

Scientist or Seer?

Raymond Aron's Critique of Vulgar Marxism

in *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire**

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It is therefore the task of history, once otherworldly truth has vanished, to establish the truth of this world. And after the sacred form of self-alienation has been exposed, it is above all the task of philosophy, which is handmaiden to history, to expose this self-alienation in its secular forms.¹ (Karl Marx)

The historian encounters the final questions which, posed by theology, are inevitable for the individual. Science is completed in philosophy, or rather the two of them are conjoined: the most positive scientist proceeds spontaneously to the organization of fragmentary regularities, without which history would tend to dissolve into an incoherent plurality and lose the intelligible unity that defines it.² (Raymond Aron)

Raymond Aron's criticisms of Marxism are well known and yet still subject to debate.³ Marx himself and his ideas are enjoying a new lease on life in the

* This text was prepared as part of an unpublished PhD dissertation.

¹ "Es ist also die Aufgabe der Geschichte, nachdem das Jenseits der Wahrheit verschwunden ist, die Wahrheit des Diesseits zu etablieren. Es ist zunächst die Aufgabe der Philosophie, die im Dienste der Geschichte steht, nachdem die Heiligungsgestalt der menschlichen Selbstentfremdung entlarvt ist, die Selbstentfremdung in ihren unheiligen Gestalten zu entlarven." Marx, 2013 [1844], Loc. 1287.

² "L'historien retrouve les questions dernières, issues de la théologie mais inévitables pour l'homme seul. La science s'achève en philosophie, ou plutôt l'une et l'autre se confondent : le savant le plus positif procède spontanément à l'organisation des régularités fragmentaires, sans laquelle l'histoire tendrait à se dissoudre en une pluralité incohérente et à perdre l'unité intelligible qui la définit." Aron, 1986 [1938], 324.

³ See, for example, Colen, 2013; Gordon, 2011; Judt, 1992; Judt, 1998.

fallout of the recent financial crisis.⁴ It behooves the scholar concerned with both of these phenomena to re-examine one of Marx's most attentive critics working at one of his more generous critiques of Marxism. This will provide us with the clarity indispensable for separating the wheat from the chaff in Marxism, as well as shed some light on the ongoing dispute regarding Aron's critique of Marxism.

It was in 1931 during his stay in Germany that Raymond Aron would begin his lifelong dialogue with Karl Marx, whose influence on the young French scholar's intellectual trajectory would be unmatched.⁵ He delved into this great German thinker's works "less in order to arrive at an opinion on the Soviet Union than to mark out the borderline between the analytics and dialectics (in the Kantian sense) of historical knowledge."⁶ He also wondered if a reading of *Das Kapital* might aid one in explaining the economic crisis.⁷ Sadly, Marx's analysis provided neither a sufficient explanation for the crisis nor much of a boost to Aron's vague socialism.

What it *did* offer, however, was a bold and comprehensive philosophy of History, and if that highly intrigued Aron, it was because, long before many of his countrymen, Aron had sensed that history was again "on the move". He was also ahead of almost all of his compatriots in his reading of Marx's earlier texts which, fortunately, were published in 1932 in Berlin during Raymond Aron's sojourn there.⁸ This wide range of material would likely have indicated to Aron very early on three crucial components of the totality of Marx's thought: his philosophical-anthropological assumptions, his socialist teachings, and his economic analysis, corresponding to German dialectics, French socialist thought, and the English analysis of political economy.⁹

As banal as this division may be,¹⁰ it is sufficient to make the equally banal statement that Marx's thought encompasses a number of different disciplines (philosophy, sociology/history, economics) and – considering the frequency with which Marx hops between the various disciplines in his works – we should try to take it as a whole. This division has as its corollary three motifs that dominate Marx's thought: the romantic, the Faustian-Promethean, and

⁴ See, for example, Eagleton, 2011; Hobsbawm, 2011; Sperber, 2013.

⁵ Aron, 2002, 304.

⁶ Aron, 1989, 147.

⁷ Aron, 2010 [1983], 85-86.

