenomenon, see my 'Marxism and Naturalistic Mystification,' *Science and Society* 49 (1985) 472-83.

37 *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York and London: W.W. Norton 1981), 20

gender and class roles by the social division of labour. Naive views about the innate inferiority of women and non-whites, and the natural hierarchy of the smart rich and the stupid poor, may then be reinforced by more sophisticated sexist, racist and meritocratic theories. The claim Marxists would have to defend, of course, is that this inequitable division of labour, and its official sanctioning by discriminatory ideologies, is more characteristic of capitalist than socialist societies.

3. *Class interest.* We come now to the determinant perhaps most closely associated in people's minds with the Marxist theory of ideology: class interest. In Elster's terminology, earlier cited, this is a 'hot' mechanism, and it is usually taken for granted that its effects are distortionary. Thus Melvin Rader asserts that for Marx, 'An ideology is a misleading set of ideas with which men, more or less unconsciously, rationalize and excuse or conceal their class interests' (42). Similarly, H.B. Acton states that: 'According to Marx and Engels, "ideologies" were false thinking determined by class interests' (132).

But if class interest necessarily has such negative epistemic consequences, then the Pandora's Box of problems discussed in section I, above, is immediately opened: Isn't a genetic fallacy involved here? Why don't proletarian class interests also produce 'false thinking'? How is the class determination of ideologies to be reconciled with *general* acceptance of the ruling (bourgeois) ideology? Once again, several clarifications are necessary.

(i) To begin with, it is worthwhile to remind ourselves of a point made by Joe McCarney: we should 'distinguish the thesis that ideology serves class interests from the thesis that it is determined by class interests' (32). Of course, it may be the case that *both* relationships obtain, but it is the latter which is the genetic claim. So Marx is not, absurdly, claiming that the *serving* of class interests proves epistemic deficiency. A certain kind of objection, which John McMurtry cites John Plamenatz as making – 'the difficulty of showing that an idea that favours the ruling class is also necessarily false and/or unscientific' (14) – can thus be seen simply to be misconceived.

(ii) Second, we see illustrated again the problems resulting from taking one determinant as the sole operative variable. Martin Seliger, for example, regards it as an embarrassment for Marxist theory that in most present-day capitalist countries the proletariat share significantly in the ideology of the bourgeoisie: 'That the proletariat is held capable of adopting bourgeois ideology is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the determinist foundation of false consciousness' (71). But this is only true if one attributes to Marx a *monocausal* model, which I have suggested is a basic error.

(iii) However, in my opinion, it is the view expressed by Acton which is the most serious misinterpretation of Marx's concept of socio-

economic determination. Class interest as such, I would argue, is regarded by Marx as an 'epistemically neutral' determinant, *not* necessarily connected with non-veridical beliefs. What Marx does think is that there is a correlation between different class interests and the propensity to accept/reject unscientific approaches to social investigation. But this is an historically contingent (and varying) correlation, grounded not in any arbitrarily assigned properties of 'bourgeois' as against 'proletarian' class interests, but in the differential relationship of these respective classes *to* the illusory appearances thrown up by capitalism.³⁸ It is here that the explanatory weight should be put in accounts of ideology. The failure in some of the secondary literature first to *separate* the respective determinants and then to consider their interactional pattern means that there has been a tendency to produce descriptions which short-circuit the causal process of ideological genesis. Class interest is seen as a powerful 'black box' which is capable of generating on its own, without mediating variables, the complex and multiform webs of ideas involved. But what I am suggesting is that it would be more accurately viewed as a stimulus/inhibitor of the inclination to probe the veridicality of ideas largely generated through *other* causal processes. A quotation from Marx illustrates this point:

The actual difference of magnitude between profit and surplus-value ... now completely conceals the true nature and origin of profit not only from the capitalist, who has a special interest in deceiving himself on this score, but also from the labourer.³⁹

The 'special interest' of the capitalist *contributes* to his acceptance of an illusory belief about the nature and origin of profit, but it does not produce it—the capitalist structure does. Thus it is not that a single ideational determinant—'bourgeois class interest'—is at work, and that from its corrupt character we can confidently predict the falsity of the adopted beliefs. Marx's epistemological 'privileging' of proletarian class interests does not, then, necessarily involve him in special pleading, or question-begging teleologies (the proletariat as a class with a historical destiny to realize, etc.). For he is not saying—the 'black box' interpretation—that proletarian class interests necessarily *generate* objective complexes of ideas, but, far more modestly, that the labourer—unlike the capitalist—has no 'special interest' in being deceived, so that

38 See Marx's Afterword to the second German edition of vol. 1 of *Capital*, where the historic shift away from 'scientific bourgeois economy' is described.

