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The Riddle of History

**(Marx's concept of socialism in the context of his epistemology
and theory of history)**

Ray Kelly

**Submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Kent 1991.**

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Abstract

Within the organisation of all societies, there are basic contradictions which historically have given rise to certain undesirable structural features. These same contradictions also lie at the root of alienated, ideological forms of consciousness which act as a barrier to the solution of these problems. In chapter one, I will deal with each of these issues in turn, thus introducing Marx's problematic, i.e. the so-called "riddle of history".

Chapters two and three contain a discussion of Marx's methodology, which was intended to avoid the pitfalls of ideological forms of consciousness and provide a theoretical framework for coming to terms with the problem. Chapter three in particular provides a syntax and a logical explanation for the terms and forms of argument employed in the rest of the thesis.

Marx believes that historical development itself determines the possibility of solving the problems referred to. Chapters four and five, therefore, are an analysis of the processes which govern the development of social structures, i.e. so-called "Historical Materialism". Chapter six is an investigation of the relationship between historical change and forms of consciousness.

This sets the stage for an analysis in chapter seven of the nature of capitalism itself and how it gives rise in the consciousness of the working class to a solution, in principle, to the problems identified in chapter one. Finally, chapter eight reviews the factors within the development of capitalism which might make possible the transition to socialism and the implementation of the solution in practice.

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EXPANSIONARY DYNAMICS

fig. 1

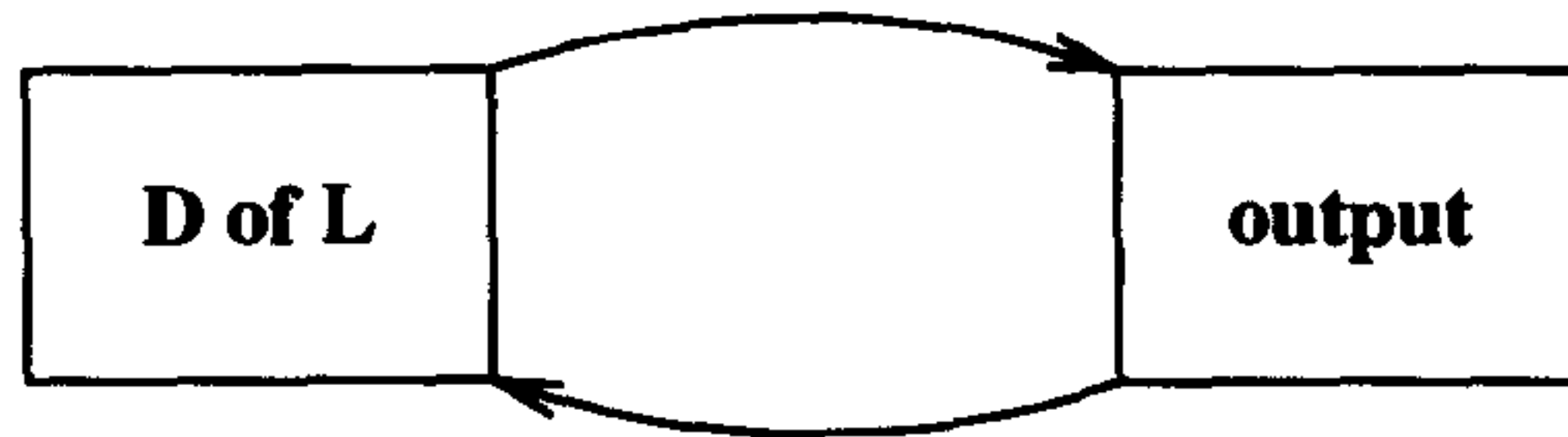


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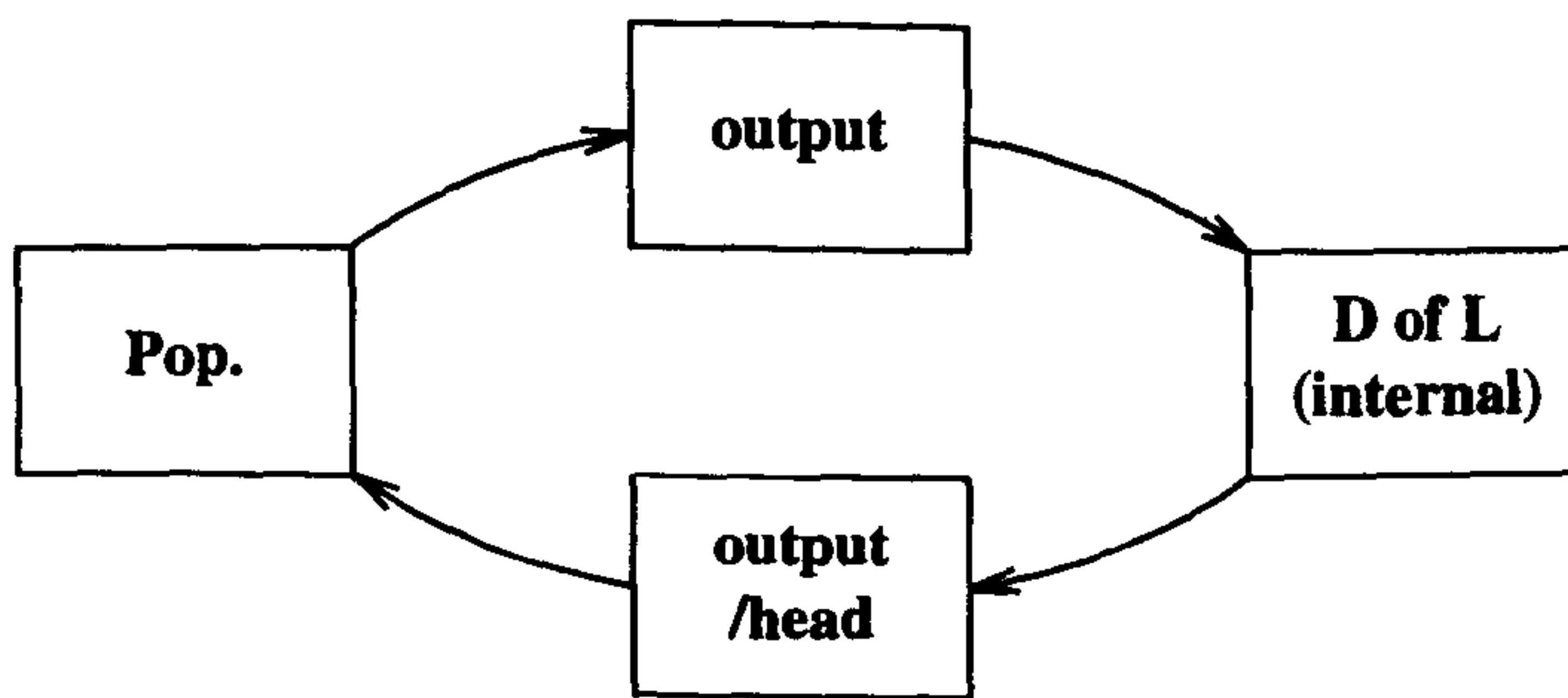


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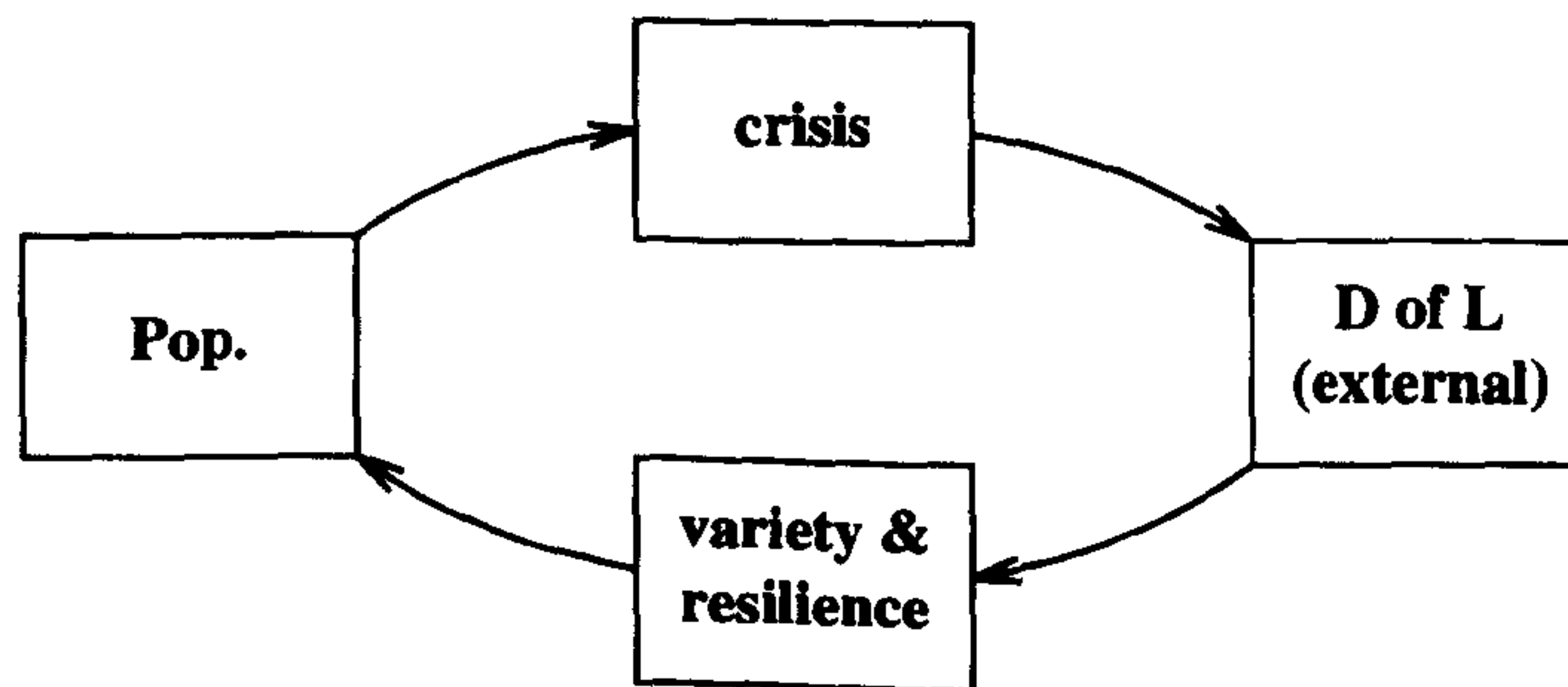


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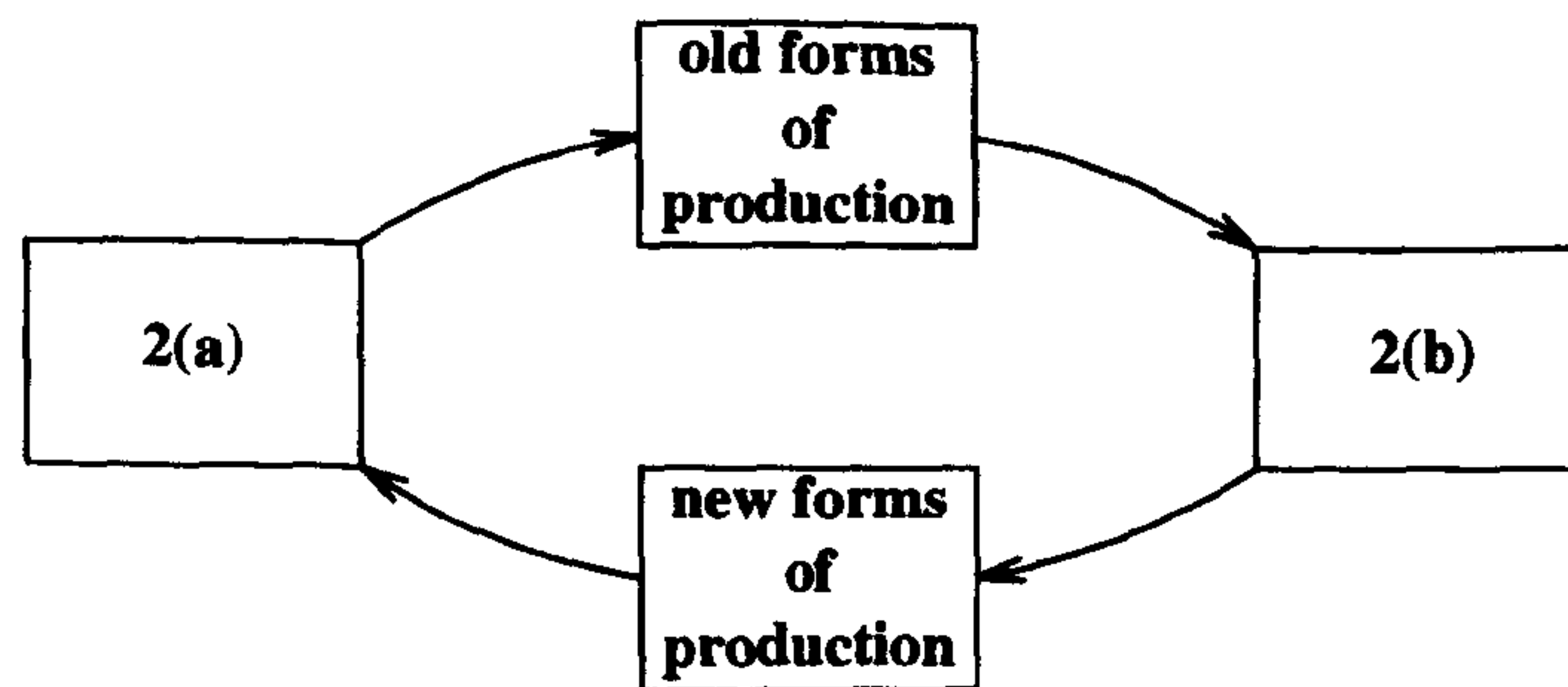


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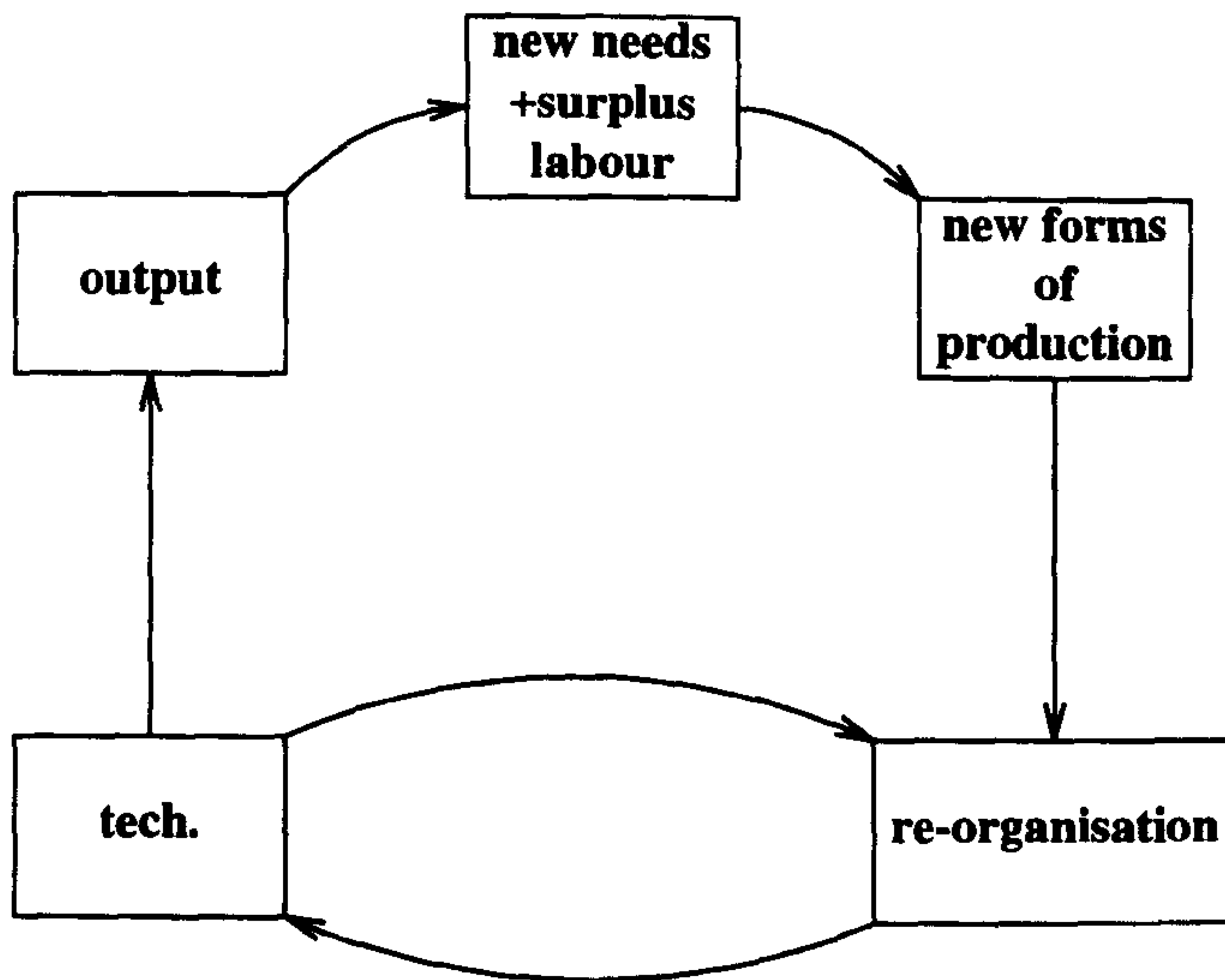


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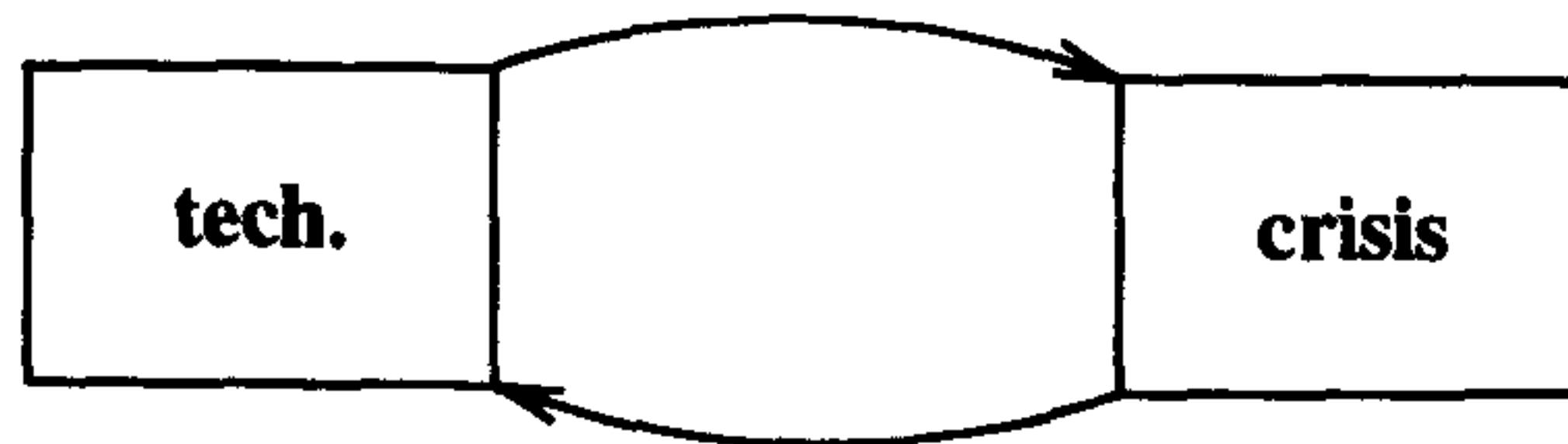


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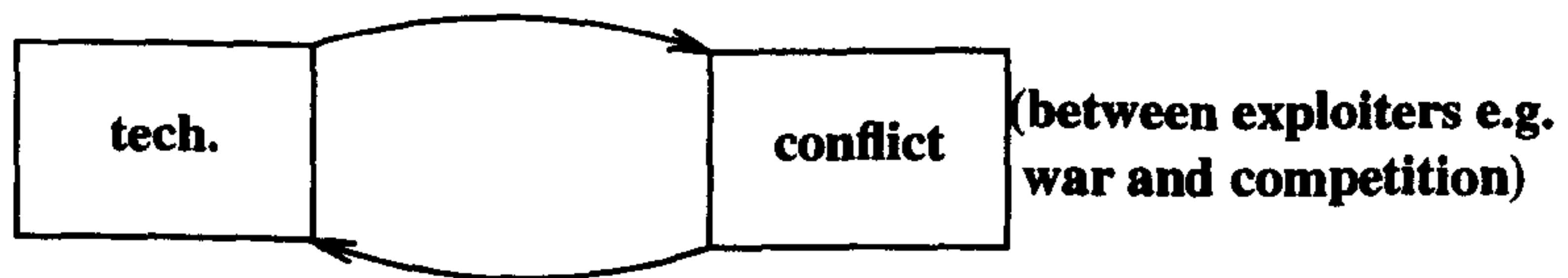
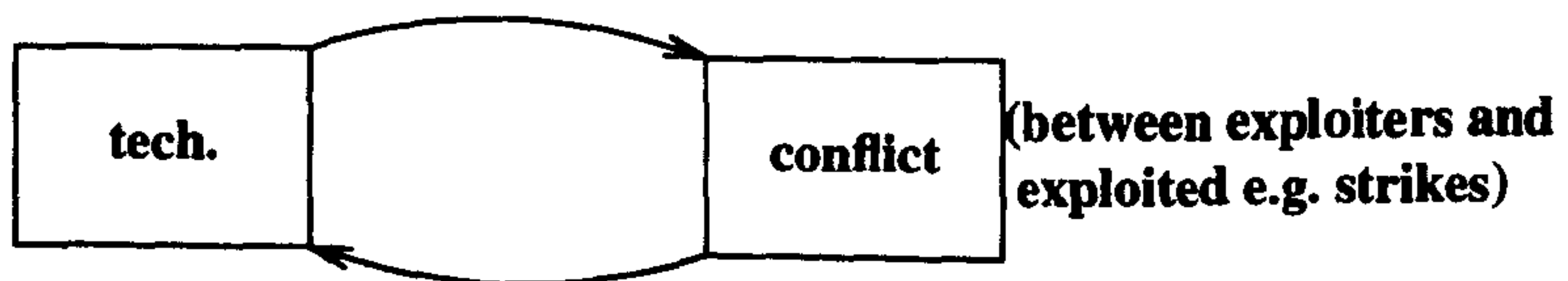


fig.5(c)



Preface

I began writing this thesis in the mid-eighties when politically there was a swing to the right. I felt that the problem for socialists was not so much that there were no convincing arguments against the new right, their ideas harked back to the nineteenth century and the counter-arguments were well rehearsed, but that the left was unable to put forward a convincing alternative. What defence there was, was moralistic in character. There was a need, therefore, to demonstrate the rational as well as the moral basis of socialist ideas. This thesis is intended to be a contribution to that enterprise.

Other than in *Capital*, Marx's work exists in the form of notebooks, polemics, pamphlets, historical studies and letters. Only in *Capital* is there a systematic attempt to expand upon a particular dimension of his thought. His epistemology and his theory of history, therefore, have to be gleaned from the totality of his work.

In this thesis I have attempted to answer the question of what socialism means to Marx as an answer to a set of problems which arise in the context of his analysis of human, historical development, i.e. socialism as the solution to the "riddle of history".

Thus, I have attempted a rational reconstruction of the viewpoint which I feel consistently underlies the whole body of his work. This has led me to expand, in places, on his analysis in a manner in line with the principles and perspectives which he adopts.

Irrespective of whether the main proposition of the thesis has been established there are a number of technical problems which I have attempted to solve. Hopefully, these contributions stand on their own.

The piece of work which follows was, as previously stated, conceived as an intervention in the cultural changes, particularly at the level of ideology, going on in the

1980s. It was not, therefore, intended primarily as a response to other interpretations of Marx's work. Nevertheless, in the remainder of this preface I shall briefly situate my own approach in relation to some of the most influential writers on Marxism, and indicate how it differs from theirs.

As an attempt at a rational defence of the Marxist perspective which attempts to show its coherence and explanatory power, the thesis is perhaps similar in intention to G. A. Cohen's *Marx's Theory of History - A defence*¹ The differences between his book and my thesis are, however, that he takes a narrower set of propositions to defend, namely, those concerned with the base/superstructure model and his method is explicitly that of analytic philosophy whereas mine is not. In contrast to Cohen, I don't believe that the complex causal explanations which Marx employs are treated adequately by the analytic approach.

1. The analytic approach

Analytic philosophy requires that concepts should be unambiguously defined and should be used consistently. One can immediately see the kind of problems which a work like Marx's, which draws upon dialectics, will generate when given this treatment.² Bertell Ollman gives examples of this in his book *Alienation*.³ What is one to make, for instance, of the assertion that "labour" is "variable capital" and that "capital" is "materialised labour"? - seemingly an identification of concepts defined in opposition to one another.

Marx's usage is clearly context dependent. Labour is variable capital from the point of view of the capitalist who regards it as a cost of production and hence part of the

¹ G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: a defence*, Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press 1978.

² For a more extensive critique of Cohen from this perspective see Sean Sayers, "Marxism and the Dialectical Method: a critique of G. A. Cohen", *Radical Philosophy* No. 36, 1984.

³ B. Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's conception of man in capitalist society*, Cambridge University Press, 1971.

necessary outlay from which he extracts a surplus, i.e. "capital". From the point of view of ownership, however, labour is employed *by* capital and hence is distinct from it. Again, from the point of view of its substance, this capital is only past, accumulated *labour*. Marx's dialectical epistemology would suggest that this context-dependency of individual statements is unavoidable. His total account, however, is that of a many-sided structure in line with his method. I have given an explanation of the logic of this approach in chapter three.

Context-dependency, however, leads to the violation of the condition of consistent usage as well as that of unambiguous definition. Lack of subtlety in handling such statements can lead to theoretical mistakes, e.g. the attempt to eliminate supposed logical contradictions in order to render the theory coherent.

Ollman also suggests that Marx uses his terms with a core meaning and an extended meaning. A concept which specifically excludes a certain term from its core meaning by being defined in opposition to it, nevertheless, may include that same term within its extended meaning. For example, whatever affects politics may be regarded as political. This may include economic factors although the political and the economic are differentiated in terms of their core meanings from each other. In this usage, terms which are defined as opposites can include each other in their extensions. This also violates the condition of unambiguous definition.

Cohen seeks to avoid most of these pitfalls, he is happy with reciprocal causality between base and superstructure.⁴ and can handle after a fashion, the simultaneous predication of social and physical factors. However, when trying to specify what factors are to be included in the base as forces of production, he includes ideas.⁵ Now it is true that Marx speaks of "mental forces of production"⁶ but again the context is all important.

⁴ c.f. *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, op. cit. pp 138, 145, 169.

⁵ *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, op. cit. pp 45-47.

⁶ K. Marx, *Grundrisse (1857-8)*, Harmondsworth, 1973 p. 502.

Ideas are not by themselves forces of production. Only when put into practice, i.e. materialised in the collective activity of people, do they become forces of production. To exist, a force must be capable of acting.

All forces of production consist of the intelligent arrangement of matter whether they are devices, arrangements of natural forces or the arrangement of human activity in a specific fashion. What makes the analytic philosopher miss this point is that the notion of a "materialised idea" violates the condition of unambiguous definition. He realises that ideas are important factors in material progress so feels they have to be included in the base.

The danger of this, of course, is that firstly, it seems to conflict with the account of practical-critical activity. There, ideas appear secondary in so far as they are determined by the conditions of material existence both in terms of their content and also in their status as acceptable. If ideas are forces of production, however, it seems that they have the primacy accorded to the base. Secondly, any mechanically causal version of the base/superstructure model would give support to the "ideas as the motor of history" viewpoint if ideas are included in the base. This would conflict with Marx's view that there is no independent history of ideas which determines real history. This is an important point of departure for Marx's theory of history.

Although I believe that the analytic approach is inadequate for the reasons stated, my own attempt to clarify the logic involved in dialectical arguments may nevertheless be in the spirit of this approach in that it aims at conceptual clarity.

2. Lukács

My work coincides with the Lukácsian approach in a number of places. Lukács regards theory as important because he believes that for a revolution to be successful it must be a "conscious" revolution. He believes this to be a necessity because otherwise other interpretations of experience might "grip the masses"⁷ and divert action into

⁷ Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, London: Merlin

unprofitable activities. His emphasis, therefore, is on showing the practical consequences of holding a correct theory. In my thesis, I have emphasised the same point in relation to overcoming ideological and alienated views of society which paralyse effective action. Indeed, I have introduced chapters two and three, on materialism and dialectics respectively, using precisely this justification.

I would also add to the above consideration the point that since the aim of a socialist revolution is to develop the capacity to channel beneficially previously misunderstood social forces, it must of necessity be a self-comprehending, conscious movement. Otherwise, it is likely to slip back into the same kinds of practices as its predecessors. Theory thus helps one to understand and clarify the objectives of a socialist revolution. This latter is the principal aim of my thesis.

Correct theory, for Lukács, involves the dialectical method. His principal concern is that theory should avoid partial, one-sided viewpoints which involve categories regarded as applicable for all time. Such viewpoints are characteristic of "reified" class perspectives which are products of the historical process but are in fact limited and relative to that process although they are treated as if they have universal validity.

To this end, he emphasises dialectical relations, as indeed I do consistently throughout the thesis. In particular, however, he stresses the dialectical relation between subject and object. This is because from *History and Class Consciousness* onwards, it plays a crucial epistemological role in his theory.

Lukács understands knowledge as a product, the result of an active engagement with the world on the part of the subject. He asserts this in opposition to a more traditional view which regards knowledge as the result of contemplation of the object. This latter view contrasts the subject's impressions with the real object. He believes that this inevitably produces the problem that since all the subject has access to is his or her own

Press, 1971 p. 2.

impressions, the true nature of the object is rendered unknowable. His own view avoids this consequence because in production, i.e. via labour, the subject objectifies him/herself and the object is subjectified. Thus the subject knows the nature of the object because it is his/her own creation.

This raises the obvious question of whether this is not idealism. The argument that the subject creates a world of material objects historically is not an idealist argument but neither is it universally true, since some of the objects of experience are not the result of labour. On the other hand, the argument that the subject actively creates knowledge of the world of objects may be true but it appears to be idealist. In this respect, the account given above⁸ doesn't take us much further than the problems besetting the traditional approach.

I have addressed the problem of how Marx can retain the notion of the subject-relativity of knowledge and yet not produce an idealist (and/or relativist) theory of knowledge in chapter two of my thesis. I have taken the position that objective knowledge⁹ describes the power of an object to affect particular subjects in particular ways. Although what is predicated of the object is subject-relative, the power which the predicate describes is a real property of the object. The descriptions by different subjects who stand in different relationships to the object can be synthesised into a wider theory which can account for subject position.¹⁰ This is an application of the dialectical perspective.

If a materialist account of the subject-relativity of knowledge can be given along the lines of the above, then the first argument about the historical production of the objects of

⁸ This is Parkinson's understanding of Lukács' position, cf. G. H. R. Parkinson, *Georg Lukács*, London and Boston, Routledge Kegan and Paul, 1977 p. 44.

⁹ Two senses of objectivity are used here. In the first usage, one-sided views are regarded as merely subjective, while the complete multi-faceted account is objective by contrast. This is Hegel's usage. In the second usage, the independent reality of the object is asserted over and against mind. Materialists need to hold both. To merely hold the first but not the second leads to an idealist position.

¹⁰ Even at an elementary level of knowledge this kind of synthesis occurs. A table top which is described as square can be experienced as a trapezium or a diamond shape from different points of observation.

the world is not required.

With respect to relativism, clearly different subjects will adopt different conceptual frameworks through which they can identify the features of the world, within the range of their experience, which are of relevance in terms of their needs and interests.¹¹ These partial perspectives, however, can be synthesised in a wider theory which accounts for their one-sidedness in terms of subject position.

Although this *can* be done, since theories result from an active engagement with the world, Lukács has to explain why it *will* be done, in particular why the working class should do it. He also needs to explain why a proletarian perspective is not one-sided if it is driven by their particular needs and limited by their experience of the world. In *History and Class Consciousness* he says the following:

"Only when a historical situation has arisen in which a class must understand society if it is to assert itself; only when the fact that a class understands itself means that it understands society as a whole ... will the unity of theory and practice, the precondition of the revolutionary function of theory, become possible.

Such a situation has in fact arisen with the entry of the working class into history."¹²

In chapter six of my thesis I examine the conditions which make this the case. I try firstly, to show why any class whose mode of existence depends upon exploitation of another class will not be able to form an accurate theory of the basis of power in the society. I then show why these problems do not affect the proletariat and why this class must attempt to understand accurately both itself and the source of its subordination. I then show how historical circumstances make this possible. I discuss the factors which are

¹¹ This is the notion of an active engagement with the world as productive of knowledge.

¹² *History and Class Consciousness*, op. cit. pp 2-3.

most likely to promote a veridical understanding of the society and how these are more prominent in capitalism than any previous system. Finally, I show how, because capitalism presents itself as the rule of *property in general* and as the depersonalised rule of a *system* of transmutable property, the problem of subordination poses itself to the proletariat in a fundamental way, a problem it cannot ignore.

In chapter seven, I chart the principal forms of consciousness of the capitalist era and show how they are part of a single problematic. I then show how and why working class consciousness prefigures a solution to the "riddle of history".

This approach is essentially Lukácsian but some of the detailed work is different though complementary.¹³ This brings me to the issue of the use of concepts by Lukács and myself which Althusser criticises as being part of a "humanist" problematic, i.e. where my work stands in relation to Marxist humanism.

3. Althusser

The thesis touches on the concerns of Louis Althusser in certain areas, namely, the nature of ideology and its relationship to science, the question of humanism in Marx's work and the model of historical change employed by both.

The very first statement of the thesis, the quote from the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, poses a problem in terms of Althusser's viewpoint because he considers them the work of the "young Marx" which address a different "problematic" to the later works. Only the later works are regarded as "scientific" by Althusser. Also, my subsequent elaboration of the opening statement's content in terms of the later works, in particular, *The German Ideology* which is a "work of the break" seems to compound the problem by bridging the problematics.

¹³ My treatment of the epistemology is more precisely related to classical problems and I hope has contributed to the clarification of issues which are still contested, thus forming the basis of a sounder defence of Marx's position.

My justification for doing this, however, stems from a view expressed by Marx himself: he says,

"It is only in a social context that subjectivism and objectivism, spiritualism and materialism, activity and passivity, cease to be antinomies. The resolution of theoretical contradictions is possible only through the practical energy of man. This resolution is ... a real task of life, a task which philosophy was unable to accomplish because it saw there a purely theoretical problem."¹⁴

If the "riddle of history" is posed in terms of mutually exclusive abstract oppositions, that is because the kind of social object the oppositions are abstracted from always contains them as irreconcilable antitheses. In a different kind of social object, e.g. the society suggested by communism, the concepts may express complementary aspects of a single practice or thing.

To grasp the nature of the problem and its solution, therefore, both the problem and the solution need to be considered in relation to their social context, i.e. the problem should be posed in terms of the transformation of the social structure. This is the kind of analysis associated with Marx's later works and also reflects my own procedure.

Althusser does not disagree with this approach, he says:

Note that my purpose is not to dispute the reality that the concept of "socialist humanism" is supposed to designate but to define the theoretical value of the concept."¹⁵

By this he means that statements such as the antitheses cited indicate a real problem but they are not scientific, rather they are *ideological* in form. If this is his objection to Marx's early works, then it is obvious that a different problematic is not the same thing as a different problem. What is at issue is the form in which the problem is posed and

¹⁴ K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1977 pp 103,104.

¹⁵ L. Althusser, *For Marx*, Verso, 1979 p. 223.

answered and the political consequences that follow from this.

What Althusser is worried about can be seen from the following passage:

"There can be no doubt that communists are correct in opposing the economic, social, political and cultural reality of socialism to the "inhumanity" of Imperialism in general; ... But it might be equally dangerous to use an ideological concept like humanism, with neither discrimination nor reserve, ... when it is inevitably charged with associations from the ideological unconsciousness and only too easily blends into themes of petit-bourgeois inspiration."¹⁶

In other words, it is the substitution of a pre-scientific framework of analysis for Marx's scientific analysis which poses the threat, not the clarification of ideological statements in terms of a scientific analysis.

When Althusser says that humanism is "ideological" it is important to see what he means by this claim in order to assess his criticism of the use of ideological explanations.

Of ideology in relation to science, he says:

When I say that the concept of humanism is an ideological concept, I mean that while it really does designate a set of existing relations, unlike a scientific concept, it does not provide us with a means of knowing them. In a particular (ideological) mode, it designates some existents, but it does not give us their essences."¹⁷

and also,

"We can say that ideology, as a system of representations, is distinguished from science in that in it, the practico-social function is more important than the theoretical function."¹⁸

¹⁶ *For Marx*, op. cit. p. 239.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 223.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 231.

The picture of ideology thus given is of a set of imperatives (moral or political etc.) based upon an ontology or picture of reality which is inadequate to explain their foundation. For example, "the rights of man", "human freedom", "the dignity of the individual" are ethical ideals which are conceptualised in terms of the abstraction "man", not in terms of the conditions of actual people located in historically evolving societies. To address the basis of ethics in practice, i.e. scientifically, a new set of categories are required (social class, mode of production etc.).

This description of ideology differs from the one I attributed to Marx in the thesis. The latter is derived from Hegel's concept of one-sidedness. Ideology is "partial" in two senses. It is a partial perspective in contrast to a complex multi-faceted whole, and it is partial in that its one-sidedness serves the interest of a particular group.

Althusser's stress on the pragmatic factor of ideology to the neglect of its logical structure leads, I believe, to the rehabilitation of ideology in his work and licences positions I would disagree with. He says, for instance,

"it is clear that ideology (as a system of mass representations) is indispensable in any society if men are to be formed, transformed and equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of existence."¹⁹

and

"I am not going to steer clear of the crucial question: historical materialism cannot conceive that even a communist society could ever do without ideology, be it ethics or world outlook."²⁰

He substantiates this latter point by reference to the fact that the base-superstructure model which is supposed to have general applicability, has ideology as a superstructural element. Marx used the term in different senses, however, and the forms of consciousness

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 235.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 232.

of communist society may not have been intended to be regarded as ideological in a pejorative sense.

Where does Althusser's view leave the consciousness of the working class? It would seem led by ideology constructed by an intellectual elite who alone have access to the scientific outlook. This view legitimates a practice which runs the risk of demagogy. In my opinion, the best defence against demagogy is that the working class should have an objective view of their circumstances and the possibilities for the realisation of their own goals, i.e. a "scientific" view of their situation. This would prevent them from being duped into a new form of subordination. I believe that the confidence that the working class, through debate and rational appraisal of their circumstances, could develop such a consciousness was the view held by Marx and Engels.

To return to the question of humanism, I have used the concept of "alienation" which Althusser associates with a humanist problematic, in a fairly central way in my thesis. He criticises the "young Lukács" for using it in the following terms:

"... I am not using "class humanism" in the sense adopted in Marx's early works, where the proletariat in its "alienation" represents the human essence itself whose "realisation" is to be assured by the revolution; this "religious" concept of the proletariat (the "universal class", since it is the "loss of man" in "revolt against its own loss") was re-adopted by the young Lukács in his *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*.²¹

Whatever the validity of this criticism, in Althusser's own viewpoint, the meaning of a concept can only be understood in terms of its place within a problematic. It is not necessarily the case, therefore, that because I use the term "alienation", I am committed to the problematic which he indicates. I use the term to designate the phenomenon whereby, in modes of production based upon antagonistic social relations, institutionalised practices

²¹ Ibid. pp 221, 222 fn. Given Lukács's emphasis on relating consciousness position within a historically changing social structure, this criticism of his views as ideological may not be valid.

become a constraint upon every individual and seemingly become an alien power subject to their own laws. A corollary of this is indeed a loss of power by the individual in proportion to the power gained by the system. A prime example of this phenomenon are so-called "market forces".

Alienation, in the above, is contextualised within the framework of the concepts of "antagonistic social relations", "mode of production" etc. These are "scientific" concepts according to Althusser. The phenomenon described has no other name but "alienation" within the literature and has not been replaced by another, scientific concept. There is no reason, therefore, not to use it.²²

The central point, however, is the question of whether to write from the point of view of humanity is always ideological. Whilst it is true that men make history collectively, and also their behaviour is socially conditioned, hence in a sense, as Althusser says, society is the subject in Marx's work, at the highest levels of generality, it would seem that the use of concepts such as "human need" or "need satisfying activity" is unavoidable.

The issue turns upon what kind of thing the generalities signify. If they imply the similarity of experience for all individuals to the exclusion of the diversity and developmental character of human life, then they are abstract universals and ideological.²³ In Hegelian terms, a concept which does not recognise its own internal complexity is an abstract universal. It is this latter charge which humanism stands accused of in Althusser's work. But if on the other hand, they designate a complex historically evolving process, then they are concrete universals and are not ideological if they represent something real.

²² It is certainly central to Engels' understanding of the task of theory, namely to grasp scientifically the nature of social relations in order that they cease to be an alien power, just as nature ceased to be an alien power after the advent of the natural sciences.

²³ If they indicate a set of behaviour patterns current at a certain time and social location but falsely generalised to all time and all locations, they are ideological in the sense of being one-sided, as well as implying the fixed character of human nature per se.

"Human needs", for instance, are understood by Marx as a diverse set of requirements which develop historically within the context of an evolving social system. They also differ between persons and between social groups. Communism is a form of social arrangement whereby need-satisfying activity and personal self-development can be pursued by all members of the society within the limits of its material resources with the support of the community as a whole, rather than by some members benefiting at the expense of the rest.

In so far as communism has transcended one-sided interests it functions for the benefit of "humanity". The latter, however, is understood as a concrete universal. This "humanism" serves the complexity of human need and is made possible by certain specific social arrangements. Without some concept of this generality it is difficult to comprehend the purpose which communism/humanism serves.

Also, without a general concept of "human" need-satisfying activity, the animus which produces the transition between modes of production can only be accounted for in terms of an "alien" process, a mechanical transition between social arrangements rather than one driven by human requirements. It appears that these high level general concepts both cannot be dispensed with and are not necessarily ideological.²⁴

The question of transitions brings us to Althusser's theory of history. Althusser uses concepts taken from Freud to develop Marx's theory of historical change: "condensation", "displacement" and "overdetermination". "Condensation" means, for Althusser, the way that different social antagonisms coalesce in a revolutionary situation into a conflict along a single dimension.²⁵ Displacement means the circumstance where the focus of social discontent can be transferred onto a different object than the one which engendered it.²⁶

²⁴ In Althusser's defence, I believe that the prejudice in bourgeois circles against his work in the last decade or so indicates the importance of his general approach in the present era. I believe that there has been a regression to pre-Marxist pre-scientific concepts in social theory and in general political consciousness.

²⁵ E.g. how workers and peasants, with different forms of oppression fought together against the Tsar and again against the "White Army".

²⁶ e.g. when internal unrest is displaced onto an external enemy in a war.