⁸ Colquhoun, 1986, 162.

⁹ Kolakowski, 2005 [1976], 9.

¹⁰ Aron, 1967, 172.

the rationalist, determinist Enlightenment.¹¹ Marx's construct claimed to explain not only the present, but also the past and predict a better future, lending it a mystical allure that was inversely proportional to its scientific plausibility; indeed, the very ambiguity of some of his terms (materialism, ideology, social classes, dialectic) accounts for both the difficulty and charm of interpreting Marx,¹² and Aron would have plenty of time in the future to combat the various apparitions that were Marx's progeny.¹³

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All that lay ahead of him, however, and the Marxist stranglehold on France would have to wait until after the war. In the meantime, he contented himself with critiquing Marx directly, and his early articles bear witness to some of Aron's fundamental insights not only about Marx, but about the world itself, such as the lack of a *primum movens*, the reciprocal relation between the economic and political spheres, and the primacy of politics.¹⁴ These observations indicated that our understanding of the world and causality was perhaps more complex than many cared to admit. Consequently, they suggested that there were certain limits to historical objectivity. If this seemingly modest conclusion strikes us today as self-evident, it is because we have so thoroughly assimilated the lesson that was shocking and extreme to Aron's academic superiors, steeped as they were in the firmly rooted French positivism of the day, namely that we constantly renew our perspective on history as we go on living in history.¹⁵ This would be the topic of Aron's primary doctoral dissertation, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire: Essai sur les limites de l'objectivité historique*.

¹¹ Kolakowski, 2005 [1976], 335-341. Cf. Aron's three motifs of Marxism in Aron, 1954 [1951], 116-118.

¹² Aron, 2002, 543-545.

¹³ See, for example, Aron's *L'opium des intellectuels, Marximes imaginaires : D'une sainte famille à l'autre*, and *Histoire et dialectique de la violence*.

¹⁴ Aron, 1931, 43-47; Aron, 1932, 647-648; Aron, 1934, 509-511; Aron, 1937, 16-47. These sources have been taken from Colen, 2013. All involuntary traces or paraphrases of this work have the permission of the author.

¹⁵ Judt, 1998, 140.

Written between October/November 1935 and Easter 1937,¹⁶ the *Introduction* was defended at the Sorbonne on 26 March 1938, two weeks after the *Anschluss*.¹⁷ While the work cannot be said to contain a formal refutation of Marxism – Aron is willing to concede as much himself¹⁸ – it raises enough questions about historical objectivity as to constitute a powerful criticism of the Marxist philosophy of History. A word must first be said about Aron's inability to refute formally Marxism in his *Introduction*. Once it has been admitted that Marxism is more of a philosophy than a science then it becomes obvious that Raymond Aron's analysis of causality has little to do with Marxism's foundation, which is a philosophy of man, and not the primacy of a particular cause.¹⁹ It is this observation that permits Aron later on to state that “authentic Marxism”, i.e. that which deems itself a philosophy, would be compelled to recognize causal complexity and the plurality of interpretations.²⁰ The problem begins when Marxism is interpreted as a science, an error for which its founder is not entirely blameless.²¹ The moment it comports itself as a science is the moment that it becomes accountable to the rules of causality, and it is this vulgar Marxism that Aron's *Introduction* has the capacity to critique.²² This is most readily apparent in the third part of the third section, on causal thought, when the *Introduction* discusses historical laws, causal systematization, and historical determinism.

Aron's first task is to establish the difference between a law and a cause, which are united in Comtean positivism. The distinction between the two

¹⁶ Aron, 2010 [1983], 163.

¹⁷ Aron, 1986 [1938], i.

¹⁸ Aron, 1986 [1938], 312.

¹⁹ Aron, 1986 [1938], 312. See also the affiliated endnote on pp. 495-496.

²⁰ Aron, 1986 [1938], 387-388.