39 *Capital*, vol. 3, 168

the embracing of a scientific analysis of society will not be hindered by 'the Furies of private interest.'⁴⁰ In the words of Michael Levin:

The working class are also caught within the same world of appearances as the bourgeoisie. ... Politically the bourgeoisie have every interest in *reinforcing* the prevailing picture of society. ... The proletariat, ideally at least, do not share this motivation. ... Dissatisfaction with the *status-quo* provides the potential for seeing through it. (506)

4. *Class position.* Finally, there is class position. This is sometimes lumped together in an undifferentiated way with class interest (for example, Levin does this [see 506-7]), but we need to separate them, for distinct lines of determination are involved. What we have here are not divergent epistemic attitudes, conditioned by class interest, towards the same 'appearance' of social reality, but significantly divergent *experiences* of that reality, arising out of the differential social locations of the agents involved. Marx's clearest statement of the role of this variable is probably in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, where he is comparing the Legitimists and the Orleanists:

Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, rises an entire superstructure of different and distinctly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought and views of life. The entire class creates and forms them out of its material foundations and out of the corresponding social relations.⁴¹

The claim is, then, that by virtue of being a member of class A rather than class B, one's daily intersection with the world will tend in certain key respects to be different, and so, accordingly, will be the ideas one tends to form of the nature of the world.

(i) Like class interest, class position is regarded by Marx as likely to have varying epistemic consequences, with the working class being best situated for gaining a veridical perspective on the system. In the classical tradition of Marxist theory (Lenin, Gramsci, etc.) this was a commonplace notion, but contemporary Western Marxism and Anglo-American Marxist exposition, mindful of the long unhappy history of Stalinist lies put forward in the name of 'proletarian truth,' is very wary

40 *Capital*, vol. 1, 10

41 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 11 (New York: International Publishers 1979), 128

of such a claim. Jon Elster, for example, is typical in contrasting the 'rational' and the 'social' causation of beliefs, and consigning both 'material interest and social position' to the latter, non-rational category (474-5). But the justified aversion to the notion that any class has a monopoly on objectivity need not imply that all classes are equally well-situated to appreciate the social truth. Marx's assertion can, I believe, be defended if it is cautiously formulated – as applying primarily not to individual social scientists, but to ordinary unreflective people constructing, at a relatively unsophisticated level, pictures of the workings of the social system from their differential experience of it. The claim would then be that, of the matrix of possible subsets of experience which are afforded by different structural locations, that of the working class is most likely to constitute the foundation of an objective view of the social structure.

An illustration drawn from an uncontroversially exploitative society may help to make this notion more understandable for us. Consider the differences in the perspectives on the South African system of *apartheid* of a white Johannesburg resident, making the comfortable rounds of cocktail parties, golf courses, and tennis courts, and a black Sowetan, commuting to work from his township shack. Which of these two men is then more likely to have the better appreciation of the actual functioning of the structures of power, of the real nature of conditions for the majority – in sum, of the true character of the society? It does not seem unreasonable to predict that it will be the one whose life has been spent in the entrails of the system, rather than the one who has been confined to the glossy cosmetic surface. And this is basically the point Marx is making.

(ii) It should not be thought, however, that Marx (except perhaps in his earlier years) believed that the simple fact of *suffering* produces enlightenment. Rather, Marx believes that what is crucial is that, of all the subordinate classes of capitalism, it is the proletariat whose daily *work experience* is most favourable for fostering a comprehension of how capitalism really functions, and how it can be transformed. The isolated and individualistic character of peasant production blocks such an understanding, and militates against the growth of a collective consciousness,⁴² while the ambiguous structural location of the petty bourgeoisie leads it, in Marx's opinion, to seek illusory compromises.⁴³ But

42 Marx and Engels, *Works*, vol. 11, 187

43 See Marx's Dec. 28, 1846, letter to P.V. Annenkov, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 38 (New York: International Publishers 1982), 105, and also Marx and Engels, *Works*, vol. 11, 130-1.