His complementary concepts "overdetermination" and "structure in dominance" are used to account for political questions which arise from the uneven development of the productive forces. Mao, in his paper "On Contradiction",²⁷ identifies many distinct levels of social antagonism (contradictions) and asks the question as to which is the dominant one around which the others coalesce. Similarly, he asks which of the levels of activity: economic, political, ideological, taken from the base-superstructure model should be principally engaged in at a particular time, i.e. which one is dominant.

From these examples it becomes obvious that Althusser is not addressing the same questions as Marx. He is using these concepts to address tactical issues which arose in the context of the Russian and Chinese revolutions. The concept of "structure in dominance" is intended to supply the answers to these questions. At this point, however, it overlaps with the base-superstructure model employed by Marx and appears as a re-interpretation of it.

Engels explains the relations between base and superstructure by saying that the superstructure "reacts back" on the base but the base determines the superstructure "in the last instance".²⁸ Althusser interprets this to mean that superstructural elements are not epiphenomena, they produce effects in their own right but the action of each of the levels is modified by its dependence on the other levels. In Althusser's terms, each level is "overdetermined" in its action by the rest of the structure. This is also what he means by "structure in dominance".²⁹ The economic sphere, however, has primacy in the sense that it determines which is the dominant level of contradiction at any time.

For instance, Althusser says, in a revolution, the political sphere is dominant. This is determined by the crisis in the economy which makes the future of the society rest upon

²⁷ Mao, Tse-Tung, *Selected Works*, International Publishers, New York 1954, Vol. II (1937-38) pp 13-52.

²⁸ F. Engels, "Letter to J. Bloch", 21 Sept 1890, in *A Handbook of Socialist Thought*, ed. Irving Howe, Victor Gollancz Ltd., London 1972 p. 153.

²⁹ "Structure in dominance" is also intended to imply that because of uneven development, one contradiction will always dominate the structure as a whole.

the outcome of the political struggle. Thus, when Engels refers to mutual causal relations between base and superstructure but "determination in the last instance" by the base, Althusser suggests that he was referring to the way the sphere of the economic continuously determines the relations of dominance between the levels, not some point in time when the economy determines the future of the society alone. This is what he means by the statement "the lonely hour of the last instance never comes."³⁰

What this ignores, however, is the fact that what Marx was trying to stress by using the base-superstructure model is the "correspondence" between base and superstructure and that when this correspondence is broken by different rates of development, it is the superstructure which is forced to adjust. Thus, in a sense there *is* a time when the economic sphere asserts its dominance, i.e. in the period of adjustment. Nevertheless, the argument that the superstructure is semi-autonomous and exercises real causal relations over the base, i.e. that the base is always modified in its action by the superstructure is not disputed. I have given my own account of this semi-autonomy in chapter five.

Determination in the last instance, however, I have explained in terms of the fact that the base is the "raison d'être" of the superstructure and hence, when the base changes its form, then much of the legitimation for the superstructural elements is lost. Whatever "self-perpetuating" factors have been built up by these spheres will then prove inadequate to prevent the imperatives of change from overcoming them. This explanation is in line with Marx's original use of the theory.

It is not simply the case, therefore, that the primacy of the base consists in its power to select which of the levels of struggle dominate at any particular time, or which antagonisms will prove the galvanising factor in a revolution, or even which country will prove the "weakest link" in Lenin's terms. Whilst it may do all these things and Althusser's theory may extend the explanatory power of the base-superstructure model, the "primacy of

³⁰ c.f. For Marx, *op. cit.* p. 113.

the base" originally explained which key elements produce the transformation of one social structure into another. Althusser appears to neglect this central point.

4. Summary

To summarise, my work would suggest that it is necessary to retain the notions of human need and its satisfaction to make sense of the Marxian enterprise. However, as Althusser says, to do justice to Marx this should be explained in terms of a theory of history in order to put it on a scientific footing. I disagree with Althusser, however, in his treatment of ideology and hence also, of the science/ideology distinction.

My understanding of Marx stresses the Hegelian inheritance and many of the positions I take are similar to Lukács. In many ways my work is a contribution to the Lukácsian enterprise but my account of the epistemology is, I believe, more adequate and less prone to idealist interpretation.

Finally, the stress on dialectics makes my work incompatible with the analytic approach as exemplified by G. A. Cohen but I have approached the topic with the same ideal of conceptual clarity.

Part One

Chapter One

The Riddle of History

"Communism is the riddle of history solved and knows itself to be this solution." - [Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844]¹

In this thesis I will attempt to outline what I believe to be the perspective which prompted Marx to write the sentence above. It will involve the analysis of Marx's dialectical-materialist conceptual framework and the reasons why Marx adopts this perspective. I will show how this provides the tool for the analysis of historical development and hence conditions his theory of history. Then I will go on to show the way in which the theory of history informs his analysis of the capitalist economy and the transition to socialism, and hence why, Marx believes, there is the possibility of a solution to the so called "riddle of history".

The first step in this exposition however, involves trying to grasp what Marx might mean by "the riddle of history" which requires a solution. The sentence which is quoted in the opening paragraph is the summary and conclusion of a set of statements which precede it and which outline the problems² that communism is alleged to solve. They state :-

"This communism, as fully developed naturalism equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man - the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and

¹ *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Progress publishers, Moscow 1977 pg 97. From henceforth referred to as "E.P.M."

² Problems in the sense of being the source of human suffering; of being problematic to the realisation of human goals. The "riddle of history" is the question of how to overcome them.

the species."³

Stated in this way, these oppositions, however, are a-historical abstractions. To understand what a resolution of them might mean in social and historical terms we need to examine how Marx conceptualises their embodiment within historically developing societies and social structures. The material I have used to illustrate this perspective is mostly drawn from *The German Ideology*.

One of the problems which will be described in the course of this exposition is the emergence of "ideological" forms of consciousness which obstruct the attempts of human beings to form a correct understanding of their situation and hence their capacity to alter it for the better. Marx's own method is an attempt to correct this problem and so the exposition provides both an explanation and a justification for his adoption of this method.

However, since the method is used to develop the theory of ideology and the theory of ideology is used to at least partially justify the method, then there is a problem of circularity in the account. This problem will be dealt with in chapter 2. In the meantime, since a circle must be broken into at some point, I will start where Marx himself starts, with the exposition of the theory rather than its justification.

1. The fundamental problem of society

Marx sees "man" as a natural being with appetites and needs for objects existing outside of himself.⁴ He satisfies those needs however, within a social group i.e. via collective activity. In the simplest form of society, social cooperation coincided with individual self-interest. Social man cooperated with others to fulfill his individual needs. Self-interest, however, is a potentially divisive motivation and is capable of destroying

³ op. cit. E.P.M. pg 97

⁴ cf. CH3 sections 3.2 - 3.3.1

cooperation. The need to cooperate and individual need, therefore, are aspects of human motivation that have the potential to come into conflict with each other. In the simplest societies, i.e. ones with little or no specialisation of economic functions, (division of labour), no particular sectional interest is powerful enough to impose its will upon the whole group. This is because the nature of this mode of production gives rise to more or less equal power within the social structure. The only social differences which occur here are at the individual level and any individual no matter how gifted or powerful will always be weaker when outnumbered by the rest of the group.⁵ This is the stage of development of the mode of production which Marx refers to as primitive communism.

The main institutional characteristics of society as we know them emerge with the extension of the division of labour beyond the family. This, according to Marx, gives rise to the social phenomena of private property, class rule, artificial scarcity, the state, and alienated consciousness. Each emerges as a result of the conflict between sectional competition and co-operation under conditions of an advanced division of labour.

In various places in *The German Ideology* Marx writes about the division of labour as if it automatically implies conflict of interest between the different functional groups. On page 43, Marx says,

"The division of labour inside a nation, leads to the separation of industrial and commercial from agricultural labour, and hence to the separation of town from country and to the conflict of their interests."⁶

Again, when discussing why ideology comes into contradiction with the forces and relations of production, Marx says,

⁵ Indeed it is a feature of hunter-gatherer societies today that equality is enforced and anyone who possesses anything special will be obliged to share it with the group. It is considered normally reprehensible in these societies not to do so and such behaviour would invite reprisal cf. *Politics and History in Band Societies*, Leacock and Lee, Cambridge University Press 1982, pp 7,8.

⁶ *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1970 pg 52.

"... because the division of labour implies the possibility, nay the very fact that intellectual and material activity, enjoyment and labour, production and consumption - devolve upon different individuals, and that the only possibility of their not coming into contradiction lies in the negation in its turn of the division of labour." ⁷

The social mechanism which causes separation to produce conflict requires a more detailed explanation. The theoretical premiss on which Marx proceeds I believe to be as follows :- Productive relations are necessarily co-operative in character. This implies that each co-operating partner will be dependent upon others. Division of labour separates the activities of people such that functional groups stand in this relation of dependence to each other. Where each functional group pursues its own collective self-interest, each group will try to extract the maximum in terms of resources and effort from the group or groups upon which it depends in order to enhance its own way of life. Thus each group will attempt to subordinate the others and organise the society in a manner favourable to its own aspirations.

Whereas in primitive communism an individual pursuing self-interest to the detriment of others in the group would be outnumbered, here, the power relation is not so unequal. Where a section of society stands opposed to other sections, the odds against it are thus reduced and if its role in the society is perceived as the most crucial to the community's well-being, may well be able to impose exploitative relations upon the rest of society.

It is the pursuit of self-interest within co-operative relations which produces conditions where functional separation implies conflict of interests. The concept of

⁷ Ibid. pg 52

Ideology, in so far as it represents some aspect of society as the independent cause of social behaviour, will be at odds with any forces and relations of production other than those which it is in fact inseparably related to and therefore at odds with social change.

exploitation comprises these two aspects, *the interdependence of co-operative relations* (which gives point to one party subordinating another) and *the pursuit of self-interest* (which leads one party to suppress the interests of another). In Marx's subsequent discussion of the consequences of division of labour, we see that this situation is the origin of the formation of and conflict between classes, the privatisation of property, the emergence of the state and of alienated consciousness i.e. the major features of all societies hitherto excepting primitive communism. These features embody the contradictions referred to in the quotation, the difficulty of overcoming which is referred to as the "riddle of history".

1.1. Social classes

Although functional groups act collectively and therefore individual members depend upon each other, selfishness within the group only promotes mutual suspicion and hence intra-group discipline (each demands that the other "pulls his weight"). Between groups however a struggle ensues until a group or groups, aided by their position in the division of labour, become dominant i.e. become a ruling class. Marx describes the process of class formation thus, (with respect to the bourgeoisie)

"The extension of trade, the establishment of communications, led the separate towns to get to know other towns, which asserted the same interest in the struggle with the same antagonist. Out of the many corporations of burghers there arose only gradually the burgher class."⁸

and also

"The separate individuals form a class only insofar as they have to carry on a common battle against another class; otherwise they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors. On the other hand, the class in its turn achieves an

⁸ op. cit. *The German Ideology* pg 82.

independent existence over against the individuals, so that the latter find their conditions of existence predestined, and have their position in life and their personal development assigned to them by their class, become subsumed under it. ... We have already indicated several times how this subsuming of individuals under a class brings with it their subjection to all kinds of ideas etc." ⁹

Thus class formation is predicated upon conflict of interest between different functional groups within the division of labour. Conflict of interest as we have seen is the result of the mutual pursuit of self-interest within the division of labour.

Control of the means of production is clearly a crucial factor in maintaining class domination. It confers power to extract a surplus product which can then be used to control and direct labour. This brings us to the issue of private property.

1.2. Private property

Privatisation of property is the struggle to retain control of resources and thus (de)prive others of their use. This situation occurs as a result of the pursuit of self-interest within the division of labour. Marx says

"With the division of labour, in which all these contradictions are implicit, and which in turn is based on the natural division of labour within the family and the separation of society into individual families opposed to one another, is given simultaneously the distribution, and indeed the unequal distribution, both quantitative and qualitative, of labour and its products, hence property: the first form of which lies in the family, where wife and children are slaves of the husband." ¹⁰

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ Ibid. pg 52.

we see that for Marx labour power is the basic resource and hence the struggle for control of labour power is the essence of the privatisation of property. He goes on to say of property

"...even at this early stage it corresponds perfectly to the definition of modern economists who call it the power of disposing of the labour power of others."¹¹

Control of physical objects is for Marx merely control of labour power in the past tense. For him, competition for hegemony over labour power lies at the heart of any system based upon the private ownership of property.¹²

1.3. The state

The social relations in the type of society described are simultaneously relations of conflict and co-operation (because of exploitation). These aspects are opposed in intention. Hence, there is a danger that the conflict will destroy the co-operation leaving either a "Hobbesian" war of all against all or complete atomisation. Either way the implication is social breakdown. In order to maintain the co-operation the the more extreme actions arising from the conflict of interest have to be suppressed. This gives rise to the institutions of the state. The state represents itself as the executor of the "general interest" and the communal life of the society appears to be acted out at this level.¹³ In fact if there is genuine communal consensus there would be no need for a separate institution to enforce this interest against the intentions of individual members of the society.

The state, however, isn't simply a neutral institution which ensures a necessary minimum of co-operation within a conflict riven society. The state must be organised and maintained and in a class divided society and only a ruling class has both the power and interest in organising such an institution.

¹¹ Ibid. pp 52, 53.

¹² Since property has to be produced and reproduced.

¹³ op. cit. *The German Ideology* pg 53 last paragraph.

The ruling class wishes to preserve a division of labour from which it benefits to a greater extent than others, hence the state at any particular time operates to ensure a minimum of co-operation within the existing division of labour. This latter clause expresses the particular interest of the ruling class. All struggles between classes therefore are accompanied by struggles to determine the form or even the existence of the state because of its role in protecting the existing division of labour. Marx says

"It follows from this that all struggles within the state, the struggle between democracy, aristocracy, the struggle for the franchise etc., etc., are merely the illusory forms in which the real struggles of the different classes are fought out among one another..."¹⁴

The state does, as an institution, reflect a genuine interest in preserving co-operation for economic purposes common to the members of a society. But because of the "contradiction" between the need to co-operate and the conflicts of interest within the society, the state, the agency which promotes this interest is set up in opposition to the free action of the members of society as if it were another individual with another particular interest.¹⁵ Thus society appears to be something other than its members - an alien being which constrains individual liberty. This is an example of the more general phenomenon inherent in the situation under discussion, namely alienation.

1.4. Alienation

Thus we see that the conflict between the individual and society also has its roots in the situation of the pursuit of self-interest within co-operation. The reification of the collective activity of the members of a society into an alien, super-social and repressive

¹⁴ Ibid. pg 53.

Marx uses the word illusory in the same sense in which he refers to ideas as imaginary premisses i.e. they are expressions of something other than themselves and not, as they appear to be, the thing itself.

¹⁵ Ibid. pg 53 last paragraph.

force is a pervasive phenomenon in societies founded upon antagonistic social relations.

The logic of such a situation is as follows:- If each individual makes demands upon the other members of society then paradoxically each individual will experience the rest of society making demands upon him. The result of this is that he will feel that his behaviour is the product of external coercion, the very opposite of his intention to assert his own interests at the expense of the rest.

For instance, because each individual demands from others as much work as possible for minimum returns, each individual also feels forced to labour, is forced to labour, and is in constant danger of not being able to survive. This state of affairs in capitalist society is reified as the "laws of the market". In so far as it is not thought to be the result of any individual human will, it is identified with a super-human will, the action of commodities as they exchange in the market according to their own immutable laws. The imperatives of the economic system appear to control peoples lives. Marx says,

"The social power, i.e. the multiplied productive force, which arises through the co-operation of individuals appears to these individuals, since the co-operation is not voluntary but has come about naturally, ¹⁶ not as their own united power, but as an alien force existing outside of them the origin and goal of which they are ignorant, which they thus cannot control, which on the contrary passes through a peculiar series of phases and stages independent of the will and action of man nay even being the prime governor of these." ¹⁷

Later he says,

"Or how does it happen that trade, which is after all nothing more than the exchange of products of various individuals and countries, rules the world

¹⁶ The distinction between volition and nature is that between free will and determinism. In the context of division of labour which is a human activity, nature refers to determination by actions not consciously directed to the end achieved.

¹⁷ op. cit. *The German Ideology* pg 54.

through supply and demand - a relation which as an English economist says, hovers over the whole earth like the fate of the ancients, and with an invisible hand allots fortune and misfortune to men, sets up empires and overthrows empires, causes nations to rise and disappear...."¹⁸

Similarly, the hostility which the individual expresses and exercises towards those who endanger the relations which serve his interests, helps to create a collective hostility towards each individual should he endanger the existing social relations, the institutional expression of which is the state.

Again, the states of affairs which each individual wishes to see manifested or prohibited take collective expression as a set of societal norms or ethics binding upon everyone and seemingly originating from no-one in particular, simply a large alien "ought". All these situations exhibit the same pattern and arise from the same cause, the pursuit of egoism or self-interest within the relations of interdependence which constitute division of labour. Each class also contains alienated relations between the individual and the group.

Competition within the working class expresses itself as "the work ethic", in the capitalist class as "market forces" and between the classes as "the trade cycle".

1.5. Scarcity

Finally, There is the question of scarcity. Harvey defines economics as follows "Scarcity forces us to economise. We weigh up the various alternatives and select that particular assortment of goods which yields the highest return from our limited resources.....Economics is the study of how men allocate their limited resources to provide for their wants." ¹⁹

¹⁸ Idem.

¹⁹ *Modern Economics*, J. Harvey, Macmillan 1969 pg 24.

The problem of scarcity which forces this situation upon us he describes as follows:-

"This then is the economic problem - unlimited wants, very limited means." ²⁰

What this viewpoint conceals is that there is more than one type of scarcity involved in the discussion. Harvey, in the examples which he gives, suggests that people do not have enough money to buy everything they desire, this is a conflation of two issues, whether the range of human needs can be satisfied and whether society could provide enough of each particular good it produces to satisfy desire for that good. Money is a means of rationing consumption and no rationing is required for goods produced in abundance.

Marx might well have agreed that human desires run ahead of the means required for their satisfaction in the short term. This after all is what gives human society its dynamic character. He could well have conceded that there may be a greater number of desires than can be satisfied at any one time by the whole society. None of this however addresses the problem of the scarcity of particular goods which are available in the society already. Why for instance are food and shelter scarce in large areas of the world including so called first world countries? Scarcity of particular goods is not an inevitable human problem as Harvey seems to imply. The Sumerian civilisation of 6000 b.c. produced food surpluses and traded them to command the labour of wood and stone cutters of other areas to provide the raw materials for their temples. Yet in the societies with the greatest capacity to produce that the world has seen, people go short of these things. Scarcity of this kind is the result of unequal distribution of the power to consume and to determine what is produced, which in turn is the result of egoism within the division of labour.

What is more, scarcity isn't only the *result* of the attempt to control the production of goods for one's own benefit in co-operative enterprises, it is also the principle means of exercising that control. Anyone who can supply a commodity which is scarce can

²⁰ Ibid. pg 21.

command the labour of others and hence social power. If scarcity were to disappear, class rule would be thereby undermined. Scarcity is, therefore, socially necessary to the maintenance of class divided societies.

This situation is rationalised in our own society in the idea that people need to be forced to work by scarcity. Instead of regarding work as a means of overcoming scarcity, scarcity is seen as a means of producing work as if work had no rational justification of its own, thus obscuring scarcity's role in class domination.

Scarcity is both a product of conflictual/co-operative societies and also serves to produce them. In principle there is no reason why all goods actually produced should not be produced in quantities in excess of need.

Scarcity, Alienation, the repressive state and class antagonisms are all limitations imposed upon the possibilities of human self-fulfillment by humanity's own institutionalised practices (which is a general definition of the "riddle of history"). We can now turn to the question of the role of consciousness in bringing about a solution to these problems, and hence to the significance of the materialist method.

2. The nature of consciousness

In the section of the book where Marx analyses the material basis of human history,²¹ he points out that first and foremost in order to survive human beings must procure their means of existence, i.e. they must enter into a relationship with nature. Secondly, since they do this collectively, they must enter into co-operative relations with each other. Thirdly, the satisfaction of needs by the social group leads to the emergence of new needs, thus making this situation dynamic in character, and fourthly, to perpetuate this social arrangement, a new generation of people must be produced, nurtured and presumably socialised. These then are the basic material prerequisites of the history of

²¹ op. cit. *The German Ideology* pg 48.

human society as we understand it. He then turns to the issue of consciousness and thus to the relationship of ideas to material circumstances.

Immediately he begins to talk about language.

"Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason also for me personally as well,"²²

(echoes of Wittgenstein's private language argument, but also Marx's views on objectification). He goes on,

"Language like consciousness only arises from the need, the necessity of intercourse with other men."²³

The conclusion however is

"Consciousness is therefore from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all."²⁴

This seems to me to be quite a cogent argument. If for instance I feel love towards someone, I would simply experience it, but if I desired to tell her that I love her, I would have to render my emotion in conceptual form. Consciousness in conceptual form does seem closely related to language and therefore social in character.

It follows that if the purpose of consciousness is to make communication possible and hence to mediate the relations between people in their social life, and since their social lives contain the co-operative relations formed to facilitate their relationship to nature, then it helps to mediate the relationship to nature as well. The contents of consciousness therefore are representations of events in both these realms first and foremost. This is what allowed Marx to say in another section,

²² Ibid. pg 51

²³ Idem.

²⁴ Idem.

"The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and material intercourse of men, the language of real life."²⁵

2.1. Ideology

He then goes on to give an account of ideology of which the various types of idealism are examples. He roots ideology in division of labour.

"Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. (The first form of ideologists, priests, is concurrent.) From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself and the world and to proceed to the formation of "pure" theory, theology, philosophy, ethics etc."²⁶

What intellectual production as a specialisation makes possible is that not only the intellectual products, but also the raw materials of production are ideas. It is easy then for such a producer to conceive of the process as moving solely within the realm of ideas. It appears to him that ideas evolve from other ideas due either to an immanent logic, each system solving the theoretical problems engendered by the previous system, or via the intervention of the intellectual, i.e. via "mental" labour. Nowhere, however, is it discerned that the material circumstances of life play a part in this process.

Furthermore, since ideas play a causal role in human activity, it becomes possible to view this "autonomous realm" as the driving force of history and social change. This viewpoint, however, stresses only one aspect of the part which production of ideas plays

²⁵ Ibid. pg 47

²⁶ Ibid. pg 51

in practical-critical activity. The actual causal connections are more complex and include how ideas are conditioned by historical processes. The idealist perspective cited above, therefore, is partial and "one-sided".

Also, since concepts are the medium via which people represent to each other facts about the material world, it becomes possible to represent the products of this thought process as the world itself. A medium acts as a transmitter of the effect of something other than itself, it acts as its representative, when this is forgotten the medium can assume the causal power of that which it only represents, as in the "motor of history" case, or it may appear that objects only exist in the form of their representation, as in the "world as Idea" case.

Ideology and idealism are synonymous for Marx. Not only is idealism a form of ideology (because it is "one-sided"), all ideological, one-sided views are regarded as idealism, as we shall see in the section entitled "Materialism as Idealism".

Whilst these perspectives are given substance by selective and one-sided viewpoints which the idealist/ideologist can credibly maintain from his specialised position in the division of labour, this is not to suggest that his reason for adopting them is mere short-sightedness.

Ideology is a one-sided, partial account of things, usually stressing certain causal relations whilst ignoring others. "Partiality" like the concept "bias", which literally means one-sided, has both a logical and a socially pejorative sense. These meanings are distinguished only by the implication that "interest" might or might not be served by the selectivity of viewpoint. The combination of "class interest" and one-sidedness produces ideology in the pejorative sense.

The notion of an autonomous sphere of action which determines all other social phenomena confers on this sphere "God-like" powers. It is an uncaused cause, a "first mover". The parallel with religious thought is not mere coincidence as we shall see later. The conceptual error contained in ideological production of this kind is primarily of

inverting expressive and causal relations between the ideal product and the material world. Thus Marx can say

"If in all ideology men and their productions appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life process as the inversion of the object on the retina does from their physical life process." ²⁷

The social position of the ideologist intellectual, however, does not totally account for how ideology is produced and propagated. Theorists receive their concepts second-hand from practitioners of one kind or another. When they attempt to work out where the ideas came from and what their role in society is, they produce ideology - ethics, political theory, theology and philosophy etc. However, the misinterpretation is not always entirely due to the perspective of the theorist. The concepts which form the raw material of their subject may already be ideological in character.

Political economy for instance takes as its concepts the concepts used by capitalists who see everything in terms of money values. This perspective also owes its origin to the nature of the capitalists' role in the social system. The money aspect of objects is the significant aspect in terms of what they do. Although it is the political economist who suggests that this realm behaves in a law-like manner and determines human action, it is to be noted that the capitalist already perceives the market in this fashion when he has to take account of market prices. This perspective is not the result of the capitalist's theoretical role in society but of an alienated view of economic activity deriving directly from practice.

Again, ethical concepts such as "good" and "right" are not invented by ethical theorists but form part of our everyday discourse. Whether they originated with the priests Marx referred to is a debatable issue, they can equally be thought to express an alienated

²⁷ Ibid. pg 47

view of what the consensus of opinion is on what is desirable. There is clearly a relationship between alienated consciousness and ideological production which needs to be explained.

The alienated perception of human activity is one which regards the products of such activity as independent, alien powers which determine human behaviour. This is of course exactly the same view which the ideologist described above propagates. The mechanism which convinces the practical man of this view however is different from that which convinces the theorist. The two perspectives, however, complement one another such that the alienated view of social action is reinforced and reified by ideology. Again an alienated view may be the original source of the intellectual ideologist's concepts. This relationship between ideology, alienation and how alienated perception affects the possibility of coming to terms with and solving the fundamental problems mentioned earlier, is the key to understanding the the practical significance of Marx's materialist method. I will take up this point again in the section headed "The religious consciousness".

2.1.1. The political dimension of ideological production

The description of the production of ideological theories so far suggests that they are either result of mistaken perceptions due to the theorist's position in the division of labour or to the apparent autonomy of alienated social processes. This however is not the whole story. Ideologies, if accepted as valid theory, have consequences for political action.

If, for instance, one accepts the consciousness of statesmen who may believe that the decisions made by them and the relations forged with other statesmen determine history (the so called great man theory of history), ²⁸ then one's political behaviour will

²⁸ Actions of statesmen are material, nevertheless Marx would have regarded a theory ascribing "one-sided" causal determinacy to them as idealism as we shall see in the next section.

consist in trying to influence the thoughts of such figures (lobbying, petitions and the like) in order to bring about social change. If, on the other hand, they are seen only as the spokesmen of social groups whose material interests they express and from whose support they draw their power, then one has to organise to alter the balance of power in society to bring about social change. Thus where causality in the social system is thought to be located is crucial for political action.

Equally, the view that ideas control social action leads to educational programmes rather than action to alter the material conditions which produce and support those ideas. Ontological idealism, (Berkeley, Hegel et al.), is not exempt here. If one believes that the objective sensuous world is an illusion, then political action to alter it commits the mistake of taking the illusion seriously.

One suspects that Berkeley, for instance, would have advocated prayer to God in whose mind the world exists as a mechanism for bringing about social change. Hegel was content that the individual as a thinking subject should mentally experience individual freedom through identification with the monarch rather than freedom of action at the material level. Even the young Hegelians did not see the problems of society as practical problems but as theoretical ones, a problem of inconsistent principles. Ontological idealism is responsible for all of this.

Now ruling classes, although they don't like being verbally attacked or having their representatives harangued by pressure groups, much prefer this kind of opposition to political organisations aimed at directly removing the source of their power and influence (e.g. redistribution of property, by force if necessary, or a new division of labour). They, therefore, tend to look favourably upon those who suggest that this type of activity is the way to make society a better place. The production and dissemination of ideology is, therefore, carried out not only by those who hold genuinely mistaken viewpoints but by people ranging from active ideologues who produce such views for their political effects, through those predisposed to believe in ideologies since their conclusions are less

alarming than alternative views (but who believe that their attitude is objective), to those who in all sincerity are unable to see things from any other viewpoint due perhaps to their position in society and lack of insight. There is, therefore, always a built-in bias in the establishment of any class-divided society towards the production and dissemination of ideologies. In essence because of the differential benefit which ruling classes gain from the existing social arrangements they have no interest in the main in solving the problems mentioned above. Indeed the promotion of ideology is aimed at diverting action into unfruitful channels.

Thus Marx opposes idealism on political as well as methodological grounds but what is at stake here can only be seen when we consider what Marx envisages as the solution to the central problem outlined earlier.

2.1.2. The creative power of labour

The crucial concept for understanding human activity for Marx is labour. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* he says

"The outstanding achievement of Hegel's *Phänomenologie* and of its final outcome, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle, is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of labour and comprehends objective man - true because real man - as the outcome of man's own labour."²⁹

Labour changes man's material environment and in doing so permits a different lifestyle. The act of labour itself, the manner of producing, constitutes a change of life activity and correspondingly also generates new needs. All these things alter and add to what man is. By labour he thus creates himself. In Marx's terms he objectifies himself, becomes actual

²⁹ op. cit. *E.P.M.* pg 140.

or real, by affecting other things. Hence he depends upon nature to be what he is and upon nature's reciprocal effect upon him to be conscious of what he is.

This is an open ended process. All processes involve negation; the future negates the present, the present negates the past. A conscious process involves negation of the present in thought, criticism, as well as in practice, labour. Labour is practical-critical activity.

Hegel objected to a deterministic materialism which suggested that the objects of nature had their own laws to which man was subject, nature as an alien, powerful being. He believed that the mind posited nature but then came to regard it as having a life of its own. This he regarded as a mistake. When the thinking subject becomes aware that nature reflects his own mental activity then he becomes conscious of what he truly is.

Marx regards this positing activity as physical labour,³⁰ and believed that Hegel had correctly objected to the view that man is impotent in the face of his own creations. The loss of control of man's own products however has a social cause and its solution involves both critical reassessment and material alteration in practice. Consciousness plays a key role here, it is due to man's ability to criticise that he can assess and alter his situation for the better. If man can understand nature then he can change it, and thereby change himself.

2.1.3. The religious consciousness

Society is a human product which daily is reproduced anew by human social activity. If it has undesirable features they can be altered by practical-critical activity. If however it is represented in consciousness as an autonomous realm which controls human action then it appears as though its "behaviour" must merely be accepted since no action can change it. This latter view is an "alienated" viewpoint and ideology reinforces

³⁰ *op. cit.* *E.P.M.* p 140.

this view. In *Anti-Dühring* Engels says,

"The forces operating in society work exactly like the forces of nature - blindly violently and destructively, so long as we fail to understand them and take them into account. But once we have recognised them and understood their action, their trend and their effects, it depends solely on ourselves to increasingly subject them to our will and to attain our ends through them." ³¹

In describing man's emerging consciousness of nature Marx says,

"At the same time it (consciousness) is consciousness of nature, which first appears to men as a completely alien, all powerful and unassailable force, with which mens relations are purely animal and by which they are overawed like beasts; it is thus a purely animal consciousness of nature (natural religion) just because nature is hardly modified historically." ³²

i.e. it has not been subjected to labour, to practical-critical activity. We know however, that as soon as men began to recognise the patterns of causality in nature they were able to subject it to their will. It then no longer appeared to be the domain of an alien all-powerful will itself. ³³

In our theories which pertain to social life however, as we have seen alien powers still apparently rule. For instance Marx describes political economy as the "theology of the god capital" and its representation of the exchange of goods in the market (as the physical representatives of money values) as fetishism.³⁴

³¹ *Anti-Dühring*, F. Engels, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1976 pg 361

³² *op. cit. The German Ideology*, pg 51

³³ It is true that Marx criticises 18th century empirical science on the grounds that it produces a "collection of dead facts", (Ibid. pg 48) His criticism is that these facts are taken as givens and not understood in relation to a particular subject in time and space and also not understood as part of the process of nature itself. In this sense they remain "alien" and "out there" both to the subject and to nature.

³⁴ *Capital* Vol. I, Ch. 1, section 4, K. Marx, Penguin 1976, pp 163, 164.

Thus we see the historical significance of idealisms and all ideology since they reify an illusory view of the world and thus presents an obstacle to our ability to come to terms with our social problems and solve them. This is done (a) by locating all causality in a particular part of the social system, ignoring the way in which it is derivative or dependent upon the other parts, (b) making this particular realm impervious to human intervention or even (c) representing the derivative part as the whole. Hegelian idealism does all three of these things.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx sets out to show the manner in which ideas are produced; the fact that they can represent an alienated conception of society or be superficial due to the theorists position in the division of labour or be wilful distortions for political purposes. All of which shows that they cannot be uncritically accepted as the premisses for a theory of society. He says,

"...we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated thought of, imagined, conceived in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real active men and on the basis of their real life process we demonstrate the development of ideological reflexes and echoes of this process." ³⁵

Direct observation by the theorist and an adequate materialist methodology do not suffer from these problems. The manner in which all ideas are produced including Marx's own must, therefore, be explained not taken for granted. Thus, he rules out both idealism as ideology and ideas as premisses. We can now also see the historical significance not only of Marx's materialist method but also of his whole work in providing the necessary critical consciousness to allow practical action to follow, as he says in the 11th thesis on Feuerbach, "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it".³⁶

³⁵ Ibid. pg 47

³⁶ *Selected Works* (in one volume), K. Marx and F. Engels, Lawrence and Wishart 1968 pg 30.

2.2. Ideology and science

Marx believes that his method of approach in coming to terms with social phenomena is "scientific", in contrast to ideologies which promote a religious and placatory attitude to such phenomena. Their method is conservative whilst his is radical.

But this espousal of science is open to at least two objections. First is it not the case that science in our society serves to strengthen the ruling class rather than undermine it? Indeed it might be argued that "science" is one aspect of the ideology of the bourgeoisie. Secondly, increase in scientific control over nature has not led to its emancipation rather to its enslavement and exploitation. Is it not more likely that a scientific grasp of social forces will increase social control and lead to less freedom not more?

An answer to these questions will anticipate later discussions, but briefly, in answer to the first objection, all social products increase the power of the ruling class when the mode of production is prospering. Science in the realm of the productive forces increases the surplus product which the ruling class appropriates thus increasing its own power relative to the subject class. In so far as it increases prosperity in general it helps to stabilise society and its success is seen as the success and fitness to rule of the class which promotes it. In the realm of social control it provides sophisticated means of coercion as well as methods of behaviour analysis which enhance the ability to manipulate others. As ideology, as stated before, it provides the rationale for trusting the ruling class to rule, those who employ scientific methods know best.

However, when, as Marx suggests happens in all class divided societies, the relations of production cease to favour the development of the forces of production, then the situation changes. Anything which promotes the forces of production tends to undermine class rule and social control. It tends to promote another class. Social analysis tends to point to the problematic nature of the mode of production itself and the need to alter the relations of production which favour the ruling class. Even advances in methods of coercion and military tactics have proved, at best, forces used by both sides, at worst (from

the point of view of a ruling class) to favour the revolutionaries. Science has the inherent quality that it shows how the limitations to human life can be overcome. It therefore serves whoever is engaged in promoting such activity. When a ruling class can no longer afford to play this role, it no longer furthers their cause.

In answer to the second issue, socialism is intended to transform social relations, indeed, according to the *Economic and Philosophical manuscripts of 1844*, the relations between man and the whole of nature.³⁷ At present, due to the egoistic form of cooperative relations, society is based upon exploitation of nature, others, and even one's own nature. In changing this antagonistic form of social existence, socialism makes use of science in a different manner.

To anticipate, Kant says that men should not be treated as merely means to another's ends,³⁸ i.e. exploited, but should be treated as ends in their own right i.e. their own ends or right to satisfy their needs should be respected. For Kant, this can be no more than a pious hope opposed to the reality of human egoism. The dialectical solution to this opposition however, would be to create a society where to treat others as ends in themselves would be a means to one's own ends. Where each individual benefits from the enhancement of other people's development instead of, as in competitive societies, suffers from it.³⁹ The paradoxical situation of alienation gives an incentive to create such a society where men are not enslaved by their own powers and the demands each makes upon others.

In the discussion so far I have referred to the "one-sidedness" of ideologies as the decisive logical feature which characterises them rather than the reduction of reality to "ideas". A clearer view of what is meant by this is required here before we discuss the

³⁷ c.f. CH1 introduction.

³⁸ *The Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* in *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, 6th. edition, Longmans, Green and Co. 1909, section 63, pg 52. -reprinted 1963.

³⁹ See chapter seven 2.3.1.

role which dialectics play in Marx's materialism.

2.3. Materialism as "idealism"

In the previous section of the thesis I referred to the fact that theories which reduce a whole to one of its aspects and/or treat an aspect as if it is independent of the whole and/or treat the whole as if it is causally determined by an aspect to the exclusion of reciprocal relations, is ideological irrespective of whether that aspect is the realm of ideas. The point is that we are dealing with a partial explanation, something which can only exist as an abstraction, an idea. Hegel refers to such explanations as one-sided, i.e. a description from a particular perspective which nevertheless claims to be a self-sufficient characterisation of the object.⁴⁰

Despite its use of the philosophical category of matter, Marx refers to 18th century materialism both as ideology and indeed idealism in this sense. In the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, referring to the materialist science of his day he says,

"In consequence, natural science will lose its abstractly material - or rather its idealistic tendency, and will become the basis for human science, ..." ⁴¹

Thus he clearly regards contemporary materialism as "idealism" in the sense indicated. The way Marx distinguishes his own views from the 18th century materialists is important both from the point of view of understanding what he means by materialism and in terms of the consequences for his understanding of human history and human potentiality. However, I will defer the discussion of one-sided materialism until the discussion of idealist positions in chapter two. Other examples of one-sided materialist theories which have already been cited however, are theories which treat economic arrangements as true for all time and their laws therefore absolutely unchangeable, and the "great man" theory

⁴⁰ Hegel makes this the basis of his subjective/objective distinction. See CH. II.

⁴¹ *op. cit.* *E.P.M.* pg 105.

of history.

Marx regards philosophical idealism as a reification of alienated perspectives in the realm of philosophy i.e. the rationalisation of a fundamentally religious viewpoint.⁴² The philosophical grounds which justify this perspective originate principally in two problems, the so-called "epistemological gap" between the subject and object and the problem of the ontological status of universals.

The former problem is a consequence of the fact that philosophy is a purely intellectual pursuit. When the thinking subject examines the criteria for the validity of his own thoughts there is always a problem of how one bridges the gap between the mind and the world (the correspondence theory of truth). This follows from the fact that since the object of the "mental" labourer is thought, the world itself tends to appear as a world of thoughts to him.

The second issue, the problem of universals, has long been linked with issues to do with God and therefore to the issue of alienation. It is in part the attempt to solve this problem which leads to the perspective of dialectics. Hegel's solution is regarded by Marx as still one-sided and he considers his own dialectical materialism as providing the more correct conceptual basis for the scientific investigation of social phenomena. It is to the origins of this perspective that I shall now turn.

⁴² op. cit. *E.P.M.*, pg 135.

Chapter Two

Materialism

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I suggested that Marx identifies "idealism" and "ideology" to the extent that he regards certain one-sided forms of materialism as idealism. Clearly Marx's own materialism must avoid these problems if it is to be the basis of a non-ideological viewpoint. The following chapter is intended to demonstrate and justify Marx's approach to this topic.

Marx's materialism is based upon his rejection of idealism and his own understanding of the epistemological problem. The account given below is an attempt at a rational reconstruction of this position based upon his comments in his notebooks and elsewhere.

Marx is a materialist in the minimal sense that he believes that all things, including human beings and their mental processes, are part of the physical world.¹ He is not committed to any particular notion of "the material" or "matter".² At most he is committed to a view which would regard the world as "real"³ in the sense of being independent of the mental activity of the subject and, in principle, capable of being known via the senses. Whether Marx's views are consistent with realism will be examined in section 2.1.2.

The justification of Marx's materialist perspective, however, requires him to be able to refute idealism on the ground on which its proponents attempt to establish it, namely,

¹ Mental experience is merely the way that the human organism is aware of changes in its own physical state and the beyond it, the causes of these changes.

² Thus "light", which is not matter, but is still part of the physical world and any other physical entities by which the world can be described, pose no problems for materialism in this sense.

³ Materialism is of necessity "realist" because it is committed to the reality of the material world, i.e. its independence from mind.

philosophy. To do this he needs to show both how and why idealist views arise and why they are misconceived. This is what I shall attempt to do below.

2. Mental labour and the epistemological gap

In the previous chapter, I suggested that there are essentially two philosophical issues that lead to idealist theories, the epistemological gap between subject and object and the status of universals. The idealist solution to the first of these is, I believe, conditioned in the way that Marx suggests, by the philosopher's position in the division of labour as a purely "mental" labourer.⁴

The epistemological question is: "What constitutes knowledge?" This is usually understood in the sense of "How can I know if my ideas are validly held?" The latter formulation accepts that knowledge has the form of ideas. The question of validity is usually understood in terms of the relation between ideas and reality.

Whether one's ideas represent anything real however, is not simply a philosopher's question. An engineer might ask himself whether the bridge which should stand up in theory will actually stand up when built - whether the ideal bridge can correctly represent a real bridge. But there is a difference between this question and the one which the philosopher asks, a difference which illuminates what the philosopher is doing.

The engineer tests his ideas against sense-experience. If he and others experience the bridge collapse, then he believes his ideas were wrong. The philosopher on the other hand questions the nature of experience itself, it might be an illusion or a dream. The difference is not simply that the engineer uncritically accepts the evidence of the senses. He is well aware that there are occasions when he may make wrong judgements based on sense experience. The crucial difference is that he and the philosopher are trying to solve different (though related) problems hence they are engaged in different different types of

⁴ Op. cit. *The German Ideology* pg 51. Cf. also, Chapter 1, 2.1.

practice.⁵

The philosopher is searching for a criterion of certainty internal to the world of ideas, which are the raw material of his speculative task. He is aware of the fact that experience is thought-mediated and therefore as problematic as thought itself.

The engineer in contrast does not care if experience is classified as an illusion. His problem is to avoid the unpleasant experience of a bridge which falls down. Sense-certainty is *necessarily* involved in validating the engineer's ideas by virtue of his project, his type of practice.

The philosopher is searching for intellectual certainty which renders him satisfied with the plausibility of his thought-world. On the other hand, the world of the senses is the real world to the engineer, in the sense of being the world to which his actions are held to account. Its objects are real, sensuous and therefore material.

The philosopher's final court of appeal, on the other hand, is the intellect, reality is therefore mediated by the subject's mind and this realm appears more secure than the objects it postulates, hence the epistemological gap.

The paradigm case of this is Descartes. Descartes is searching for propositions which are certain on which to base his system of knowledge. He sets up a thought experiment to discover them. Since the basis of a thought experiment is thought itself, this basic presupposition of the method seems the most certain piece of knowledge, "I cannot doubt that I am thinking because to doubt is to think".⁶ One might imagine an engineer

⁵ I will argue below that an understanding of the relationship between material practice and intellectual practice provides the solution to the intellectual problems which appear to licence idealism.

⁶ Discourse 4, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, translated by F.E. Sutcliffe, Penguin Classics, Penguin 1968, pg 54.

If a doubt was not regarded as a "thought object" but perhaps merely as a "phenomenon" or a certain kind of event, then it would not necessarily follow that "to doubt is to think". From this example it can be seen how the ontological assumptions about the method condition the conclusions drawn.

coming up with the proposition "I build therefore material things are". Certainty resides in the presuppositions about the method.