²¹ See Aron, 2006 [1937], 133. Aron justifies his distinction between authentic and vulgar Marxism on the basis of the latter's proclivity to seek after the prestige of a positive science. He claims that this was an error Marx himself did not make, provided that one is willing to take seriously the texts of his youth in which he outlined his definitive philosophy. This argument is unconvincing as long as we count *The German Ideology* as one of Marx's youthful texts (and Aron himself seems to do so—see Aron, 1967, 145) wherein he makes it quite clear that the premises on which is based the materialist conception of history are real and “can thus be verified in a purely empirical way.” See Marx and Engels, 1998 [1932], 36.

²² Given that I will endeavour to explore primarily Aron's critique of vulgar Marxism, and the *Introduction* does not contain a detailed critique of Marx's economics, Marx's economics-heavy works, namely *Das Kapital*, have been excluded from this analysis. Furthermore, “Marxism” will henceforth refer to vulgar Marxism and its philosophy of History, while the name “Marx” will be reserved for the aforementioned “authentic Marxism”.

terms depends on the inevitability of a particular effect resulting from a particular cause, or a particular cause always existing prior to a particular effect. If B results from A as certainly as night follows day, then we are in the presence of a law. If generalization is impossible, then we have likely come across but a cause for a unique effect located within an historical whole where many unique factors are at work. One speaks, for example, of the causes, and not the laws, of suicide, for we recognize that suicide is an act located at the convergence of many particular factors in an historical whole. Similarly, there are not laws, but effects of devaluation which are contingent on the circumstances in which devaluation occurs.²³ Nonetheless, these examples aside, are there laws in history? Raymond Aron concludes negatively: it is not possible to discern laws in the historical totality. This is not to say that there are no partial laws, for example in linguistics; but the assertion that there are laws that apply to the historical totality, such as the inevitability of cycles, are as incontestable as they are meaningless if that's the extent of their explanatory power.²⁴ The best we can hope for then is a fragmentary determinism.

Causal Systematization

And yet Marxism pretended to be way beyond this point as it had already isolated the cause of primary importance — the economic order — and, by virtue of a sweeping philosophy of History, had demonstrated both how history could be explained in terms of this cause and how the contradictions inherent to the present economic order were doomed to inch closer to that extreme point at which the current bourgeois society would collapse under the weight of its own injustice, bringing about an order free of alienation and oppression and thus essentially different from all previous societies.

Such an exhaustive causal systematization begs three questions: does the primacy of a single cause even exist and, if so, can one discover it? Can one identify *all* of the causes of any given occurrence? Can one discern constant relations amongst typical causes? In brief, to what extent is causal thought amenable to systematization?²⁵ The second and third questions can be

²³ Aron, 1986 [1938], 294.

²⁴ Aron, 1986 [1938], 300-301.

²⁵ Aron, 1986 [1938], 307.

consigned to irrelevance in the Marxist schema because of the affirmation of the first question. What, then, constitutes the primacy of the economic order? Marx states clearly that

[I]n the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.²⁶

To begin with, how are we to understand the forces and relations of production? Do they include political and legal institutions or are they merely technology and the economic order? If political and legal institutions are incorporated in the terms – which is perfectly acceptable, for everyone can initially define his terms however he likes and then is obliged to be consistent – then it can be said that the cause is inherent to the system, or that the system's very own contradictions are the cause.²⁷ Yet, if the forces and relations of production *include* political and legal institutions (and our consciousness of material forces), then one can do no better than arrive at the vapid conclusion that the forces and relations of production effect themselves. And then how is the superstructure distinct from this all-inclusive infrastructure?

But Karl Marx wouldn't deign to leave us with such a trite and uninspired finding. Besides, he makes eminently clear in the aforementioned quote that the interaction between the forces and relations of production, which constitutes the economic structure of society (infrastructure), are the foundation of the superstructure (political institutions, law, consciousness, etc.). With these two entities' separateness established, it remains to be seen

²⁶ Marx, 1977 [1859].