Marx felt that the working conditions of the proletariat—involving the bringing together of large numbers of people in a production process structured around a hierarchy of power and domination—would themselves stimulate the development of a sense of class unity, antagonism to the ruling class, and willingness to engage in collective action.⁴⁴ As Joe McCarney puts it:

[T]he sense of its situation naturally available to the proletariat contains in embryo the possibility of a scientific account of society.... What the proletariat is made aware of by virtue of its life experience are such realities as the existence of social classes, of conflicting class interests, of exploitation and of its own status as a commodity. (116)

The argument would be that in this case class position has the effect of undercutting some of the societal illusions discussed earlier, so that its epistemic influence would actually be positive.

IV

I would suggest, then, that these four variables—class domination, societal appearance, class interest, and class position—are regarded by Marx as the most important socio-economic influences on ideological genesis and development.

The picture we arrive at is therefore something like the following. Of the four determinants singled out, two are general (trans-class) in their effects and two are class-specific. So different patterns of interaction are produced for different classes. For the ruling class, social reality appears to be a certain way, the dominant ideology confirms it is that way, their unrepresentative experience does not contradict this picture, and their material interests militate against any desire to probe deeper. The prevailing tendency, then, is to accept the beliefs generated by the surface appearance of society.

For the subordinate classes, though, particularly the working class, the situation is more complex. Their own specific class experiences and class interests produce an opposing ideational tendency, an embryonic counter-ideology. But they are not exempt from the general illusions fostered by the capitalist structure, nor can they avoid the pervasive influence of the educational system and the mass media. Moreover,

44 See, for example, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (New York: International Publishers 1976), 490-6.

they have the additional disadvantage of generally lacking (because of the division of labour) the sophisticated cultural and intellectual training which would give them the tools to refine their own ideas, and to develop a critique of the dominant ideology. Overall, then, the workers will tend to give their doxastic allegiance to the ideology of the capitalist class, but their acceptance will not be monolithic, but qualified in many ways, undercut by their own contrary experience.

This hypothetical picture is, I suggest, borne out by much contemporary sociological research. Instead of a 'false consciousness,' then, the more fruitful notion of a 'contradictory consciousness' is sometimes employed, which, as two British sociologists write, 'reflects the difference between the real experience of capitalist production and the phenomenal forms of the market.'⁴⁵ Similarly, a study of London dockworkers suggests that discrepancies in replies to survey questions indicate the existence of 'two frames of reference': 'The first is the acceptance of dominant values.... The second is the subordinate value system which arises out of people's own experience and that of others in the same situation.'⁴⁶

The resulting consciousness is thus a divided one, so that while some tenets of ruling-class ideology may be accepted completely, others may be only partially accepted, or accepted only in certain contexts, and still others may be accepted as abstractions but rejected at the pragmatic level. An important paper by Michael Mann that summarizes two decades of sociological research into the beliefs of U.S. and British workers documents this pattern of what he calls 'theoretical schizophrenia.'⁴⁷ He found that 'working class individuals ... exhibit less internal *consistency* in their values than middle-class people,' tending to be willing to endorse 'general platitudes,' but then to show by their replies to more concrete questions that 'these have little actual relevance for their own life-projects.'⁴⁸ Mann suggests that the evidence

45 Eve Brook and Dan Finn, 'Working Class Images of Society and Community Studies,' in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, ed., *On Ideology* (1977; rpt. London: Hutchinson 1978), 126. For Gramsci's original use, see Gramsci, 333.

46 Stephen Hill, *The Dockers: Class and Tradition in London* (London: Heinemann 1976), 141

47 'The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy,' *American Sociological Review* 35 (1970) 423-39; reprinted in Anthony Giddens and David Held, eds., *Classes, Power, and Conflict* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1982), 373-95

48 Mann (in Giddens and Held), 388; 378-82

indicates the working class is 'able and willing to produce deviant simplistic views of society but not deviant abstract ones' (382).⁴⁹ The prestige and authority of the ruling ideology produce a conceptual blockage in the potential development of working-class thought, so that even though the workers' experience contradicts prevailing shibboleths, they are not able to develop these empirical generalizations to the point where they can mount a *theoretical* challenge to the dominant views. Nevertheless, the fact that even this much ideological deviation is possible shows how misleading is the characterization of the workers' consciousness as *completely* mystified.