Philosophers deal with ideas and search for intellectual criteria internal to ideas (consistency, intuitive clarity etc.) to demonstrate their validity, but the world on which they operate appears, by virtue of their method, as ideas first and foremost and reality only derivatively.

Scepticism periodically collapses philosophical systems back to the world of the thinking subject and to that alone. Even the 18th century empiricists who suggest that the mind is a blank slate until experience writes upon it, discovered via Berkeley that the only evidence of which we can be sure is the slate itself and the writing upon it. Marx, however, is also a philosopher so the question arises as to whether his philosophy escapes the charmed circle of the mind and its contents.⁷

A correct understanding of the origin of these idealist positions I will later argue requires a critique of the epistemological enterprise itself. I intend to show that the question of certainty, indeed the very concept of knowledge stems from the problems encountered in material practice and not from speculative activity considered in isolation.

The functional separation of the realm of intellectual practice from the realm of sensuous practice,⁸ however, results in the situation where practical issues become transposed, referring exclusively to problems within the realm of ideas rather than to those of sensuous reality. The question of certainty then applies in respect to a self-subsistent world of ideas and in this context, can only be answered in a fashion which is purely arbitrary. This is the source of "the dilemma of epistemology" which I will discuss later.

⁷ I am not suggesting that philosophy has no practical use. The intellect is always involved in informing our actions. To critically assess the means by which we represent reality to ourselves therefore has a crucial effect upon our orientation to action. Philosophy comes to the fore in periods when our conceptual or theoretical frameworks cease to function adequately and a new intellectual approach is required.

⁸ see CH1 section 2.1

The arbitrary nature of what one calls certain opens up the content of our ideas to sceptical doubt, militating against a realist viewpoint. It correspondingly licences not only relativism but also idealist viewpoints since the relationship of ideas to the thinking subject seems more secure than the relationship of ideas to any object they purport to represent.

2.1. The epistemological gap

The epistemological gap is a problem which occurs in the context of a realist epistemology. Sceptical arguments about realism provide the point of departure for all the major idealist theories and this problem affords idealists such an opportunity.

These skeptical arguments take two principal forms. Firstly, skepticism about a world beyond our ideas which is based upon observations about human fallibility, which, given that philosophy's point of departure is the thinking subject, leads to idealism. Secondly, skepticism about a world beyond our ideas deriving from the assumption that, since experience is the experience of a thinking subject, its objects are necessarily thoughts and nothing else.

The epistemological gap results from the assumption that experience cannot be taken at face value, it may be subject to error and illusion or in some other way problematic. The rationalists were always suspicious of the evidence of the senses⁹ and even the empiricist tradition, in so far as it sees a *problem* in "the veil of perception", implicitly acknowledges that experience need not convey the nature of reality unadulterated.¹⁰ The problem for a realist is how he can know that his ideas correspond to reality if the world can only be apprehended via problematic experience.

⁹ E.g. Descartes says that the sun appears to be small but reason tells us that it is large. Cf. op. cit. *Discourse on Method* 4, pg 59 and pg 118.

¹⁰ Cf. *Locke, Berkely, Hume: central themes*, Jonathan Bennett, Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press 1971, pp 68-70.

The realist model of the relation between subject and object and their co-products knowledge and experience is as follows:- humanity and the non-human world have an existence which does not directly depend upon the cognitive relation between them but knowledge and experience are the product of their interaction.

In the positivist version, correct theories or knowledge have the same form as the object itself, but in the Kantian version, they cannot be known to have the same form since the form of thing-in-itself (reality), cannot be conceptualised. The *existence* of the thing-in-itself, however, is asserted.

The problem is this: knowledge and experience depend in part on the conceptual apparatus of the knowing subject whereas the character of the thing-in-itself does not. We cannot compare subject-related experience with reality unless we can experience reality "independently of experience". We cannot step outside of human experience to see what things are "in themselves". This holds good for the question of whether the thing-in-itself exists.

It follows that objective knowledge cannot consist in a correspondence between reality and experience or reality and theory since no comparison can be made. How then, can we be sure that the objects which our concepts describe exist independently of the knower? The idealist answer to this question is that we cannot; I will discuss the problems associated with this position later. On the other hand, Hegel, Feuerbach and Marx all present solutions to this problem based upon the notion of "objectification" which attempt to bridge this gap.

2.1.1. Objectification

Hegel's solution to the gap between subject and object is to regard the world as "Reason". In *The Philosophy of History*, he says:-

"...Reason is Substance, as well as Infinite Power; its own Infinite Material underlying all the natural and spiritual life which it originates, as also

the Infinite Form - that which sets this material in motion."¹¹

Reason as the source of reality is subject creating the world, as the world itself it is object. Subject and object are thus identified. The rational individual can understand the world because the world is itself reason. The individual subject shares the faculty of reason with the "cosmic subject", God who created it. Treating the world as "reason external to the subject" leads to the notion of "objectification", i.e. reason becoming something real and independent of its creative source.

Feuerbach as a materialist treats the creative source as man and stresses the sensuous nature of objectification both in thought and action. Man objectifies his needs and powers through labour when he creates useful objects and equally objectifies his needs and powers in thought when he creates thought objects. A concept such as "food" for instance relates to the need and power to eat, and God, for Feuerbach, is a thought object created by man as an imaginary satisfaction to what are ultimately sensuous needs.

However, the whole notion of our view of the world as objectification seems problematic for a materialist. A realist/materialist cannot say that a thing has a certain form because we *think* that it does. This is Idealism. This view suggests that if we were not human-beings with human needs, we would presumably describe the world differently. This appears to make our concepts subject-relative in a way that seems incompatible with the notion of something which is true independently of a subject's impressions. Nor can a materialist say, as Kant does, that the human input to experience creates a phenomenal world of experience different from the "world-in-itself". The realist element in Marx's position dictates that thought should be able to arrive at a correct representation of the thing-in-itself and that the object so described is not merely mental or a projection of the subject's sensuous need.

¹¹ *The Philosophy of History* -introduction, G.W.F. Hegel, Dover Publications 1956, pg 9.

The problem of knowledge thus posed for materialism is that if the subject is regarded as the co-producer of knowledge, then it seems that we cannot prove that the product corresponds to a reality independent of the producer, unless we regard "reality" as something produced by the subject's mind, i.e. some kind of idealism. The problem in particular for Marx is how one retains the notion of objectification and yet avoids ending up in an idealist position.

His solution I believe is as follows: in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, Marx says,

"The sun is the object of the plant - an indispensable object to it, confirming its life - just as the plant is an object of the sun, of the sun's objective essential power."

and

"A being which has no object outside itself is not an objective being"

and

"A non-objective being is a non-being".¹²

What Marx appears to be saying is that what a thing *is* depends upon its relation to other things, i.e. how it manifests itself. The extreme corollary of this seems to be that that which is not manifest is not!

An object's properties clearly do relate to how it interacts with other things. It follows from this that what a thing *is* is what it is for some other thing, i.e. the cause of certain effects. Part of what an object is, therefore, is what it is for a human being, the effect which it has. Consciousness of these effects, the attempt to describe them in language, does not, for Marx, therefore, render the object mental or merely a subjective impression, since the nature of its being is partially disclosed via this relation; the relation to a

¹² Op. cit., *E.P.M.* p145.

conscious subject will reveal rather than conceal what it is.¹³ The contrast with Kant perhaps shows this most clearly. For Kant the relation to the subject obscures what the object is, For Marx it reveals it.

What has been shown so far is how, by adopting the ontological position that the being of an object consists in it being the locus of a set of powers,¹⁴ Marx avoids the epistemological problem that what a thing appears to be to a particular subject might be different from what it is "in itself". In Marx's view what a thing is for another thing and what it is in itself are necessarily related.¹⁵ Hence there is no "gap". The epistemological justification for adopting this ontological position is not complete however, if it is simply pointed out that this position avoids both the problems of "correspondence theory of truth" and the "subjectivising" of the object. The idealist move is still possible, so a complete justification requires a refutation of Idealism. Furthermore to show that Marx's viewpoint is a realist one requires that other points relating to a realist ontology be met. I will attempt to deal with the latter issue first.

2.1.2. Realist Claims

If we are going to judge whether Marx's views are consistent with realism, it will be necessary to examine in more detail the sorts of claim involved in a realist position. The first and minimal claim of realism is that there is some independent and conditioning factor in our experience which we cannot wish away. Nearly everybody is a realist in this

¹³ This, of course, leaves the problem of how one accounts for errors, illusions, etc. This will be dealt with in section 2.1.2.1.

¹⁴ i.e. it acts as cause. It is worth noting that the fact that Marx defines identities in terms of how things act is the characteristic which leads G.A. Cohen to ascribe a functionalist method to Marx in *Karl Marx's Theory of History: a defence*, Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press 1978. "Capital", for instance is anything which is used to increase its own value in the labour process, in Cohen's terms anything which "functions" as capital. Marx's view of course does not carry the implication that something only takes on value or indeed can be completely understood in terms of the role which it plays in some *particular* system.

¹⁵ As potential to actual.

sense. This is the quality of "out-thereeness" or intransigence of the world. Another way of formulating it is to say that there is some check upon our creativity, the world cannot be created by us "willy-nilly".

Popper claims to be a realist in this sense because the world acts as a negative check on theories in his system.¹⁶ Kant's "thing-in-itself" is also real in this sense, in so far as interaction with it provides the raw material of experience, which reason organises into the phenomenal world. However, this claim does not go far enough to satisfy a fully-fledged realism as Collier's attack on Kolokowski's position shows.¹⁷ Kolokowski pointed out that "the qualities of the world do not arise out of nothing." They are created, in Kolokowski's work, out of a "pre-existing chaos" which human beings encounter and make sense of in a manner which is useful in relation to their needs. Collier counters that "Precisely to serve our needs, cognition must obtain a certain independence of them".¹⁸ Just because Kolokowski's world is not created in total freedom, does not allow him to characterise it as "real" in Collier's sense. Collier wants to know how reality can be separated from illusion and error which are also part of that which is "created (by the subject) from a pre-existing chaos".

Thus the second claim made by realists is that the form which reality actually has, exists independently of the form which anyone might think that it has. In this contrast, according to Collier, consists the possibility of science and the quest for objective knowledge. Illusions and errors are just as intransigent as reality to the person who does not know that they are illusions and errors.

Thirdly, the criterion that the world should offer opposition to the creative activity of some subject does not go far enough to establish the independence of the world for

¹⁶ *Conjectures and Refutations*, by K.R. Popper, 4th edition, Routledge, Keegan and Paul 1972. pp 116, 117.

¹⁷ Andrew Collier, "Truth and Practise" - *Radical Philosophy* No 5, summer 1973 cf. Leszek Kolokowski, "Karl Marx and the classical definition of truth" - *Marxism and Beyond* 1969

¹⁸ Idem.

realism proper. The world must be asserted to exist whether any subject does encounter it, has encountered it, or ever will encounter it. Its reality cannot depend upon its contact with a human subject.

These then are the three principle claims:-

- (1) The question of the limit to creativity.
- (2) The question of truth and error.
- (3) The question of the independent existence of the world.

From the point of view of our three realist criteria, it is the issue of the independent existence of things which causes epistemological problems for Kant. If the thing-in-itself is not subject-mediated (by definition), how can it be "deduced" or "intuited" (depending on which interpretation of Kant you accept)? Doesn't this activity make it "thing-for-a human subject" i.e. make it a phenomenon? Hegel correctly pointed out that if nothing can be known about it then we cannot talk about it at all.

It is the objectivity of knowledge which is problematic in Popper. Popper admits that scientific theories are "Doxa"¹⁹ i.e. opinion. He must therefore, if he is going to defend science against non-science, have some method of differentiating good opinions from bad ones, to prevent the rejoinder that one opinion is as good as another. His criterion of falsification however, only indicates an inconsistency between ideas held, it doesn't show which is correct or even more correct, since his criterion could be used in such a manner as to select *less* true theories, it being always possible that the major flaws in a theory have yet to be discovered. The fact is that on this view we cannot know.²⁰

The first criterion of realism, the limit to creativity, suggests that the objective world constrains the forms in which it can be apprehended. This can be shown to be a debatable issue also since Idealists are able to argue that the constraint on the form in which the

¹⁹ Op. cit. *Conjectures and Refutations*, pp 25, 26.

²⁰ I am indebted to Greg Hunt for this argument, presented in his lectures at the University of Warwick in the late seventies.

world appears is due to the structure of the mind. But this issue perhaps gives us some purchase on the problem, namely in what respect experience itself contains obdurate or intransigent features, that is to say, in what respect it can be thought to have an objective structure (in the sense of not being moulded by the subject's will).

2.1.2.1. The objective structure of experience

Firstly, the "restraint to creativity" criterion. Marx's retention of the notion of objectification from the Hegelian/Feuerbachian philosophy, as has been shown, does not lead to the misrepresentation of the real features of the object, (e.g. the concept "food" not only expresses the significance of the object in terms of the needs of a human subject but also the real power of the object to satisfy that need).

Nevertheless, how the subject apprehends the object is not solely determined by nature of the object itself, there is an element of subjective choice involved. This obtains in two areas, namely, what type of activity the subject wishes to engage in (and hence what the theory is intended to explain) and how the subject identifies the key features of his experience (i.e. how the world is to be analysed when that activity provides an experience). This latter practice is theoretical activity.

But given that these choices have been made, once we have decided for instance what type of action it is necessary to perform to validate a statement such as "the cat is over there" (looking), and we have decided what kind of mental identification procedure would constitute "seeing a cat", then either we can or cannot perform these actions successfully and thereby have the expected experience. Whether the expected experience occurs or not is beyond our control, it is a constraining feature of the world.

The meaning of an assertion about the world carries the implication of what subjective choices have been made i.e. what actions are intended to be performed in order to validate it. To claim to understand an assertion you must know how to apply it in a judgement. From that point on however, experience either conforms or it does not to your

expectations.

This has a bearing upon the question of what constitutes an error. The previous discussion suggested that if the proposed act of identification cannot be performed then the judgement is in error. This is correct but it is not the whole story as the problems engendered by a statement such as "the golden mountain does not exist" shows.

The problem is how the statement can refer to something which the import of the sentence suggests cannot be referred to. The answer is of course that the golden mountain may exist as an object of thought but not as a physical reality. All assertions about existence must be qualified by the intended context of verification if they are to be unambiguous. The error here, therefore, might be considered to be a misunderstanding over the intended context of verification (thought-object or sense-object).²¹

The meaning of an assertion however, cannot necessarily be unambiguously read off from a statement, the meaning of a statement will alter if the context of its application alters, e.g. in our example "over there" could apply to any direction and even "cat" can have more than one meaning. The criticism must be answered, therefore, that by altering the context any statement whatsoever could be shown to be valid, hence the world does not constrain our theories. In effect we are saying that from some viewpoint any theory is valid.

For Marx, who is a dialectician, however, this is not a problem. Emphasis on any one viewpoint is for him one-sided and incorrect, what the object is can only be described fully in terms of the complete set of its manifestations or effects including effects on human subjects. An object described this way transcends the subjective choice of perspectives. It is what the object is for a human experiencer from all possible experiential

²¹ This reflects Hegel's approach to ascertaining the truth of statements. It is not so much whether something exists but what kind of existence it has. It is a question of seeing things in context. This is characteristic of the rationalist approach to truth and error as against the empiricist approach.

contexts i.e. its complete human significance.

In practice of course, the synthesis is never complete one can always say more about any object. As knowledge grows however, the world view moves closer to objectivity since one-sidedness is being eliminated. Thus it is possible to say that the form which experience takes is not freely created but constrained both in the sense that there is a necessary connection between certain actions and the occurrence of certain experiences, and that increasing knowledge of the world tends towards a transcendence of subjective choice, at least in principle.

This brings us to the second criterion namely, the ability to distinguish truth from error and illusion from reality. Something has already been said about how this can be done. Identifying error however, goes beyond finding the appropriate context for single statements and empirically testing them.

A crucial source of error for Hegel and Marx is mistaking one-sided viewpoints for universally valid viewpoints. This also, of course, is a question of understanding the context in which the statement is correct, but it also shows how more complex theories replace simpler ones by including them as partial perspectives. Furthermore, it allows us to explain how opposed statements can be accommodated within a more complex theory.

Now there is some evidence that the way in which Marx distinguishes less erroneous from more erroneous theories is related to the way Hegel makes this same distinction, namely, in terms of the relation between essence and appearance. Marx's view of the relation between his work in *Capital* and the work of bourgeois political economists for instance is that they simply formulate the regularities found in appearances whilst he conceptualises the appearances as an expression of their essential causes.²² He shows the

²² Cf. op. cit. *E.P.M.*, pg 66. E.g, the "Labour theory of value" involves the reconceptualisation of money relations as "value" relations (Marx's use of the term). Money is shown to be the representative of value and the laws governing its movement depend upon the movement of value. To treat the realm of monetary transactions as a self-subsisting realm is one-sided and ideological. The more "essential" theory shows how value must "appear" in money form. Cf. *Capital: a Critique of Political Economy*, Karl Marx, translated by Ben Fowkes, foreword by Ernest Mandel,

whole process, they only comprehend part and hence are limited in their perspective and arrive in places at contradictory conclusions.

But what is this relation between essence and appearance? Hegel believes that more essential theories "absorb and supercede" more superficial ones. For instance the view of the world which postulated two stars, the morning star and the evening star, is superceded by the view that they are both the same object, the planet Venus. For Hegel, the morning star and the evening star turn out to be "moments" or aspects of the planet Venus, not self-subsisting entities. In this way, the better theories are considered to comprise and include the less adequate ones. The criterion which is being used to make this distinction, it seems, is growth in content and/or more adequate systematisation of evidence. Yet there are features of the less complete theories which are being rejected.

The view that there are two stars is clearly at odds with the view that there is only one planet, so how can one say that one theory contains the other within it rather than that it simply replaces it? Note that if one theory does simply replace the other we will once more require a criterion for deciding which is the better of the two. This is the same issue as that discussed by Paul Feyerabend about whether Newton's theory is "contained" within Einstein's theory as a subordinate case.²³

Feyerabend points out that the concepts in each theory are mutually exclusive in meaning i.e. incommensurable, as indeed with our present example, therefore one cannot describe the other. There is nevertheless a systematic link between them, namely, that in each instance where the respective theories are applied, Einstein takes into account factors which Newton does not (relative frames of reference). Newton conceptualised the world in a manner such that these factors did not exist for his theory. His view was, we now believe, erroneous. We therefore know which factors to ignore or consider when we

Penguin 1976, Vol. 1, pp 127, 128 and introduction pg 20.

²³ * "How to be a good Empiricist" - Paul Feyerabend in *Philosophy of Science: The Delaware Seminar*, ed. B. Baumrin, Vol. 2 1962-3, pp 13-16.

wish to move from one theory to the other.

The main difference is that Newton's view is now thought to be valid in a particular context rather than in all contexts i.e. his absolutism is refuted but not his localised results and this leaves room for other viewpoints which are now no longer excluded by the law of non-contradiction. Newton's theory becomes an explanation of a particular appearance i.e. how reality manifests itself in a restricted context. Such appearances are not illusions unless they are treated as self-subsisting things.

The sense in which one is a subordinate case of the other is this. There are a set of tests, a set of actions and experiences which verify both theories. The fact that one says that what is being identified in each theory which is being tested is a different entity, doesn't mean that the identification procedure isn't the same.²⁴ The difference between them lies in the implications of the respective concepts which lie beyond the test procedure. The notions of one star and two stars respectively, carry different implications for actions and the connected experiences. They diverge over such issues as whether both stars could be seen at the same time from some point in space and a whole series of other assumptions which differ between the experience of one object and the experience of two. In practice however, the only tests which could be performed until recently were those that verified both.

One might be tempted to say in the light of this that the problem with erroneous theories is that they go beyond the evidence, that they carry excess meaning. But separating the excess meaning from the content to be verified can only be done in retrospect. All our experiences are theory-mediated hence they contain assumptions which are liable to be discredited at some future date. We discover which assumptions are untenable, only in the process of attempting to render our theories consistent with new pieces of knowledge.

²⁴ The procedure I am describing here is similar to C. S. Peirce's "definition in use". Cf. C.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, Harvard University Press 1931-1935, Vol. II, section 330 (the definition of Lithium).

For instance, the orbiting planet theory might be disproved were it discovered that a distortion in the medium across which it is observed is responsible for the apparent movement. If we refused to commit ourselves in advance to a viewpoint because other possible interpretations exist we would not be able to say anything. Our theories then might be considered as useful fictions, in so far as they carry excess content and thus since our experience is theory mediated this would render it illusory.

Nevertheless, we also know in retrospect that not all the implications of the theory are rendered false and an accretion of dependable connections between action and experience occurs as our theories succeed each other. It is in this sense that one theory absorbs another and it is in this sense that these false theories are becoming more and more objective.

Finally, the criterion of the existence, independently of experience of entities encountered. In Marx's philosophy, the existence of an object and its nature is equated with its power to affect other things, it is the locus of powers. Now "powers" are potentialities and can be understood in terms of hypothetical relations to other objects e.g. if a human subject came into contact with "A", "B" would be the result. This statement makes no assertion about whether a human subject actually fulfills this condition and is therefore quite consistent with criterion (3). We only *know* what an object is (its potentiality), however, after it has manifested or realised its powers in the world.

2.1.3. What is wrong with idealist arguments

Having shown that Marx's viewpoint is consistent with the realist criteria, in order to complete the justification of his materialism it is necessary to show that idealist alternatives based upon a sceptical argument about the relation between subject and object are misconceived. I will attempt to show that firstly, idealist arguments built from empirical evidence are fallacious and secondly, that there is good reason to accept a realist view of the world which is more securely grounded in the empirical evidence and which the

idealist is obliged to reject. What is at issue here can perhaps be condensed into the alternatives of whether the mind is in the world or the world is in the mind.

2.1.3.1. The structure of idealist arguments

The idealist argument typically proceeds as follows:- The realist view of the world holds that there are perceiving subjects, perceptions and non-mental objects which are perceived. For the idealist, the link between the perceiver and his perceptions is epistemologically sound. The link between the perceptions and the objects of perception however cannot be established with certainty. Hence the view that there are objects which perceptions represent is not a matter of knowledge. Therefore we are only entitled to assert the existence, in the world which we experience, of ideas.²⁵ This view is further supported by the normally accepted applicability of the concepts of error, dreams and illusion. all of which imply that perceptions need not correspond to their objects, if indeed there is an object. Might not the world be a dream or an illusion or always the product of an erring mind?

In order to establish his case the idealist must demonstrate a relation between subject and perceptions such that the dependence of perceptions upon the subject prejudices their objectivity, i.e. their relation to an object.²⁶

In the light of this it worth examining the precise nature of the relationship between the subject and perceptions which the idealist is attempting to establish. In order to do this we need to look at the idealist concept of the subject.

Commonsense would locate the subject in the world with external relations to other things. The idealist subject however, is identified with the world, since the world is

²⁵ Kant falls into this category despite the thing-in-itself. since it is the fact that he sees the link between the object, the thing-in-itself. and perceptions as problematic which leads him to regard the world of experience as mental.

²⁶ This is not presupposed in the meaning of a perception since it remains to be established what sort of thing perception is.

composed of ideas and ideas are located in the mind of the subject. Mind, world and subject are the same.²⁷ I intend to argue that it is impossible for the idealist to support this view since firstly, most of the evidence of our experience tends to contradict it and secondly, the evidence which he selects does not support his claim.

2.1.3.2. Some evidence against

The first piece of evidence which seems to contradict the idealist viewpoint is the fact that the point of perception of the subject appears to be located in space among its objects. Clearly this view of the subject is no use to the idealist since spatial relations are external and locate the world outside of the subject. The idealist subject cannot be located in space no matter what appearances might suggest.

However, a subject which is capable of motion in space offers the possibility of establishing the dependence of perception upon the subject, since movement affects the possibilities of perception in the tactile as well as the visual fields. Motion on its own however, is insufficient to establish this point as Copernicus showed when he pointed out that the empirical evidence is consistent with the motion of either the subject or the object (earth or stars). To establish the *mere* subjectivity of perception, the subject must be shown to be the cause of the perceptual change, his movement must be the independent variable. This is possible only if we assume a willing subject whose decisions act as first cause.

This viewpoint however, is the basis of the realist distinction between perceptions and their objects. The object is distinguished from the experience of it by the fact that the object is said to exist when the subject is not in a position to perceive it (when he changes position). This distinction however, is simply between something whose existence

²⁷ For non-solipsist idealists there may of course be more than one self-contained mental world, perhaps carbon copies of each other, perhaps not.

depends only upon itself (the object) and something whose existence depends upon interaction (the experience).

The idealist cannot use it, since the interaction referred to is interaction in space i.e. external relations between subject and real object. If motion in space is the foundation of the distinction between perceptions and objects of perception then it contradicts rather than supports the idealist argument.²⁸

2.1.3.3. The empirical starting point of idealist arguments

Although the idealist must show that the perceptions depend upon the subject he cannot do so in a manner which involves references to the body or locates the perceiver in space. What he requires is empirical evidence that perception does not in fact have this character.

Now there are certain empirical phenomena which do not appear either to be connected to the body or to be located in space. These phenomena are classed as "mental" and they include thinking (a kind of dialogue with ourselves which we nevertheless don't hear in the normal way), imagining (similarly a kind of "seeing" which is not really seeing), emotions, decision making, etc. These phenomena appear to take place against the background of sense-perception such that we can experience them simultaneously with our everyday sensuous activity. They are not associated with any particular parts of the body as would be a pain for instance. Hence we cannot locate them directly in space.

The idealist requires that all perceptions, including "sense" perceptions, should be related to the subject in a similar way. Sense perceptions, as we have seen, do not appear to have this character. However, the idealist can find some purchase for his argument due to the fact that certain types of apparent sense-experience is categorised in the realist

²⁸ A further corollary is that since motion of the point of perception in space is effected via the ability to control the body, the subject tends to be associated with the body, because it is this which moves in space.

perspective as mental along with the phenomena mentioned above. These are dreams, illusions and errors. The idealist will typically therefore attempt to show that all sense-perception either falls into these categories or analogous philosophical ones and hence all perceptions are mental. Berkeley for instance thought the mind has "ideas" for which there is no corresponding material object. This is similar to what we mean by dreaming or hallucinating. Kant believed that the mind intervenes in the the perceptual process such that the object perceived is different in character to the object in the world. This is similar to what we mean by an illusion or a perceptual error. The distinctive feature of idealist theories therefore, is that all sense-experience is assimilated to these categories.

2.1.3.4. A note on evidence

Before continuing to show how the idealist develops his argument it is perhaps worth noting that should the idealist manage to establish this view, then he is in a position to dismiss the commonsense empirical evidence to the contrary simply as misleading ideas. Clearly there are epistemological dangers in doing this as we shall see below.

2.1.3.5. The development of the argument and the role of reason

The next step is to investigate how it is possible for the idealist to categorise experience in this way. In the case of dreams, the realist view regards them as mental because the "sense" evidence of our dream is hard to reconcile with the rest of our sense experience plus the fact that it is likely to be at odds with the reports of others in our vicinity at the time and place at which the dream took place. It is due to the inconsistency of the evidence that we banish dreams to the realm of the merely mental and likewise with illusions. But this shows that what is regarded as objective has something to do with the thought process. Correction of errors discloses the role of reason. Similarly, it is the inconsistency of the 18th century scientist's description of the perceived world with the way we describe our experience of it (pulses of air as against sound etc.) which led Locke

to relegate the latter to the merely mental. This provided Berkeley with his point of departure from which to prove that all perception was of secondary qualities (merely mental).

Again, the inconsistency between a description of the world purely in terms of sense data and our customary descriptions of it, led Hume to relegate the non-sense-data concepts to the merely mental in keeping with his empiricist method. This provided Kant with his point of departure from which to prove that since these categories are isolatable only by intellectual analysis but not in experience, all experience is a partial product of the mind.

In general, it is because we reason about the world that some sensuous phenomena (including illusions, dreams, etc.) are thought to be merely mental. It should be noticed at this point however, that the action of reason is discriminatory in these cases, it makes its distinction within the world which is experienced as sensuous. This becomes problematic for the type of argument which the idealist wishes to construct upon this analysis of experience.²⁹

The idealist argument now typically proceeds as follows:- If we can be mistaken about one experience i.e. it is merely mental, dream, idea, etc., then by recursion we could be mistaken about every experience of the same type. Even stronger is the suggestion that if perceptions are of the same type then they are thereby proved to have the same status i.e. mere ideas.

This is the form of the argument which Berkeley uses against Locke showing that if primary and secondary qualities are of the same type, then what is true of secondary qualities is also true of primary qualities and hence all qualities. Kant's argument is slightly different, he attempts to show that all experience requires the mental categories hence it

²⁹ I have not mentioned Hegel here but Hegel in this context is a completion of Kant. He effects a transformation similar to the Locke-Berkeley move to remove the thing-in-itself, leaving all form supplied by the mind. His attitude to contrary empirical evidence is similar to Berkeley also.

is all mind-dependent. These recursive arguments are logically correct for any perception hence the plausibility of the idealist case.

However, there is a problem which the idealist does not acknowledge but which invalidates his conclusion. Since the class of "sense-perception" which comes to be regarded as mental is established by the discriminatory action of reason, then by recursion there is always some sense-perception which is by contrast not regarded as merely mental. The conclusion that all sense-perception is mental therefore is invalid. The possibility that we might be deceived by the content of some of our experiences is admitted by the realist viewpoint but the possibility that we might be deceived by all of it is not.

It should be noted here that Kant attempts to maintain the contrast between ideas which form the content of our experience and an unknowable real world which is distinguished from it. Experience is ideal precisely because it is different from the thing-in-itself. But since the thing-in-itself cannot be part of the known world on pain of introducing a non-idea into experience, it is difficult to see how the contrast, which is intended to be a piece of knowledge can be made.

If we cannot know the thing-in-itself we cannot know that the experienced world is ideal. If we can know the thing-in-itself then some of our experience is not merely ideal. This inconsistency shows that Kant cannot remain an idealist and also retain the contrast which justifies this position. The conclusion remains that the idealist argument is non-sequitur.

2.1.3.6. Idealism and the problem of evidence

The failure of the sceptical argument to establish its conclusion leads to further problems for the idealist. The ordinary usage of terms such as idea, mind, subject, is in terms of oppositions ideal/real, mind/matter, subject/object. This accords with the distinctions which reason makes within experience. The idealist wishes however, to use the term on one-side of each opposition universally. This produces an inconsistent use of

terms between the oppositional and universal usage.

The idealist view of reality seems to contain ideas which are ideas in distinction to real things to which they correspond, but also ideas which *are* the real things. (thus some ideas are also not ideas, a contradiction). It will contain a subject in distinction from its objects, and objects which are also part of the subject. Finally, it will contain mind which is indeed mind but also matter which is mind. It thus degenerates into contradictions as the universal usage comes into conflict with the oppositional one (e.g mind which is matter is mind which is not mind).

This does not create an insuperable obstacle for the idealist however, he simply relegates the oppositional usage to a distinction between mere appearances. Thus there are ideas which appear to be ideas and ideas which appear not to be ideas etc. - no contradiction. However, in denying validity to the distinctions made by the realist view of experience, by calling them mere appearance, the idealist invalidates the foundation of his own argument in experience.

This has the consequence of rendering the idealist argument impervious to empirical evidence since such evidence is drawn from the world of mere appearance. Thus Samuel Johnson's demonstration of the solidity of a stone is regarded by idealists as no refutation since solidity is yet another idea, Johnson was misled by mere appearances. Similarly, Kant would not have accepted the "Johnson-like" claim that because I experience objects as extended in space, this constitutes evidence that this is how they are "in-themselves". If the idealist is consistent then empirical evidence can count neither in support of his position nor against it since it is all compromised. This, as stated before, contradicts the foundation of the position in the facts of experience, now regarded as inadmissible.

Idealism thus ends up as dogma. This is ironic since it is ostensibly founded upon a sceptical epistemological attack upon the relationship between perceptions and their objects.

2.1.4. Hegelian idealism

Hegel's idealism, in contrast to the idealists referred to above, does not rest upon the sceptical argument about the relation between subject and object. If Marx's critique in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844³⁰ is correct however, it nevertheless stems from the identification of the subject with the thinking subject, i.e. the philosophical consciousness. As we have seen it is the philosopher's method, the search for criteria of certainty which are internal to the world of thought, which leads to the view that the world is "ideal".

Hegel conceives the epistemological problem from a rationalist perspective very like that of Descartes. Reason is to be used to determine what is true, i.e. our thoughts are to be rendered internally consistent. As stated before, to a rationalist everything which can be thought has existence, the problem is posed as to what kind of existing thing it is. The subject of such a procedure however, is a reasoning subject and only as such does it experience the objects of the world. Since the raw material of reason is ideas, the world only exists in this form for such a subject.

That this is the case can be seen in the *Phenomenology* where Hegel attempts to prove his method correct by comparing the objects which a subject experiences with the subjective action thought appropriate to give adequate knowledge of the objects.³¹ The fact that these actions are regarded only as activities of the mind is shown by the name which Hegel gives the process "The Phenomenology of Mind". The subject is merely a thinking or reasoning subject. Sense-experience is comprehended only as the image immediately given to the thinking subject i.e. to the philosophical consciousness. This is why some empiricist philosophers, although they stress sense-experience, nevertheless

³⁰ Op. cit. *E.P.M.* pg 152 and pp 154,155.

³¹ He discovers, like Hume, that sensuous experience cannot be fully explained in terms of the action of the senses, it involves perception. Similarly, perceptions involve understanding and understanding reason. Only the action of reason is consistent with its intended object. Cf. Richard Norman's *Hegel's Phenomenology*, op. cit.

end up as idealists; they regard sensation not in terms of the implications it carries for a real world but simply in terms of its "being" as the raw material of their own speculations and as such a form of idea.

In contrast to the philosopher's practice, which involves intellectual labour upon mental objects, sensuous practice involves intellectual and physical activity upon real, material objects. The theoretical problem facing the engineer in the example given earlier, is to bring his ideas into congruence with the *real* possibilities in the world. The notion of an independently existing sensible world is assumed within his method, it is internal to the way the problem is set up.³² If there was no gap between the ideal and the real in this sense there would be no practical problem. This does not exclude the possibility that due to philosophical deliberation, he might regard his enterprise as operating within a world of mere appearances i.e. he might be a philosophical idealist, but what might be called his "operational ontology" is necessarily realist and materialist because it is implicit in his practice at the most basic level (i.e. it is an "essential" part of it).

Marx's critique of Hegel therefore revolves around the issue of the abstract or one-sided understanding of human activity. The idealist error stems from the fact that the philosopher generalises his own practice to human practice as such. Marx's claim is that intellectual products are produced first and foremost in the context of sensuous practice and it is only with the division of mental from manual labour that the intellectual element appears to operate independently.

Also, the intellectual level remains parasitic upon sensuous practice for its raw materials and its products can only be understood, therefore, in relation to this practice. In *The German Ideology*,³³ Marx gives a brief analysis of the production of ideas, correct and ideological, from this perspective.³⁴ Because of this false generalisation of

³² This does not subjectivise this view since the world confirms the assumption as we have seen above.

³³ Op. cit. *The German Ideology*, pg 47.

³⁴ Op. cit. *The German Ideology*, Pg 47. The possibility of the production of one-sided, ideo-

his own practice, the philosopher is necessarily unaware of the relation of intellectual labour to other kinds of practical activity within the social division of labour and thus gives a misleading account of the relationship of ideas to the human life-process. Marx's characterisation of the subject as involved in sensuous practice is intended to rectify this error and is the basis of his materialism. The world reveals itself to the person involved in sensuous practice as something real and material to which he has to come to terms.

2.1.4.1. Feuerbach's critique

The Hegelian "error" was criticised in purely philosophical terms by Feuerbach, a critique which Marx accepts. His objections are epistemological and ontological, the former leading to the latter. The epistemological critique centres upon the criterion of certainty. Feuerbach stresses sense-certainty, he says,

"The true and the divine is only that which needs no proof, that is certain directly in itself But only the sensuous is clear as daylight; all doubt and dispute cease only where sensation begins. The secret of immediate knowledge is sensation."³⁵

Commenting on the Cartesian criterion of certainty (clear and distinct ideas), he says,

"The existence of God is doubtful, and so generally that which I think; but that I exist, that it is I who think and doubt, is certain. But the self-consciousness of modern philosophy is itself only a being ideated and mediated through abstraction and thus a doubtful being."³⁶

Thus he rules out the Cartesian criterion as mediated and ideal. He appears to identify ideation and mediation here. This is because the certainty of the cogito depends upon a

logical viewpoints means of course that idea systems cannot be uncritically accepted as premisses for theory.

³⁵ *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, Ludwig Feuerbach, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis 1966 pg 55 (S38). Henceforth referred to as "P.P.F."

³⁶ *Ibid.* S37.

rational demonstration and a process of abstraction and hence is only indirectly perceived by the mind.³⁷

Feuerbach is not espousing the empiricist doctrine of the *tabula rasa* however, as can be seen by the following,

"All is mediated says the Hegelian philosophy, but something is true however when it is *no longer* mediated."³⁸

Truth is not considered by Feuerbach to be transparent to the mind via the senses. He is referring here to *confirmation* by sense-experience. He goes on,

"Historical epochs arise therefore, only where that which before was ideated and mediated becomes an object of immediate and sensuous certainty, namely that which before was only an idea becomes truth."³⁹

That is to say, when the idea is put into practice and validated by sense-experience. On mediation he says,

"Who can elevate mediation to a necessity and a law of truth? only he who still struggles and quarrels with himself, who has not completely made up his mind; in short he in whom truth is only a talent, a matter of special, even outstanding ability but not genius and a matter of the whole man.⁴⁰ Genius is immediate sensuous knowledge."⁴¹

The talented man entertains doubt and has to prove his case, but to the genius sense-experience filtered through his superior understanding continually confirms the identity between his thoughts and reality. Thus Feuerbach is stressing confirmation not the *tabula rasa* doctrine.

³⁷ Husserl, who took this criterion to mean a direct mental "seeing", would have disagreed.

³⁸ *Op. cit. P.P.F. S38*, (my italics).

³⁹ *Ibid. S38*, pp 55, 56.

⁴⁰ A reference to the one-sidedness of the merely thinking subject.

⁴¹ *Ibid. S38*, pg 56.

However, Hegel's epistemological criterion of "self-mediation" which he criticises is a device for overcoming a problem which Richard Norman refers to as "The dilemma of epistemology"⁴² and which will be encountered below in relation to Marx's work.

Hegel's own viewpoint on mediacy and immediacy is superficially not unlike Feuerbach's because he believes that the unity of opposites which mediate each other form a new concept which is grasped immediately. Hence truth is characterised by immediacy for Hegel also. The distinction between this and Feuerbach's view, however, can be seen by considering Feuerbach's ontological criticisms of Hegel. In section 28 of the *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* he says,

"That being with which the Phenomenology starts stands in the most direct contradiction to real being no less than the being with which the Logic starts"⁴³

The being with which the *Phenomenology* starts is immediate sense-experience represented by the concept "this" which denotes its particularity. Feuerbach continues,

"What an immense difference there is between the "this " as an object of abstract thought and the "this" as an object of reality!"⁴⁴

He goes on to point out that since every object can be referred to correctly as "this" object, if the meaning were strictly adhered to, the statement "this house is mine" would suggest that every house which can be referred to as "this house" is mine and he makes a similar point with respect to wives. Since the statement is true for everyone who can lay claim to a house or wife he suggests that the result would be communal ownership of property and women. The "this" of sense-experience is a unique object, the "this" of language and thought is a universal. He concludes,

⁴² *Hegel's Phenomenology*, Richard Norman, Sussex University Press 1976 pg 12.

⁴³ *Op. cit. P.P.F.* S28, pp 42, 43.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* S28, pg 43.

"Just as the word is not the object so the being that is spoken or ideated is not the real being."⁴⁵

The immediacy of Hegel, therefore, can at best be the immediacy of the idea which he himself refers to as "intuition".⁴⁶ Even this however, is subject to Feuerbach's critique since even mental experience must be particular and different from the universal itself. Hegel may however mean to use the term "(im)mediate" to denote logical simplicity, although it clearly cannot mean axiomatic. Feuerbach still has to explain why a criterion should not be one which is internal to the thought process i.e. why such a criterion would not give us knowledge of the real world. He fends off a supposed criticism of his ontological attack on Hegel as follows,

"Were one to reply that Hegel deals with being, not from the practical viewpoint, as here, but from the theoretical viewpoint, I would be obliged to reciprocate by saying that the practical viewpoint is here completely justified. The question of being is indeed a practical question in which our being participates; it is a question of life and death."⁴⁷

This is a telling point as we shall see below. Feuerbach's ontology is materialist since what is known is ultimately sensuous and real (being the contingent particular which is independent of the thought process). Hegel's view is therefore a misrepresentation. Abstractions are now taken to be part of the material world. With respect to art (which is always abstract to some degree), he says,

"Art "depicts the truth in sensation"; this means when rightly comprehended and expressed, that art depicts the truth of sensation."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid. S28, pg 43.

⁴⁶ This is also Husserl's "seeing". Hegel regards it as the lowest level of knowledge, reflecting first impressions and popular prejudice. This is because the true meaning of a concept is only understood when it is grasped in relation to the universe of thought to which it is necessarily related. Our concepts must be critically assessed in this light according to him.

⁴⁷ Op. cit., *P.P.F.* S28

⁴⁸ Ibid. S39, pg 57.

and of religion,

"Where God appears in the fire and is worshiped, there in truth, the fire is worshiped as God. God in the fire is nothing other than the essence of fire which, because of its effects and attributes astounds men; ⁴⁹ God in man is nothing other than the essence of man."⁵⁰

This is the Feuerbachian inversion of Hegel. However, explaining how essences, which are universal, exist in the world of sensuous particulars is more difficult. Language consists of universals, sensuous particulars are not part of language, they are, according to Feuerbach, "unutterable". He says,

"But here also I owe my existence never to the linguistic or logical bread - bread in itself - but always only to "this" bread, to the "unutterable". Being that is founded on many such unutterable things is therefore itself something unutterable."⁵¹

and,

If therefore, being unutterable is being irrational, then the whole of existence is irrational because it is always and forever only *this* existence."⁵²

This assumes that reason is possible only in terms of relations between universal concepts. He goes on,

"But it is not irrational. Existence has meaning and rationality for itself, also without being utterable."⁵³

⁴⁹ This is not the case unless all the attributes of God are manifested in the fire. Even then the logic is not strictly correct. Iron was once regarded as a holy metal. An iron sword might be treated with reverence but so might an iron bucket. The particular object is not what is being revered. Feuerbach may be correct in saying that the essence of fire is the predicate of a material object, but as a universal it could be predicated of many different objects. This is precisely how the trinity is described in the Greek texts although the evidence for the existence of the things to which divinity is ascribed is scanty.

⁵⁰ Op. cit. *P.P.F.* S40, pp 57, 58.

⁵¹ Ibid. S28, pp 43, 44.

⁵² Ibid. S28, p44.

⁵³ Ibid. S28, pg 44.

He seems to be saying that nature has a "logic-like" structure, perhaps a kind of natural necessity. What he is denying is the identity of this with its mental representation.