²⁷ Aron, 1986 [1938], 308.

how the infrastructure determines the superstructure. Raymond Aron outlines two different ways of going about this: the sociological and the historical methods.²⁸

The former approach would require one to demonstrate that a particular economic situation has a particular political regime, ideology, etc. as its result; similarly, one should be able to determine, on the basis of a particular political regime, ideology, etc., the particular economic situation that is its cause. But it's undeniable that many capitalist regimes have different political systems or constitutions which are also sometimes transformed without having been stimulated by the economic system. Can the multiple political regime changes in France since 1789 be explained by economics alone?²⁹

The latter approach involves tracing historical events back to economic antecedents. The trouble here is that there is no scientific reason why one should arrest his investigation once the desired economic cause has been found. Furthermore, causal regression is bound to discover an economic antecedent at some point. To suggest, then, that it is the *first* and/or *only* cause says more about the analyst's curiosity or scientific disingenuousness than about the phenomenon in question. Karl Marx himself was too intelligent to fall consistently into the same trap that some of his disciples did. The closer he got to the complexities of *histoire-se-faisant*, the more clearly the contradictions shone between the in-depth analysis required by his journalistic integrity and the sweeping generalizations demanded by his theory. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* is a testament to the difficult balancing act he tried to perform. On the one hand, the work is loaded with allusions to continual class conflict and the folly inherent in any effort on the part of the socialists to achieve parliamentary compromise – what Marx derisively referred to as "parliamentary cretinism".³⁰ On the other hand, he's compelled to admit that the Legitimists and Orleanists – whose conflict, Marx maintains, is provoked by the rivalry between landed property and industrial property, respectively – are able to come to terms with each other in a parliamentary republic, hence granting that a change of political regime can effect a reconciliation. But if the struggle between the two classes boils down

²⁸ Aron, 1986 [1938], 308.

²⁹ Aron, 2006 [1937], 131.

³⁰ Marx, 2012 [1852], Loc. 1433.

to socio-economic factors alone, then any sort of compromise should be impossible regardless of the political regime.³¹

What this example illustrates is that while one can *describe* a society well enough on the basis of the relations of production, this is insufficient to *explain* a society. "If the economy obeyed a purely autonomous law then prediction and explanation would be equally possible",³² in much the same way that the physicist points indifferently to the formula $F = ma$ both when asked with what force an object of given mass hit the ground, as well as when asked with what force an object of a different mass *will* hit the ground. It is therefore true to say that the economic and political spheres interact, but a more precise analysis of *how* exactly is beyond the scope of Aron's dissertation.³³

The relation between the infrastructure and the superstructure is manifested on the historical stage as the class struggle. Even if one were to be swept up into a state of euphoria by those declarative and audacious words – "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles"³⁴ – one would still be tempted, in a moment of clarity, to inquire into the content behind them. How, for example, does one designate a class? There's a brief enumeration to be found in *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*,³⁵ and a more comprehensive outline (dealing with the lack of a peasant class, properly speaking) in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*.³⁶ It goes without saying that a class is composed of many families living in similar conditions with similar interests; however, the peasants do *not* constitute a class because they lack class consciousness.³⁷ According to Karl Marx, they lack the consciousness requisite for a class because "each individual peasant family is practically self-sufficient, directly producing the majority of their own

³¹ Aron, 1967, 290-292.

³² "Si l'économie obéissait à une loi purement autonome, prévision et explication seraient également possibles." Aron, 1986 [1938], 309.

³³ Aron's Sorbonne trilogy on industrial society (*Dix-huit leçons sur la société industrielle*, *La lutte de classes*, *Démocratie et totalitarisme*) explores the complex interrelations between these different spheres.

³⁴ Marx and Engels, 2012 [1848], 73.

³⁵ Marx, 2012 [1895], 27.

³⁶ Marx, 2012 [1852], Loc. 2008-2018.