V

My conclusion is, then, that the tradition which links a monocausal socio-economic determinism to a consequent necessary cognitive deformation ('ideology,' 'illusion,' 'false consciousness,' etc.) has been a baneful influence in Marx interpretation. By utilizing a multi-causal approach, we can construct a theory of the determination of consciousness which, while it admits the distorting role of illusive appearances and mystifying ideologies, simultaneously allows for the possibility of a *veridical* insight into the characteristics of the social structure which is itself no less socially determined.

At the beginning of this paper, I pointed out that because of the centrality of the issue of ideational determination to Marxist theory, any revision of the traditional picture would have implications for a number of separate areas of inquiry. I want to close by giving a brief sketch of how this revision may suggest possible avenues of approach to some of the questions posed at the start.

1. To begin with, we can now see that a functional account of the dominance of ruling-class ideology that relies solely on the benefits to ruling-class interests will be explanatorily deficient. It would at least need to be supplemented by a description of the societal appearances which furnish the ideational raw material for these ideologies.⁵⁰ In addition,

49 More recent discussions, and extensive bibliographies, can be found in David J. Cheal, 'Hegemony, Ideology and Contradictory Consciousness,' *The Sociological Quarterly* 20 (1979) 109-17, and Gordon Marshall, 'Some Remarks on the Study of Working-Class Consciousness,' *Politics and Society* 12 (1983) 263-301.

50 In this spirit, James Noble has argued that one of the important 'adequacy conditions' Marxian functionalist explanations must meet to avoid being mere pseudo-

the existence of *countervailing* ideological tendencies would have to be acknowledged, and have a theoretical space provided for them.

2. The minefield of problems that results from tying socio-economic determination to unscientific ideation can be simply circumvented. These problems include the charge of self-refutation, the question of whether a society without (illusory) ideologies is possible, and the epistemological difficulties of currently fashionable relativist sociologies of belief and philosophies of science.⁵¹ The key premise for all these problematic views is the assumption that social causality necessarily undermines rationality, and I am proposing that the evidence indicates that Marx, at least, was not advancing this claim. His intellectual paternity cannot therefore be cited in its support.

3. The meta-ethical non-cognitivism attributed to Marx on the basis of the (parallel) putative undercutting of the objectivity of values by social determination would thus also need re-examination. There are, of course, other reasons for thinking that Marx was sceptical of ethical claims, but this reconceptualization does at least open up the theoretical possibility of an objectivist ethic influenced in its development by alternate (non-distorting) paths of determination.⁵²

4. Finally, the fact that the workers are capable of attaining, on their own, a partially veridical comprehension of the workings of the social system, reduces the elitist aspect of the relationship between them and the socialist political parties who claim to be seeking their emancipation. It is no longer a question of a purely external cognitive liberation – the replacement of ‘false consciousness’ by ‘science’ – with its accompanying dangerous paternalism, but the more reciprocal pedagogical relationship Gramsci envisaged, in which the workers not only actively

explanations is some plausible auxiliary genetic theory of ‘how it comes about that the item that fulfills the need is there in the first place’ (see James Noble, ‘Marxian Functionalism,’ in Ball and Farr, 114).

51 For example, the ‘strong programme’ of the Edinburgh school; see Barry Barnes, *Interests and the Growth of Knowledge* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1977) and David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1976).

52 See, for example, Ziyad Husami’s critique of Robert Tucker and Allen Wood’s ‘anti-moralist’ (the phrase is Kai Nielsen’s) interpretations of Marx’s views on justice, in which Husami emphasizes that Marx’s ‘sociology of morals’ involves ‘two levels of determination’ (‘Marx on Distributive Justice,’ in Cohen, Nagel and Scanlon, 47).

assist in their own enlightenment, but also contribute to the modification of abstract theory on the basis of their own practical experience.⁵³ If this can be achieved, then perhaps the realization of socialism would mean more than the mere rotation of elites.

Received August, 1987

Revised November, 1987

53 For discussions of Gramsci's views on this issue, see, for example, Joseph Femia, 'Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci,' *Political Studies* 23 (1975) 29-48, and Jerome Karel, 'Revolutionary Contradictions: Antonio Gramsci and the Problem of Intellectuals,' *Politics and Society* 6 (1976) 123-72.