Despite saying that nature is "unutterable" and "particular" he clearly thinks that it is describable in terms of universal concepts since he himself continually attempts to describe particular features of it. I would suggest that the view that he is expressing is that language "maps on" to nature without being identical with it and that nature itself has a "language-like" structure. This is presumably what licences the use in Marx and Engels of phrases like the "logic" of history or the "contradictions" of capitalism. An explanation of how this mapping is possible and how universality is revealed via particular experiences would of course involve a development of Marx's position on the relationship between subject and object.

The Feuerbachian inversion does not however, fully explain Marx's relationship to Hegel. Marx's view is not simply Hegel's view of History interpreted as a material process. Feuerbach is simply the point of departure. Hegel for instance uses empirical material to demonstrate the existence of "Logic" in nature and society, whereas Marx uses the "Logic" as a means of analysing and expressing practically significant empirical material. Furthermore, Marx does not find it necessary to endorse Hegel's long deduction of the categories but uses Hegel's results piecemeal. Not only have these differences of approach and their consequences to be explained but crucially, how it is possible that a system of concepts, which can be applied to the world *a priori* and which is connected by logical necessity, can be interpreted as part of an *a posteriori, contingent* reality.

Feuerbach is accusing Hegel of misrepresenting the nature of experience and thus giving a false account. But a critique of this kind still only addresses the question of the nature of the phenomenal world, is it not simply in this sense, a phenomenology? Although we have seen that when considering the evidence of experience, a self-consistent idealist theory cannot be constructed from it, whereas materialism can solve its own conceptual problems, yet there is a lingering sceptical doubt about the nature of

experience.

Appeals to consistency and the evidence of the senses do not completely dispel this doubt because they appear to be criteria which function only to show the form which the phenomenal world must necessarily take but which lack the power to ascribe a status to it as a whole. We are still playing the philosopher's game of looking for criteria which are internal to thought but which leave the nagging doubt that when all is said and done we are still dealing with a world of ideas.

To put the discussion into perspective we must look at nature of epistemology itself and its relation to practice. But first a related problem will be examined, namely, on what basis can acceptance of the epistemological criteria themselves be justified? This is the problem previously referred to as "the dilemma of epistemology".

2.1.5. The dilemma of epistemology

Richard Norman summarises the problem as follows:-

" Any principle which specifies some criterion of what can and cannot count as authentic knowledge must itself appeal either to that criterion (circularity) or to some other criterion (regress); and this is so because, as Hegel says, any such principle is itself a claim to knowledge."⁵⁴

He gives as an illustration of this point not only Hegel's analysis of the problem but also the way that it applies to Descartes and to empiricist philosophers. For Descartes, he quotes a passage from the "Meditations" where he tries to justify the criterion of clear and distinct ideas, in order to show that it is circular. But Descartes provides an excellent example of the problem in the longer and more celebrated "circle" within his thought.

⁵⁴ Op. cit. *Hegel's Phenomenology*, Richard Norman, pg 12.

He imagines an evil demon which puts ideas into his mind and asks himself the question as to whether there is anything which he thinks of about which he might not be deceived? He arrives at "the cogito" which he finds impossible to doubt. Then he asks himself why the cogito is convincing, formulating the criterion of clear and distinct ideas. But then he asks why it might not be that the whole mental process was the result of the demon's activities? The answer is that God created this process and would not allow us to be permanently deceived (to be a deceived being). This of course rests upon assumptions about the existence and nature of God, propositions which elsewhere he tries to prove from the criterion of clear and distinct ideas. Thus he completes the circle.

It is to his credit that he saw that no matter how plausible or inevitable the criterion might seem, one can continue to ask whether or not the plausibility itself might not be an error?⁵⁵ He chose circularity rather than the regress, hoping perhaps, that piety might do what logic could not.

Modern empiricists also seem to be engaged in a justification for their methods⁵⁶ which seems suspiciously circular. A good criterion it seems is one which rules out Astrology but admits Physics.⁵⁷ When asked why Physics is epistemologically acceptable the answer seems to be because the criterion justifies it⁵⁸ which is of course a circular argument.

⁵⁵ Descartes is of course asking the question in terms of thought and what it represents not the somewhat sterile Husserlian question of whether I can know my own thought content?

⁵⁶ If I appear to be using the terms "method" and "criterion" interchangeably, this is because although one suggests a simple test and the other a complex of procedures, both function to rule on the admissibility or otherwise of theories.

⁵⁷ In *Conjectures and Refutations* Popper says,

"My criticism of the verifyability criterion has always been this: against the intention of its defenders, *it did not exclude the most obvious metaphysical statements*; but it did exclude the most important and interesting of all scientific statements,"

Op. cit. *Conjectures and Refutations*, K.R. Popper, pg 281. see also pg 40 and pp 255, 256.

⁵⁸ Ibid. pp 57, 56. In this section he also attempts to show that logic grounds the criterion thus begging the question of what grounds logic?

Even if the criterion is applied to things other than the physical sciences, it does no more than show that the method of these other practices is consistent with the physical sciences, which themselves remain unproved. The criterion can neither be established in terms of its own plausibility nor in terms of a well reputed body of theory. Perhaps this accounts for what some have perceived to be an ambiguity in Popper's work, namely whether he is saying what scientists do or what they ought to do. This may be vacillation between grounding his method in science or its own plausibility.

Popperians might object that Popper does not ground his method in anything in the sense of making it rest logically on other premisses, it is a hypothesis which is held open to refutation. But how is the method to be refuted? If it is tested directly to see if it gives satisfactory results, then the criterion by which we judge whether the results are satisfactory or not is either the criteria of the method itself, which involves us in circularity, or some other criterion in which case we are involved in a regress. The problem of what determines the admissibility of the evidence by which the method is tested is a variant of the problem which Paul Feyerabend pointed out, namely that there can be no neutral test between paradigms⁵⁹ (particularly epistemological paradigms). Testing the method against experience is an attempt to show its plausibility directly (what scientists should do).

If, on the other hand, we take we take the option that this is what scientists actually do then we run into problems here also. This is because the method is validated not against experience but against an as yet unjustified methodology. Suppose the paradigm of science was Astrology. Popperians would hardly consider the question "does it accord with scientific method?" a reliable test under these circumstances. The only way to ensure that the test is reliable is to have a body of knowledge which is tested in the manner prescribed by the method itself. But now once again the result of the test of

⁵⁹ Op. cit. "How to be a Good Empiricist", *Philosophy of Science: The Delaware Seminar*, pp 7,8.

method is a foregone conclusion. If on the other hand science is justified in some other way, e.g. by its "success" (however this might be evaluated), then the position is not circular but it has the problem of a regress. But if the method cannot be tested in these ways how can it be tested?

The problem appears in Marx's work in *The German Ideology* where he adopts the materialist perspective derived from his emphasis on sensuous practice. On the basis of this, he then proceeds to mount a critique of idealism, which forms the basis of the justification of his method. The method initially adopted assumes results based upon itself, the procedure is clearly circular.⁶⁰

Hegel's attempted solution to this problem rests upon the view that all plausible criteria are partially valid methods of arriving at knowledge. Since they are partial, in his terms "one-sided", he can generate, via the usual logical procedure, a whole and complete method from them. This escapes the "dilemma" for two reasons. Firstly it is a negative process, each partial criterion is shown to be invalid since it isn't adequate to give the kind of knowledge which its "notion" suggests. This is what Richard Norman refers to as an "internal" test.⁶¹ It escapes the dilemma because criteria are not "founded" on each other in the usual way, i.e. the validity of one criterion depending upon the validity of another. Rather the validity of one criterion depends upon the correction of the invalidity of another. This avoids the foundationalist regress since one is not required in turn to validate the criterion which acts as the invalid point of departure. This might be referred to as a "critical" method since it proceeds by self-correction. Secondly its claim to validity rests upon the totality of the result. The method is a kind of completeness proof; it generates all the partially valid criteria and shows their relationship to each other. It follows that there can be no criterion giving another kind of knowledge which lies outside of the method. Hence there can be no sense in which the method can be shown

⁶⁰ Op. cit. *The German Ideology* pp 47, 48.

⁶¹ Op. cit. *Hegel's Phenomenology*, pg 20.

inadequate to provide knowledge of any kind.

One might doubt, however, that all plausible criteria are in fact linked conceptually in this way. Why should they be? Or secondly, even if there is such a structure of related criteria, Hegel may not have given a correct account of it. This last point is illustrated by Feuerbach's criticisms that Hegel misrepresents the role of sense-experience in the acquisition of knowledge.⁶²

However, in suggesting that all criteria that appear superficially acceptable are connected in some way, Hegel is making an important point, because criteria are either plausible or implausible for some definite reason. If the reasons which make criteria plausible could be uncovered then an important insight would have been gained into the nature of the epistemological enterprise. Hegel's own account of this connection however, is less than satisfactory.

Criteria are related by virtue of being "moments" in the activity of reason. Reason is the appropriate way of gaining knowledge because reality is rational. Reality is rational because God is rational and reality is the embodiment of God's thought. This is both a mystified account of why the criteria must be connected and also one which does not advance the understanding much further. Reason has a structure which is itself not amenable to further explanation it just "is". In fact reason is the only real, objective and independent being for Hegel, freely conditioning everything else, whilst itself remaining unconditioned (or self-conditioned). It is Hegel's cosmological and theological equivalent to the Kantian structure of the mind.

⁶² See above, *P.P.F.*, section 28.

2.2. Epistemology and practice

The explanation for all these problems I believe is as follows:- epistemology is the investigation into what constitutes knowledge. This is not a purely definitional problem. One might, for instance, say that if we take knowledge to be intellectual (knowing "that" rather than knowing "how"), then the criterion of self-consistency must apply since otherwise the candidate for knowledge would be unintelligible and therefore could not be intellectual knowledge by definition. But all definitional issues are, in the last instance, underdetermined by another question, namely, what criteria will give reliable information about the world? This question is a practical one, it refers to reliability in practice. Self-consistent theories may well be rejected if they give the wrong results and inconsistent ones may be retained. ⁶³ Feuerbach put his finger on the key issue when he said with respect to ontology,

"The question of being is indeed a *practical* question it is a question of life and death." ⁶⁴

What is true of ontology (what kind of world we face in our lives), is also true of epistemology (how we can come to know and hence deal with it). If the epistemological question is a practical one, that narrows down the sort of thing which can count as an answer. In general, the answer to "what criterion will give information which is reliable in practice?" is "one which can be shown to give reliable results in practice". This is a tautology but it serves a useful function because it rules out criteria that bear no relation to practice e.g. "inner certainty" as inappropriate answers and it demands that other criteria e.g. "internal consistency", be justified in terms of their practical value if they are to count as an answer. The "dilemma" as it applies to Popper for instance can be prevented by stopping the regress as follows.

⁶³ Witness quantum theory.

⁶⁴ Op. cit. *P.P.F.*, S28, pg 43. (My italics).

Science is a collection of theories and methods which have proved reliable in practice. This provides a foundation against which we can test epistemological principles. "Reliability in practice" as a criterion of acceptability doesn't require further justification because it is directly related to the question asked, namely, "what methods provide information which is reliable in practice?"⁶⁵ I am not simply defining the epistemological enquiry in these terms, the practical question has always underlain epistemological concerns no matter how the problem has been posed by different writers.

Epistemological criteria in fact take their plausibility from the role they play in practice. Internal consistency for instance is a "good" criterion because understanding is involved in human beings coping with the world. Since inconsistency thwarts the understanding so consistency becomes valued as a pre-requisite of knowledge. Similarly, since human beings are attempting to predict sense-experience so in the last analysis these predictions can only be tested against sense-experience. Thus sense-experience becomes valued as a criterion of knowledge. The fact that we might misinterpret the evidence of the senses only poses a sub-problem for empiricism, not a refutation. We must both test our views this way and eliminate false interpretations. Sceptical arguments cannot be carried to the limit against the evidence of the senses as we have seen. Once again this stops the regress. If criteria are justified in terms of the role they play in practice then the appeal to practice needs no further justification. To ask the question whether our views, though they work in practice, might not be useful fictions; would beg the question as to what we might mean by "fiction" in this context.

In general, however, the problems of the pervasiveness of scepticism about any form of realism (might it not just be an idea?) and the dilemma of epistemology, are due to treating the epistemological enquiry as if it were a question of discovering that which

⁶⁵ The criterion is somewhat vague; no doubt the Zande believe that their witch-oracle is reliable in practice. I would argue however, that a reduction in unexplained fires would be better affected by fire precautions than by hunting for witches and that this can be shown unequivocally.

is convincing to the intellect. The status of the intellectually plausible can never be more than that of a belief or hypothesis and hence uncertain and vulnerable to skeptical argument. If one's belief is wrong then it is nothing more than an idea, a subjective impression. It is this view which undermines all certainty about the ontological status of the "real" world.

Similarly, all *criteria* of certainty are vulnerable to scepticism for the same reason hence the dilemma of the "regress" or "circularity". However, once the epistemological question is posed not in terms of plausibility but in terms of reliability for sensuous practice, the ground of the debate is shifted from questions of belief to questions of evidence. The realist, materialist ontology is "built in" to the way this question is asked. One may question the actual relationship between our ideas and sense-experience but not the attempt to produce a congruence between them.

Marx's materialism therefore is justified in the last analysis not simply by the fact that it is conceptually coherent (his solution to the subject-object relation), nor that idealist alternatives are conceptually incoherent. These are necessary but not sufficient conditions of a correct epistemology. The final justification comes from the manner in which these criteria are themselves related to the fundamental question of epistemological inquiry, i.e. their relation to sensuous practice.

3. Universals in a Materialist perspective

Now we can turn to the second conceptual source of idealist theories, namely the status of universals. Universals are collective entities. The question of the relationship between a collective entity and the sectional and individual parts that comprise it directly addresses the issue raised in chapter one concerning the source of undesirable features of all societies other than primitive or developed communism.

It addresses the question of how to correctly understand the relationship between collective or societal interests and individual interests, collective values and individual

values, institutionalised action and individual or sectional action. It is the coincidence of social co-operation and individual and sectional conflict which is the source of the problems referred to above and the solution to them presupposes an adequate analysis of these relationships.

To represent the collective as something which has or ought to have causal primacy over the individuals which comprise it is to represent it as an alien force which controls people, a god. It is characteristic of a religious, non-scientific mode of thought. Such views in part derive their plausibility from the conceptual errors in the treatment of the problem of universals.⁶⁶ Marx tends to refer to any theory which treats the collective in this way as "idealism" since it involves treating an abstraction as an all powerful and complete entity. Such an entity for him is a projection of the mind, an imaginary or illusory being.

The connection with idealism in the narrower sense, however, comes through the identification of the universal with unavoidable or morally obligatory conceptualisations of the world. Sensuous particulars by contrast are identified with the irrational, pliant, material substrate of the world. Such views act as justifications of a moral order.

Marx's philosophy of science is, among other things, an attempt to "de-mystify" this interpretation by exposing it as fallacious. Correct articulation of the relationship between universal and particular and the corresponding status of the former is especially urgent for Marx since he is committed to re-interpreting the Hegelian "Logic", a system of universals, as something which refers to material reality.

⁶⁶ Marx stresses the reciprocal argument as even more fundamental. The representation of universals as something other than and opposed to their parts is made plausible by the existence of collective entities such as the state and the market which appear to correspond to this relationship. It is Marx's contention that only by changing the social circumstances which give rise to these spurious collective entities, (spurious in the sense of not totally expressing the collective will and therefore not being the proper universal corresponding to their supposed particulars), that the intellectual arguments will be settled. Historical circumstances will provide counter-examples to the speculative logic and undermine its plausibility. Cf. *op.cit. Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, pg 103, last paragraph.

What then is the origin of universality and necessity? I think that whilst one may accept Hume's point that they are not sensuous particulars, one need not conclude that their origin is unconnected with the world of sense-experience. Truth is a description of reality, and how the world is to be described for Marx and Engels is in terms of its predisposition to manifest itself in certain ways.

What an object actually does, how it interacts with other things including the subject, is recorded in experience. What it *is* however, is something which can be relied on to act in certain ways, that which "always" acts in certain ways, that which "necessarily" acts in certain ways. Universality and necessity are implied in the move from descriptions of experience to descriptions of essence.

There are good practical reasons however, why we should describe the world in terms of essences. Hume showed that the alternative is conceptual atomisation of the world in time and space. These essences however are material essences, material things with dispositional properties, but it is their dispositional character which involves universality and necessity.

One cannot of course know with absolute certainty on the basis of the evidence of experience that some relation holds universally and necessarily. There are however, practical advantages in looking for and acting as if relationships have this character.

If, for instance, a series of separate events are linked in a necessary sequence, then when part of the sequence is experienced, I can anticipate the rest. Thus, I regard the presence of each event as an experience of the process in which it is embodied, (a single thing which is experienced as a sequence of different things). The *process* is the universal single cause of the appearances. When each event is present the process is present.

Similarly, when I experience a useful object, say a carrier bag, from different visual perspectives, I assume that other experiences can be had in relation to this object if the appropriate actions are performed, visual experiences as well as the experience of carrying things in it. The assumption that this is necessarily the case allows me to make

inferences about the potential of the object which go beyond factors which are immediately present to experience. That these properties are permanent features of the object is an assumption which allows me to regard each different experience as an experience of a single universally present object.⁶⁷

The fact that these are only assumptions however, does not licence the conclusion that in describing the dispositional properties of an object I am characterising it as an idea. Also, in so far as experience does not falsify them, the assumptions are justifiable from the point of view of sensuous practice.

Not all universals however, seem to represent a single entity which is predisposed to act in certain ways. A word such as leaf represents many objects which are not simply manifestations of the same thing.⁶⁸ It does however represent the propensity of each of these objects to stand in the same relation in some respect to a subject or to other objects. Thus it relates to a common mode of action and interaction which is assumed to be a universal property of the class. The universal "leaf", of course doesn't name the common property but whatever has the property.

There is a link between the unification of many events into the behaviour of a single entity and the unification of many entities into a single class. If some dispositional property exists there is a suggestion that it will manifest itself on more than one occasion or

⁶⁷ This position is derived from Hegel's approach to the question of the nature of universality and necessity. Hegel criticises the Kantian solution to the problem bequeathed by Hume that the necessary connections between sensuous particulars which would establish their unity are not themselves given in experience. Kant suggests that unifying categories are supplied by the mind but Hegel tries to show the *intrinsic*, logical relation between the universal and particular.

In contrast to the Socratic position which identifies the universal with the common feature within each particular, Hegel's view regards the universal as the whole interconnected structure of particulars which is expressed through each individual. There need not be a common feature. This clearly is an attempt to solve the modern, Humean problem of universals not the mediaeval one (despite the Platonic connection evidenced by the similarity of the solution to the discourse in the second part of Plato's *Parmenides*).

⁶⁸ Marx ridicules Hegel for confusing these different uses of universals in *The Holy Family* where he points out that there isn't an entity called "the fruit" which manifests itself now as an apple, now as a pear.

in more than one set of circumstances. The situations in which it does manifest itself are thereby linked as a class. Some operation which can be performed with respect to each member of the class defines it, i.e. each member responds to some particular way which a subject is disposed to act, (the class of objects I define as food is composed of all the things I am disposed to eat).

A universal used to denote a class names anything possessing a particular value for action. Referring to things by class names simplifies our relations to the world, emphasising only those features which are of particular significance in terms of our general orientation and de-emphasising the features which are not significant for action. Referring to things uniquely would put impossible barriers in the way of lastingly useful, transmissible, knowledge.

At no time in this description have I suggested that what the universal names is an idea. Both the common feature and the thing which possesses it can be part of the material world. Thus Marx and Engels can intelligibly regard universals as material.

Hegelian universals are linked by logical necessity however, so if Marx accepts these logical relations his position requires an explanation of how such relations can describe the apparently contingent world of sense-experience. Formal truths such as logical and mathematical truths are true by virtue of the rules of how to correctly manipulate the concepts, i.e. correctness is checked a posteriori against the rules rather than against the world. But where the concepts can represent relations in the world, they represent abstract formal properties of invariant material relations. If the material relations were not invariant then the mathematics or logic could not represent them.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ There is a problem of the intelligibility of the notion of a common property which appears in Plato's *Parmenides* which I will not discuss here.

⁶⁹ This is why Euclidean geometry which is essentially a system of logic can be used to solve architectural problems for example.

Thus Hegel's logic is not just a conceptual game with arbitrary rules but a game whose rules have a physical analogue. Marx and Engels regard the Logic as an abstraction from the physical world of its most general features and the necessity it expresses represents the necessary relations within the material world.⁷⁰ But if Marx accepts the logical relations the question arises as to whether the whole encyclopedia applies in every case since it is connected by a long chain of deductive links. It raises the question of the position taken by Marx and Hegel to the long deduction.

3.1. The Locke-Leibniz debate

In response to the question of Marx's attitude to the long deduction of Hegel, it will be useful to recall the background to the Hegelian enterprise. Some light may be shed on this by considering the debate between Locke and Leibniz on the contents of the mind.

Locke held that the mind is a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) until experience writes upon it. The only functions other than recording experience allotted to the mind was the capacity to dissociate and associate ideas, such that for instance the idea of a centaur can be formed from the ideas of part of a horse and part of a man.

Leibniz wrote to Locke pointing out that mathematical truths cannot be accounted for in this way. The truth that two and two make four cannot be derived from experience since no matter how many times this is observed to be true of objects in the world, the necessity of the result, which is what vouches for its universal validity, cannot be demonstrated. Leibniz went on to suggest that the mind was less like a blank slate than a piece of veined marble.⁷¹ If a sculptor attempts to carve veined marble, unless the chisel is held at or close to a right angle to the veins, the stone will fissure along the line of the vein.

⁷⁰ Why these features are seemingly ubiquitous is discussed in the next chapter.

⁷¹ *New Essays on Human Understanding*, G.W. Leibniz, translated and edited by Peter Remnant and Jonathon Bennett, Cambridge University Press 1981, Bk. 1, Ch. 1, Preface and section 23 (86).

The stone tends to assume certain shapes which are natural to it since these are already part of the way that it is constituted.⁷²

Similarly, Leibniz suggested, The mind also has an inbuilt structure which predisposes it towards recognition of certain formal relations in the world, indeed since it cannot do otherwise in virtue of its nature, these relations appear to be necessary relations, their denial a denial of thought itself.

Kant was a dogmatic Leibnizian⁷³ until he realised that Hume's discovery that universality and necessity are not sense objects accorded with Leibniz' account. He then realised that it was possible to give a single account in line with both traditions. Kant's categories and Hegel's Logic are both attempts to trace the veins in the marble but since Hegel believes that the world is mind for him this is an attempt to trace the ultimate structure of reality.⁷⁴ Logical necessity for him as for Leibniz is the defining characteristic of this structure. To show that something is logically necessary then, is to demonstrate that it is part of the framework of reality.

He also accepts the view of Plato that truth is that which doesn't change.⁷⁵ The state for instance can be a monarchy, an oligarchy, a democracy etc. To discover what the true or essential nature of the state is, Socrates searches for characteristics which remain unchanged in the differing forms. Characteristics which are always present are necessarily present. Hence the search for truth is the search for universal and necessary

⁷² This is a somewhat Kantian interpretation. In the section quoted Leibniz does no more than suggest that the mind needs to be "polished up" (by mathematics) to see the veins (structure).

⁷³ Re. "dogmatic slumber", *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be able to Represent Itself as a Science*, Introduction and notes by Peter G. Lucas, Manchester University Press 1971, pg 9. For Kant's relation to Leibniz see *Kant*, R. Scruton, Oxford University Press 1982, pp 13-17.

⁷⁴ Hegel is taking a position opposite to Leibniz and Kant in so far as this structure is not regarded as a structure of the subject's mind but of objective reason-in-the-world, e.g. "What is real is rational and what is rational is real".

⁷⁵ The argument is something like as follows:- Truth is an assertion about reality which is never false, which evidence cannot refute. Since the assertion always applies, what it is an assertion about can never change, otherwise the real world would no longer correspond to the assertion. Hence the search for truth is a search for descriptions of the unchanging features of the real world.

characteristics.⁷⁶ One must add to this that the object of inquiry in Hegel is the world in its most general features not any particular quality of it. So his truth is not any particular truth but an all-embracing structure of truth.

Thus we are back to Leibniz's veined marble, a universal and necessary structure which because it is universal and necessary is an ideal not a sensuous object. Its status as truth depends upon these features and the deduction establishes the status.

3.2. Marx and Engels on Truth

All conceptual frameworks for Marx and Engels are human products and as such are related to sensuous practice. Given the relationship which Marx postulates between consciousness and language, one would assume that the "Logic" is regarded as a linguistic form.

Since language is a historical human product not a framework of eternal truth, the validity of the application of both language and logic, one would presume, is to be found by assessing their role in representing and communicating those features of the world which have practical significance to a human subject. Hence, Marx and Engels must reject the veined marble account.

If universality and necessity are due to the structure of the mind, the structure of reason (or language as they would regard it) or even due to the structure of the brain (if this is taken as the ultimate level of explanation) then we have "reality", as it is experienced, determined in these most basic features by subjective factors alone and untouched by human interaction with the external world. This is a non-dialectical explanation. The form of Marx and Engels' explanations of the features of the world is invariably evolution via interaction. There are no uncaused causes.

⁷⁶ Though as stated previously, for Hegel it is not some part of each individual which remains the same but the connection of each individual to the whole. The connection to the whole is an important element in the identity of each part.

The role of the deduction as something which establishes truth, therefore, must be rejected by Marx and Engels along with the metaphysics in which it is embedded.⁷⁷

3.3. Marx's selective use of Hegel's analysis

The insight into the logical relations between some of the concepts, however, is accepted. Marx does not accept all the deductions of the *Encyclopedia*, in particular he criticises the connections which Hegel tries to establish between the major divisions of the *Encyclopedia*. These transitions are clearly different in kind from the relations within these divisions. Also, he only accepts sections from the "Nature" and the "Mind". The explanation for these usages is given below. How and when concepts are to be applied to reality, is determined by empirical circumstances. Marx's use of dialectics therefore is part of the methodology of an empirical science. I will discuss this in more detail in chapter three.

The basis of the argument which justifies the transition from the "Logic" to the "Nature" in the *Encyclopedia* is that nature is the realm of the particular, and the universals of the Logic presuppose particular instantiations. This view draws upon the Humean dichotomy which sees particulars as part of the external world of experience but universals as supplied by the mind. He also says that nature is not merely external to the mind but is itself the realm of external relations, one supposes because particulars are external to each other.

In fact the particulars in the "Nature" are just the universals of the Logic with the qualification that they are to be regarded as external to the mind. These universals therefore inhabit the Humean realm of sensuous experience, they are universals in the world. "Being" becomes "Space" and "Becoming" becomes "Time". "Space" and "Time" are regarded as particular instances of "Being" and "Becoming".

⁷⁷ The so-called "logic" of historical processes is a different concept, see below.

Their *deduction* however, relies upon identifying "particularity" with "externality to the mind" since it is this latter quality which is the specific difference which has been added rather than particularity as such. This represents a provisional acceptance of the Humean view of particulars but also a negation of this view in favour of the "naive realist" position with respect to universals.

Since the universals are related logically to each other, so the concepts of the "Nature" lose their externality to each other in the course of the dialectical reasoning process. What is achieved, however, is on one hand the reproduction of the Logic with the qualification that it has external existence; on the other, and perhaps more enlightening, an exposition of the logical relations between the concepts commonly used to describe natural phenomena. This is a useful practical result.

With respect to the former point, Marx says that the transition to Nature is made because thought is dissatisfied with its own sterility and wants to deduce something real. But the deduction of nature can never be anything more than the deduction of the thought of nature.⁷⁸

Hegel cannot deduce the empirical detail of the natural world only explain the relations between the concepts we use to describe it. He has unified the universal and particular which are divided in Hume in an attempt to show that the universals are as objective as the particulars. This is intended to overcome the devaluation of the universal to the status of the merely subjective in contrast to the sensuous particulars, a view subscribed to, each in their different ways, by both Hume and Kant.

He criticises Kant on this account for being too empiricist but this proximate result is even more empiricist since the subject now supplies no content to reality. The second major transition from "Nature" to "Mind", however, is intended to rectify this situation by unifying subject and object in a manner which gives primacy to subjectivity.

⁷⁸ Op. cit. *E.P.M.* pg. 152-155

When Hegel's analysis of nature has reached the categories of organic life he attempts to take the next step to deduce consciousness. Consciousness is represented as holistic awareness, i.e. the organism aware of the whole of its own functioning. This is part of the way the whole controls the behaviour of the parts implied by the analysis of "organic causality" (just as reciprocally the parts determine the behaviour of the whole). Conscious life however, is subjective so the object is now simultaneously subject as well.

From this point on he analyses human conscious activity which he sees as determined by mind. He draws the conclusion therefore, that individual and social life in so far as it is determined by reason will once again reflect the categories of the Logic though this time via the mediation of consciousness. The conscious mind discovers the logical sequence of the categories in history.

This gives the dialectic a temporal dimension whereas in the "Logic" it only has a logical dimension and in the "Nature" a structural dimension. In the "Mind" therefore subject dominates object and determines its form. Because Hegel could analyse nature in terms of the structure of the Logic he somewhat unwarrantedly drew the conclusion that Reason, i.e. the Logic, was the "substance" of nature. After the transition to Mind he also draws the conclusion that it is "subject" also. The Logic works itself out through conscious action in the world.

Marx agrees with Hegel's insight that in *human* activity, both individual and social, man is both subject and object. He makes himself and the world on which he depends the object of his own actions. He disagrees however, with the view that the sequence of the Hegelian universals determine his actions in changing himself as an object.

In the "Mind", in one sense, what we have again is the sterile replication of the Logic in yet another dimension of existence, the purpose of which is merely to justify Hegel's metaphysical claims. But again crucially, we also have an analysis of actual social relations which shows the correct structural form which they take due to his use of the appropriate logic in his analysis of them. It is this substantive element in Hegel's

work, rather than the more grandiose claims, which Marx praises as going beyond any other theorist up to his own time.

In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, he says,

"The human character of nature and of nature created by history - man's products - appears in the form that they are products of abstract mind as such, therefore, phases of mind - thought entities."

and

".....even though man appears only as mind, there lie concealed in it [the Phenomenology] all the elements of criticism, already *prepared* and *elaborated* in a manner often rising above the Hegelian standpoint. The "unhappy consciousness", the "honest consciousness", the struggle of "noble and base consciousness", etc., etc. -these separate sections contain, but still in an estranged form, the critical elements of whole spheres such as religion, the state, civil life etc." ⁷⁹

The Logic as the determining force in history however is the central point with which he disagrees. Hegel refers to "the cunning of Reason" that it makes use of the passions in order that ideas may be brought into effect. Ideas for Hegel arouse passions, men are passionate about ideas and struggle over them. Sensuous existence therefore serves reason.

For Marx, however, the relation is reversed, reason is in the service of sensuous existence. Material conditions determine the problematic of sensuous existence and rational thought is always, no matter how obliquely, a *response* to that problematic. It is the material process, not the dialectic of ideas therefore, which is the crucial determining factor.

⁷⁹ Ibid. pg 139-140

In the Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* of 1859, he contrasts the Hegelian notion of the order of discovery of concepts running from simple to complex with actual examples. In these examples he shows instances which coincide with Hegel's view and ones which show the opposite. He demonstrates in this text the complexity of the methodological problem to which Hegel's simple reproduction of the Logic in the realm of history is not adequate.

Marx himself analyses history as a predictable process, however, but the material process which he analyses draws upon the Logic as the correct form in which the empirical material is interconnected. The *content* of history is not supplied by the Logic as it is in Hegel, it is discovered.

Hegel's *Nature* is not in fact a single structure. The earlier categories "sun" and "moon" are not intended to be regarded as part of say "the terrestrial organism" which comes later. The principles which the sun and moon embody may be involved in the later structure but the substantive examples are separate. This is also true of the *Mind*.

In the same way the substantive issues which Marx addresses must be analysed on their merits, organic systems require organic logic etc. In the widest framework of analysis we are dealing with totalities so that in this sense the organic logic always required for an exhaustive explanation but for localised problems it is not always required. One might, on this basis, want to argue that "choice of context" determines which level of analysis will be used, but inclusion of a wider context re-defines the object of study, i.e. it gives us a new object.

To understand what Marx specifically derives from Hegel's work we must look at the nature of the logic itself.

Chapter Three

Dialectical Logic

1. Hegel's problematic and the Logic

Hegel's dialectical approach to philosophy may be understood both as a response to the political and social environment in which he wrote and to the problems of the intellectual traditions which he inherited. Hegel wrote at a time when Europe was attempting to come to terms with one of its most significant events - the French Revolution. It offered the spectacle of a society attempting to reconstruct itself on the basis of a new philosophy. The challenge to the old ways of thought was fundamental. Truth was to be decided not by reference to an authoritative source (tradition, Aristotle, the Bible) but by reference to reason and the evidence of the senses. This method tended to produce a naturalist ontology with no place for spiritual entities such as angels or God, and none therefore, for the church. Its ethics were egalitarian since all men, as a natural species, had the same capacities for enjoyment and suffering and its democratic politics flowed from this since it followed that inherited power and status appears arbitrary and unjustified from this standpoint. The challenge was thus epistemological, ontological, ethical and political. It was a phenomenon of the utmost importance for the future of European society and exercised the minds of all its hereditary rulers who had much to lose.

For philosophy, however, it raised questions which had not been addressed by the enlightenment up to this point, questions concerning the dynamics of change. The battle between the idea systems appeared on the surface to be the cause of the historical change.

It raised the question for rationalists of whether one can decide on rational grounds that one system is better than another. All systems previously had assumed their own foundations intuitively to be correct or by virtue of rhetorical arguments which were not recognised as such. Hegel saw that there was a problem with foundations (the dilemma of epistemology).¹ Although he doesn't set out explicitly to give an answer to the political problem of legitimacy as the point of departure of his work, nevertheless, it addresses it at this crucial time, a point not lost on his successors, "The Young Hegelians", of whom Marx was one.

The Hegelian "solution" involved the development of a dialectical logic in which ideas and systems based upon them are seen to be related in terms of oppositions and reconciliations in syntheses which encompass the opposites. Politically, this allows comparison and evaluation of the idea systems on which social programmes are based because a synthesis is superior to each of the opposites (since they are partial or one-sided by comparison). History is seen as the progressive movement of reason in time expressed through human action. Later developments are justified at the expense of earlier since they preserve what was of value in previous systems whilst superceding them. This view is a form of rationalism which attempts to avoid the charge of simply being a subversive antithesis to tradition as was levelled at the French Enlightenment. It could be seen, therefore, as a defence of rationalism against both reaction and relativism.

Hegel's response to the philosophical thought of his time, the Enlightenment and German Idealism, can also be seen as the source of his dialectical logic. He accepted the essentially Leibnizian move of Kant in response to the crisis of Hume's empiricism. The mind or reason has a structure outside of which we cannot think intelligibly. According to Kant, this structure is composed of fundamental concepts which must be applied to the world in order that it may be understood. Hegel, however, claims to be more thoroughly

¹ Op. cit., *Hegel's Phenomenology*, Richard Norman, CH1 pp 9-12.
This dilemma is at the root of much of the anti-foundationalist philosophy of the present time.

rationalist than Kant.² For him, the way we reason the world to be is the way that it *is*. The concepts are also "in the world" as its fundamental structure and not merely products of the human mind. Since, however, he also accepts the view that the concepts are universals and that universality is a characteristic of reason, he is led to regard everything as "Mind" in a sense similar to the "Nous" of Anaxagoras or to the viewpoint of Spinoza.

Hegel's grounding, however, was in ancient Greek philosophy and he analysed the Humean problem in terms of the relationship of the universal to the particular, i.e. he understood it as a rediscovery of the problem of universals.³ The defect in Hume's empiricism for him, therefore, was its one-sided emphasis on the particular events of sense experience to the exclusion of the systematic interrelationships in terms of which each event alone becomes intelligible. For Hegel, the characterisation of the particular depends upon its relationship to other particulars and therefore, to the universal⁴ and (vice versa). *The Phenomenology of Mind*, beginning as it does with sense-certainty, is intended to address the Humean problematic from this viewpoint. He regards Kant's solution as being in error,⁵ therefore, in regarding the universals of the mind and the particulars of sense as separate orders of things such that the imposition of the categories distorts reality and masks the nature of the "thing-in-itself" from the subject. For Hegel, in contrast, "the rational" is "the real" and sense-experience, in so far as it is intelligible, logically presupposes the universal structure in which it is embedded.⁶

² He regards Kant's "thing-in-itself" as an empiricist prejudice that there is something "out there" which causes experience and which is not a product of mind.

³ If experience takes the form of individual events, the question arises as to the origin of the universal concepts in terms of which we describe it.

The answers to this question are usually classified under the headings realist, conceptualist or nominalist. Kant is clearly a conceptualist, Hegel is a conceptualist-realist, since he thinks everything is "Mind", and Marx is a nominalist-realist, since he regards consciousness as identical to language but also as representing something real.

⁴ For Hegel, the interrelated system of particulars is what the universal names.

⁵ Hegel's other main criticism of Kant, of course, is that he did not grasp that Mind evolves historically and hence did not appreciate the role of reason in this process (or indeed *as* the process). Hegel regarded Kant's epistemology as retarded at the level of the understanding.

⁶ The Feuerbachian/Marxian critique of which is to accept the logical point but to object that it also re-absorbs the *objectivity* of sense-experience into the realm of Mind. Cf. op. cit., *E.P.M.* pg 141.

In the character of this solution, based upon the interrelation between the universal and the particular, we see one of the reasons for Hegel's reversion to and re-interpretation of the dialectics of ancient Greek philosophy which will be explained in greater detail below. In the Kantian problem of "the antinomies of reason" we see another. Kant found that when applying "the categories" to infinite objects: the world, God, the mind etc., one can construct equally good arguments supporting opposed propositions with respect to the predicate in question, e.g. "the world is limited (in time and space)"; "the world is unlimited (in time and space)". Kant reasoned, however, that since the purpose of the categories is to make sense of experience and "the infinite" cannot be experienced, then the categories cannot properly be applied to it.⁷

Hegel thought this solution to be based upon a misconception of the problem. Firstly, he demonstrated that Kant's antinomies are actually contradictions, (e.g. from the assumption that the world is limited it can be deduced that it is unlimited and vice versa).⁸ Secondly, the reason for the contradiction lies not in the nature of the object to which they are applied but in the nature of the categories themselves. The Kantian categories are what Plato referred to as "categorials" - concepts which can be predicated of everything. Everything has unity, i.e. is one thing; everything has a cause etc.

Hegel accepts the proposition that "to determine is to negate", i.e. to specify something involves differentiating it from what it is not. Specification, therefore, produces pairs of concepts, e.g. red and non-red. If the concepts are *not* categorials, then of the objects of which they can logically be predicated (in the case above colours), one side of the opposition will refer to some of the objects and the other side will refer to the rest. If on the other hand the concepts *are* categorials, then both of the opposed concepts can always be correctly predicated of everything, that is to say they will of necessity refer to

⁷ Cf. *The Critique of Pure Reason*, I. Kant, introduction, Norman Kemp Smith, "Antinomies of Pure Reason" section 9, Macmillan 1929 pp 454, 455. Reprinted 1978.

⁸ Cf. *The Science of Logic*, G.W.F. Hegel, trans. A.V. Miller, Allen and Unwin 1969 pp 236, 237.

the same things at the same time. This is the source of the antinomies. The application of the categories to totalities such as the world draws attention to the problem but is not its cause.⁹ Furthermore it affects every object not just the so-called infinite ones.

1.1. The classical sources of Hegel's dialectics

In the *zusatz* to SS81 of the Lesser logic, the section which describes dialectic, Hegel gives as examples, Kant's antinomies of reason and Plato's *Parmenides*.¹⁰

In the third part of the *Parmenides* the question is posed, "Can the one be many?" ("One" and "many" are, of course, categorials). The answer given is "no". The argument continues: If the one cannot be many then it cannot have parts (since that would make it many). If it doesn't have parts then it cannot be a whole because a whole is composed of parts. Then later: It cannot be round because to be round is to have all points on its circumference equal distance from the centre, but to speak of points, circumference and centre is to divide it into parts. Similarly, it cannot be straight, at rest, moving, etc. This is a sample of the argument.¹¹

What appears to follow from it is first, the concepts of one and many, although exclusive of each other in meaning, must apply to the same things on pain of setting up a destructive pattern of reasoning which denies truth to every proposition including both predicates of exhaustive oppositions. This situation would reduce all statements to unintelligibility. This is the opposite view to the one which informs the law of non-contradiction. There, the predication of mutually exclusive concepts to the same thing

⁹ If a concept is applied to a totality - an infinite object - there is nothing for its opposite concept to apply to except the same totality (otherwise it would have no referent).

¹⁰ He also discusses the relationship of dialectics to Sophistry and Humean skepticism. C.f. *Hegel's Logic - being part one of the encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences.*, trans. W. Wallace, Oxford University Press 1975, section 81, pp 116-119.

¹¹ *Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Princeton University Press 1961, *Parmenides*, section 137 c, d, e, pp 91, 92.

results in unintelligibility, here, it results from not permitting it. Secondly, concepts such as "straight" or "round" which are not categorials are affected also because they can be regarded as "species" of the categorials, e.g. a line defined as a series of points is a specific form of "plurality". As such it becomes entangled in the problem of the relation of plurality to unity. This latter point gives an insight into how Hegel's logic might be related to arguments concerning more concrete issues than just the relationships between the categorials themselves.¹²

In *The Sophist*, Plato responds to his own problem (of "necessary" contradictions) through the character of an Eleatic philosopher. In the course of attempting to define a Sophist as someone who propagates illusions, he confronts the problem of what an illusion (which is unreal) might "be". Parmenides had said,

"Never shall this be enforced,
that things that are not are;"¹³

He therefore begins to investigate the use of the term "being". "Being" is the most fundamental of the categorials since everything else presupposes it.¹⁴ Since categorials describe everything, it follows that being can be predicated of things to which its opposite, non-being, is predicated, e.g. illusions. He looks at the descriptions of being, in particular the quantification of it (unity, plurality, etc.) in the work of famous philosophers in order to ascertain its nature and why it appears to admit of contradictory descriptions, e.g. "one" and "many". In the course of this argument he recapitulates some of the problems of the *Parmenides* as well as dealing with "being and becoming", "mind and matter" and "rest and motion". Returning to the main problem, he concludes that certain

¹² A Heraclitan example might be "Father and son are one", cf. *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments*, ed. G.S. Kirk, Cambridge University Press 1962. Fr. 50, pg 65., or more correctly, "Parent and child are one". This, in the most obvious sense, is a qualified form of the dialectical relation between cause and effect.

¹³ *Plato: The Sophist and the Statesman*, trans. A.E. Taylor, ed. Raymond Klibanski and Elisabeth Anscombe, Thomas Nelson and sons 1961., *The Sophist*, section 258D, p 167.