³⁷ Aron, 2002, 531.

consumption and thereby sustaining themselves more in interacting with nature than society.”³⁸

But can a class become self-conscious only through economic intercourse (*Verkehr*) in society? If one answers negatively, then it stands to reason that there are other, potentially non-materialistic, ways of creating a class, and this would undermine the Marxist assertion that the infrastructure determines the superstructure and, thereby, the course of history. However, if one answers affirmatively, then the relation between infrastructure and superstructure is left intact, but one is then obliged to jump to the level of history and ask whether it is indeed the case that class struggles characterize the history of all hitherto existing societies. Is the class the only sort of social grouping into which individuals can be organized? Are there other groupings or forms of collective consciousness that have the potential to override the purely materialistic factor connecting people, such as national prejudices or religion? Marxism’s high-powered focus on only class struggle suffers, on the level of historical explanation, from the same defect that plagues its conception of the relation between the infrastructure and the superstructure on the level of sociological explanation: reality is too complex to permit only a single cause or perspective.

This innate complexity also hinders our ability to list every cause for any given phenomenon, not to mention guarantee constant relations amongst the typical causes (the reader will recall that these two additional conditions – deemed irrelevant in the Marxist schema – are also necessary to foresee the future, in all of its specificity, beyond a reasonable doubt). On the one hand, one could always have recourse to “faith” in order to escape the narrow confines of causal reason’s cage, but only at the cost of demoting one’s science to philosophy. In this way at least the teleology would be preserved. On the other hand, once Providence has been sacrificed on the altar of science there is no longer any reason to believe that history has an end.³⁹ As for the existence of a *primum movens* in the world, there is no reason, scientific or based on the rules of causality, i.e. analysis and comparison, to believe that the historical totality has a first cause, much less an economic

³⁸ “Jede einzelne Bauernfamilie genügt beinahe sich selbst, produziert unmittelbar selbst den größten Teil ihres Konsums und gewinnt so ihr Lebensmaterial mehr im Austausche mit der Natur als im Verkehr mit der Gesellschaft.” Marx, 2012 [1852], Loc. 2008.

³⁹ Aron, 1986 [1938], 322.

one at that.⁴⁰ We, and not History, then, are responsible for our actions and our own destiny.⁴¹

Partial Determinism

This realization does not leave us to wade through a swamp of uncertainty. There are still partial laws and fragmentary determinism, punctuated by chance and individual acts, which could be called probabilism, and it walks the fine line between absolute regularities and total incoherence. As Raymond Aron noted:

(...) once we realize there are no necessary relations, we're brought back to the antithesis of the part and the whole, because if a causal connection can coincide with an observed succession only by losing all of its generality, it's because the constellations in which a regularity manifests itself are singular, and each constellation belongs to an historical totality which is both unique and unified. Therefore, probability would be the result, in this instance, of the contradiction between the *necessity of classification* and the *impossibility of isolation*.⁴²

Room is thereby made for some of Marx's predictions *qua* predictions, and not *qua* prophecies, to be proved correct, provided they are predictions which recognize the fundamental impenetrability of the logic of History and instead readjust themselves to account for only a part of reality. Would Marxism be proved or disproved if capitalism, burdened by its own internal contradictions, finally did come to a standstill, but the proletariat opted for a political regime other than communism?⁴³ Is the increasing dissolution of the family today a victory for Marxism?⁴⁴ Such questions cannot expect a scientific answer when Marxism itself has been subject to so many different interpretations and poses at one moment as a science and, at the next, as a religion.

⁴⁰ Aron, 1986 [1938], 316.

⁴¹ Cf. with views in Popper, 2011 [1945], 474-483.

⁴² "D'une autre manière, l'irréalité des relations nécessaires nous ramène à l'antithèse de la partie et du tout, car si le rapport de causalité ne coïncide avec la succession observée qu'en perdant toute généralité, c'est que les constellations dans lesquelles se manifeste une régularité sont singulières et que chaque constellation appartient à une totalité historique, à la fois unique et relativement unifiée. La probabilité résulterait donc, ici, de la contradiction entre la *nécessité du découpage* et *l'impossibilité de l'isolement*." Aron, 1986 [1938], 328.

⁴³ Aron, 1986 [1938], 309-310.

⁴⁴ Hobsbawm, 2011 [1998], 112.