¹⁴ Including its nearest "relatives" non-being and coming-to-be (becoming).

terms cannot be predicated of each other (or by implication both of the same thing) e.g. motion is at rest, but some can, e.g. "one" is also "many". Put another way, sometimes different names name different things but other times the same thing. He defines the purpose of the process of dialectics as follows:

"To divide things by their kinds, not to take one and the same form for different, nor different forms for the same, that, shall we not say, is the business of the science of dialectic?"¹⁵

With respect to "being", his solution is to suggest that to say an object is not some particular thing, e.g. "non-red", is merely to say that it is other than that thing, not that it has no being. Thus an illusion is "other" than it appears but nevertheless "is". This seems to dismiss the problem of the contradiction as a mistaken use of words. A deeper reading, however, shows this not to be the case. The concept of "other" suggests two things, that with respect to a particular predicate the "other" is *not* what it designates but also that it *is* something else. Plato is indicating, therefore, that the concept "non-being" is an abstraction from the more complex concept "other" (it refers to its negative aspect). An illusion is regarded as a non-being only in so far as *what it purports to be* has no being. There is a logical relation between being and non-being in the concept "other" - together they comprise its definition.

Opposed categorials in general necessarily apply to the same things but are relational in character, differing by virtue of the aspect of the object which is focused upon, e.g. "the other" is the non - being (of that which it is other than) but it "is" (in relation to itself). One cannot predicate one categorial without implicitly assuming the predication of its opposite. Hence, one normally predicates unity of something which is assumed to be a plurality and plurality of objects considered together as a unity.¹⁶ The relation between them may be named (or implied) by a third categorial, e.g. "quantity", which

¹⁵ The Sophist 253 D.

¹⁶ In the language of Heraclitus, "They arise together".

explicitly refers to a differentiated unity. The categorials presuppose each other and form a logical framework which applies as a whole. This it would appear is how Hegel read Plato and why he approves of his approach. The concepts in *The Sophist*, are the ones which form the beginning of Hegel's Logic: "being", "nothing", "becoming", "other", "same" and (by implication) "different".

1.2. Deduction and movement

Hegel deduces the relations between the categorials in a systematic fashion. Beginning with one side of an opposition, he looks at all the objects of which it can be correctly predicated, looking for that which is common to all of them and disregarding those features which are characterisations of the opposite concept. The first concept he considers is "being" so he disregards all aspects which give rise to the predication of non-being, i.e. he disregards specific differences between beings - the respects by virtue of which they *are not* each other.¹⁷ Being appears indeterminate by this method since it ignores all specific differences. Similarly, "nothing" is also indeterminate when considered in abstraction, since it is also "no thing" - the absence of specific determination. The opposites thus appear identical. It is the relation between the concepts which defines each and the attempt to comprehend them intelligibly outside of this relation fails. This amounts to a transcendental deduction of the concept which embodies the opposition between them.¹⁸ Naming this concept is referred to by Hegel as the speculative stage of the Logic, since it involves finding a term not previously given. In the case of "being" and "nothing" the concept is "becoming".¹⁹

¹⁷ Op. cit. *Hegel's Logic*, section 87 (zusatz), pg 128.

¹⁸ Op. cit. *Hegel's Logic*, section 82, (gamma) pg 119.

¹⁹ In "becoming" nothing is transformed into being (what is not comes to be) and/or being passes into nothing (what is ceases to be). What "becoming" describes is a point of transition, a boundary. Things are determined by virtue of boundaries, hence, "being and "nothing" can only describe something determinate if they are predicated together in this relation, not in isolation - in abstraction.

The identity of the opposed concepts appears at first simply to be an error induced by treating them as if they could be predicated in isolation from each other (they both appear indeterminate). The contradiction of the unity of opposites, therefore, appears to have only negative significance. Hegel points out, however, that in so far as it negates the view that they are conceptually isolable, it also indicates a genuine unity between them. They are identical in the sense that they logically presuppose one another and hence, can exist only as elements of this logical relation. Thus, each is to be understood as a description of this relation differing only in respect of which pole is explicit and which is implicit, i.e. their content is the same.²⁰ The new concept which describes this relation (the synthesis), however, is also a categorial and so the deduction can begin again with respect to its opposite concept. In this way Hegel attempts to generate the complete set of categorials and to demonstrate their relationship to each other.

The set of categorials revealed in this way could be regarded as the structure of mind in the Kantian sense, i.e. as a framework of concepts which must be applied at all times on pain of unintelligibility. Hegel, however, regarded them not as a structure but as a process - the process of reason. This has important implications for his philosophy. It gives it its historical dimension.²¹ Hence, he says,

"The reason why dialectic first seizes upon motion as its object lies in the fact that dialectic is itself this motion; or put another way motion is the dialectic of all that is."²²

²⁰ As in the case of "one" and "many", they are descriptions of the same thing. Each, while emphasising one aspect, implies the other as part of the thing described.

²¹ Hegel's work marks an important point of departure in modern philosophy. The philosophers of the enlightenment had sought to establish a new foundation for knowledge based upon the methods of natural science after revealed truth had ceased to be able to fulfill this role. Paradoxically, this attempt to replace one epistemology with another calls into question the ultimate status of all epistemologies (the dilemma epistemology) and gives rise to questions concerning the process by which they change, a situation dramatically emphasised by the conflict of these ideas which appeared as the bone of contention of the French Revolution. Hegel was the first modern philosopher to address this important issue for a rapidly changing world.

²² Quoted by Gadamer in *Hegel's Dialectic*, Yale University Press 1976 pg 13. from *Werke* edited by Freunde des Verewigten, Dunker, Berlin 1832. A modern source in english is *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, translated by E.S. Haldane, Vol. I, p 266. Routledge, Keegan and

There are two propositions here, first that the conceptual dialectic is a process (motion) and secondly, that all motion is dialectical in form. This explains why the Logic has a dialectical form. The statement that "motion is the dialectic of all that is", however, goes further in its implications. It can be rephrased as "all dialectics, (the dialectic of all that is) describe, or indeed are equivalent to, motion". Not only has motion a dialectical structure but all things with a dialectical structure are motion. Hegel appears to be attempting to establish the origin of dialectics in the nature of motion.

There is a similar view expressed by Heraclitus that all movement is the result of the ebb and flow of opposed forces, "War is king and father of all".²³ This view remains merely a metaphysical principle of change, however, unless justified epistemologically. It is not sufficient to regard dialectics simply as a description of this internal structure of motion. To Hegel, for whom the rational is real, the description would have to be demonstrated to be a consequence of reason. He would have to show that motion can only be rationalised or conceptualised in this way. He offers the following explanation in *The Philosophy of Nature*,

"We are accustomed to viewing it (motion) as a predicate, as a condition, [because our comprehending thereby predicates and fixes], but it is in fact self, subject as subject, *the remaining of disappearance*."²⁴

He appears to be saying that the attempt to use concepts to describe motion involves us in imputing duration to that which by definition does not endure.²⁵ This entangles us in con-

Paul 1955, 1963.

²³ The implication of this for systems or "totalities" is that their evolution is to be explained in terms of an internal struggle between their constituent parts, a form of explanation employed by Marx. See chapter 4, sections 1.2 and 2.

²⁴ Quoted in *Hegel's Dialectic*, H.G. Gadamer, op.cit. p 13. A modern source in english is *The Philosophy of Nature*, translated by A.V. Miller, Clarendon Press 1970. - zusatz to paragraph 261 p 43. My emphasis and words in () brackets mine.

²⁵ It may be objected that there can be a "momentary" condition. Even so, There is a sense in which the moment may be thought to endure - for a moment. But not only may it endure. If it is not to be regarded as static, it must also have "transition" within it. This involves duality and hence, even the "moment" can only be described in terms of the dialectic of change.

traditions.

It is clear that the attempt to describe "change" in general involves us in a contradiction because it implies that "something" has changed. The something is on one hand assumed to be the same thing but on the other different since it has changed. We identify the object before and after the change despite its characteristics not being the same in every respect. The subject-predicate form of synthetic statements shows that our thought processes exhibit the same characteristic. We assume a certain subject and then add to our conception of it in the predicate. The subject is thus characterised in different ways before and after the predication.

This general schema may be also applied to the Logic since it represents the description of the same thing (Being) by a succession of different concepts. Hegel differentiates reason from understanding in precisely this fashion, i.e. that whereas understanding implies subsuming reality under a static non-contradictory conception of things, reason is a process of discovery which, starting from what is understood, develops it in new directions.²⁶ In doing so it alters the conception of its object from that which was its point of departure and thus involves the contradiction inherent in change.

1.3. Three sources of contradiction

It appears now, however, that I have given two if not three different explanations of the origin of contradiction in Hegel's work: universality, (the fact that the concepts of the Logic apply to everything), motion, and also context (because of his concept of one-sidedness). These different explanations, however, are linked in his work. The contradictions engendered by universality occur because if a concept applies to everything then it can only be defined by distinction from another concept which also applies to everything but which differs from it by virtue of a different emphasis or context of interest. Universality as cause is thus reduced to context as cause. The contradictions which are the

²⁶ Op. cit., *Hegel's Logic*, sections 79-82, pp 113-121.

result of predication of concepts in different contexts, however, can also be reduced, as we have seen Hegel does, to the movement of reason as it examines and discovers the nature of its object first from one point of view then from its opposite. Movement thus appears to be the primary source of contradiction in Hegel. This is not surprising given his phenomenological approach. The problem presents itself in the form of the question of where the unity originates which links together the Humean stream of perception. The movement of the mind is his starting point. The spinning out of the universal structure of mind, however, is a specific problem inherited from Kant and related to Hegel's concern about the characterisation of totalities and infinite objects. He applies the more general perspective of dialectics to this problem to produce *The Encyclopedia*, which resembles the Cartesian project of unifying knowledge but which is grounded in a way which avoids the problems of a self-evident foundation.

1.4. The law of non-contradiction

By suggesting that motion, context and universality necessarily involve contradictions in their descriptions I am implying that there can be such a thing as an intelligible contradiction. For most theorists this is an irrationalist position. For them contradiction implies unintelligibility. If something is a contradiction then it cannot be understood, if it can be understood then it is not a contradiction. This view is often asserted somewhat dogmatically. Light may be shed on the issue, however, if we ask what makes a contradiction unintelligible?

In symbolic logic a contradiction is the conjunction of A and not-A. This corresponds to the claim that a thing cannot both be and not be something. This formulation involving being does not specify the full range of contradictory statements however. The concept of a round square is said to be contradictory and similarly, a colour cannot be both red and green. To reduce these contradictory predications to formal contradictions, bridging statements of the form "what is green is non-red" would have to be supplied so that the being and non-being of a single predicate (red) can be inferred. Such

additional statements would, however, have to distinguish between incompatible predicates such as "red" and "green" and compatible ones such as "red" and "square" which can be predicated of the same thing without contradiction. From these considerations a more general account of contradiction may perhaps be formulated.

Clearly, the difference between the relationship of "red" and "green" and that of "red" and "square" would seem to be that the former are species of the genus "colour" whereas the latter do not share the same genus. The rule would appear to be that one cannot predicate more than one species term of its own genus without contradiction, e.g. a colour cannot be both green and red nor a shape both round and square. To do so would be to invoke the specific difference between the terms only implicitly to then deny the difference by identifying them. A rule of communication is thus invoked by the form of the statement only to be violated by the content. The result is miscommunication and hence unintelligibility. Being and non-being might be treated as examples of the same phenomenon. The distinction between them is annulled by their predication of the same object.²⁷

It might be argued, however, that the argument for a general explanation based upon the genus-species form is circular since it makes use of the intuitive unintelligibility of the conjunction of being and non-being. One might argue that to assert a specific difference and then to deny it is both to assert and deny its being and, therefore, to make use of the conjunction to be explained. The language used in the explanation above, however, refers to action - the pragmatics of communication. Although any attempt to logically reduce a contradiction to another statement is liable to produce another contradiction because one cannot find a logical antecedent to a primitive rule, the point being made here is that the unacceptability derives not from another rule governing unintelligibility,

²⁷ What the genus term is here, however, is difficult to say; these terms are intimately tied up with specification and concept formation itself and hence have a kind of primacy. Hegel demonstrates this by showing their relationship to determination (determinate being). Nevertheless, the cause of miscommunication appears to be of the same kind.

but from the imperatives of communication, i.e. observance or breach of a rule governing speech. If this account is acceptable we may now be in a position to see why Hegel's contradictions do not fit this scheme and are in fact intelligible.

1.4.1. Categorials

With respect to the categorials, it is obvious that the opposed concepts are abstractions. The rule suggested before, that not more than one species term may be predicated of its own genus, needs to be further qualified. The genus *concept*, e.g. "colour" may be described by more than one predicate but where it is used to indicate that some specification of it is to follow, e.g. "this colour is", then only one such specification is allowed. In the case of the categorials, a concept such as "quantity" may be described as "one" and "many" in so far as it is understood to represent a differentiated unity. One may not say "this quantity is both one and many", however, if what is meant is that the number of quanta are both one and many, i.e. if some specification of "this quantity" is to follow. Abstraction is the predication of a partial description, it is not the further specification of a genus term and therefore does not fall within the rule.

1.4.2. Context

The categorials are distinguished from each other by the point of focus of our interest. We abstract certain features of an object according to our interest in them thereby producing a dichotomy between the features relating to our interest and those which do not. The object is thus described in different ways in relation to, or in the context of, our focus of interest. For example, a "whole" is the unity of its parts - here we stress unity, diversity being implicit; "the parts" comprise the differentiated structure of the whole - here we stress plurality, the unity being implicit. This is not the only example of context-related predication, however.

The Heraclitan aphorism "To the fish the sea is pure but to the man it is polluted"²⁸

²⁸ Op. cit. *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments*, Fr. 61, pg 74.

shows that a differing relationship between subject and object can lead to contradictory judgements about the properties of an object. This issue was almost theorised by Locke when he defined secondary qualities, not as Berkeley attributes to him - as ideas in minds, but as the power of an object to affect a subject in a certain manner.²⁹ The subject-relative nature of secondary qualities should have led him to realise that there could be contradictory attributes to an object depending upon the context of interaction with the subject. Berkeley was right, however, in pointing out that all qualities are secondary and this would have implied that all qualities have this potential for involvement in contradiction. Locke encountered this problem in the relationship between the descriptions of sensory phenomena in terms of the ontology of sensation and the ontology of material properties. Sound for instance, is described by physics as a pulse of air, a physical object accessible to touch rather than an auditory phenomenon accessible to hearing. This is similar to the Heraclitan aphorism described above but because physics explains the former in terms of the latter, Locke gave primacy to the physicists' ontology.³⁰

One might argue that what I have just shown is that these context-relative statements do not contradict each other. This would only be the case, however, if one restricts the meaning of contradiction to the genus-species relation as suggested above. Formally these statements appear to be contradictions - mutually exclusive concepts predicated of the same thing.

Marx uses both of the above perspectives in his criticism of political economy. He characterises it as bourgeois and one-sided because firstly, its questions and answers are restricted to those which concern the capitalists and the significance of everything is seen *in relation to these concerns*.³¹ Secondly, because the approach to the topic begins with

²⁹ C.f. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke, ed. and introduction Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford University Press 1975, Chapter VIII, section 10. p 135.

³⁰ The physicists view may give more control over nature and fit into a general framework which relates it to other materialist theories but this doesn't give its concepts the kind of ontological primacy which Locke describes.

³¹ *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in op. cit. *Selected Works*, pg 120.

competition and exchange in the market which reflects the way the capitalists *experience* the economy. Money values and competition appear to explain everything. Questions such as the source of value and the nature of profit are poorly analysed or ignored.

Marx distinguishes the classical bourgeois economists from the later "vulgar" economists on the grounds that the former were led from exchange relations to production and exploitation by their inquiries although their analyses were imperfect, whereas the latter, seeing where the arguments led, avoided the questions for ideological reasons. The former views are limited because they do not totally transcend the experience of the bourgeoisie, the latter because they do not transcend their interests. Marx and Engels also try to show that arguments that appear to be inevitably in conflict are often, in fact, only partial perspectives on the same problem and can be reconciled when seen in context.³² In this way they try to show the superiority of their own analysis.

1.4.3. motion

Clearly the characterisation of some identical object as changing and consequently manifesting mutually exclusive characteristics sequentially does not fall within the rule governing the unintelligibility of contradiction as I have described it. If as a counter-example to the claim that a colour can not be both red and green I was to cite the colour of a traffic light, I would risk not being taken seriously. Yet to add the qualification "at the same time" is an important restriction to the application of the law of non-contradiction. Change involves identifying things which are dissimilar - a formal contradiction - and most things have duration in time and are processes. The problems raised by this issue are not trivial. They include the issue of how one can show the continuity between idea systems and the question of the progress and growth of knowledge. In the philosophy of science there is the view that all new theories should "save the phenomena" of the theories that they replace, i.e. they should account for the same evi-

³² E.g. the discussion on Say and Ricardo in op.cit. *E.P.M.* pp 169,170.

dence. When the terms of the description are totally different, however, it is problematic how one can show that it is the same phenomenon that is being described. The incommensurability of theories makes comparisons between them problematic and tends to relativise them all.

Hegel encounters this problem in the political context of the French revolution. The ideas of the enlightenment challenged the traditional viewpoints at the level of epistemology, ontology, ethics and politics. Furthermore, the new viewpoints were used as the basis for the reconstruction of society. The relativising of ideas poses a problem of legitimacy in this situation. Hegel was concerned to show how ideas, and hence history, evolved as a single rational process, solving the problem of legitimacy and providing the basis for a critique of new ideas. Hegel sees himself in the tradition of Plato and Socrates arguing for realism against compelling arguments for relativism.³³ The same problem was encountered in the philosophy of science a century later when the theory of relativity replaced the Newtonian system. Because the ontology of the former was different from the latter, doubt was cast on the status of theoretical terms and certainty was restricted to what could be known immediately in doctrines such as phenomenalism and operationalism.³⁴ This transformation, however, is a good example of the way knowledge grows by the inclusion and reconciliation of opposed descriptions in a wider context. The results of measurement in a situation where the measurer and the measured (subject and object) do not move rapidly with respect to each other was held by Newton to be true in all situations. Einstein showed that depending upon the relative velocity between subject and object judgements of measurement would differ with respect to time and space. A set of context-relative judgements are thus obtained for any particular situation. Newton's view

³³ As Plato does in the *Theatatus* and later in the *Sophist* where he approves of the Eleatic project of finding "the truth" but disapproves of Heraclitan/Protagorean relativism. Hegel takes up the same position relative to "Parmenides" and the question of "truth" in general.

³⁴ See *Conjectures and Refutations* Chapter 3 - Karl Popper. Popper attributes the change to quantum theory but most of the debate about the status of theoretical terms appears to have been generated by the demise of the Newtonian system.

thus appears in Hegelian terms to be "one-sided" since it only takes into account a single context which it erroneously generalises. Einstein's view supercedes Newton's by virtue of being a more comprehensive account. In this way, later theories are compared with earlier ones and knowledge is shown to progress by absorption and supercession. As stated before, this is the way, via the theory of ideology, Marx deals with opponent's views. It also means, however, that he tends to take the work of others as his point of departure and his work is continuous with theirs.

Marx not only uses Hegel's logic as a means of criticising the theories of others, he assumes it in the elaboration of his own views. This is why his use of language sometimes reveals contradictions.³⁵ In particular his analysis of social systems and of the movement of history draws upon the treatment of organic relations and of evolutionary processes in the work of Hegel.

1.5. Marx's use of Hegel's logic

As the discussion above shows, Marx uses Hegel's logical analysis in a number of different ways. In his own theory it is presupposed as a kind of logical syntax the violation of which leads to theoretical mistakes and fallacies. He puts it to critical use when he uses it to expose the errors in the work of his opponents. He accepts Hegel's analysis of the logical relations between the categorials, applying this kind of analysis, for instance, to political economy in the *Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.³⁶ He also adopts the more general perspectives which underpin it, i.e. the more general understanding of "one-sidedness". This latter concept allows Marx to incorporate the Heraclitan issues of the context relativity of predication both in terms of focus of interest, as Hegel does, and also of the experiential context in which the judgement is

³⁵ cf. *Alienation* by Bertell Ollman, Cambridge University Press, 2nd. edition 1976 CH1 -"With words that appear like bats".

³⁶ Where production and consumption, for instance, are treated according to the dialectic of "Being and Nothing". C.f. *Preface and Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, K. Marx, Introduction, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1976, pp 17-18.

made since for him, ideas are not simply the product of reason but of social practice. In addition, it also allows him to incorporate the Protagorean position, that "man is the measure"³⁷ which is usually thought to imply relativism, via the concept of "interest" in so far as interest leads to one-sided interpretations. His own position is, like that of Hegel, that of dialectical realism where a many-sided solution is deemed superior to a one-sided one.

When a dialectical account is used descriptively, the debate is about the nature of the world, whereas when it is put to critical use the debate occurs at the level of theory (although possibly conditioned via interest by mundane factors). The critical use includes Marx's methodological deliberations. A further use is epistemological.³⁸ In this case the relationship between the theorist and the object of the theory is treated dialectically. A fourth use is speculative, namely the attempt to envisage a set of circumstances in which oppositions coexist without limiting each other, i.e. without being in conflict. It is this latter use which gives Marx's work its optimistic, revolutionary character since it raises the possibility of solutions to problems which are ruled out by the limited oppositions of "either/or" in which bourgeois political theory is cast.

2. The Dialectics of Nature

The explanation of Hegel's Logic so far has mainly been based upon the "Doctrine of Being", the first part of the Logic. The method of the Logic is to uncover the relations by which a concept is defined. These relations are made increasingly explicit in successive concepts, e.g. the relation to "non-being" is more explicit in the concept "Determinate Being"³⁹ than in the concept "Being". Thus by the second section of the Logic, the "Doctrine of Essence", the concepts form pairs, e.g. positive and negative, which explicitly refer to each other -although only in a negative way, i.e. they are defined by the

³⁷ Cf. *Plato: Theatatus*, trans. Robin H. Waterfield, Penguin 1987. *Theatatus* 167d, pg 58.

³⁸ See section 5, "The Subject/Object Dialectic".

³⁹ By virtue of the assumption that to determine is to negate.

opposition between them. This section is mainly about essence and appearance although it contains a general definition of **causality**⁴⁰ where the cause, as essence, is deemed the source of its effects, the appearances in which it manifests itself.

Many of the concepts, such as causality, in this section and the next (the "Doctrine of the Notion") are part of the ontology of the natural sciences and, in so far as society is viewed "objectively", also of the social and historical sciences. The third section, the "Doctrine of the Notion", follows from the development of the concept of **Necessity**; ⁴¹ perhaps most intelligible as "natural necessity". From "Necessity", Hegel derives the notion of **Freedom**.⁴² He says that in so far as something acts according to its own internal necessity, i.e. its nature, it acts freely. Thus he identifies freedom and necessity. He can only do this, however, in so far as all causes are internal causes and necessity is internal necessity, that is to say in so far as the object under consideration is regarded as a self-determining system.

This brings us to the "Notion". In the Notion the unity and not just the diversity between the related elements is explicitly recognised. Each set of concepts in the "Doctrine of the Notion" forms a mutually referring triad consisting of a pair of opposites and that which names the unity in which they coexist as aspects. Each element explicitly makes reference to the other two.⁴³

⁴⁰ I intend to emphasise in heavy type key concepts in this section.

⁴¹ Hegel regards all causation ultimately as reciprocal causation because it requires a contribution from both active and passive elements and because both the cause and the effect can be regarded as either the active or passive factor from different standpoints. He identifies this as the structure of Necessity.

⁴² The treatment of this particular opposition, freedom and necessity, is especially important to his whole philosophy because the struggle for freedom is the source of human action in Hegel's work.

⁴³ I use the term "explicit" here in the sense in which I used "implicit" when describing the poles of the relation of one and many. In that case the element named e.g. "one" was differentiated from that which was only implied, e.g. "many". However, that which is implied is more explicit than that to which no reference is made at all and that is the contrast I am making here.

2.1. The Doctrine of the Notion

The Doctrine of the Notion investigates the logic of relations conceptualised as a system. It is sub-divided into subjective, objective and "the idea" which is conceptualised as both subject and object. Hegel's distinction between subjective and objective rests primarily on the concept of one-sidedness. Each of the elements of the Notion, when considered separately, is something abstract and therefore, its separateness is the result of an act of consciousness; it is **subjective**. Conversely, when the meaning of each is fully developed it is seen that they only exist by virtue of each other, together they form an object which, because of the way their meanings are mutually dependent, each one is. **Objectivity**, for Hegel therefore, is synonymous with completeness or absence of one-sidedness. This is important for a number of reasons one of which is that "Nature", or the external world, for Hegel, is the objective aspect of the idea.

In the section on the objective notion he deals with three forms of causality basic to natural and social phenomena - **mechanical, chemical and teleological**. This analysis allows us to understand Marx's use of these same concepts. When dealing with **Teleology** he introduces the concept of subjectivity again. This time the contrast is between the "End" understood as something merely postulated by a subject, and therefore subjective because non-existent, and the objective state which the End represents. His resolution of this contradiction is the **immanent end** which is a design working itself out in the development of the activity of the subject. This for Hegel is the **Idea**. The Idea is a self-realising subject/object. Nature is regarded by Hegel as the objective aspect of the thought process (phenomenon) viewed by the subject as something external. In this way, it is objective in the sense that it embodies the categories of the Logic in a fashion which is not one-sided but is non-objective in the sense that it doesn't acknowledge the role of subjectivity in the constitution of the object of consciousness in the first place. It is in the latter sense, therefore, that Hegel regards Nature as one-sided. Of the transition from Logic to Nature he says:

The Idea which is independent or for itself, when viewed on the point of this unity with itself, is Perception or Intuition, and the percipient Idea is **Nature**. But as intuition the Idea is, through an external "reflection", invested with the one-sided characteristic of immediacy, or negation. in its own absolute truth it [the Idea] resolves to let the "moment" of its particularity,the immediate idea, as its reflected image, go freely forth as Nature.⁴⁴

2.2. Nature

In *The Nature*, Hegel regards nature as embodying particular instances of the universal categories of the Logic. Since universals are thought to be mental and the particular is regarded at this stage one-sidedly as something merely opposed to the universal, nature as the realm of the particular is regarded as something merely external to mind. However, nature is not only external to mind, external relations exist between the entities in nature themselves (as between parts of a whole).

Also, whereas in the Logic, the existence of each category depended upon its relations to other categories, in nature there is also an external relation to mind which establishes the existence of an entity independently of its relation to other entities in nature. It follows therefore that only the part of the object's identity which depends upon the relation is destroyed when the relation itself is destroyed.

Molecules for instance are composed of atoms. If a molecule is dissociated into atoms the molecule disappears but the objects which composed it have not disappeared they have simply lost their character as parts of a whole or collectively as the molecule itself. The part/whole relation has been destroyed but the molecule is only destroyed "as such" i.e. as a whole composed of parts not as something existing in relation to the subject since the atoms remain. In general it is always the case with natural objects that it is

⁴⁴ N.B. This interpretation of the transition from Logic to Nature would justify Marx's view that Nature is portrayed merely as an object of consciousness without real objectivity and independence. C.f. op. cit., *E.P.M.*, pg 155.

only the constitution of their identity which depends upon the dialectical relations in which they participate. This coincides with Marx's views since he regards the interaction of objects with other things (including a subject) as the source of their "being"⁴⁵ For a known object, the direct or indirect relation to the subject always remains.

2.2.1. Causality

The major divisions of the "Nature" are "Mechanics", "Physics" and "Organics". These divisions correspond to the three types of causality in the section of the Logic called "The objective notion". The correspondence is not quite exact since "Chemism" corresponds to only one section of the "Physics". It is obvious from this treatment however, that Hegel sees his enterprise as tracing the development of different methods of analysis rather than different subject matters. Organics for instance includes "The terrestrial organism" even though such things as rocks or the earth itself would normally be classed as inorganic.⁴⁶ What defines something as organic is the nature of the causal relations between its parts. The logic leads us inwards towards greater understanding not onwards towards different entities.⁴⁷ For Hegel nature as a whole is organic. Mechanical or chemical relations exist only between entities abstracted or considered in isolation from the whole. Particles and Chemicals exist of course as independent entities apart from any organic relations in which they may or may not participate but "organicity" is implicit in what we take them to be.

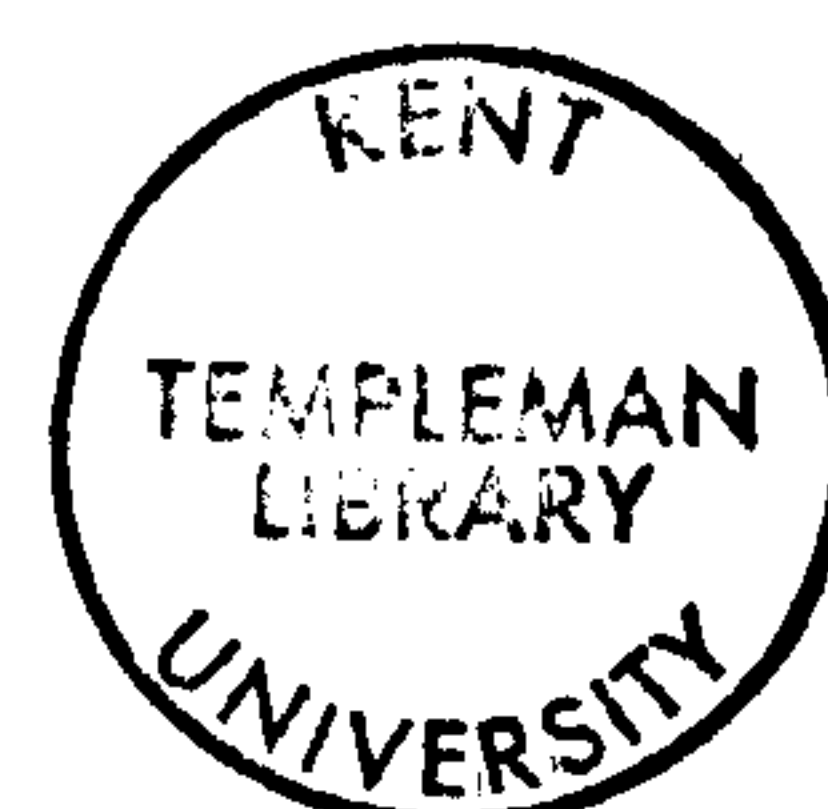
2.2.2. The Hierarchy of the Sciences

If this treatment is given to the hierarchy of sciences and their ontologies, then the

⁴⁵ *op. cit.* *E.P.M.* pg 144.

⁴⁶ That teleology applies to the non-biological nature therefore involves the claim that non-biological nature forms a self-contained system with constraining conditions which regulate its growth. I think that Hegel would claim that in the last analysis any totality must have this form. Clearly there cannot be an external cause for a self-sufficient whole by definition.

⁴⁷ Where specific natural objects are named they exemplify a logical category embodied in nature.



more "micro" the entity the more abstract one must regard it. Abstract here cannot mean existing only as an aspect of a more concrete entity. As stated previously entities in nature only take on character from the dialectical relations not existence itself. Atoms can exist independently from molecules but their character as identical units which can be arranged in different ways to produce different substances depends upon their role within molecules. In this sense they are abstract.

Relations at the more abstract levels provide an explanation for relations at the more concrete levels but as one might expect such explanations are also deficient in some respects. The laws governing sub-atomic particles for instance explain what chemical combinations are possible, but they don't explain what chemicals actually exist and what reactions actually take place nor why this is so. The range of possible interactions given at this level is wider than those actually taking place and more information is needed to narrow these possibilities down and provide a totally deterministic explanation of the world.⁴⁸ Explanation in terms of different types of causality is required at the different levels precisely because higher levels of determinacy are required for more concrete entities. Chemical explanations in terms of affinities or predispositions (e.g. notions of acidity and basicity - defined in terms of their reactions with each other - or electrochemical replacement) define the entities in question in terms of the the reactions they typically do participate in. Chemical explanations of this kind do not explain why precisely these chemical groups exist nor whether any of the reactions they describe will take place at any particular time, but that they do take place is implicit in the way that the subject matter is defined. An organic explanation on the other hand will show how as a consequence of the operation of the whole system certain chemicals are brought into contact with other chemicals at a certain time enabling them to react and produce some new chemical. This holistic determination completes an explanation that would otherwise

⁴⁸ Hegel regards contingency as the sign of immature science and the greater the degree of contingency in the explanation the less scientific it is. It is in this sense that mechanically causal explanations are partial and for him abstract.

remain at the level of mere possibilities. It is in this sense that the more micro levels are abstract, since they can only provide a partial account as elements of a more comprehensive explanation. Mechanical and chemical causality needs to be supplemented with teleological causality, i.e. the form of causality appropriate to self-governing systems, in which they find their proper place.

2.2.3. Causality within systems

Organic explanations, therefore, are for Hegel the most adequate form of explanation because there are no contingent causes. All causality is internal and mutually referring. Furthermore, not only do the parts of an organism cause the whole to be what it is, but the whole functioning organism is required for the maintenance of the parts. There is a relation of mutual causality, therefore, between the parts and the whole. The organism may simply maintain itself in a steady-state or it may evolve. All living things have a life cycle, that is they evolve. The process of growth is controlled by the organism itself through self-regulation. A steady-state will also typically involve self-regulation through homeostatic mechanisms. The concept of teleology, therefore, finds its application here. Where there are no contingent causes the end to which an organism progresses is totally determined. It is quite in order to regard its parts as functioning to bring the end about - especially when one considers that the parts are themselves produced and maintained by the whole organism. A self-regulating, evolving organism is the physical counterpart of "The Idea". in which the end progressively realises itself via an immanent teleology. Expressed another way, an adequate explanation of functioning totalities or systems requires the acknowledgement of these kinds of causal relationship.

2.2.3.1. Systemic and external causes

Physical organisms, however, do not correspond exactly to the logic of "Organic" causality which Hegel describes. An organism will require sustenance from outside of itself, i.e. things which it does not itself produce. It will be subject, therefore, to external

causality. Nevertheless, it will have an internal dynamic which will determine its growth - "ceteris paribus" i.e. if nothing interferes, for example, with its food supply. This can be studied in abstraction. Human beings who produce their own food bring this external causal factor within a wider system of an economy over which they can exercise control. This can once again be studied as an organic entity.

In general, social arrangements which are based upon self-reproducing institutions are best analysed in this way. They fulfill all the criteria for a system of mutually referring causes with self-governing mechanisms. It is part Marx's method to analyse them in this way. Social arrangements can also be interrupted by external causes of course, natural disasters may fall into this category. Nevertheless their evolutionary tendencies can also be studied "ceteris paribus" as before.

Since society is composed of human organisms which depend upon external factors to sustain them, so there is a potential for conflict between them over the procurement of these factors depending upon the social arrangements through which they interact. Each human organism will have its own internal dynamic of development which will typically make demands on its external environment, i.e. needs. Part of that external environment will include its relations with other human beings on which it depends. This raises the possibility that each, by pursuing its own development, will make mutually incompatible demands upon the others, i.e. there will be a conflict of interests.

If one also takes into account that human needs are partially conditioned by social environment, then to this extent, the conflict may be understood as a product of the social system itself. Conflicts produced in this way are what Marx refers to as "material contradictions". In Chapter 1, one can see that this perspective forms the framework in which he analyses the emergence of private property, artificial scarcity, class, class struggle, the state etc. Initially conflict may be merely a product of individual egoism but as soon as this is institutionalised as exploitation, it becomes principally a product of the system which maintains and reproduces it in its social relations.

3. The Philosophy of Mind

The previous section explained why the forms of causality appropriate to organisms are also appropriate in the explanation of social systems. However, this procedure neglects the role of consciousness in determining human behaviour.

Hegel sees consciousness (or "mind" since at its most basic levels Hegel doesn't regard it as conscious) as a faculty of organic life at a certain level of complexity. More specifically, it is the faculty which monitors and regulates the organism's performance, i.e. which makes it sentient and responsive to its environment. The dialectical relation between part and whole in an organism permits us to understand mind in terms of these holistic functions. There is, therefore, no sharp break between nature and mind for Hegel.

3.1. Self-consciousness

Consciousness involves awareness of the phenomena of experience. It becomes self-consciousness according to Hegel with reflective thought where the object is experienced as a thought object. At this point the mind is aware of its contents as part of itself.

Within Marx's perspective, where such developments tend to be explained as responses to the practical need to cope with the environment, reflection could be seen as part of the process of anticipation of events, a useful capacity for any organism in a changing environment.

This creates two senses of the self - as knowing subject and as a thought object. The contradiction between these incompatible accounts of mind is the source, according to Hegel of *desire*.

3.2. Desire

Desire is the need of an organism for something outside of itself. There are two forms of desire that Hegel draws attention to: the desire for knowledge and the desire for "self-realisation". The desire for knowledge is the need to subsume experience under forms of thought, i.e to subjectivise it and thus to make it familiar and manageable for the

subject.⁴⁹ The desire for self-realisation derives from the fact that the subject as agent or cause can only know itself by its effects. It must, therefore, create effects in the world in order to become an object for itself. Thus desire, for Hegel, is the need both to subjectivise the object and to objectivise the subject, i.e. to mentally achieve some kind of unity between these aspects of the self.

This explanation moves totally within the sphere of the mind. However, physical needs can be treated in a similar fashion. Physical needs, such as the need for food, can be seen as the need of an organic system to incorporate elements of the external world within its own sphere of activity, i.e. in a sense within itself, in order to function properly and cope with the world around. The need for knowledge is part of this process.⁵⁰ Similarly, action in the world is necessary for self-realisation not only in order to experience oneself as a thinking subject, but also as a subject capable of having an effect upon the natural world.

The utility of the latter is obvious, since it is an advantage to be able to estimate one's own capacities when one needs to take action and also, the more capacities one has the greater freedom and control one will feel. This is perhaps part of the explanation of the satisfaction felt at the discovery and exercise of ability. Nietzsche refers to the desire to manifest ones capacities as "the will to power" and regards it as *the* fundamental human need. Marx includes the failure of objectifying activity to provide self-realisation under the rubric of alienation and treats it as one of the problems of "the riddle of history".⁵¹

⁴⁹ His explanation of the euphoria engendered by the renaissance amplifies this point. He explains this as the realisation that the world is governed by reason and hence for the first time man felt at home in it. C.f. *The Philosophy of History*, G.W.F. Hegel, trans. J. Sibree, intro. C.J. Friedrich, Dover 1956, p440.

⁵⁰ This is what Hegel in *The Philosophy of Right* refers to as "appropriation" and is the source of "property". Marx often follows this usage. - cf. *The Philosophy of Right*, G.W.F. Hegel, trans. and notes T.M. Knox, Oxford University Press 1952, sections 44, 45, pp 41, 42.,

⁵¹ op. cit. *E.P.M.* pg 97 see CH1 introduction - The powerlessness implied here is not merely psychological, however, the worker's efforts in extreme circumstances do not permit him/her to sustain his/herself physically either.

3.3. Freedom

Desire manifests itself in a multiplicity of urges or impulses, some of them mutually exclusive. Which are to be acted upon is a matter of choice and this is a decision of the will. In order to ensure maximum satisfaction, the will must be free to make the optimum choices. In this way the freedom of the will itself becomes a desirable objective. When this objective is pursued consciously, we have, according to Hegel, the primary driving force of social organisation and social change.

3.3.1. The Social Dimension

The need of human beings for others is explained by Hegel in his discussion of self-consciousness. Whilst labour can produce objects which conform to human designs, hence objectifying both the idea and the power to produce in conformity with it, human qualities such as "goodness", "taste" etc. can only be confirmed by the assent of other people. These others, moreover, must be free to withhold their approval. In the relationship between master and slave for instance, the slave says what the master tells him to. His behaviour, therefore, is merely an extension of the master's will and hence cannot confirm the master's humanity independently.

This need for others is not only psychological, the division of labour enhances the possibilities of human activity and human life. Almost all the things we enjoy make use of the creations of others both past and present. In these relations of material interdependence, therefore, there also exists the possibility of the master-slave relation. This latter can only be transcended in circumstances where people develop the need for each other as both allies and companions - hence as free individuals. For Hegel and for Marx, therefore, both self-realisation and freedom depend upon society.

The form of organisation of society, according to Hegel, always embodies the claim by some or all of its members for freedom, in the sense defined above. Political disputes about the organisation of society are, accordingly, disputes about the potential for free-

dom that different systems will confer.

3.3.2. Historical change

Historical change for Hegel, therefore, always takes the form of collisions between different ideas about the principles on which the organisation of society should be based. The relationship between these ideas has the same kind of structure as that between all ideas (indeed, for Hegel, of all reality) namely, the dialectical structure of "reason". Thus, Hegel sees the unfolding of reason at work in history.

In *The Philosophy of History*, he says that eastern despotisms are based upon the principle that *one* is free, Athenian democracy was based upon the principle that *some* (the citizens) are free but only Christendom recognised that *all* are free by virtue of the nature of man.⁵²

The progressive realisation of such principles in the consciousness of human subjects is the motor of history. As soon as men understand that it is their nature to be free, then they can no longer tolerate institutions which support their captivity. Then begins a struggle to bring about a new social order. Human interests and passions are involved in this struggle but Hegel sees reason as the latent guiding force as human beings progress towards the establishment of institutions which permit the realisation of their true nature as free, rational beings.⁵³

Views about freedom are at first one-sided and engender the contradictory view as equally valid. Oppositions of this kind, embodying the authentic claims of different groups will lead to conflict. This can, however, be overcome when the genuine human aspiration expressed in each claim is accommodated in a synthesis in which they can be

⁵² Op. cit., *The Philosophy of History*, pg 18.

⁵³ Freedom, however, according to Hegel is only possible within a structure of law because although the law restricts individual freedom, it does so to prevent individuals restricting each other's freedom. The point of the law (at least good laws which embody "right") is to maximise freedom. Freedom is only possible, therefore, within a state which enacts rational laws.

It follows, however, that battles over what behaviour is appropriate to man as a free individual will become battles over the form of the constitution of the state.

shown no longer to be opposed and hence neither a denial of nor limit upon each other. An institutional form has then to be found which allows the behaviour thus legitimated to be manifested without conflict. In this way, according to Hegel, reason in the world develops through conflict and conflict resolution.

4. Differences between Hegel and Marx

This account of the role of consciousness in history is a point of departure for Marx's own work but differs from it in crucial ways. First and most important is the fact that Hegel views history as determined by the development of "the idea" in the minds of men. This is essentially a logical process although passions and action are required to realise the idea in history.

Marx, on the other hand, does not agree that history is determined by a teleological process in the minds of men which is aimed at the realisation of the absolute idea. In the *German Ideology* he says:

"Morality, Religion, Metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life."

Hegel justifies his view of the world by logic because for him "the rational is the real" but Marx sees reason in the service of a practice oriented towards the solution of the problems of embodied subjects in the natural world.⁵⁴ Ideas, for Marx, are a product of practical-critical activity (or critical-practical activity in the correct temporal order). According to Marx, human beings assess the nature of their environment critically, i.e

⁵⁴ This is why in the previous sections I provided an explanation both in terms of the logical development of Hegel's concepts and also of the practical reasons for the development of the mental processes thus described.

with a view to changing it in accordance with their needs. Their ideas reflect these concerns. Firstly, ideas begin as responses to the problems of sensuous existence and thus, their content is conditioned by changes in the material environment as they affect human needs. Secondly, the acceptance of ideas is determined in the final instance by whether they provide solutions to these problems.