Long-term extrapolations meant to paint a detailed picture of the future in broad strokes are the result of mistaking a simple tendency for a law.⁴⁵ And when the prophecy comes to naught, the “high priest” need only declare that this historical event was, in fact, not the moment ordained in Scripture and that we must continue to wait. All doomsayers proclaiming the end of civilization or the world operate on the same pusillanimous principle: they can’t be proved wrong. It is for this reason that Karl Popper – with whom Aron shared an elective affinity⁴⁶ – scorned the principle of verifiability, which could impart a respectable scientific veneer to any trash theory, and replaced it with the principle of falsifiability, which would display not only the modesty of the researcher as an individual, but also his noble willingness to test his own ideas at every turn.⁴⁷

Conclusion – Marxism as Existential Choice

By this point it should be quite obvious that the Marxist obsession with the relations between the infrastructure and the superstructure, forces of production and relations of production, class conflict, etc. is the result of a preference that precedes science and causal analysis. Whether the question is on what level one should analyze a phenomenon⁴⁸ or whether there are universal laws in history,⁴⁹ the curiosity and prejudices of the researcher are reflected at all times in his work.

In the case of Karl Marx there is a clear predilection for materialism over idealism.⁵⁰ While scientifically illustrating which of the two precedes the other is bound to be an exercise in futility, it’s patent enough that, early on, Marx was trying to distance himself from the imperious influence of Hegel and the

⁴⁵ For a discussion of this error see Popper, 2002 [1957], 116-119.

⁴⁶ Aron, 2010 [1983], 539, 936.

⁴⁷ “Here was an attitude utterly different from the dogmatic attitude of Marx, Freud, Adler, and even more so that of their followers. Einstein was looking for crucial experiments whose agreement with his predictions would by no means establish his theory; while a disagreement, as he was the first to stress, would show his theory to be untenable.” Popper, 2002 [1992], 38.

⁴⁸ Aron, 1986 [1938], 285.

⁴⁹ Aron, 1986 [1938], 306.

⁵⁰ It is worth noting that, in Aron’s view at least, Marx’s interpretation of history in 1848 did not strictly imply materialism. See Aron, 2002, 56.

Young Hegelians' idealism.⁵¹ In his mind, after Hegel, no one had made any significant theoretical contributions to German philosophy other than Feuerbach.⁵² And with Feuerbach one gets the impression that, for all of his materialism, he had still failed to overcome Hegel in at least one respect that was absolutely essential for Karl Marx: action.

The chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that thing [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively.⁵³

Marx's call to action and his desire to subject consciousness to material reality, not to mention a grave concern for the state of Germany, are already to be found in some of his earliest letters and works.⁵⁴

He began with a critique of religion, that opium of the people,⁵⁵ and progressed by way of a critique of politics and law to a critique of the economy. This last critique was the most important because it aimed at revealing the exploitative nature of the present socio-economic order, and so Marx's theoretical contributions post-1848 were very much concerned with analyzing the economy.⁵⁶ His fundamental contention in *Das Kapital* was that labourers were clearly being paid less than the value of what they were producing – this was the peculiarity of labour as a commodity.⁵⁷ The products themselves were crystallized labour and so their value was equal to the amount of labour required to produce them (theory of labour value), while the labourer's wages were equal to the amount required to sustain the labourer and his family (theory of wage value). Given that labourers were not being remunerated at the price of their goods, they must have been working partly

⁵¹ See his polemical works *The Holy Family* and *The German Ideology*. This does not mean that he effected a total break from Hegel's influence on all counts. After all, desperately trying to escape from under the wing of an individual's influence is also an indication of that very influence and, in a sense, an homage to the predecessor. Marx's notion of alienation derives from Hegel (see Aron, 1967, 176) and the absolute validity that Marxism is meant to represent is a literal interpretation of Hegelianism (see Aron, 1986 [1938], 393).

⁵² Marx, 1988 [1932], Loc. 89.

⁵³ Marx, 1998 [1938], Loc. 12550.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Marx, 1843a; Marx, 1843b; Marx, 2013 [1844].

⁵⁵ Marx, 2013 [1844], Loc. 1279.

⁵⁶ The key works are the *Grundrisse*, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, and *Das Kapital*.