Marx's objection to Hegel is that his view of the causality involved here is one-sided and therefore ideological, since although he recognises that ideas condition actions and hence the world, he ignores the reciprocal relationship, the way that the world conditions ideas. Furthermore, because of the way the acceptance of ideas is conditioned by material concerns, it is this relationship which is decisive for the sequence of the dominant ideas in history.

This, however, raises a problem with respect to Marx's acceptance of Hegel's *Logic*. The relationship between the categories in the *Encyclopedia* is one long unbroken deduction. If Marx accepts the *Logic* then presumably he has to accept the validity of this deduction. There are, however, problems with Hegel's deduction in the *Encyclopedia*.

4.1. Contingency in Nature and Mind

As stated in the previous chapter, the terms Hegel uses in the *The Nature* and also the *The Mind* are exemplars of the categories of the *Logic* with the qualification of being regarded as either external to the subject or explicitly mental respectively.⁵⁵ As examples, however, they are not unique, they merely represent a class of entities which all embody a certain relation. The specific form of each, therefore, is something which has to be discovered a posteriori, i.e. empirically. This allows Marx to stress the role of experience in supplying the content of history.

Moreover, for Marx, the logical process is not the historical process. The concepts

⁵⁵ This is illustrated by the example in the *Nature* of the "sun" and "moon", which are clearly not aspects of "the terrestrial organism" although they precede it in the deduction.

of the logic, therefore, can be used in their interconnections at each point in the historical account as appropriate.

It might be argued that this procedure is Kantian, in that empirical material which has not been deduced is organised within a logical framework which has been imposed upon it apparently without regard to content. This, however, would not be strictly correct because firstly, the concepts of the Logic are not regarded by Marx as a priori valid since they are part of language and have been created as instruments of communication in response to the world. They are, therefore, equally as subject to empirical validation as is the content itself - a point elaborated below. Secondly, their application is constrained by the nature of the objects to which they are applied. For instance, Organic relations only apply to organic wholes.⁵⁶ There is a connection between form and content, therefore, which is absent in Kant. These points provide Marx with some defence against the accusation that the Logic is a metaphysical framework.

4.2. Contingency in the Logic

Even the deductions of the Logic itself, however, pose a problem. Hegel refers to the terms in the logic as abstractions but if the categories arise by the process of abstraction and the dialectic only synthesises the abstractions back into the concrete entity from which they originated, what is the point of re-tracing the process in the opposite direction? One presumably already knows its outcome, i.e. the point of departure from which the abstractions were made in the first place?

On the other hand, Hegel clearly regards the movement of the dialectic from simple abstractions to more complex concrete categories as a process of discovery. His treatment of History as a process governed by the evolution of "the Idea" demonstrates this point.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Although a complete explanation of any phenomenon will in the widest context arrive at an explanation in terms of the organic whole of which it is part, not everything itself is to be regarded as an organic whole.

⁵⁷ *Op. cit.*, *The Philosophy of History*, pg 53.

This is in contradiction to the first point. How can consciousness discover the abstractions before the synthesis when they need to be derived by a thought process from it? It seems that one would initially need to have knowledge of the Absolute and derive all the categories of the dialectic from it by abstraction in order to arrive at the point of origin of the dialectical process. It seems difficult to reconcile these competing claims about the origin of the categories.

An explanation might be as follows: consciousness first encounters a field of awareness within which it then discovers distinctions. This clearly is the logical order of discovery. The understanding then derives separate concepts from this differentiated unity by a process of abstraction. Now it is possible to perform a task, even an intellectual task, without being conscious of precisely how the task is performed. The interconnection between the abstracted concepts and the synthesis in which they originated, therefore, may remain unexplained and thus remains a possible source of confusion until the philosopher comes along and explains it via the dialectic.

Marx says that the philosopher comes along "post festum", that is, he/she merely synthesises into a rational theory viewpoints already developed through practice. In the case above, the concepts of the Logic arise from the activity of making distinctions in the world, an activity which is conditioned both by the interests of the subject and the nature of the world itself (in so far as language is able to represent the possibilities of experience). There is thus an element of contingency in the process of concept formation. The logical necessity of the dialectic results from the fact this process is one of making distinctions which produce pairs of opposites related by meaning which together comprise the whole. Retracing the related meanings shows the logical connections but the original distinctions are formed by a contingent process. Whereas Hegel's theory of history simply recapitulates the Logic in the realm of social relations, Marx uses it selectively according to empirical context.

4.3. The World as Mind?

Hegel's transition from Nature to Mind is the basis of his view that everything is Mind. The "Mind", however, is mostly about the human mind and it is not obvious in what sense Hegel regards the rest of nature as mind, therefore. A clue may be given, however, by what he says in the introduction to *The Philosophy of History*:

"The destiny of the Spiritual World and - *Since this is the substantial world while the physical remains subordinate to it ...* - the final cause of the world at large, we allege to be the consciousness of its freedom on the part of the spirit, ..."⁵⁸

The view that the form which the natural world will ultimately take will be one imposed by mind implies that in the end it is human designs which shape the destiny of nature. There would seem to be some truth in this view when one considers how humans have continually extended their domain of control over the rest of the natural world.

One implication of this for the hierarchy of the sciences would be that the social sciences are the least abstract and the most complete. Even evolutionary theory, for instance, which explains the development of species, cannot ignore human activities. Some species have been destroyed, others have adapted to conditions of increasing industrialisation and lately men have been able to create new species by genetic engineering. Perhaps man will destroy the planet by war or pollution. For all these reasons one cannot predict the course of evolution without taking into account the activities of man.⁵⁹ Marx accepts this view in his statements about a single science.⁶⁰ His criticism of Hegel's

⁵⁸ Op. cit., *The Philosophy of History*, pg 19.

⁵⁹ Even the human physical constitution is not a natural "given". Men have the potential to modify their own biology. "Human Nature" is not, therefore, fixed in any respect, it is an ongoing process - one reason why only a dialectical approach will suffice in the study of what "man" is.

⁶⁰

"History is a real fact of natural history Natural science will one day incorporate the science of man just as the science of man will incorporate natural science; there will be one science"

- op. cit. *E.P.M.* pg 105.

idealism relate to the representation of Nature as the phenomenal content of mind.

5. The Subject/Object dialectic

The transition from Logic to Nature portrayed nature as the phenomenal content of mind. When this phenomenal content becomes dominated by mental activity, according to Hegel, the mind recognises itself in the phenomenal object, thus coming to self-knowledge. The distinction between subject and object produced by the first transition, therefore, is reunited as a differentiated unity by the second. The unity of subject and object is realised in the "subject-object" which is the topic of "The Mind". In this section, Hegel sees human activity as a process of coming to self-knowledge and as a process of self-changing.⁶¹

Marx agrees that both theorising and acting in the social realm involves this peculiar relation where the actors are both subject and object at the same time and this creates an important set of logical problems in his work. These include problems concerning two other oppositions which are related to the subject/object opposition. These are the free will/determinism opposition and the fact/value opposition.

With respect to the free will/determinism opposition, subjective awareness suggests to the actor that he/she is making choices in the world and hence that the will is free to choose whatever it wishes. On the other hand, however, it is always possible to predict human behaviour to some extent and such behaviour, when studied as an object of knowledge, exhibits law-like regularities. Subjective awareness, therefore, suggests that the will is free, objective awareness that it is determined.

With respect to the fact/value opposition, human beings evaluate things in the world according to subjective preferences, placing things in rank order. On the other hand, these preferences can be studied objectively as a species of fact and explained as predictable

⁶¹ Marx agrees except that where Hegel sees the latter as a means to the former, Marx sees the former as a means to the latter.

responses to the environment.⁶² Because these other oppositions involve the subjective/objective opposition the problems which affect it affect them also.

5.1. Free will/determinism

Hegel deals with the relation of freedom and necessity, as stated above, by regarding human behaviour as law-like on the one hand, yet on the other, to act in accordance with the law of one's own nature is also to be free. The opposites thus coincide. The main problem arises, however, when the relation is formulated in terms of the interaction between subject and object. Engels says:

"The forces operating in society work exactly like the forces of nature - blindly, violently and destructively, so long as we fail to understand them and take them into account. But once we have recognised them and understood their action, their trend and their effects, it depends solely on ourselves to increasingly subject them to our will and to attain our ends through them."⁶³

But if our actions are determined, how do we have the freedom to change them?

The problem is most acute in psychotherapy where self-understanding is directly the means to changing oneself. Would not such a change refute the original account? On the other hand if the account is correct how can any change be made?

The same problem occurs with social action; if the description of the way society is constituted is correct how can it be changed? If it can be changed does that not prove the original account wrong?⁶⁴

⁶² Value systems which claim to be objective (in the sense of not being based merely on subjective preference) are treated in Marx's work as alienated social products (see Chapter 1).

Preference appears to be independent of the individual subject because either it results from the views of the majority of society (as in Durkheim's "conscience collective") or of the majority of some powerful and influential subgroup (as in the "dominant ideology" thesis). In addition to this, if a dominant ideology, such a system must needs be represented as universal truth rather than sectional interest for political reasons, a point expanded upon in Chapter six.

⁶³ *op. cit. Anti-Dühring* pg 361.

⁶⁴ The problem occurs even with respect to natural science once practice is emphasised. Bacon says:

"In order to command nature we must first obey it".

These arguments occurred at the turn of the century in the exchanges between Lenin and Kautsky over the question of the inevitability of a revolution or the need for political activity.

More recently, Karl Popper in *The Poverty of Historicism* says:

"The social scientist may be striving to find truth; but, at the same time, he must always be exerting a definite influence upon society. The very fact that his pronouncements *do* exert an influence destroys their objectivity."⁶⁵

Popper believes that the theorist should always be an outside observer to the object of study.

Critical Theorists, on the other hand, believe exactly the opposite. Theorising, for them, is a hermeneutic process aimed at assessing the world from the point of view of the desire to change it (their point of departure being Marx's concept of practical-critical activity). They criticise "positivism" and in particular "positivistic" accounts of Marx which result in dogmatic, scientific theories which allow neither for subject error nor subjective intervention.

Engels is often regarded as the source of these views. They hold that while he understood dialectical relations within changing, organic social structures, he neglected the dialectical relation between the theorist and the object of study, placing the former outside of the latter.

That the relation of free will to determinism is still not understood in Marxist circles is evidenced by argument between critical theorists who stress subjective intervention and structuralists who stress the evolution of structures of social relations according to

- Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. F.H. Anderson, Bobbs-Merrill 1960, pg ..., Book One, Aphorism III.

This is a contradictory formulation. If we are obeying the laws of nature, how can we intervene to command it?

⁶⁵ *The Poverty of Historicism*, K. R. Popper, R.K.P. 1957 pg 16.

He doesn't believe this to be true of hypothetical statements since their truth is contingent upon the fulfillment of the initial conditions which may exclude the influence of the theory.

their laws of transformation and composition.

5.1.1. Means v ends as a solution

The problem is less formidable, however, if the question is divided into that of the relationship between knowledge and action concerning means and between knowledge and action concerning ends. With respect to ends: knowledge of our desires or goals which motivate us will not lead us to change those desires. By definition we will have no incentive (desire) to do so.⁶⁶ Knowledge of the appropriateness of the means used to achieve those ends, on the other hand, will affect our behaviour, it will make us more efficient at getting the things we want. A critical assessment of our conditions of existence, therefore, would consist of appraising the means in the light of our knowledge of the ends.

When we describe goals or tendencies, therefore, we are describing something that endures, that will not change as a result of our theories. When we describe the means, on the other hand, these are historically specific - the description is true for the time they are in use, i.e up to the point when we know better and change them. They can be changed without altering our view of the ultimate direction taken by our activities.

Popper is simply wrong, therefore, with respect to both ends and means, when he assumes that because theories influence action they undermine the objectivity of their own account.

Engels' statement is intelligible in the light of the above. Our social practices are means to the achievement of certain ends and can be critically assessed in relation to those ends provided that we can understand fully their consequences. Otherwise, our activities may have undesirable consequences at the collective level, whatever the intentions at the individual level.

⁶⁶ Where there is a conflict of ends we may repress one in favour of another. Although this complicates the picture, the general principle holds.

Similarly, with psychotherapy, it is our behavioural strategies for dealing with the world which we seek to change in the light of knowledge of our desires. Freudian methods, for instance, advocate sublimation rather than repression of desire, existential therapy seeks to extend the choice of behavioural strategies and behaviourism attempts to coerce the patient into different behavioural patterns. In each case the focus of action is on behaviour as a means to an end.

Ends, of course may also be means to more remote ends. For instance, if I rob a bank, the end is to obtain money but obtaining money is itself perhaps the means to help me retire in luxury in South America. Nevertheless, the fact that the end may be regarded as a means in another theoretical context, does not undermine the points made above. In any given theoretical framework, ends will be treated descriptively rather critically, i.e. will not be assessed in relation to some further goal beyond the issue considered. There is, therefore, nothing logically problematic about this procedure.

This does raise the question, however, of whether there is some ultimate set of human needs or goals to ground the regress of ends and means. In *The German Ideology*, Marx says:

"... we must begin by stating the first premise of human existence and, therefore, of all history, the premise, namely, that men must be in a position to live in order to "make history". But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things."⁶⁷

This has been taken as the basis of a theory of a hierarchy of needs. A dialectical treatment of human development, however, would suggest that since human development is an open ended process, no needs are immutable. Furthermore, needs will differ within any society between both social groups and individuals. Nevertheless, it would be true to say that basic needs based in human biology have existed since the beginning of history

⁶⁷ op. cit. *The German Ideology*, pg 48.

and are likely to remain over a very long period. These needs are also generalisable to all members of the species. This view, however, is complemented in Marx's work by his emphasis on the fact that it is the increasing complexity and diversity of need which characterises human life. Universalism, for him, does not stem from a levelling down to some minimal set of common characteristics, but from precisely the opposite, namely, interchangeability of social roles and hence of experience within a modern, complex, pluralistic society as we shall see in Chapter Seven.

5.1.1.1. Critical Theory and Structuralism

Structuralist Marxism takes as its point of departure the view that, in Marx's words:

Feuerbach resolves religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.⁶⁸

It claims that the epistemic subject of Marx's later works was not "man" in the abstract but the structure of social relations and the rules governing the transformation of one kind of society into another.

"Man", however, was not the subject of Marx's earlier works either. The quote above is part of a polemic in his early work directed against both the "Young Hegelians" and Feuerbach for doing just that. Marx's humanism concerns the possibility of making a society in which each individual is free to develop his or her potential to the full. These are concrete individuals, located in different places in a social structure, having different needs and capacities.

To suggest that Marx's later work does not contain this emancipatory element I think would be false and for structuralism to take this position would be to portray Marx's theory merely as a description of the laws governing social change rather than also as a means to bring it about.

⁶⁸ Theses on Feuerbach, K. Marx, thesis VI.

The structuralist method applied to a mode of production allows one to generate the set of logical possibilities for the forms that the mode might take given the institutional parameters that define it, e.g. commodity production, wage labour, etc. In principle it allows one to determine what, for instance, capitalism can and cannot be; can and cannot do.

Applied to history as a whole, however, the problem is different because the structural parameters which govern the transformation of modes of production cannot be any particular set of institutionalised practices. In Marx's work the constraining parameter of social change, such that it is, is the tendency to adopt practices that satisfy human need and realise human aspirations to the greatest extent. This alone governs the transition between modes of production. This, of course, whilst being an assertion of fact in the theory, is also a supposedly a "humanist" concern which brings us to the relationship between fact and value in Marx's work.

5.2. Fact/value

The /Fact value distinction is usually expressed in the form of the argument that no description of what is the case can determine whether a person approves or disapproves of the situation. Fact and value are separate orders of judgement such that one neither determines nor logically implies the other. This is the position as stated by David Hume.

Hegel, on the other hand, points out that when one positively evaluates something by saying that it "ought" to be so, the standpoint only makes sense if it also could be so as a matter of fact. It then follows that the only judgements of what ought to be the case that make sense are those that approve of what will in fact be the case at some future time. To will the future is the "true" ought for Hegel. A description of what ought to be is a description of what will be at some future date. Thus fact and value are not distinct.

Nevertheless, the subject in the world does not know for certain what the world will be like in the future and furthermore, his or her actions will help to shape that future. The

subjective view of value is that it is a matter of free choice or preference although equally we could treat choices or preferences people actually make objectively as matters of fact.

But if values can be treated factually, what is taken to be fact is not entirely independent of evaluation either. As my treatment of the dilemma of epistemology suggested what is accepted as the criterion of truth itself rests upon pragmatic choice, i.e. its relationship to human projects. However, projects express values or desirable ends hence this underdetermines our judgement of what is a fact.

Nietzsche, for instance, treats all theoretical systems as symptoms of a particular orientation to life, not as potential "truths". If one so desired one could always look at things differently. This viewpoint expresses the Protagorean doctrine "man is the measure".⁶⁹

The relationship between fact and value is thus dialectical. The question which we need to answer is how Marx's work is located within this dialectical relation? Marx's theories are couched in factual language and are mostly intended to be factual accounts. At the same time they are critiques of the existing system of social relations with a view to facilitate changing it.

The point of view from which Marx's critique is set up, however, is not arbitrary. Marx accepts the projects which men have taken upon themselves and which are expressed in their theoretical systems. His critique consists in showing how their practices undermine and fall short of these implied goals. Thus he suggests that though capitalism claims to make the society richer, it simultaneously impoverishes most of its citizens. The goal of improved welfare is not a value of Marx's invention but one which historically has always been able to achieve popular support. It is one current in the society in which he and indeed we live.

⁶⁹ Scepticism about "Truth" and indubitable foundations for knowledge is the basis of Post-modernist critiques (of which Post-structuralism is a species in so far as Structuralism is also regarded as "modernist").

Marx's view is similar to Hegel in this respect, he does not judge society from an absolute standpoint outside of it but treats values factually as immanent tendencies within it. Values are created by men in history and no other source of value is possible. Having said that, however, it is possible to judge men's practices in the light of these ends. The process is similar to the means-end distinction employed to elucidate the free will/ determinism dichotomy.

Although one might object that there are many and conflicting goals and values within society, Marx's dialectical view would suggest that a system which could permit the satisfaction of these ends simultaneously and without conflict would have priority as a goal. Only the "one-sidedness" of values brings approbrium from Marx's view, i.e. special pleading, selfishness and exclusivity. It is in the context of these dialectical perspectives then that Marx constructs his theory of historical change.

Part Two

Chapter Four

The Theory of History (1)

1. History as the evolution of systems

The analysis of human society is, at the abstract level, an analysis of systematic arrangements or totalities. Institutionalised behaviour patterns are the forms taken by social cooperation and it is the dynamics of their operation which governs social development. It is from this point of view that Marx elaborates his theory of history. The types of relationship which are characteristic of totalities are those of mutual causality i.e. dialectical relations. The dynamics of history are therefore analysed by Marx in these terms.

Although the elements of a system are interdependent the nature of the interaction between them can vary. Each element may act from an internal dynamic which is synchronised in some way to the imperatives of the system as a whole.¹ Under these circumstances there can be no conflict between the parts or disharmony within the system.

On the other hand, the dynamics of each element of the system may simply respond to external constraint and hence the dynamic of the system as a whole would then appear to be the accidental result of the external relations between the interdependent parts.

The history of all societies prior to communism presents us with development along the lines of the latter model. What follows therefore is a more detailed elaboration of this process.

¹ Durkheim's "conscience collective", for instance, is intended to play this role of synchronising social activity in his social theory.

Positivism and history

It may appear from the preceding paragraph, that I am representing Marx's theory of history as a theory about social relations understood as an independent, self-evolving *alien* structure which determines individual action. As such, it would be at odds with the discussion in the earlier chapters of alienated consciousness and of the religious as against the scientific approach to social phenomena.

There appears in fact to be a paradox in Marx's own work here, since on one hand he wishes to say that to represent social relations, which are social products, as an external force compelling men to act, is to represent them as God-like and as such is an illusion. On the other hand, he is also committed to saying that this is precisely the situation prior to communism and therefore to describe it as such is correct. Men under these circumstances are in fact slaves of their social products.

The difference between Marx's views and a positivist history, however, is that the latter raises to a metaphysical absolute what the former regards as a historical circumstance. For the positivist, alienation defines social relations per se. It becomes the paradigm of social existence. Marx's view, by contrast, includes the analysis of how men, as conscious subjects, come to understand and take control of their own society.

It is true that the emergence of an adequate social consciousness is itself analysed as a predictable and law-like process, (within limits), and so the whole process appears deterministic, but the willed activity of the subject, even if it is law-like cannot be said to be an alien constraint.² To act in accordance with one's will is to be free. In the last analysis therefore, it is this willed activity which has causal primacy in the theory and not the social product, i.e. social relations, as such.

The scenario is roughly as follows: in order to shape "alien" nature to human needs, men engage in production. Production implies the application of humanly developed

² *Logic* (part one of the encyclopedia), G. W. F. Hegel, section 158.

means; implements, skills, knowledge, forms of social cooperation etc., to the task. Apart from their limited utility in overcoming nature, these products are objects of nature in their own right and have their own characteristic patterns of "behaviour".

Human beings are, therefore, confronted with a second world of alien beings in their own products. In order not to be subjected to these as they were to nature, they have to attempt to understand and control this realm also.³ Since, however, this is the realm of their own life-activity, this is self-understanding and self-control.

Any theory which attempts to comprehend this realm, must necessarily be able to explain its own existence since it is also a part of the life-activity of the society and a means of overcoming alienation. This then raises the seeming paradoxes concerned with "self-creation" and the subject-object dialectic discussed in the previous chapter. In particular it raises the "Baconian paradox" of how if the world is law-governed it is possible to change it.⁴

1.1. Mutual causality in a dynamic context

We see in debates about whether mental events are the cause of material events or vice-versa, the problems which arise when it is assumed that only linear causation is possible and that there must be some "first cause" which determines everything else. Mutual determination thwarts the question which desires to know which is prior, seeming to answer, paradoxically, both and neither. Mutual causality is perfectly possible, however, in at least two respects.

First, when interacting elements of a system simultaneously condition each other's behaviour; for instance, in the case of capitalists and wage labourers (the characteristic

³ c.f. *Anti-Dühring*, F. Engels, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1976, pg 361 - cited in CH1 section 2.1.3

⁴ Bacon says that "In order to command nature we must first obey it" - op. cit. *The New Organon*, Book One, Aphorism III. The discussion of how one can create anything new whilst still obeying natural laws is discussed in the previous chapter.

behaviour of each is related to the behaviour of the other). Secondly, and for our purposes crucially, when the causation from A to B follows the causation from B to A in time, i.e. when we are dealing with a continuous process.

In this latter situation, if the action of each simply maintains the other in its existing form, or has no effect upon the form of the reciprocal action of the other, then we have a purely cyclical process which preserves the status quo, e.g. in the way an organism reproduces its own organs and the organs sustain the organism, (not taking into account growth).

If, on the other hand, the action of A on B changes the nature of the reciprocal action of B on A from what it was previously and similarly, for the action of B on A, then what we have is a system that evolves. Such a self-enclosed system of causes has both cyclical and linear properties. It can perhaps best be likened to a spiral. This dual character is summed up in the Heraclitan aphorism,

"The movement of the screw is straight and the movement of the screw is round."⁵

This kind of developmental dynamic is part of the structure of the fundamental processes of historical change.⁶ Substantive examples of the key processes will be given in the following sections.

1.1.1. Production and the division of labour

One such spiral is the relationship between volume of production and division of labour. For instance, in order for someone to specialise in a particular task, it is necessary that its performance should require something close to the average amount of social

⁵ *op. cit.* *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments*, ed. G. S. Kirk 1962.

⁶ Whilst Marx characterises these relations in terms of mutual determination, in some cases he also stresses "determination in the last instance" by one of the poles of the relation. I will discuss the logic of this below.

labour expected of the individual by other members of the group.

A Farrier in a community with only one horse would be regarded as not pulling his weight. As output grows, however, the volume of work at each particular task grows. Specialisation in small tasks then becomes feasible.

Increased production therefore permits increased division of labour without loss of man-hours to the community. Increased production is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of the division of labour. Since, as stated earlier, we cannot rely upon synchronised action⁷ as the means by which this development tends to occur historically, an individualistic explanation is required to fill the gap.

For the individual, specialisation in a particular skilled task might bring with it a number of advantages. Firstly, the contribution of that particular activity to the group might be that of a key element in the economy. Thus someone who is skilled at it might gain social leverage by making him/herself indispensable. Secondly, it isn't easy to quantify the contribution of someone whose activity is different from everyone else. It is therefore possible for that person to argue the case that less effort at this task makes the same contribution to the community as more effort at other tasks. In primitive societies (in terms of the development of productive forces), key skills such as "rainmaker" take on a mystique which gives their practitioners a relative advantage in the social division of labour.

Increased output, given these incentives, therefore, will give rise to an increase in the division of labour. Increase in the division of labour, however, gives rise to an increase in output since it makes production more efficient.⁸ Thus we have a dynamic of

⁷ such as might be brought about by a common understanding of the benefits of division of labour and consequent collective action.

⁸ Efficiency may increase because it is easier to become skilled at a smaller task hence the goods produced by the specialist will be more effective for the purpose for which they are used. It may also be the case, however, that a specialist has more time to study the productive process in which he is engaged and therefore more likely to invent new techniques.

The fact that other variables intervene in the spiral process doesn't render false the conclusion that this is a self-enclosed in the sense of a self-referring dynamic. Also, all the other vari-

expanding output and increasing division of labour as each responds to the other.⁹

In the history of mankind after the ice age, of course, we are discussing what was initially a slow and fragmented process but its effects can nevertheless be discerned. As early as 8,000 BC, 2,000 years before the river valley civilisation of Sumer, the city of Catal Hayuk in Anatolia specialised in the production of craft objects, - axes, mirrors, other edged tools, etc., made of Obsidian. This testifies to the degree of expansion and intercourse between the small agricultural settlements in Anatolia to make this possible.

A noticeable feature of history with respect to these movements is how in the course of time the the whole process speeds up. One of the reasons for this is possibly the way that consciousness intervenes in the process. Once the effect of certain kinds of practice are known, then if they give desirable results they will be consciously and actively pursued.

Knowledge increases the efficiency of action and thus speeds up the process of growth. Thus in the capitalist system, entrepreneurs actively search for a "gap in the market" i.e. a form of production in which to specialise, and the theorists of capitalism consciously advocate the increase in the division of labour, by the community, as a means of increasing output.¹⁰

By this stage the whole process has become conscious and institutionalised. This illustrates how consciousness can intervene in a historical process without altering its overall direction, since the goal of the process is the satisfaction of sensuous need, and what is affected here is only the means of achieving that goal.

ables are themselves involved in mutually enhancing spirals so that together they form a self-enhancing system.

⁹ See fig.1

¹⁰ Cf. "Taylorism", from *Scientific Management: comprising shop management, the principles of scientific management and testimony before the special house committee*, F.W. Taylor, Harper and Bros. 1911.

Another contributory factor to the speeding up of change, is that since in a system, changes in one particular area affect a wider set of circumstances than the thing that has been changed, new opportunities for development are opened up in other parts of the system affected by these output-enhancing changes.

This in turn produces an escalating chain reaction as each of these changes affects an even wider range of activities. The whole environment therefore becomes progressively more volatile until the dynamic just described ends up permeating every part of the system.

Clearly, the more changes taking place at any given time the faster the process of change in the system as a whole since the changes feed off each other. This process is enhanced considerably by the fact that as output and division of labour increases, the system becomes larger and more complex.

The effect of change, therefore, has consequences which increase in both number and diversity in the larger and more interconnected system. The rapidity of change in the capitalist system is connected to the size and complexity of this type of production. The rate of change in the system as a whole, therefore, speeds up until as Marx says:-

All that is solid melts into air etc.¹¹

1.1.2. Population

In *The German Ideology*, Marx says that production begins with an increase in population.¹² Presumably this necessitates the conscious attempt to control the environment in order to provide for the requirements of extra people from limited resources. Humans thus begin to actively produce their own means of subsistence.

¹¹ *The Communist Manifesto*, K. Marx and F Engels, Penguin Books 1967 pg 83.

¹² *op. cit. The German Ideology* pg. 42

He goes on to assert that this attempt to organise production entails definite forms of social organisation, i.e. relations of production, corresponding to the productive forces available. He continues:

"How far the productive forces of a nation are developed is shown most manifestly by the degree to which the division of labour has been carried. Each new productive force insofar as it is not merely a quantitative extension of productive forces already known causes a further development of the division of labour."

Population pressure produces the need to develop new productive forces and this in turn increases the division of labour.

One cannot guarantee that this kind of division of labour increases the efficiency of production. It doesn't involve the breaking down of tasks into smaller specialisations, it merely produces diversity of production method.

Diversity of production, on the other hand, may make an economy more stable, more flexible in its response to the needs of the population and less vulnerable to changes in the environment in which the production is carried out, all of which will tend to promote further population growth.¹³

This dynamic assumes a limited supply of the existing means of production in the face of expanding population, necessitating the discovery of new means. These new means are new technology in the broadest sense. I will deal with the dynamics involving technology in the next section.¹⁴

There is however, another spiral which operates when population expansion occurs under conditions where the means of production exist in *abundance* relative to the

¹³ See fig.2(b)

¹⁴ The division of labour involved here is *external* to the existing forms of production in the sense that a new form of production is added to them.

producers, i.e. for practical purposes they may be regarded as unlimited.

These conditions obtain when a new technology has been discovered but is as yet under-exploited. Under these circumstances, increased population leads to expansion of production, (since it increases the number of producers), and thus to an increase in output.

This, as we have seen, leads to an increase in the division of labour. Increased division of labour, (i.e. specialisation), produces greater efficiency and increases output per head. Increased output per head produces the material conditions which, unless totally offset by the maldistribution of wealth, lead to a further increase in population.¹⁵

Thus division of labour and population cause each other to increase via the mediation of output.¹⁶ This situation seems to have occurred on the Iranian Plateau some time before 9,000 b.c. amongst the first known agricultural communities. Settlements increased both in size and number and since there was a relative abundance of agricultural land spread out across the Iranian Plateau. This gave rise to the possibility of whole settlements specialising in craft manufactures such as occurred with the town of Catal Hayuk.¹⁷ Added to this, under conditions where large families are an insurance against not having enough labour to exploit the available resources there are positive incentives to population growth.

It can be seen from this discussion that the two spiral movements described occur in historical succession as a new method of production is progressively exploited and eventually becomes limited relative to the expanding population. This puts into perspective the viewpoint of Malthus, that population increase engenders a cyclical movement whereby wars and famine reduce the number of people until the process of expansion

¹⁵ See fig.2(a)

¹⁶ The division of labour here is *internal* to the existing means of production in the sense that no new form of production is involved only the subdivision of tasks within the existing forms.

¹⁷ We see a similar cellular division with respect to pastoral communities in the biblical story of Lot.

begins again.¹⁸ Malthus's problems occur only at the end of a period of development based on certain methods of production and as the first discussion indicated, even then can be overcome by technological innovation.¹⁹

It is interesting at this point to contrast Malthus's theory with the analysis put forward by Lenin in *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Lenin suggested that the world after the turn of the century had been totally divided up into "economic spheres of influence" by the advanced capitalist nations and that the expansionary dynamic of each capitalist nation could only continue at the expense of each others economic interests./** The difference between this theory and Malthus's, however is that the barrier to production in this situation is not scarcity of the means of production but the internal barrier of the lack of purchasing power by the majority of the consumers.²⁰ What is required to sustain the capitalist system, therefore, is new consumers who are not wage labourers for capitalism itself.

Since the world is divided up, there are no external consumers. As a consequence, capitalist nations attempt to "dump" their surplus goods on each other's markets. As for the question of resources, since competitiveness is affected by the cheapness of raw materials, and raw materials which are owned are cheaper than those acquired on the open market, there is a struggle to control those areas where these resources are to be had. The limit in this situation is lack of consumers relative to supply, not the other way round. Increased productivity tends to worsen the situation rather than solve the problem unlike in the "Malthusian problem". Technology is not the answer in this case, rather, some of the means of production have to be destroyed.

¹⁸ *An Essay in the Principle of Population*, Thomas Malthus, printed for J. Johnson, 1906.

¹⁹ See fig.3

¹⁹ V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1975, pp 89-103.

²⁰ For a fuller description of the theory of underconsumption (overproduction), c.f. CH8 section 1.1.1.1

1.1.3. Technology

New Technology, in so far as it increases productivity per head, releases surplus labour and makes possible the satisfaction of new needs. This leads, other factors permitting, to new forms of production and productive activity. In turn this engenders both a reorganisation of production as a whole, since it alters the demands upon labour, raw materials and capital, and also poses problems for the organisation of the new activity itself. These new production problems then engender further technological developments to provide solutions.

There are two types of spiral involved in this situation, a shorter one involving the reorganisation of existing kinds²¹ of production and new technology which engender each other, and a larger one between new kinds of production and new technology (mediated by the need for reorganisation as well as the release of surplus labour).

An example of the shorter process can be seen in the cotton industry in the late 18th and the 19th century. Kay's "Fly Shuttle" speeded up the weaving process which produced a bottleneck since the spinning industry could not produce enough yarn to keep pace. The problem was solved via the invention of a series of spinning machines, the Jenny, the Water Frame and the Mule. This reversed the problem. Now the weaving industry could not use the excess yarn.²² In turn the invention of the Power Loom reversed the situation again. At each stage there was massive unemployment due to the introduction of the machines but some of this at least was in the long term diverted into other kinds of production.

An example of the longer process can be seen in the situation after machinery was introduced into agriculture. The displacement of labour into new kinds of production is illustrated by the fact that workers were forcibly shipped from agricultural parishes to the

²¹ Kinds of product rather than methods of production.

²² Cf. "Early Factory Development in the West Riding of Yorkshire 1770-1800", in *Textile History and Economic History*, Manchester University Press 1973, pg 249.

expanding towns where labour was in relative short supply. This in turn made possible the expansion of new industries and the development of new technologies.²³

1.2. Conflict, crisis and new technology

New technology can create crises by causing dislocations in the productive process as we have seen, and also, in capitalism for other reasons e.g. the tendency to depress the rate of profit. In a competitive society, it can also be the source of conflict as a result of the crises engendered. Examples of this are numerous. "The swing riots of the late 18th century would be a domestic example.

Internationally, wars provoked by trading advantages or general recessions are often the result of prior technological changes. The industrial revolution, for instance, led to the conquest, often by force, of lucrative trade outlets. The technological growth of the German economy is said by some to have caused the attempt to wrest colonial markets from the other imperialist powers in the First World War,** and the Second World War followed on the heels of a major recession. Technological change can disturb the balance of power as well as disrupt the coordination of the division of labour.

But if technological change can create crises and conflicts (in the context of antagonistic economic relations), it also results from them. In the conflict with the working classes, workers occupying key positions in the economic process can be outmanoeuvred by a reorganisation of that process. This particularly applies to skilled workers whose jobs can be de-skilled by the evolution of new techniques.

Warfare is generally acknowledged as a stimulus to technology, and technological development is particularly rapid in periods of war. Finally crises as we have seen also act as a stimulus to the invention of new technologies to afford an escape from them. In

²³ See fig.4

²³ cf. Henry Noel Brailsford, *War of Steel and Gold*, London, G. Bell, 1914.

capitalism this takes the form of the individualistic motive to cheapen costs, although such things as alternative energy sources etc. might be pioneered by government in a situation of extreme shortage. There is, therefore, a spiral relationship not only between reorganisation and diversification and new technology, but also between conflict and crisis and new technology.²⁴

These latter considerations are part of a more general issue. They pose the problem of the relationship of antagonistic social relations to the development of the productive forces. So far we have been discussing these relations from their productive aspect, their tendency to promote growth, albeit sometimes through the mediation of destructive episodes. But this view of the spiral movement is too simple, for a fuller picture we need to examine the destructive aspect of the movement.

2. Division, conflict and uneven development

In the section on dialectical oppositions in the discussion of the logic of dialectics, the example used is that of the parent-child relation.²⁵ In that instance we were discussing the relation between the concepts which represent the being or identity of the real object. The discussion of dialectical relations within an evolving system presents us with the same type of situation in a dynamic context.

What a thing is is to be understood, according to Marx, in terms of the characteristic way in which it manifests itself, i.e. the way in which it interacts with other things.²⁶ This gives us a method of transition from identity or "essence" to "action" and the analysis of processes.

In the parent-child example the concept of "parent" implies the relation to the child and therefore has the whole relation as its content. Similarly with the concept "child". In

²⁴ See fig.5(a), fig.5(b) and fig.5(c).

²⁵ CH3 footnote 12.

²⁶ cf. CH2 2.1.1

the context of "action", the parent can only act as "parent" with the compliance of the child. If the child should run away, for instance, then the parent would not be able to carry out his or her parental duties. Similarly for the child. If the parent-child relation is regarded as a simple social system, then the whole system is involved in the action of each of its elements, just as before the whole relation was involved in the identity of each of its elements. The action of each, therefore, is the combined action of the whole.

Each element, however, has its own dynamic. Each element may be regarded as a sub-system, the causes governing its development may simply apply to each other, thus forming a totality in themselves.

We have seen in the section on "Organic Causality" how even when such a system exists, and this system accounts for the direction of the organism's development, still there may be other, enabling inputs from outside of the system as well. Organisms require raw material, food etc., to transform into their own living material. Whether the environment is conducive or not, therefore, affects their growth.

In a similar way, the self-enclosed dynamic of each pole of the relationship we are considering requires the *compliance* of the opposite pole, even though the dynamic of the pole itself as a spiraling system of mutual cause and effect is not *determined in its direction* by the opposite pole. Its relation to the other pole is as to an external constraint on its progress. Focusing upon the poles, therefore, one can discern the principle or law which governs the action of each of them by considering its internal dynamic in isolation (*ceteris paribus*). However, things are not necessarily equal. Indeed, in certain kinds of system it is necessarily the case that the behaviour of each of the elements will not be supportive to the dynamic of the other elements. Since each relates to the others as to an external constraint, this implies a conflict within the system.

In any organic system, the parts and their modes of action are both created and sustained by the system as a whole. If the system manifests itself in conflicting processes this shows its identity to be self-divided, the unity of an action and its negation, a so-

called "material contradiction".²⁷

The situation just described is one of ongoing conflict. However, the contradiction is posed at its sharpest form under conditions where neither of the conflicting elements can accommodate the other to any degree at all, a situation where, for instance, each in order to survive must immediately realise its ends. Since these ends are mutually exclusive of one another, only one can succeed. For the system as a whole this produces a destructive dilemma. Two processes each of which play an essential role in the system cannot survive except on the condition that the other is destroyed. Whichever process is preserved the result is the same, destruction of the system as a whole.

One might, for instance, envisage a situation in the capitalist system where the rate of profit is almost too low to act as an incentive to production. Two conflicting imperatives operate within the capitalism to preserve the profit making process without which the system would cease to function. First, unless the system continually expands, profit for the system as a whole cannot be taken.²⁸ Secondly, If the system continually expands and profit accumulates as capital, then the rate of profit, (which is the actual incentive for production), will be depressed.²⁹ In the situation described above, stagnation of the system would destroy profit by virtue of the first mechanism, expansion of the system would destroy it by virtue of the second. Contradictions, therefore, may act as a stimulus to development as in the spirals described earlier, but they can also, under certain circumstances, be the source of its destruction.

²⁷ It is worth pointing out at this point that the empiricist model of a causal law would not permit us to draw the above conclusions i.e. that the action of the system as a whole can be described by conflicting laws. If a law is to be understood as being verified, or not falsified, when specified set of antecedent conditions are observed and a predicted set of consequences are observed to follow, then two laws or principles which state the same set of antecedent conditions but different, mutually exclusive consequences, cannot both be verified. Hence they cannot both describe the action of the object. The "ceteris paribus" condition may allow us to escape from falsification. However, as I have argued earlier in Chapter 3, causal laws cannot be specified in this way and circumstances which are specified by neither can be taken as a verification of both.

²⁸ c.f. op. cit. *Communist Manifesto*, pg. 83.

²⁹ c.f. CH8 section 1.1.1.2

The crises which figure in the theory of history are mainly situations arising from uncoordinated development of the elements of a system. In some cases this is a result of the quasi-separate existence of the individual processes that comprise the system, in other cases it is the direct result of a tendency towards polarisation.³⁰

In both cases what occurs is that the relations of interdependency are strained by the lack of synchrony between the poles. This causes a crisis and either a rapid and more or less violent re-adjustment of the system or its total failure. We have already seen this process occur in the example of developments between the spinning and weaving industries.

Hegel's concept of quantitative change leading to sudden qualitative change is relevant here because changes in the operating environment of some element of a system will only become critical beyond a certain point when the affected part will be forced to respond. A period of sudden change will then follow.

It is because of the uneven development and the external relations between the parts of social systems that developments in history and particularly in the capitalist period have had a spasmodic character. Antagonistic modes of production engender crises because they lead to polarisation. Uncoordinated division of labour leads to crises because it would be highly fortuitous and unlikely that any synchrony would occur except through the agency of crisis.

We see in Marx's analysis how dislocations occur between the economic base and the political superstructure and between forces and relations of production leading to a rapid adjustment of the latter in so-called "revolutionary" periods. Changes in the fortunes of groups in the division of labour undermine the political and legal relations

³⁰ The distinction between these causes is by no means trivial. In the case of Marxist analyses of the capitalist economy, it is the point at issue between "neo-harmonists" who believe that capitalism could be stabilised if the proportions of goods exchanged could be synchronised properly and "overproductionists" who believe that polarisation is a necessary feature of the system. For a fuller discussion, see *The Making of Marx's Capital*, Roman Rosdolski, Pluto Press, London 1977, Ch. 7 pp. 406-504.

between them, leading to a reorganisation of the "peck order" usually by means of conflict.

Marx's analysis of the capitalist economy also makes use of this model. As soon as use-value and exchange-value, which are aspects of the commodity, become physically separated in the money system, then the possibility, or rather the probability, exists that the imperatives corresponding to each will come into conflict. Similarly with the two aspects of exchange, purchase and sale, which become separated by the money transaction.

The seeming contradiction in Marx's account of base-superstructure relations between suggesting on one hand, that there is a necessary correspondence between them, and on the other, that the base develops faster than the superstructure, provoking crisis, is thus explained by this model also. In the first case he is describing the relations of interdependence, in the second, the process by which they develop out of synchrony with each other leading to re-adjustment.

This illustrates the Marxian version of the Hegel-type analysis. One-sided conceptualisation becomes physical separation and conflict between the opposed dynamics. Synthesis is a form of coordination which can preserve the humanly valuable elements in the action of the opposed functions. Now we can return to the more substantive topics we were discussing earlier.

2.1. Relative limits

In the section on population, a cycle or spiral of development was described whereby a new method of production permits economic expansion under conditions of relative abundance of the means of production upon which the method is based. Expansion continues until these resources become scarce relative to demand. A period of increasing conflict will then follow as competing groups struggle for control of the limited resources in order to continue to expand, often expropriating them from each other.³¹

³¹ In a society based upon exploitative social relations, there will be principally three interrelated spheres of conflict: between the exploiter and the exploited for the division of the social pro-

The problem of scarcity can be solved by new production techniques which require different means of production thus beginning a new cycle of expansion based upon a new division of labour.

If the new method of production is of such a fundamentally different kind that it necessitates changes in the principal relations of production, i.e. the form of domination exercised by a ruling class, the method of appropriating the surplus and consequently the form of distribution, then the life cycle of this new technique corresponds to the life cycle of what Marx refers to as a "mode of production".

We see from a study of the development of manufacturing that the existence of a fundamentally new method of production will pre-date the period of its initial rapid expansion. Manufacturing develops within the context of the feudal system prior to its expansion in the sixteenth century. In a similar way, agrarian experiments amongst hunter-gatherers must have pre-dated the expansion of small agricultural communities. The period of relatively unlimited expansion therefore initiates a new historical epoch but is not co-terminus with the development of the new technique on which it is based.³²

The question of what it is that "limits" the expansion of the economy based on a new technique is an important one because everywhere such a limit is encountered the society will begin to exhibit the features characteristic of the later stage of the cycle rather than those of the former. The limits encountered by an expanding system are not usually absolute limits. They can be relative in at least three different ways. Firstly, they

duct, between exploiters for the right to exploit and between the exploited for the right to be exploited and hence to survive. All these dimensions of conflict intensify when resources become scarce.

³¹ New technologies within a mode of production will, however, also produce "mini-cycles" of the same kind for those who attempt to exploit them.

³² It should be further noted that the point in time at which the relations of production are transformed does not necessarily occur either when the new technique is implemented or when it begins to become dominant. It depends upon which feature in the new method is responsible for the change and at what point this feature begins to assert itself. Some of the crucial features of capitalism for instance are conditioned by the scale and rapidity of change of this method of production. These changes only take effect at a relatively mature stage of the emergence of this system.

can be relative to a particular method of production as we have seen. Here new techniques overcome the problem. Secondly, they can be relative to the rate of expansion of the economy, and thirdly relative to the ease of obtaining means of production by other methods such as theft or warfare. All these situations cause resources to be regarded as if they are finite for all practical purposes.

We see present day examples of limits to the expansion of the economy in three impending crises, namely, the shortage of raw materials, in particular energy reserves, the threat of pollution, and the threat of nuclear war.³³ The first is a good example of a limit relative to the rate of expansion of the economy and the latter two, though a result merely of the scale of production are worth discussing because they approximate to the destructive dilemma situation described above.

The shortage of raw materials, it should be noted, is not the result of the resources having been gradually used up over the years. Rather it is the case that production has increased exponentially over the latter part of the century such that the demand for raw material is increasing faster than the ability to find and develop new resources. Resources are scarce relative to the rate of increase in demand.

In absolute terms, there are ample resources. Two thirds of the world is under water and the resources of the sea bed have been exploited hardly at all. These latter resources, however, are more difficult to extract which raises the possibility of regarding the limit as a relative one in the third sense as well as the second.

As the century progresses, one would expect sharpening tensions over possession of resources (although the recession has slowed this process down). The third sense in which resources are regarded as finite involves a weighing of cost against benefit between the alternatives of developing a resource oneself and trying to take it from someone else. Resources can be regarded as limited in this sense at any point in the life cycle of their

³³ For an extended discussion of these contradictions c.f. CH8 section 1.2.3

use and the same consequences follow from such a situation as if the limit was absolute. Limitation relative to the rate of increase in demand is an example of a situation where one pole of a relation, i.e. demand, expands faster than the other pole, i.e. supply, thus straining to crisis point the relation of interdependence between them and threatening the whole system.

In the case of pollution and nuclear war the situation is not simply one in which the poles of a relation develop in a non-synchronised way relative to each other, but where these related processes are actually in conflict with each other. Again it is the rapidity in the growth of industrial production which has increased both the power to pollute and to destroy. The ecological system supports the productive activities of men. These activities in turn make possible pollution and destruction on a scale which will destroy the ecology of the planet. Indeed the dynamics of capitalism engender these destructive tendencies. War has always destroyed some of the productive forces but now, through the destruction of the ecological system, it can destroy them all.

This is a dynamic of self-destruction. The case is similar with pollution if it continues. This situation has similar formal properties to the destructive dilemma outlined earlier. If the destructive tendencies continue then essential elements of the system will be destroyed. The question is whether wars and pollution are themselves also essential elements in the development of the capitalist system, because if they are and they cannot be removed without destroying the system then the dilemma is complete.

It may seem that in the period of expansion of an economic system when the means of production exist in relative abundance no limits will be encountered and thus there will be no conflict. This is sometimes but not necessarily the case.

A concrete example might be the dispersion of settlers into the western part of the U.S.A. (Indians notwithstanding). There does not seem to have been any conflict between the settlers. The nearest example of conflict is the range wars between farmers and ranchers. This probably occurred when the available land had been already mostly converted to

range, since it is unlikely that settlers would deliberately fence off ranges if there were alternative sites.

On the other hand, the limitation to the available land could have been relative in the sense that alternative land was not as good or difficult to farm for other reasons. The ranchers for their part may have refused to move for the reason that in a competitive society it is necessary to prevent others from taking what you have.

One imagines that the dispersion of the early agricultural communities across the Iranian plateau was probably relatively conflict free in the same way, although Engels in "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State", suggests that as soon as labourers can produce more than mere subsistence, then raids between communities, the taking of slaves and the gradual emergence of a class of warriors that regard labour as the activity of a lower class may begin to emerge.

Another scenario is possible however. If a new method of production emerges from a system in which power and wealth has become centralised in the hands of rival factions and conflicts have sharpened in the latter phase of the previous cycle, then the antagonisms engendered are not necessarily dispelled by the relatively easier economic climate which follows. The reasons for this are twofold. First, new means of production, although not scarce, enhance the power of erstwhile rivals and, should a new limit be reached on the basis of the new technology, that power would become a threat.

Secondly, the wealth accumulated in the previous era might prove a more tempting prize than any new resource that could be developed, therefore no state can let its rivals become too powerful. Conflict is therefore likely to arise over the potential productivity of a resource rather than its actual productivity.

This phenomenon can be seen at times of imperialist expansion when land is seized and defended irrespective its actual yield of wealth.³⁴ At the same time, whilst this

³⁴ c.f. *Rhodesia: White Racism and Imperial Response*, Martin Loney, Penguin 1975, pp 29-36.

expansion is taking place actual productive resources are treated as limited. They are contested over on the basis of the principle that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush". What has already been developed is of proved value and is of significance in terms of the rivalry. What has not yet been developed is for the future and is not as significant. European powers were prepared to trade whole continents in the new world for small European possessions at the beginning of their expansion into this area. The system is always therefore relatively closed in this sense.

Relative closure creates three principal tendencies: the intensification of social antagonisms, the discovery of new techniques and the tendency towards the centralisation of wealth and power. The extent of the pressure towards the realisation of these societal results depends upon the extent to which the closure of the system cannot be circumvented.

2.2. Centralisation and Decentralisation

Marx states in many places that the tendency of capital is towards concentration and centralisation in a few hands. In *Capital* volume 1 he gives the reason as follows:

"This expropriation [of capitalists by other capitalists] is accomplished by the action of the immanent laws of capitalist production itself, by centralisation of capital. One capitalist always kills many"³⁵ (my parentheses)

This explanation holds good, however, not just for capitalism but for any mode of production which involves competition for the possession of private property. The wealthy always have advantages over the less wealthy.

Feudalism, for instance, began with small kings and ended up with the whole territory of Europe owned by just a few families. The Greek city states began as independent entities but ended up as part of the Spartan or Delian leagues, dominated economically

³⁵ *op. cit.* *Capital*, Vol. 1, Ch. 32, pg 927.

and politically by Sparta and Athens respectively. Economic and political centralisation seems to take place in all competitive modes of production.

It also appears from this, however, that it is equally the case that *decentralisation* of wealth and power must take place between modes of production since each starts out with small scale private property. Engels, in "Outlines of a critique of political economy",³⁶ talks about the *restoration* of monopoly by capitalism. This is because small scale capitalist private property took the place of Feudal monopolies only to re-establish monopoly again through its own dynamic. There seems to be a cyclical pattern, therefore, between the centralising and decentralising tendencies for each economic epoch.

2.3. Centralisation

I will deal more specifically with the mechanisms of centralisation under three headings: "competitive centralisation", "administrative centralisation" (i.e. to meet the needs of administration) and centralisation as a response to external threat.

2.3.1. Competitive centralisation

As soon as economic systems are efficient enough to produce a surplus product over and above the minimum subsistence for the workers, there is an incentive for the extension of hegemony by any ruling class over the largest possible amount of the means of production in order to appropriate the largest possible surplus. However, the extent to which this accumulation, should it occur, also represents a centralisation of wealth and consequently of power in the hands of fewer and fewer people, depends upon whether or not the means of production are in relative abundance or shortage relative to potential producers.

³⁶ "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy" in op. cit. *E.P.M.* Appendix, pg 165.

In a closed system (in the sense of limited resources) the stronger parties will incorporate the resources of the weak until only a few, sometimes only two, economic and political entities remain. In an open system, however, producers will constantly escape from the dominance of would be rulers and set up in economic and political opposition since the resources from which to do this exist in relative abundance.

This is where the concept of a relative limit comes into play. The degree of centralisation and the intensity of the centralising process depend upon whether the potential for expansion encounters a limit. If the limit is only a question of the ease of appropriating resources and subordinating other producers as against developing new resources oneself, then beyond a certain point of centralisation with its attendant subordination and exploitation, producers will begin to "bleed" from the system. The external difficulties associated with the underdeveloped resources will be preferable to living in an exploitative system.

Russia and Poland experienced this problem in the 16th and 17th centuries when large numbers of workers escaped serfdom to live with the Cossacks in the south. The diaspora westwards in the U.S.A. was fueled by similar motives as was the immigration to America itself.

Where small producers go the large producers follow, however. In America for instance the large corporations followed the pioneers and subordinated them once more (except for those that had grown rich rapidly enough to be large capitalists themselves). The incorporation of smaller producers by the larger ones takes place most rapidly however, when new resources are exhausted, (in America when the frontier reached the Pacific Ocean).

Capitalism progresses in exactly the same fashion in the cycles of boom and slump, although the limit to the development of new resources is here provided by the market. In the expansionary phase of the cycle, small capitalist enterprises spring up attempting to cater for new needs in an expanding economy, these "pioneers" or at least the ones that

are successful, are then taken over by large corporations.

The real process of centralisation begins, however, when the rate of profit starts to decline and there are insufficient markets to retain profitability. The small firms then go out of business and the large firms merge or take one another over. Since these large firms can survive the crisis, the "frontier" of small capitalists becomes a less significant factor in the economy relative to the larger and fewer corporations cycle by cycle. Economic power in the system thus becomes increasingly centralised.

A historical example of competitive centralisation under conditions of finite resources is that of the Greek city states of the classical period. The Hellenic peninsula has a "backbone" of mountains into which are cut small fertile plains. Each of these plains originally supported a number of independent city states. As they prospered and population grew, so they were brought into conflict with each other over the possession of agricultural land. Eventually one city came to dominate each plain, which meant in effect that although the plain did not produce any more food, now, only the ruling class of one city was appropriating the surplus. The dominant city needless to say grew in wealth and power.

Then the same situation arose between plains until the lesser ones were joined on unfavourable economic terms to the stronger. Eventually there were just two "super-powers" Athens at the head of the Delian league and Sparta at the head of the Spartan league. Athens by this time, however, had advanced technologically and was producing craft products which it traded for food with Egypt. This did not reduce the need to dominate other states, however, because this arrangement made it dependent on its trading partners and so spread the sphere in which it needed to exercise control overseas as well. The result of the rivalry between the leagues as we know was the Peloponnesian war which ruined them both.

2.3.2. Administrative centralisation

Having said that property based on a new form of production begins as small private property and gradually centralises, it is necessary to qualify this by looking at several notable exceptions and to elucidate a second factor governing the centralisation process which has consequences for the extent to which it can progress.

Early in the feudal period, "Charlemagne", established an empire across Western Europe. That empire, however, subsequently disintegrated into smaller states after his death. Alfred the Great, on the other hand, a king obviously styling himself on Charles a century later, managed to unite the kingdoms of England and this economic and political unit survived him. Similarly, in the classical period, Alexander the Great established an empire which included an area around the Mediterranean sea and a substantial part of the Near East stretching as far as Northern India. This empire also broke into smaller kingdoms after his death whereas the equally extensive Roman empire, reaching its full extent four hundred years later, remained viable for almost half a millennium after that.

The empires of Charlemagne and Alexander represent early political centralisation by conquest based on a certain mode of production and I would argue were inherently unstable political entities compared with the later cases of England and the Roman empire based on the same mode of production respectively.

A number of factors affect the stability of a centralised system. First there is the question of how efficient the mechanism is for making the surplus product available to the central authority. The central authority must create for itself forces strong enough to subdue any power base existing within its realm which might rebel or secede. For this it requires taxation.

It is a chicken and egg situation. Taxes buy soldiers and bureaucrats, soldiers and bureaucrats make it possible to collect taxes. Mutual causality however, is a characteristic of evolutionary processes and each of these things enhance the development of the other. Under these circumstances one would expect centralisation to occur gradually,

although exceptional historical circumstances may allow more rapid development.

Once such a self-funding centralised system has been established, however, it exhibits stabilising characteristics. Principally it seems to be the case that any ambitious person who is strong enough to resist the central authority will also be strong enough to try take control of it. Provincial power bases therefore, will tend to be used by ambitious men as springboards to take control of the whole system rather than to hive off part of it as a smaller independent system. The whole system is the richer prize. It follows that centralisation must take place over a period of time by small increases so that conquests can be consolidated. Only then do the larger properties become viable economic and political units. Alexander's and Charlemagne's empires were too large and were conquered too rapidly to be consolidated. Only the personal qualities and reputations of these men could hold them together.

Secondly, there is the degree to which the economy of the area to be consolidated is integrated or composed of self-sufficient units. If the economy forms an integrated unity, then secession of part of it means a loss for everyone, if not it can easily be dissociated. Whether the seceding part loses or gains of course depends on how ruthlessly it is being plundered in favour of the central authority. An integrated economy however, can provide a strong incentive to maintain it as a single unit.

Cromwell's economic unification of the Scottish and English economies had created sufficient prosperity to prevent the lowland Scots from "rocking the boat" by supporting the Stuart claims to the throne in 1745. Integration of the economy in turn will require coordinating functions to be performed centrally and therefore necessitate centralisation. This consideration comes into play when unification comes about by alliance or merger rather than by conquest. Alexander's empire on the other hand was easily dissociated into its component parts.

Thirdly, external threat will necessitate the centralising of resources on a sufficient scale to meet the threat. This may force petty rulers to submit to a central authority to

ensure their mutual survival. All these factors work together.

Alfred's kingdom was smaller than Charlemagne's. The merchant classes supported him because unifying the country promoted trade between different areas. A healthy economy for the merchants in turn meant a full exchequer, a prerequisite for centralising power. The external threat from the Danes lasted for the next two hundred years, necessitating a strong Saxon army. This also relied on the exchequer in the last analysis and the establishment of a single dynastic rule prevented internal squabbles weakening the Saxon cause against the common threat. This situation was consolidated by the time the Norman's centralised the system even further.

Charlemagne's empire by contrast was too large to build an efficient tax gathering system in his lifetime. Although the court moved from place to place and he had inspectors to check on his dukes, no successor without the benefit of his military abilities and reputation could have held on to so vast an area with this arrangement.

Alexander's conquests took place in such a short space of time that the administration of these countries was virtually the same by the time of his death. The Roman empire on the other hand grew over two hundred years in which the provinces were systematically plundered to enrich Rome. Although the wealth itself created problems the aspiration of ambitious provincial governors was always to become Emperor in Rome not to secede (at least not until the empire's collapse).

This brings us to the question of the second factor governing the process of centralisation mentioned at the start of this section. As an economic system which is based upon competition expands to take in extra units of production, it will also require extra administrative apparatus to oversee their operation, but not in the same proportion.

If, for instance, a state consisting of productive forces of a certain size were to add to itself a province of approximately the same productive capacity, it would have duplicated its productive forces. It would not, however, simply be required to duplicate its administration. If it simply duplicated the administration in the new province, there

would in effect be two administrations with the possibility of conflict between them and the danger of secession. There would also be no coordination or integration of their economies. As the number of productive units increase, one cannot simply add an administrative structure of the same kind as all the other units, the hierarchy must also get "taller". In a competitive system there is always the question of "who guards the guards". Both with respect to coordination and central control, therefore, a higher, more centralised level of bureaucracy must be added. In general, the broader the productive "base" of a system, the taller the administrative hierarchy needed to maintain centralised control of it. The alternative is at best a loose federated structure, at worst the disintegration of the system.

Expansion of a system based on competitive relations, therefore, involves a dynamic whereby the central administration must expand faster than the productive base, because it not only keeps pace "laterally" but also gets "taller". Beyond a certain size, therefore, administrative costs will outstrip the surplus product available to pay for them. This is another example of a situation in which one pole of a relation develops faster than the other endangering the relation of dependence between them. There is, therefore, for any technological level and given rate of surplus production, a limit to how far a system can expand and maintain central control.

If the dynamic which causes the system to expand is not coordinated with needs of administration, it will push the system beyond this point into crisis. This was probably the main factor at work in the eventual collapse of the Roman Empire.³⁷

³⁷ Other factors include the fact that Western Europe had a sparse population distributed in a large area, which produced long borders to defend with only a small amount of agricultural production within them to defray the costs.

Also, the Germanic tribes along that border increased in size and number over time increasing military costs even further. Increased production within those boundaries, however, may have worsened the situation since central administration would have to cope with controlling the power of governors who would become richer thereby.

attempts at centralisation of power by the king in England under successive "Angevin" monarchs (who held more land in France than the French king) resulted in political upheavals. The most notable of these was king John's encounter with the barons at Runnymede where the principle bone of contention was the king's unlimited right to extract taxes for the exchequer. Richard I had had problems in raising money from time to time and Henry II problems in regularising the administration of the law.

In a period of economic prosperity, however, the increased surplus will permit a greater degree of centralised power providing the ruler can take possession of the surplus. At such times, on the other hand, the rulers peers also become stronger and will attempt to increase their own wealth and power. Such periods in a competitive system are therefore predisposed towards power struggles.

Periods of economic crisis provoke conflict because there is less property to share amongst the class of proprietors. This tends to produce fewer owners with the winners taking over the property of the losers. Prosperity on the other hand can produce the same effect although this time property will polarise within the existing class.

If the surplus is large enough and polarisation is taken beyond a certain point, it will be possible for the winner of the competitive struggle to build a bureaucracy and establish himself as an absolute ruler. A good example of this in the late middle ages is the rise of absolutism in England. The hierarchy thus becomes "taller" and the class subdivides.

The first "Wars of the Roses" began at a time of economic crisis and tension. The "Black Death" killed a third of the working population which led to less income for the nobility and revolts by the hard pressed peasants who were expected to make up the deficit. Although plunder from the hundred years war offset the losses to some extent and focused attention abroad still the times remained unstable until the end of the 14th century.

The second "Wars of the Roses", however, took place a century later at a time of unprecedented prosperity. The increase in production in the 15th century laid the basis for the expansion of trade in the 16th century. In these wars, ambitious barons fought to control and later to become monarch because the king was at first a minor then later an unpopular monarch with disputed title to the throne.

The wars, however, weakened the barons sufficiently for the victorious Henry VII to subordinate them completely and establish himself as absolute monarch at the head of a bureaucratic machine. Increased prosperity not only permits the centralising of power, therefore, it necessitates it through competition.

2.3.3. Centralisation as a response to external threat

We saw earlier how the existence of an external threat assists the process of concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a central authority. As soon as one state has achieved this centralisation, however, it becomes a threat to all the rest of its competitors due to the resources which it has at its disposal. They are forced therefore either to attempt to centralise power themselves or to succumb to external domination. In this way the world tends to follow the leader and the economic and political entities in the world are bound to become larger and fewer.

A contemporary example of this can be seen in the logic advanced by pro - E.E.C. politicians that only an economic and political unit of this size will have the resources to compete both economically and politically with the super-powers. The E.E.C.'s central budget permits ventures such as the European space programme and it has become necessary for European countries to cooperate on arms production and civil aviation etc.

2.3.3.1. Unity and Kingship

Group decisions within centralised organisations imply some element of bureaucratic control and the bureaucratic principle requires a single authority to have ultimate power over executive decisions. A "monarch", therefore, is the logical head of a bureaucratic system. Where centralisation occurs via alliance due to external threat, (threat from a subject class is an external threat to a ruling class), then the relation between the allies and the executive power is important.

Alliances, particularly for the purpose of warfare, are stronger if there is a single, acknowledged leader. This is because troops who owe allegiance to different leaders within an alliance will behave as rivals³⁸ and differences between the leaders can cause conflict between the troops. A single executive power provides a mechanism for settling divisive disputes within the ruling group. The greater the external threat, the more dangerous is internal division. Agreement to obey a single authority entails members of the ruling group relinquishing some of their personal power to the central authority but this is the price which is paid for ensuring internal cohesion and discipline. (This power may not always be relinquished voluntarily in the first instance).

There is a tendency, therefore, for ruling classes, both because of the threat from other ruling classes and the threat from their own subject classes, to foster a cult of leadership. "The leader" produces unity and is treated as if he/she embodies the ideals of the organisation or movement.

Identification with a cause can also act as a unifying force but where potential antagonism between the allied forces is great, a strong executive is required, essentially to protect them from themselves. The extent to which obedience to leaders is thought important reflects the extent to which the rule of a class depends upon the existence of a

³⁸ An example of this was the allied armies in the Second World War whose troops had to be kept apart to prevent conflicts breaking out between them.

bureaucratic machine rather than the natural abilities of its members. Subservience is thus treated as the greatest "good".³⁹

2.4. Decentralisation

We have so far been discussing development within a mode of production rather than the transition from one to another. Although Marx and Engels' analysis indicates decentralisation occurring on the basis of a new mode of production, there are also decentralising tendencies within the period of development of an "old" mode of production.

Periods of relative prosperity, (as well as periods of crisis), as we have seen lead to competitive centralisation within the ruling class and sometimes administrative centralisation also. Not only the ruling class will necessarily share in the prosperity, however. Groups of "nouveau riches" will appear. The number of groups capable of exerting political pressure, therefore, will increase.

Whether these groups can consolidate their position will depend upon whether their prosperity is based on linear or merely cyclical factors in the development of the economy. Nevertheless they will press for economic and political privileges reflecting their new position which are denied to them under the existing power structure. This kind of challenge from below will usually meet with opposition from those with a vested interest in maintaining the structure as it is. This is to be expected in a competitive system where each is jealous of his position. In so far as the newly gained economic base confers leverage, however, the demands will have to be accommodated and eventually they will be incorporated into the existing structure.

By accommodating input to government from a larger set of interest groups the base of the governmental system is thereby widened. This may take place on the basis of new legal rights or in terms of direct representation depending upon the strength of the

³⁹ c.f. CH7 section 2.2.3

challenge. The system remains centralised in the sense that no independent power base remains outside of it but the incorporation of pressure groups leads to increased democratisation of the state machine itself.

Centralising tendencies both within the economy and the state, however, tend to focus the real power at the centre of the bureaucracy, undermining the input from the periphery. In the modern era in Britain, as national capital has become centralised in large corporations, so the interests of the local capital of particular areas has become less important for the economy and correspondingly the influence of backbenchers in parliament has lessened. Government has become increasingly centralised even within the cabinet. The ruling interests are those of "the city" and the multinational corporations.

An example of the incorporation process just described is given by the way the de Montfort rebellion in the middle ages led to the establishment of the house of commons. The thirteenth century was a period of prosperity when trade in particular flourished. The king, Henry III, was absent on crusades for long periods of time and the country was run by his son-in-law Simon de Montfort. Henry had angered a number of groups of people for various reasons but the problems came to a head when he angered the Pope by not paying a sum of money which he had agreed to pay but which he didn't have. The view of the dissatisfied groups within the country was that he was endangering their prosperity and that the country's wealth was not simply his personal property to dispose of as he wished. They coined the concept of "the Commonwealth" and demanded accountability in its disposal.

The rebellion was crushed, but Edward I, Henry's son and general, recognised that many of the people who had opposed his father were a new political force with no legally acknowledged voice in government, so when he became king he gave them a second chamber, the House of Commons, thus incorporating the dissent. He may have seen them as potential allies against the barons but the principle remains the same.

The gradual extension of the franchise towards universal suffrage in the 19th century provides more examples. The extension in 1832 comes two years into the boom period beginning in 1830 and gave the vote to the newly prosperous middle classes. The extension of 1867 is one year later than the commercial crisis which began in 1866 and extended the vote by 88%. The extension of 1884 comes one year into the crisis beginning in 1883 and confers universal male suffrage. The latter two occasions extended the vote to the working classes, at first with property qualifications based on house ownership. They each come at the end of a boom period and at the onset of crisis.

The explanation for this is possibly that the worsening conditions act as a trigger for agitation after a period when the strength of the groups later enfranchised had been consolidated within the economy. The years from 1850 to 1875 were referred to as "The golden years" and British capital in those years dominated the world. The basis for this supremacy however, was the productivity of the working class whose demands for recognition eventually could not be ignored. Recognition may, however, fall short of having ones own representatives within the political system.

In the 1960's boom, subordinated groups such as youth, women, ethnic minorities etc. and oppressed groups such as homosexuals, demanded equal rights and consideration of their specific demands as interest groups. This was a period of full employment when the market for their labour gave them financial independence and freed them from economic control. The principles which they asserted were partially conceded either in the form of legislation or their accepted treatment within the culture.

The gains made by these groups continued even with the onset of crisis in the 1970's but the 1980's has seen increased pressure to re-subordinate them with youth being the most vulnerable group, bearing the brunt both of unemployment and discriminatory legislation. Whether this subordination can be achieved to the extent of pre-war situation will depend upon how far the boom period has altered the material basis of the whole culture and correspondingly their position within it. The growth in consciousness

in those years is an equally important factor in the realisation of their potential as a political force.

The discussion so far has been concerned within the period of the "normal" development of a mode of production. In the next chapter the discussion will turn to the "revolutionary", transitional periods between modes of production.

Chapter Five

The Theory of History (2)

1. Periods of transition between modes of production ("revolutionary" periods)

The period of transition between modes of production presents us with a different situation to the one described so far. In the processes analysed above, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, relatively speaking. But in a period of transition, an underclass emerges to displace the ruling class and property and power become decentralised rather than centralised. The reasons for this are described below.

1.1. The failure of incorporation

In the previous section we saw how groups whose social position improves as a result of general prosperity will demand some kind of recognition of their interests. If their demands are supported by a real change in the power differentials in society, then eventually their demands will be recognised and the group will be incorporated within the central power structure. In an earlier section we also saw how small property owners "pioneer" a new means of production only to be incorporated economically within larger concentrations of property at a later date.¹

In these situations centralised power and wealth always has the advantage but in a transitional period this is not the case. If a form of property and method of production contains within itself the potential to become the principal wealth creating activity of the whole society, then the activities of those directly involved in this practice can never

¹ c.f. CH4 section 2.3.1

ultimately be incorporated either economically or politically. The rise of such people to become the dominant social group does not depend upon their ownership of their own means of production, the importance of what they do to the economy will give sufficient social leverage to deliver control of the process into their own hands.

Any attempt to incorporate them politically by giving them a voice in central government will merely present them with a public platform from which to advance even greater demands corresponding to their growing power and significance within the economy. They can be incorporated only temporarily whilst the potential of the productive process in which they are engaged is as yet underdeveloped. An example of how the potential of a productive process can overcome legal and political restraints is seen in the way the bourgeoisie emerged as an independent class from feudal society.

Originally, the bourgeoisie were peasants who had been granted "burgages" by a feudal lord. Instead of performing agricultural labour to produce surplus for the lord, they engaged in craft production on a similar basis, with the lord having some entitlement to the surplus. Burgages were popular with the feudal aristocracy because of the economic advantages they bestowed. First they involved very little land, the principal form of wealth in feudal society, yet yielded goods of equivalent value to a peasants acreage and secondly, they provided "luxury" products. The lord could thus have his land and craft production too (or money equivalents).

As a consequence of this the number of burgages grew, increasing the collective strength of the burghers. Small towns with markets appeared and commerce grew between them. The wealth of the towns allowed the burghers to apply for Royal Charters. Instead of being subject to the rule of the local feudal lord, the charter conferred self-government.

This effectively meant taking absolute control over their own property, it meant ownership of the town with the right of administration in the way a feudal lord would administer his land and govern the activities of those within his domain. The price of this

was taxation paid by the town to the monarch. The monarch himself now saw the towns as a source of revenue and was prepared to trade this for political privilege.

As the wealth of the towns increased, even this claim on its property was either circumvented or repudiated. The bourgeoisie had become strong enough to assert complete independence and defend it with armed force if necessary.² At each stage it was the wealth-creating potential of this particular mode of production which proved the decisive lever.

Economic incorporation of such enterprises will also fail with a powerful method of production. New economic ventures set up outside the main structure of the productive process cannot be run on the same basis as the main productive process since they constitute a new form of property and a new method of production. Control of the practice must be left in the hands of those who already manage it. They cannot, therefore, be integrated into the existing economic structure.

They cannot be dominated either, because the wealth which they produce and the consequent increase in the size and scope of their activity will eventually provide a power base from which those engaged in such activity will be able to break free of such domination. An example of this process can be seen as early in the development of capitalism as 1776, when the American colonies were able to successfully break free of their colonial masters. Had the schism not occurred then it must have occurred later as the full potential of the American continent began to be realised.

Independence rather than a bid to take control of the central authority was bound to be the political objective once the centre could no longer control the periphery. It was clearly part of the consciousness of the rebels anyway that the future lay with the society that they were building, to play power games in Europe was no longer worth the effort.

² op. cit. *Communist Manifesto*, pg 81.

In a period when a new means of production is in relatively abundant supply outside of the existing system and incorporation of the new activity is proving problematic for the ruling class, small scale private property can not only maintain its independence but increasingly assert its collective power.

The large concentrations of property based on the old methods of production possess no advantage when moving into the new areas of activity. Correct methods have to be discovered and the old ruling class are not the people best equipped to discover them. Large scale organisation based on the new means of production is at this stage premature and the structures for managing it do not exist. This situation is well illustrated by the way the monarchy attempted to incorporate merchant capital at the beginning of the 16th century.

Trading monopolies were granted to favoured courtiers in much the same way as a member of the service nobility might have been given a piece of land. The courtiers managed them as they would a piece of land, as absentee landlords, having little grasp of the new situation. The capital that thrived, therefore, was in the hands of practical merchants who understood the cut and thrust of trade and not the capital of these courtiers.

The monarch could confer a trading monopoly but not prosperity. This power was now out of his hands, he had to ally himself and the interests of his country increasingly to those of the merchant capitalists. Hence under these circumstances the old monopolies break up and independent small scale private property becomes the central feature of the economy.

Since the people who control the new property form an alliance of more or less numerous people of roughly equal power, their political ideas are egalitarian and their typical form of organisation is democratic, reflecting the real power situation.

They also tend to be critical of despotism in the form in which it appears in the late stages of the old mode of production. Other transitional periods such as the break up of the monopolies of the "gens" in Attica in favour of private property, slave production and

trade exhibit the same features.³

1.2. Division of labour and class control

The progress of a future ruling class begins as we have seen when a group of people within the economy are directly involved in a form of production which is destined to become the main source of wealth for the whole community. It is due to the leverage which this confer that they come to dominate the society economically and politically. Their position thus depends initially on their role within the division of labour.

However, since a society based on private property is by its nature exploitative,⁴ this class will develop from the position of performing the most useful function in the economy to performing no function at all. They will eventually become "Rois fainéants" substituting the labour of others for their own wherever possible. The ability to do this of course depends on the size of the output which determines the divisibility of labour, and the size of the surplus, which determines the degree to which a ruling class can exist as non-producers without harming the productive process itself.

An industrialist in the 19th century for instance would initially be his own accountant, lawyer and factory manager. As his prosperity increased he would divide these functions and employ others to perform them. We see the same phenomenon in antiquity. The slave-based society of the Greek city states supported a class of "citizens" who regarded labour as the behaviour of a slave and hence beneath them. In Greece and in Rome this made the economic system particularly inflexible when crisis overtook it.⁵ This process

³ *op. cit. Origin of the Family Private Property and the State*, pp 528-535.

⁴ Those who "possess" means of production which are more productive than their fellows have an incentive to privatise it. The division thus created between rich and poor however engenders avarice, enmity and a competitive dynamic. This ultimately leads to the centralisation of the means of production as we have seen. Centralisation of property fully developed leaves a mass of propertyless people who would otherwise starve if not used on an exploitative basis by those who possess the property. The motive to enrich oneself at the expense of others is present, however, in the first act of privatisation which excludes others from the use of the productive forces.

⁵ *op. cit. Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, pg 560.

always takes place however as a mode of production matures and centralises.

The basis of class control rests on three factors. Firstly, as already stated, it rests on the role of the ruling class within the economy, which confers the initial social leverage. Secondly, it rests upon a repressive apparatus which can be set up to control dissent once social leverage has been established, and finally, it rests on the complete monopoly of the means of production which serves the dual purpose of maximising the wealth of the ruling class and depriving would be rebels of an independent economic base from which to sustain their rebellion.

A ruling class, however, will as stated, eventually dispense with the first of these and depend on the other two. This renders their position potentially more fragile than it would otherwise have been. Although the performance of the economic function associated with the ruling class is eventually abandoned by them, the forms of authority which they exercise is still notionally legitimised by it. These forms are also specifically related to the principal role of the ruling class in the mode of production since they were established during that class's rise to power.

If then a new type of production emerges which entails a division of labour in which their traditional role plays no part, then, first, the forms of authority which they traditionally exercise will not be able to control it, and second, the right to exercise authority in the new areas will not be perceived as legitimate. Class rule thereby becomes undermined.

Traditional land taxes could not, for instance easily be used to appropriate surplus realised in the form of mercantile or manufacturing profit. Taxes on the towns were eventually circumvented by manufacture outside of the towns.

The old feudal bargain whereby the lord was entitled to the surplus in return for military protection was not regarded as a reasonable legitimation for feudal taxes by classes who were forced to defend themselves, which they did quite capably, principally against the predations of these same feudal lords. The feudal lords performed no service for these

classes and no obligation was acknowledged.

If the proletariat were to begin to organise their own production and distribution a similar situation would obtain. Neither the government nor the capitalists could use their traditional methods of appropriating the surplus, nor could they justify the attempt to do so, (the capitalists could not claim remuneration as the "organisers" of production). The shift in the division of labour gives the ruling class problems with respect to both legitimacy and power.

1.3. The definition of "Class"

Transitional periods occur when a ruling class is displaced by an emerging class, but what defines a class? So far we have only referred to the association with a method of production and/or a new type of product. This is a somewhat vague definition. An emerging class will occupy a specific position within the division of labour. The butcher, baker and the candlestick maker occupy different positions within the division of labour but are they members of the same class? and if so, is it the artisan class, the bourgeoisie, or are they each classes by themselves? Division of labour alone is clearly not a sufficient criterion to identify a class.

Perhaps classes are defined in terms of the type of exploitative relationship in which they are involved? e.g. serfage, slavery, wage labour etc. This cannot be a satisfactory definition either because in ancient and feudal societies Marx suggests that there were many classes⁶ whereas definition by these criteria produces only pairs of classes. Even if we regard the relations within the feudal aristocracy for instance as exploitative, the lord/vassal relationship obtains throughout the hierarchy and is incapable of dividing great barons from barons and barons from knights by virtue of the *type* of relationship. Exploitative relations in general are much too widely diffused to be the basis of class

⁶ op. cit. *Communist Manifesto*, pp 79-80.

definition if we disregard the question of type.

A further problem is raised if we consider the fact that Marx specifically says that the relations within the guilds have the same form as feudal relations⁷ op. cit. *The German Ideology*, pg 74.

on the land yet he does not regard the guild master as a member of the aristocracy. What divides the guild master from the aristocrat is the type of product the property of each produces and its role in the economy. This brings us back to the division of labour.

1.3.1. Production processes and class rule

To understand the role of division of labour in the determination of class we need to re-emphasise a distinction made in the early section on population. Division of labour can occur in two ways, by the sub-division of tasks within a productive process and by the discovery of new productive processes. It is the latter not the former situation which produces new classes as can be seen from any of Marx and Engels' discussions on changes in the social structure.

The discovery of agriculture and animal breeding leads first to a shift in the balance of power between male and female in the pre-class, gentile social system.⁸ Then later, since raiding parties increase because of the greater surplus, it leads to warrior cultures and the taking of slaves. New methods of acquiring wealth, e.g. agriculture based on slavery, form the basis of new classes.⁹ This form of production co-exists for a time with the gens organisation until the latter is unable to cope with the new social practices.

In the same way manufacturing arose and co-existed with the agrarian production of the feudal system although destined to displace it as the principal form of productive

⁸ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, op. cit. pp 485-487.

⁹ In this case the first classes to emerge historically.

activity. At this early stage the form of exploitation within the system of craft production did not distinguish it from the forms of exploitation in feudal society in general. The labourers - journeymen, apprentices etc., would live in the house of the master craftsman and he would feed them as a feudal lord would feed his household. The surplus was at the disposal of the master. Wage labour does not appear as the basis for manufactures until the 18th century. What distinguishes the two classes of exploiter, therefore, is the form of property.

One is destined to grow relative to the other because of the natural dynamic of the economy. This must eventually upset the political and economic balance of society and bring them into conflict with each other. The process which produces this effect is the basic principle that as productivity increases demand diversifies, as stated in the sections on division of labour. Proportionately, therefore, agricultural production must become less important and with it the classes based on this kind of production. Thus there are two intersecting criteria which define class, division of labour and exploitation. Each of these criteria, however, must be explained in greater detail.

On the question of division of labour, for instance, as stated previously, the butcher, baker and candlestick maker are members of the same class though they produce different artifacts. None of these trades could form the basis of a dominant class with a separate class interest because demand for these artifacts will never dominate the productive process of the community. Which divisions of labour are the operative ones in the formation of classes as interest groups, therefore, is determined by the changes in the process of social production itself and the position occupied by those groups within it. It cannot be ascertained by merely looking at the characteristics of each group in abstraction from that process.

Artisans are natural allies since their conditions in the developing economic system tend to prosper or fail from the same major changes but none of them is strong enough to assert its interests alone. These objective conditions determine their unity as part of a

class.

On the other hand, merchants, manufacturers and professional people are considered to be part of the bourgeoisie. Merchants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were likely to be as rich as landowners. The explanation that they could not form an effective separate interest group does not necessarily hold for them.

The division of labour between the groups cited above, however, is due to the subdivision of a single process rather than the discovery of a new productive process. It is the first type of the division of labour mentioned earlier, not the second. Originally all these functions were performed by the same person, the mediaeval burgher. He marketed his own goods, kept his own accounts and fought his own legal battles.

Later, for reasons already given, different people found it advantageous to specialise in these functions. Nevertheless, as elements, or moments, in the same process, the fortunes of each are tied to those of the others. Trade cannot increase unless the manufacture of the products traded increases. Manufacture can not increase unless trade outlets increase. Professional services depend upon the forms of intercourse that require them. These activities are organically linked and it is for this reason that they form a single interest group.

Specific issues may divide them, but ultimately their interests coincide. In the modern era, finance capitalists, for instance, benefit when manufacturing is in crisis because there is an excess of liquid capital looking for profitable investment. The money handled is of larger amounts and the profits correspondingly greater. But these circumstances indicate a sick economy and typically precede financial collapse as debtors default.¹⁰ The long term interest of finance capital therefore must lie in supporting a healthy manufacturing base upon which it ultimately depends. Temporary, tactical interest is outweighed by long-term strategic interest and disputes are never allowed to

¹⁰ c.f. CH8 section 1.1.1.1

endanger class unity on the more fundamental issues such as the future of the existing division of labour itself. These issues are the crucial test because they affect the power relations in society as we have seen.

It should be noted that major producing industries need not be functionally independent of one another in order to form the basis of different classes. Agriculture supplies the raw material for many manufactures and also food for its labourers. Nevertheless the market which this provides is not sufficient to prevent the wealth accruing to each from diverging. The latter will come to subordinate the former. Agriculture is not organically linked to manufacture, it also provides products for other groups of consumers. Manufacture provides tools for agriculture but again this does not exhaust its speciality. Their development can proceed semi-independently therefore as the pattern of demand changes. This is not true of the functionally related groups of the bourgeoisie discussed previously.

It is possible, however, for a specific functional element in a process to become more complex, absorb more labour, add more value and consequently generate more wealth than other functions. The question therefore is whether this would provide the basis of a sub-division of the class? In theory this ought to be possible, since the description of exploitation given earlier involves manipulation of the relations of dependence within the division of labour. In practice, however, when a class sub-divides, what seems to happen is that members of the class who perform the same function become polarised, usually through competition, into rich and poor.¹¹ The rich then attempt to force the poorer members of their own class into increased dependence upon them and an exploitative relationship is set up which allows the rich to appropriate the surplus product of the poorer members. Once such a relationship exists the class has become sub-divided into exploiter and exploited.

¹¹ Polarisation occurs when the surplus increases.

An example of this is how early Greek society was polarised into larger and smaller landowners and a relationship of usury set up between them. The poorer class was a transitory phenomenon, however, because its members were eventually reduced to the class of slaves. After this of course finance and land were united once again in the hands of the same class.¹²

1.3.2. Exploitation and class membership

With respect to the criterion of exploitation, there are again complexities. Exploitation is a property relation since it involves expropriation of a product surplus to the subsistence requirements of the direct producer. A distinction between goods and services is not relevant to this concept. A person who spends more time performing a service in return for subsistence, a slave for instance, than he/she would require to produce that subsistence his/herself is being exploited. One can see in this example why Marx interprets appropriation and property in terms of labour expended rather than any particular kind of product of labour, e.g. in "the labour theory of value".

A distinction does need to be made, however, between direct producers and other forms of labour. Direct producers are those people whose activities satisfy "natural" as against "social" needs. Labour of supervision, for instance, since it has as its object the social relationships which allow production to be carried out, is not direct production. Exploitation is expropriation of the direct producers. There is some question therefore whether non-producers can be exploited, i.e. expropriated, even when their labour is not adequately rewarded in terms of the time and effort expended.

¹² c.f. *The Emergence of Greek Democracy*, W. G. Forest, Wiedenfield and Nicholson, London 1978, pg 147.

¹² Marx in his analysis of value uses the relation between "the minimum socially necessary labour time" involved in the production of subsistence as against that involved in the production of the worker's output to define exploitation, rather than making it depend upon the propensities of particular individuals.

Labour of this kind, which has as its object the perpetuation of an exploitative system, is rewarded from the surplus product. These labourers, therefore, share in the fruits of exploitation which their labour helps perpetuate directly. They are nevertheless not members of the exploiting class, the surplus does not accrue to them even though they are remunerated from it. They are therefore neither direct producers nor direct exploiters.

Their class allegiance is likewise ambivalent. Their objective circumstances in a non-revolutionary period tie them to the exploiting class since they are remunerated from the fruits of exploitation. But in a revolutionary period a ruling class may not be able to continue to reward them. When it becomes obvious that a rival and potentially more successful power has arisen, mercenary interests will no longer be sufficient to hold their allegiance.