⁵⁷ Kolakowski, 2005 [1976], 211. The following summary of some of the salient concepts of *Das Kapital* draws heavily on Aron, 1967, 160-164.

for themselves and partly for someone else, namely the employer (theory of surplus value), who enjoyed the privileged position of being able to extract this additional effort from the workers because he owned the means of production. This critique allowed Marx to explain profit – the very essence of capitalism – and it also laid bare the perverted core of the capitalist system.

These critiques were necessary in order to penetrate the many illusions of our existence and get at reality. Philosophy itself was one of these illusions insofar as it remained contemplative – not rooted in practice – and thereby alienated man,⁵⁸ with this alienation permeating man's material (economic) existence as well. Bourgeois society was predicated on the market, composed of proprietors and wage-labourers whose only human connection to each other was money. In the older guild system, the more limited intercourse (*Verkehr*) between towns, coupled with the less advanced division of labour, meant that craftsmen could really involve themselves in their work which could assume a more artistic and personal human value.⁵⁹ Bourgeois society diminished this level of human involvement in their products and rendered social interaction and human life in general as nothing more than making a living, as opposed to allowing individuals to realize all of their aptitudes.⁶⁰ And because humans are defined by what and how they produce, individuals were, in effect, becoming dehumanized.⁶¹

The group most adversely affected by this phenomenon was, according to Marx, the proletariat. The proletariat is given a momentous role for the first time in *Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. "It is here that he expresses for the first time the idea of a specific historical mission of the proletariat, and the interpretation of revolution not as a violation of history but as a fulfillment of its innate tendency."⁶² Marx, ever the opponent of injustice,

⁵⁸ Lichtheim, 1964 [1961], 44.

⁵⁹ Marx and Engels, 1998 [1932], 74.

⁶⁰ Aron, 1967, 178.

⁶¹ Marx and Engels, 1998 [1932], 37.

⁶² Kolakowski, 2005 [1976], 105. See Marx, 2013 [1844], Loc. 1538: "A thorough Germany cannot make a revolution without making a revolution thoroughly. The emancipation of the German is the emancipation of man. The head of this emancipation is philosophy; its heart is the proletariat. Philosophy cannot be realized without the transcendence of the proletariat; the proletariat cannot transcend itself without the realization of philosophy."

"Das gründliche Deutschland kann nicht revolutionieren, ohne von Grund aus zu revolutionieren. Die Emancipation des Deutschen ist die Emancipation des Menschen. Der Kopf dieser Emancipation ist die Philosophie, ihr Herz das Proletariat. Die

must also have been appalled when, in 1850, he arrived in London to see first-hand the working conditions of the proletariat: workdays over 16 hours long, every day of the week, with men, women, and children as young as ten working and sleeping in the factory for a wage that could hardly sustain them – life was grueling work and nothing more.⁶³ Bourgeois society had simply prolonged the oppression of one class by another, and whether the disadvantaged class was called slaves, serfs, or wage-labourers did little to conceal their servility. What was perhaps most despicable, however, was that this order of things was supposed to be progressive and liberal.

Karl Marx surely thought that the capitalism of his day was an outrage, a crime against humanity that could be answered only by revolutionary action. Marxism is rather an existential attitude⁶⁴ where choice – the refusal of capitalism and the wish to destroy it – precedes theory.⁶⁵ Therefore Marx spent his life trying to dispel the many insidious illusions that had developed and were obscuring the true nature of reality. In so doing he created an enormously impressive and infectious *Weltanschauung*. A century later Raymond Aron – no less a defender of truth and justice than Marx – would spend his life fighting the illusions that Marx's own system had produced.

Philosophie kann sich nicht verwirklichen ohne die Aufhebung des Proletariats, das Proletariat kann sich nicht aufheben ohne die Verwirklichung der Philosophie.”

⁶³ Morrison, 2006 [1995], Loc. 1296-1304.

⁶⁴ Not to mention a detailed analysis of capitalism.

⁶⁵ Aron, 1986 [1938], 389.

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