The form of payment which they receive is usually the same as that of the exploited class, e.g. in feudalism subsistence as household servants, in capitalism wages. Their conditions are therefore superficially similar to those of the exploited class with whom under certain circumstances they may identify. In a revolutionary period, the justification of this kind of labour in terms of the "social good" also becomes problematic. When the functions which they are expected to perform at the behest of the ruling class no longer tend to aid the development of the productive forces or enhance general well-being, self-justification becomes more difficult.

In particular, the state, whose function is both to preserve the general well-being and protect the existing economic order is placed in an ambiguous position when these imperatives diverge and usually disintegrates into factions. The allegiance of the "public power", as Engels calls it,¹³ under these circumstances is by no means certain. The lower orders often side with the oppressed classes whose communities they are drawn from and whose conditions they all but share.

¹³ *op. cit.* *Origin of the Family Private Property and the State*, pg 528.

Marx regards the "Society of December the 10th" for instance, as "Lumpen-proletariat" clearly a faction of the proletariat, and indeed like the proletariat they must sell their labour to live.¹⁴ Perhaps they are in some sense de-classed workers who are potentially members of the exploited class and may under certain circumstances revert to this role.

The importance of class analysis is to aid the comprehension of the dynamics of social change. Understanding this process is more important than fitting each group neatly into a class. The class position of workers who are not involved in direct production is ambiguous.

It emerges from this discussion, however, that class membership is not a question of similarities in income, power or status. Although the people who one might rub shoulders with might command one's sympathy, in terms of changing fortunes and political interests it is the functional position within the social structure that crucially determines material interests in a situation of social change. Classes undoubtedly differ on average in their command of the above mentioned attributes, (income, power and status), but within a class there will be a range of different amounts of each corresponding to the rank order of its members and between classes there will be overlap. None of these criteria therefore provide a reliable guide to class membership and attempting to group those with equal amounts together is the result of theoretical confusion and lack of a historical perspective.

The criterion of exploitation needs to be further elaborated. A ruling class is defined in terms of its form of property, an exploited class in terms of the manner of its exploitation. The rule of a certain kind of property is not unequivocally linked to a particular method of exploitation.¹⁵ Slavery for instance re-appears in the capitalist era and the

¹⁴ *op. cit.* *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, pp 136-138.

¹⁵ If one invokes the tautology that a certain kind of appropriation leads to a certain kind of property one can only show that feudal exploitation leads to feudal property but not that feudal exploitation leads to landed property nor vice versa.

production of the slave-plantations was an integral part of the emerging capitalist system.

Within the category of those exploited by a certain form of property, therefore, there are sub-divisions which correspond to different classes. These subdivisions are class divisions because of the way that they determine class interest. The political objectives, i.e. what is counted as emancipation, of an exploited class are crucially determined by the form of subjugation of that class, e.g. the slave desires to be a free citizen, the peasant the sole owner of his own small piece of land. The proletarian both propertyless and formally free cannot emancipate himself without taking control of the means of production as a whole.

The emancipated slave within capitalist society no doubt found that he was still exploited as a proletarian, nevertheless, I would contend that slave and proletarian are not members of the same class. These different forms of exploitation are not simply accidental occurrences they are part of the life-cycle of the mode of production.

In capitalism's early stages surplus could be extracted by methods similar to earlier modes of production, later, as capitalism developed these methods became inappropriate. Wage-labour is the necessary form of exploitation of developed capitalism but historically it is by no means the only form.

If a ruling class can correspond to different exploited classes, can one exploited class correspond to more than one ruling class over a period of time? I think the answer to this is no. Different property forms define different classes even when the form of exploitative relations are the same. The journeyman and the mediaeval serf, for instance, are members of different classes even though their form of exploitation is similar.

We are thus left with a picture of class defined by "vertical" divisions between property forms, within which there are "horizontal" divisions between exploiter and exploited and within which there are further sub-divisions corresponding to the forms of exploitation.

But what then are the consequences for class identity of the transition by a social group from being an exploited class under one form of property to being a ruling class under another form of property? Because the emergence of a certain kind of property and a certain form of exploitation do not historically coincide, the career of a revolutionary class will have a period when its class identity is ambivalent.

The early burghers became capitalists when they began to produce their products for the market rather than solely for the lord. The history of this class as such begins then. The relations of production in which they laboured, however, do not lose their feudal character totally at least until the granting of the town charters. According to whether one is interested in the end of feudal exploitation or the emergence of capitalism, the members of this class are either the last manufacturing serfs or the first capitalists. In fact, in true dialectical fashion they are both. The "tails" of the two movements interpenetrate.

It follows from this, therefore, that the phrase "the dictatorship of the proletariat" is slightly misleading because once this class takes possession of social property it begins a new life as something else, "humanity" perhaps. As it struggles to rid itself of the forms of subjugation in which it laboured, it has a dual identity.

1.3.3. Trade, the market and the rule of money

The analysis of class given so far, however, is incomplete. The classes within capitalism are qualitatively different from any previous classes. In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx says,

"Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat."¹⁶

¹⁶ *The Communist Manifesto* K. Marx and F. Engels, Penguin Books 1967 pg 80.

As productivity increases over time the historical tendency is towards societies of greater complexity. The ranks, orders, sub-groupings, increase. Society, as Durkheim noticed, tends towards pluralism. This is due to the increased division of labour and though there might be alliances between different sub-groups, social organisation is hardly becoming simpler.

The extension of the market system to encompass all forms of production does, of course, tend to subject all property owners to the same market conditions and the same periodic crises and likewise the labourers they exploit. Production has become genuine "social production" the market links every production process to every other production process and regulates them all automatically.

The main difference between the bourgeoisie and any previous class, however, is not that they are a class whose members are all subject to the same market conditions, but that they are a class whose membership is not based upon any *particular* means of production and product. Product differences do not divide them as landed production was divided from manufacture. Indeed in the bourgeois era landed production has become agrarian capitalism and landownership has been effectively incorporated within the bourgeois class. This is because the characteristic property form of the bourgeoisie is not any particular type of useful product, it is money. They recognise themselves and other bourgeois principally as money-makers.

The bourgeoisie rose to power by manufacture and trade but the latter practice brought with it new economic conditions even though it was dependent upon the growth of the former, (manufacture). In a market system all products can be obtained with the medium of exchange and all producers are in competition with each other. Under such circumstances money becomes the most desirable commodity because it confers social power par excellence, it will buy *any* advantage and this is vital in a competitive system.

The natural relation between production and need is that production serves the need. Where the battle between producers, competition, becomes the dominant motive,

however, this relation is reversed. Accumulation of the means of exchange is the prime requirement in order to remain ahead of one's rivals. Need satisfaction is only the means to this end. Under these circumstances no new type of desirable product can emerge that cannot be appropriated by the bourgeoisie.

Property held in the form of money is property which is independent of any particular physical form, it is property in an abstract quantified form, property in general. This point has far reaching significance, for in previous modes of production a subject class could overthrow a class whose domination was based on one kind of production by supplanting it with a rule based on its own more powerful productive process.

Capitalism, as the rule of property in general, cannot be overthrown in this way, new products and production processes are grist to the mill, their owners become successful capitalists themselves.¹⁷ The proletariat as an exploited class subject to the rule of money can only overthrow that rule by the overthrow, not of one particular kind of property, but of property in general. The proletariat, therefore, is a class with "radical chains",¹⁸ it is forced by circumstance to confront the problem which is at the root of all the previous systems based on exploitation and oppression, i.e. competition for private property.

The evolution of systems based upon antagonistic social relations was bound to progress in this direction since increasing division of labour leads to increased exchange of products. Marx explains in *Grundrisse*¹⁹ how increased exchange necessitates the use of money.

¹⁷ Neither the type of product nor the form of organisation of a particular productive process is sufficient to change the nature of the market system, as can be seen from the lack of success of worker co-operatives in this direction. Only the transformation of competitive relations in general would undermine the rule of money.

¹⁸ "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right", *Early Writings of Karl Marx*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, London; New Left Review 1975, pg 256.

¹⁹ *Grundrisse: foundations of the critique of political economy (rough draft)* Harmondsworth, England; Baltimore, Penguin Books 1973, pp 149, 150.

A product has two basic properties, it is a useful object and it is a part of the total production of the community. The first property depends upon the natural qualities of the object, the second is a purely quantitative factor. Exchange brings these factors into contradiction with each other.

For instance, if an exchange of goods takes place whereby three suits of clothes are worth half an ox, in value terms, i.e. as equivalent quantities of the social product, each person in the exchange is receiving what he gives. But as use values, half an ox is as useful as no ox at all for pulling a plough. "Value" is infinitely divisible, use-values are not. To facilitate equal exchange therefore, the owner of the ox must convert it into a form which merely represents its value as part of the total product, i.e. a medium of exchange. In this way the quantitative and qualitative aspects of products come to exist as separate physical entities. The medium of exchange is the object as a quantity of the social property, property in the abstract.

It is the antagonism between the interests of buyer and seller which establishes this result since it is because of this that strict "equality" in exchange is required so that no one is cheated.²⁰ Exchange on the basis of "from each according to his ability to each according to his need", would not encounter the antagonism between these two aspects, since it could take place purely on the basis of use-value.

This is another example of the mechanism of alienation, whereby the universal quality of objects as social property has to be represented by something external. This is due to the fact that, under conditions of competition to possess them as private property, the differences between the particular objects as use-values prevents their social character from manifesting itself via exchange. Competition for possession of the product tends to undermine the economic process as a collective activity and the result is the alienation of this social activity in the "money system" and its rule.

²⁰ Private property is assumed here also since it is in terms of this that equality is understood.

It seems that one of the criteria determining class must be qualified. It is not simply differences in the method of production and the product that distinguish pairs of ruling/ruled classes from each other, it is these things in so far as they constitute private property. It is this dimension of the objects which confer social leverage both in capitalism and before. In general, the correct criterion is different "forms of property" although without prior explanation this criterion would have appeared vague.

The bourgeoisie have the advantage that due to the market they are no longer committed to possessing their property in any particular form of useful object, unlike, for instance, the feudal aristocracy whose wealth was tied to the production of the land. The only effective interest group amongst the exploited, therefore, is the proletariat as a whole, simply because the bourgeoisie can shift their property from industry to industry and geographical area to geographical area. They must therefore, be confronted across the boundaries both of territory and of industry to undermine the rule of their form of property. This requires the unity of all groups of wage-labourers. The need to unite to ensure effective action is one of the objective factors which tends to bind these workers together as a class.

A second factor is that their labour is treated as primarily a money-making activity irrespective of its form. Labour to the capitalist is equivalent to labour cost, i.e. labour in the abstract, labour considered in relation to its potential for producing profit, something to be used and discarded in the money making process. Thus they all face the same kinds of treatment as commodities.

Thirdly, there is a high degree of substitutability of labour due to de-skilling and the use of machines. This is double-edged in terms of class cohesion. On one hand by extending the pool of available labour, it increases competition for jobs between the workers and hence is divisive. On the other it means that the success of one group of workers in obtaining concessions from employers strengthens the bargaining position of other groups of workers because the firms which have conceded now have an advantage

over their rivals in the competition between firms and industries for labour.

Conversely, if one group of workers is forced to accept worse conditions of employment, the competitive pressures operate in the opposite direction weakening the rest of the workers. This promotes mutual support, especially since wage rates between skill groups are linked together by differentials so that gains are not only transmitted between similar skills in different industries but between different skills as well.

Other divisive factors are as we have seen the fact that some wage-labourers are involved directly in the process of exploitation, e.g. labour of supervision, and differential rewards for skilled and unskilled work. The situation of the latter category of workers, however, is only secure in the short term as employers continually attempt to de-skill their jobs and use cheaper more easily substitutable labour. There is bound to be a relation of mistrust between these workers and the employers and grounds for sympathy with less privileged workers. The class allegiance of the former is by no means certain in a crisis as we have seen.

Finally, there are people like housewives retired people etc. who are not directly involved in the competition between employer and employee, (often via management) in the workplace. General crises, however, often affect these groups the worst and they share the fate of the other members of their families and communities. These are the principle reasons I would suggest for Marx's judgement in the quote from *The Communist Manifesto* and they throw light upon the concept of class which Marx uses and his view of the proletariat. I will leave the discussion of whether new class divisions could appear should the proletariat take control to a later section.

A class is potentially a revolutionary class only when it is both involved at the level of direct production with a form of property destined to become the dominant form and when the form of its exploitation will force it to take control of that property in order to emancipate itself. Neither factor on its own is sufficient, both have to be present.

1.4. Forces and relations of production.

The account of historical change so far suggests that certain developments in the forces of production will alter the balance of power in society, throwing up a new dominant class. More precisely, new forces of production create a new division of labour which under certain circumstances is sufficient to undermine the old class rule. Forces of production thus have a determining effect both on the relations of production and on social relations in general. To understand this process properly, however, we need to understand what sort of changes in the forces of production are responsible for what changes in the relations of production. I intend to look at the different types (moments) of change in the forces of production and their consequences for the processes discussed so far.

1.4.1. Changes in the Physical form of the forces of production

First of all there is the question of changes in the physical characteristics of the forces and hence the methods of production. This is a major determining factor in the conditions of life of the labouring classes. The use of large pieces of capital equipment, for instance, and/or a single central power source to drive machinery, requires the concentration of production in the vicinity of this equipment. Although factories pre-date the use of water or steam-driven machinery, clearly the use of the latter is only possible on the basis of the factory system. This has far reaching consequences for the living and working conditions of the labourers.

Small scale instruments of labour on the other hand probably mean that production will be dispersed throughout the community and therefore distributed over a relatively greater area per number of producers. The growth of towns composed of factories sited close to the sources of raw materials and the concentration of the workforce in the same areas is a result of the physical requirements of industrial production in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This arrangement also determines the forms of supervision of the labourers and the forms of organisation to resist exploitation engaged in by the labourers. The social relations between the workers, the specific forms of deprivation which they experience, the kinds of skills, knowledge and education they acquire and consequently the attitudes and political understanding which they have are all conditioned by the physical requirements of the labour process.

Nevertheless, the physical form of the production process does not directly affect the question of the general form of class relations as such. It may, however, have an indirect effect by modifying the effects of other factors which are directly related to this issue as we shall see later.

One crucial factor which it does affect, however, is the all-important question of the form of property ownership. New modes of production begin with small-scale property ownership, but the physical organisation of the productive process determines the minimum social unit which can operate the means of production and this unit will become the basic property owning unit of an emerging class.

There can be no formal acknowledgement of exploitative relations within the revolutionary forces at the time in which they still confront the ruling classes. Consequently, the demands for new property rights cannot be allowed to sub-divide the labourers into haves and have-nots within a single production process. The property form which the new ruling class demands therefore must be based on the minimum unit of production.

A piece of land, for instance, requires all the members of a family to work it, thus the family unit becomes the basis of agricultural private property. Pastoral peoples, if the herds are large, may require an extended family unit to tend them and this becomes the basis of ownership. The small craftsman can produce as an individual hence individual private property is the basis of the emerging capitalist system. Later developments in the mode of production may see the labour of an exploited class replace that of the members of the original productive unit, e.g. the slave-based societies of antiquity. Nevertheless,

the original form of property entitlement will continue formally to determine possession. Family inheritance remains the important property institution in the Ancient world. The proletariat produce collectively so workers' collectives will form the minimum basis of ownership of this class.

With respect to the collectivism of the proletariat, this alone is not sufficient to necessitate the abolition of private property and the market system. If the workers took control of the means of production, the market could continue on the basis of worker co-operatives. This, however, would not effectively emancipate the working class. The significance of Marx's location of deprivation and oppression in the phenomenon of alienation can be seen here.

According to Marx, in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, the position of the capitalist as owner is the consequence of alienated labour.²¹ This is true in the sense that it is the consequence of a competitive system which simultaneously determines that the worker should alienate his labour and that someone else, therefore, should nominally possess it. The possession is merely nominal in the sense that the capitalist is constrained in his ability to dispose of the product by the requirements of the market system itself. His actions are in the main dictated by such considerations. He therefore merely acts as the representative of capital which has its own alien will, (the laws of the market), which he obeys.

It follows, therefore, that merely to replace the capitalist by a factory committee, would simply replace the antagonism between the capitalist and the workers with the antagonism between the factory committee and the workers. The factory committee would obey the dictates of the market and impose the same alien control over the labour process as before. The labourers would lose control of both the labour process and the product in the course of the competitive struggle.

²¹ op. cit. *E.P.M.*, pp 76,77.

1.4.2. Changes in the importance of different sectors of the economy based on the development of new productive forces.

The second type of change in the development of the productive forces we have already discussed to some extent. This is the question of the change in the *economic importance* of one kind of productive process relative to another and the consequent change in political leverage of the groups associated with each activity. New productive forces, as stated before, lead to a new division of labour, but this in turn leads to a new balance of power within a competitive system. Prior to capitalism, these changes determined which classes would rule.

The fortunes of the members of the workforce, even in a capitalist society, is still tied to some extent to the fortunes of the type of production in which they are engaged and individual capitalists will also lose if they let their capital remain too long in an ailing industry. Such changes do not, of course, as stated previously, threaten the capitalist class as a whole but they do provide the vehicle for mobility in and out of the class and the emergence of new leaders within the capitalist class.

1.4.3. Changes in the magnitude of the productive forces

The third type of change follows on from the latter point. Capitalism is possible as a mode of production because of the existence of a near enough to universal market in commodities. The development of the institution of the market and the increasing use of a medium of exchange is related to the *magnitude* of the productive process, i.e. the changes in the power of the productive forces.

As stated earlier, increased production leads to increased division of labour which in turn leads to increased exchange and in a competitive system, the prevalent use of money. Quantitative factors have far reaching importance in determining the nature of the relations of production, not only in terms of the evolution of the market system, and therefore the capitalist property form, but also the form of exploitation appropriate to a

particular mode of production.

According to Engels,²² the taking of slaves occurs when the productivity of labour has risen beyond the level of mere subsistence. Only if the labourer produces a surplus product does it make any sense to exploit him as a slave.

The *form* of exploitation, however, slavery, is also determined by quantitative factors. The need to control the slave bodily suggests a situation of scarcity of labour relative to the available means of production.²³ Competition for labour between exploiters and the possibility that the labourer might run away leads to an institution which gives the exploiter total right of ownership over the labourers.

A second situation in which slavery is the most appropriate form of exploitation is one where the productive process is undergoing change, expanding or altering in form or both. The labourer, under these circumstances, can not be allowed any rights which would give him control over his own labouring activity since the exploiter needs to be free to direct the labour process as required by the changing circumstances. This latter situation is one in which serfage, which gives the worker traditional rights, for instance, would be inappropriate and unworkable. The expanding phase of a mode of production is for this reason pre-disposed towards the institution of slavery, because it combines both of the situations described above.²⁴

It might be argued, however, that in Ancient Greece, debt bondage was a means by which people were enslaved. Debt bondage merely has the effect of transferring the

²² *op. cit.* *Origin of the Family Private Property and the State* pg 486.

²³ This might only be a scarcity of eligible labour, e.g. in Rome where slavery replaced labour by citizens. Also, scarcity should be understood as scarcity at the site where the labour is performed, not scarcity per se. A plentiful supply of labour in some other location, on the contrary, is a powerful incentive to enslave.

²⁴ By expansion of production, what is meant, is the bringing together of new productive forces for the purpose of producing. Territorial expansion which simply takes over the existing productive forces, albeit introducing new relations of exploitation at the same time, does not necessarily engender slavery, as the extension of serfdom to the peoples of Southern Russia and Poland in the 16th century shows.

surplus product from the debtor to the creditor without alteration to the productive forces. This raises an important point. What is at issue here is the factors which are responsible for the *origins* of a form of exploitation, not conditions which merely reproduce the existing institution.

Usury leads to slavery, only where slavery is the prevailing form of exploitation. In capitalist society, for instance, the debtor will typically pay via wage labour. In general, the prevailing form of exploitation will continue in a society until forced to change by new conditions.

Serfage, by contrast, corresponds to the stagnant phase of the development of the forces of production. The exploiter in this situation owns the *land* rather than the labourer which suggests that good land²⁵ rather than labour is the thing which is scarce. Here, the other means of production are scarce relative to labour rather than vice-versa.

The labourer is not owned bodily, nevertheless, just as before he is legally prohibited from running away or working for another master. The difference between this and slavery is that this control is exercised indirectly through the obligation of the serf and his descendants to work on the same land and to give the surplus to the lord. Since the serf has greater freedom to control his own daily activities, the chance of escaping is potentially greater. Again, this points to a situation of stagnation; where an escaped serf would have no where to find an alternative livelihood, control does not have to be so strict.

The relation which is totally at odds with a situation of expansion, however, is the right of the worker and his descendants to live from a particular piece of land. In a situation of change any *traditional* rights of the labourer would be threatened but where mobility of labour is required, the right to control the means of production can not be tolerated. Serfage also allows the serf to produce in a traditional manner, clearly this is

²⁵ Land which is highly productive.

only possible because the prevailing production process in the society itself remains the same.

Historically, serfage first appears in Europe at the end of the Roman Empire. Unable to administer the large estates any longer, the Roman landlords freed the slaves, since they could no longer afford to maintain them. They then sold the land on the basis that whoever bought it maintained themselves but gave the surplus to the landowner. These people were called "coloni".²⁶ This institution thus corresponded to a time when the mode of production was declining and there was an abundance of destitute workers.

The cost of administration relative to the productivity of labour, therefore, is a crucial determining factor here. Serfage as a form of exploitation is connected to the question of the optimum possibilities for centralised control.

The *physical* aspect of the productive forces is also a relevant factor. Where the means of production are geographically dispersed, administration becomes more difficult and costly. This is why this institution was adopted by the Germanic tribes who invaded Western Europe. They inherited productive forces which yielded a low surplus and were geographically dispersed. Armies of slaves were not a possibility under these circumstances.²⁷

This form of exploitation is thus also determined by quantitative factors, though not in a simple way. It can be seen from this that the separation of physical, relational (relative importance) and quantitative aspects of change does not exclude interaction between these factors. What I have attempted to do, however, is to show the immediate and necessary connections between certain aspects of change of the forces of production and certain types of relation of production as distinct from indirect and accidental relations.

²⁶ op. cit. *Origin of the Family Private Property and the State*, pg 560.

²⁷ op. cit. *The German Ideology*, pg 45.

The physical dispersion of the means of production affects the method of exploitation only indirectly, via administration costs. It is also an accidental determinant of the method of exploitation since anything which increases the administration costs of the labour force to an unacceptable level would have the same effect.

There is thus no simple linear correlation between the power of the productive forces and the forms of exploitation discussed so far. Rather, they seem to correspond to the potential for expansion of the forces of production at any given time. Perhaps the rate of exploitation i.e. the amount of surplus per head of population might afford an acceptable measure as to which is the more likely, slavery or serfdom. Wage labour, as the dominant form of exploitation, on the other hand, corresponds to a certain point in the development of the power of the forces of production.

With respect to legal control over the movements of the labourer by the exploiter, the wage-labourers are the most free of all the exploited groups considered so far. As in the case of the serf, this points to an abundance of labour relative to the means of production. We have seen that this situation occurs when the development of the forces of production is stagnant or in crisis. Again, like the serf, the wage-labourer is responsible for his own maintenance, another factor which points in the same direction.

Unlike the serf, however, the wage-labourer neither owns nor in any way controls the means of production. In this respect, his relationship to the means of production more closely resembles that of the slave than the serf. Wage-labour is to slavery as hire is to ownership. Hire is temporary ownership. The circumstance in which hire is preferred to ownership is usually when the thing hired is only required for a short period. The prevalence of the hire of labour, therefore, suggests conditions of changing demand for labour and changing conditions of production. Combined with the over-supply of labour, this may indicate a situation of crisis and uncertainty, hence the short-term acquisition of labour.

On the other hand, where this form of exploitation becomes the normal and persisting method, it can only do so on the basis of a flourishing economy. These circumstances, therefore, can only indicate a constant and rapid alteration and development of the productive forces. This seems to contradict the conclusions drawn from the fact that labour is formally free. Capitalism, however, is the mode of production, which in its mature form, resolves this contradiction, producing both over-supply of labour and rapidly changing conditions of production simultaneously.

Capitalism expands on the basis of labour-saving technology. This, by definition, displaces labour at the same time that it alters the production process. Moreover capitalism progresses spasmodically, oscillating between expansion and contraction.²⁸ In the period of contraction, i.e. when some of the productive forces are being destroyed, not only is it impossible that any traditional right of the worker to a livelihood should be respected, but neither will negotiated agreements be respected. Over-supply of labour is thus created under conditions for which serfdom would be inappropriate.

If, in this period and afterwards, output all but stagnates, nevertheless, the forces of production will not remain constant, capitalist firms will be restructuring their enterprises in order to become profitable again. Thus a form of exploitation which confers traditional rights of control over the labour process on the labourer will still be inappropriate.

Such a period creates the conditions whereby economic factors alone are sufficient to subordinate the labourers who will offer themselves to be exploited. Physical coercion can be reduced to a minimum, hence the labourers are formally free.

Capitalism can expand on the basis of this exploitation. If this expansion, by absorbing the surplus labour, undermines the conditions on which the subordination of the workforce was originally based, this will tend to express itself in the form of demands for

²⁸ Output rarely contracts, even in periods of so called "commercial crisis". Some of the forces of production, on the other hand, cease to produce, and it is in this sense that the forces of production might be regarded as contracting.

higher wages by the workers. If granted this will eventually cut off the boom returning the economy to a crisis state and the re-subordination of the labour force.

Under constant conditions of rapid change such as those described above, wage-labour becomes the only viable form of exploitation. Serfage is inappropriate for the reasons already given. Slavery is inappropriate for the compelling reason that fluctuating demand for labour leaves the exploiter in the position of either maintaining labourers for periods when they are not needed or selling them at a time when no one is willing to buy them only to buy more at a time when, because there are more favourable conditions for trade, everyone else is doing the same. Selling cheap and buying dear, the capitalist would always make a loss. It makes no sense tying up capital in the labour force under these conditions.

As stated in the section entitled "Production and the division of labour" in chapter four,²⁹ the rapidity of change in the productive forces is conditioned by the amount of innovation in the economy already which feeds off itself and the size and interconnectedness of the economic system which magnifies the repercussions of any particular innovation. These factors increase in magnitude over time as the cycle of innovation speeds up. Wage labour, as the dominant method of exploitation, therefore, corresponds to a certain stage in the development of the magnitude of the productive forces.

1.5. "Progressive" classes and the new ruling class.

As we have seen, changes in the forces of production underlie changes in the relations of production and in particular the rise to power of a new ruling class. The political progress of this class to a position of domination is not, however, a pre-requisite for the transformation of the mode of production.

²⁹ c.f. CH4 section 1.1.1

Whether this class is able to act as the principal agent of change depends upon other contingent social and historical factors. The form of production carried on by this class may be underdeveloped, thus not providing a sufficiently strong political base, or their internal organisation or class consciousness might be lacking under certain circumstances.

Nevertheless, the importance of the type of economic activity with which this class is associated will ensure the development of these practices irrespective of the ability of the new ruling class to promote them itself. Other classes will, either voluntarily or by virtue of compelling circumstances, promote these relations because of the way that they affect their own situations. These other classes, along with the new ruling class itself are generally referred to as "progressive classes", since their interests are tied up with the progress of the forces of production.

On the continent of Europe, for instance, capitalism was initially promoted by so-called "Enlightened Monarchs" in the majority of countries. Even in the countries where early revolutionary struggles took place such as England and the Dutch Republic, in the former case, a class of small landowners formed the vanguard of the movement and in the latter, the bourgeoisie shared the leadership of the rebellion with the aristocratic house of Orange. Monarchs, in particular, once the potential to acquire revenues from trade and industry increased, were subject to pressures to cultivate these activities in order to have as much wealth and power as their international rivals.

The class base of monarchy had been the feudal aristocracy which raised armies and supported the political claims of the monarch when necessary. This function declined rapidly as political power came to depend more upon the revenues which the exchequer could obtain from taxation of both the land and trading interests. The monarch, given a sufficient income from taxation could train and deploy forces directly. Thus monarchs, on pain of losing the competitive battle in the international sphere, were forced to promote manufacturing and trading interests even though in doing so they were enhancing the

power of a class which at best, would find the monarch's role superfluous and at worst, an obstacle to their own ambitions to govern the society directly.

As far as the small landowners in Britain and the House of Orange in the Netherlands are concerned, a combination of factors threw them into the revolutionary vanguard. Each was threatened by the loss of their existing power due to attempts at centralisation by their feudal masters.

In the case of the Netherlands, Philip II of Spain attempted to increase central control of his lands to guard against the encroachments of Protestantism and the danger of secession, the principal provocation here being the introduction of the Spanish Inquisition.

The creation, with the advent of capitalism, of economic power bases throughout the large dynastic territories such as the Holy Roman Empire, was already creating decentralising pressures. Many princes became Protestant for reasons which were unconnected to religion in order to secede from obligations to their feudal overlords. Henry VIII of England was one such king, the princes of Brandenburg, later Prussia, afford another example. The latter state adopted a policy of religious toleration avowedly to attract refugees from the religious wars into its growing manufacturing industries.

No doubt William of Orange was willing to play the part of the Enlightened monarch if the Dutch burghers would accept him. Religious conviction was clearly not an issue here since William changed his religion to Protestant in the course of the struggle in order to become an acceptable leader to the Huguenots, who were the hard core of the resistance to Philip.

In the case of England, the attempt to increase taxation by the monarch, led to the replacing of the gentry in local government by court appointees in order to be better able to collect the tax. The loss of power and money in the form of tax, alienated this class from the monarch. They were also prepared to organise their production in order to supply the expanding towns with food and therefore to turn themselves into agrarian

capitalists. Hence they found their natural allies in the urban classes with whom they also had ideological links.

It should be noted here that although the bourgeoisie gained virtual independence from Feudalism in the middle ages by their own efforts, they were not in a position to assert their supremacy as a social class until the 19th century. Their role in the process of transformation of the mode of production, however, was not insignificant. Where the balance of forces was such that a swift victory could not be gained by the ruling power, whoever had the bourgeoisie as its allies would win in the long run. This class could provide the material means of waging war in a manner which could not be matched by other classes. The urban classes also supplied the most determined and implacable of the rebel forces. It was precisely because of the involvement of this class that rebellions succeeded which in an earlier epoch would most certainly have failed.

2. The relations between "levels" in the "base" and "superstructure"

In the preceding analysis, the causal primacy of the growth of the forces of production in throwing up new classes and transforming the economic and political system was asserted. The causal relations between the economic base and the legal, political and ideological superstructure, however, is more complex than this and this complexity requires explanation. For instance, the growth of relations of exchange, i.e. the market, in the 16th century appears to have been the *cause* of the subsequent expansion of manufacturing industry. Hence, the relations of production of capitalism seem to be causally prior to the growth in the forces of production.

Again political and legal "superstructures" are supposed to be determined by the economic "base" but the political victories and legal reforms of the progressive classes in England and the Dutch republic was arguably the *cause* of the rapid development of manufacture and trade in these countries. The "superstructure" appears once again to be causally prior to the "base".

These battles were also fought out under the banner of Protestantism. This idea system appears to have provided the necessary cohesion which made generalised political action possible, once again reversing the causal order which is stressed by Marx.

Added to these three examples is the situation described in the previous section whereby monarchs promoted trade and industry as a response to political rivalry. Again political concerns appear to be causally prior to economic ones and this is reflected in the doctrine of "Mercantilism" which represents the causal order in precisely this fashion.³⁰ To provide a refutation of these seeming counter-instances, we need to return to the general theoretical perspective in terms of which Marx and Engels theory is cast.

With respect to the general economic relations within which the productive forces develop, as pointed out previously, technology produces economic dislocations and economic dislocations in turn stimulate new technology.³¹ Similarly with the growth of the productive forces in general.

Technological determinism is a flawed theory because, like idealism, it suggests that one aspect of a process has a linear development by which other aspects of the process will be conditioned as mere epiphenomena. In fact, changes in the productive forces interact with the economic context via dislocations and contradictions and the conditioning relations are mutual.

Because of the unplanned nature of the system, the development is spasmodic in character. Similarly, the economic sphere interacts with the political and legal spheres, economic changes producing political and legal changes and political and legal changes in turn affecting the economy. Idea systems are related to social change in a similar fashion.

³⁰ Mercantilism is criticised by Engels in "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy" in op. cit. *E.P.M.* pp 161, 162.

³¹ CH4 section 1.1.3

With respect to the issue of the growth in trade in the 16th century, in the introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx says,

"Hence production produces consumption 1) by creating the material for it; 2) by determining the manner of consumption; 3) by creating as a want in the consumer (the desire for) products which it initially posits as an object. Similarly, consumption produces the disposition of the producer by soliciting him (in the form of) a goal determining need."³²

The market, i.e. the consumers, appear as such only in so far as saleable goods exist which produce in them a need; point three above. The reciprocal relation then takes effect as noted in the next point.

The discovery of new markets is conditioned in the first instance by the existence of saleable commodities which gives point to this activity. This in turn depends upon the growth of the productive forces. Thus historically, the productivity of feudal agriculture makes possible specialisation of a kind in craft techniques and the granting of burgages. This gives rise to market relations which in turn give a boost to the crafts. Production of wool and later cloth proceeds in the same way until the massive market opportunities of the 16th century and afterwards transform the production system.³³

Similarly, the transformation in the economy towards trade and manufacture altered the balance of power and the legal framework which defined the class relations, but the victory of the progressive classes in turn boosted the economies of the countries where it took place which then brought forth new developments in technology.

³² op. cit. *Preface and Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, pg 21.

The words in brackets were added by me for the sake of clarity. The second phrase replaces the word "as".

³³ The incentive to import luxury goods was probably the main motive for the initial expansion of trade in the 16th century but this also was possible only because of the already existing prosperity in Western Europe based upon the growth of the productive forces.

Finally, the justifications for the existing social system were transformed under the impact of the critiques of the progressive classes but these new arguments themselves acted as a means of both educating and mobilising political forces. Thus Protestantism paved the way for the political victories of the progressive classes.

In more general theoretical terms, the interaction between the various levels of social activity has a dialectical form. On one hand the development of each of these practices follows its own internal dynamic but on the other hand the interdependence between them causes each to affect the circumstances of the other, usually by provoking a crisis. As each practice adapts to overcome the crisis this creates conditions which will produce a reciprocal reaction in the other.

The result is spasmodic development, periods of normality followed by rapid, revolutionary shifts. The development by crisis and adaptation is caused by the fact that the changes in the poles of the dialectical relation are semi-independent rather than synchronised. The relationship between them therefore becomes strained and then violently re-asserted. This is the character of "natural" i.e. involuntary growth within such systems. These relations are what Marx refers to as the "contradictions" of a mode of production.

The term "contradiction" describes relations of different types. All divisions of labour in a competitive society create contradictions since the different functions of the labour thus divided develop their own objectives which are pursued not only without reference to other functions but often in opposition to other functions, as in the cases of competition and exploitation.

The activities may be separated because they come to be performed by different sets of people but they may also be separated because one type of activity is by its nature a response to or the result of another. For example, changes in the patterns of activity at the economic level may initiate changes in the patterns of activity at the political level. The relations between the forces of production, the economic relations of production, political and legal relations and ideological disputes are dialectical in the manner just described

and there is mutual causality between them, each provoking changes in the other(s) in a cyclical movement (or rather a spiral, since the result of the changes does not restore the status quo).

2.1. Determination "in the last analysis"

Relations of mutual causality produce on-going cycles but they do not in themselves indicate that any particular cause should be regarded as having primacy. Marx, on the other hand, whilst indicating that causality within systems is of this reciprocal kind, constantly asserts that certain causes are to be treated as having primacy when it comes determining the rest. Engels in this connection talks about determination by economic causes "in the last analysis".³⁴

The answer to this problem can be approached I believe along the following lines. Although the causes are reciprocal, the type of causality is not necessarily the same in both directions and it is upon this qualitative point that I believe that the claim to the causal primacy of certain activities over others rests.

The type of relations described in the previous section are of the means to ends or "teleological" type. Changes in the end affects the means in a different and more fundamental manner than changes in the means affects the end.³⁵ Alteration of means will enhance or retard the achievement of the end, but alteration of the end will render the existing means inappropriate and redundant, it transforms the nature of the whole activity.

For instance, the legal constraints upon the direct producers under the feudal system were means by which the ruling class could exercise control over the production process. They formed a necessary and integral part of this form of exploitation. However, when

³⁴ *Late letters*

³⁵ c.f. CH3 section 5.1.1

the source of wealth shifted from manorial production to a market system based upon manufacture and trade, these forms of control became totally inappropriate, in fact they became fetters which prevented the economy developing. The end which they had been designed to achieve was no longer the main social priority hence the means had come to be at odds with the new goals. New ends require new means.

On the other hand, where the bourgeoisie or their allies seized power and altered the legal framework to a set of more appropriate controls, capitalism developed at an increased rate. In this case the means changed but the ends (of the bourgeoisie) remained the same, the promotion of capitalism. They were simply realised under this regime with greater speed and efficiency, e.g. in the Dutch Republic and in England. This is the so-called base/superstructure relation.

The most fundamental changes take place in the forces of production since all the other changes are teleologically linked directly or indirectly to transformations in this sphere of activity, i.e. the exploitation of the productive forces. This I believe is Marx's basic proposition in his analysis of social structure and change. This proposition nevertheless requires further qualification because not all teleological relations have the "base" activities as the end and the "superstructural" activities as the means.

In the doctrine of Mercantilism, for instance, Economic development is seen as a means to strengthen the state. One has to say that it is in fact true that economic development is a means by which the state may be strengthened and therefore a teleological relation runs in the reverse direction between the economic and political spheres. The question of primacy, therefore, has a further dimension which relates to the primary determining moments in a process.

Although the interchange between the economic and political spheres is mutual, only one of those spheres could logically be the initiator of the relation. The state is an institution which maintains the normal functioning of some particular socio-economic formation. It therefore pre-supposes the existence of an economy of some kind as its

"raison d'être". The economy in turn is teleologically linked to the goal of the satisfaction of human need as its raison d'être.³⁶ This is a linear teleological chain and it is this chain of causes which act as the "raison d'être" of others which runs from base to superstructure and is prior to any other teleological relation. That which acts as "raison d'être" is logically prior to any other cause.

The economy may be a means of supporting the state but the state only exists because of its teleological relation to the economy. This latter relation is therefore the basis of the "mercantilist" relation and the "first cause" even within the relations of mutual development. Change this relation and all the other relations are affected.

Having given an account of the logic of Marx's argument it is necessary also to explain the apparent resilience of the so-called superstructural spheres through history despite changes in the economic base. This consideration applies particularly to idea systems.

Each sphere of activity is a concrete object and hence, like any concrete object, it will have a variety of effects. An idea system may function in a number of different ways simultaneously, so that the relation which it has to some political situation may not cause it to be abandoned when the situation no longer exists, (it would simply lose its relevance as ideology with respect to that issue). An idea system does not necessarily have as its function the justification of one particular legal or political position alone, even though it may function in this way under certain circumstances, e.g. Christianity.³⁷ Such a view would constitute a one-sided representation of the object.

³⁶ The notion of the "raison d'être" can be further specified in the following way: one could imagine certain stable economic formations existing without a state institution, other formations may be unstable without a state but one could conceptualise them as existing briefly, one could not, however, conceive of a state existing unrelated to an economy because it could not function as a state. This is how to test whether the teleological relation in question corresponds to this concept.

³⁷ c.f. CH7 section 1.3

On the other hand, an idea system which specifically has an economic or political system as its object ceases to have any relevance when that object ceases to exist. Hence Marx points out that bourgeois political economy will have only antiquarian interest when capitalism ceases to exist.

As a materialist, Marx is committed to the view that idea systems articulate sensuous experience in some way but not in a narrow and one-sided way. A change in the way men produce their material existence will transform the nature of the debate and controversy surrounding economic and political practice and will render irrelevant some idea systems whilst altering the significance of others.³⁸

On the other hand, the demise of idea systems may not rest simply upon their loss of relevance for every issue but upon the acceptance or suppression of such views by dominant political factions.³⁹

Ideas can survive historical change in another way. Even when a system of ideas or a single proposition refers specifically to some object and that object ceases to exist, the idea can still be retained as relevant as an example, parable, metaphor etc. of a more general principle which remains valid. For example, the oppression of widows and orphans warned against in the Bible might be taken as an expression of the general principle of not oppressing the more vulnerable social groups when widows and orphans themselves are not in the same jeopardy as in biblical times.

The survival of idea systems is quite striking, not only do they have different, even opposed implications for action in different contexts so that they are not dependent for their significance upon any particular context, but they can even survive the

³⁸ A political struggle may similarly have a different significance for different participants and the struggle may not end because the objectives of some of the participants has been gained. A war, for instance, may be started by one group but continued by other groups who were initially drawn in as allies for entirely different reasons.

³⁹ Similarly, political struggles may end when the participants who are the strongest decide that the struggle should end.

disappearance of the questions which they specifically address to some extent by operating at a more universal or general level. This is one possible explanation for the durability of religious ideas.

The view that religious ideas address "the human condition", however, is not necessarily true. For instance, the promise of life after death may seem to offer comfort for a fear of something inevitable, but even this would take on a new significance if life could be extended indefinitely. Under these circumstances the promise would become irrelevant for those who do not wish to die and undesirable for those who do. Questions posed at higher levels of generality do, however, address themselves to the more pervasive and therefore to the more fundamental problems of existence.⁴⁰

As for the case of the categories of bourgeois political economy, only the propositions concerning the features common to all modes of production would remain relevant if capitalism ceased to exist and these are not particularly informative.⁴¹

These qualifications do not invalidate the claim that the base-superstructure relation is a teleological relation and that the alteration of the end transforms the means (after an initial period of crisis as always). Whilst the idea systems may survive, their role in ideological disputes does not. The character of the arguments change and the ideas are put to a different use.

The discussion of ideology brings us to the question of the historical development of consciousness. As stated before, since the transition to socialism involves understanding and taking control of ones own social institutions, the evolution of consciousness must be a crucial causal factor in this process.

⁴⁰ Political struggles may also be perpetuated by the generalisation of the objective. A campaign against a particular abuse may be extended to other abuses of the same type when the initial abuse has ceased.

⁴¹ *op. cit. Preface and Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, pg 12.

Chapter Six

History and Consciousness**(The historical development of consciousness)****1. The meaning of "consciousness" in Marx's work**

For the purpose of clarity it will be useful to give a preliminary definition of what Marx usually means when he refers to "consciousness" and "forms of consciousness". He is not referring, as would an 18th century empiricist, to what is likely to be happening in the mind of an individual when he or she perceives the world. Rather, he is referring to the stock of meanings, theories and interpretations through which whole classes of people represent to themselves their experiences and thus come to terms with the circumstances of their lives.¹

These interpretations are social products and include moral, philosophical, religious, social and political theories. Thus in a modern way, Marx regards the perceptions of both groups and individuals as "theory-mediated" but also, in a manner which goes beyond present-day empiricists, he regards these theories as social products and hence consciousness as mediated by social processes (mediated both by social causes and the social consequences of holding certain viewpoints).

Also, as a political theorist his primary focus of interest is not so much how the consciousness of any particular individual is conditioned, but the factors which condition the consciousness of whole classes of individuals, because it is this collective consciousness which has the most significant repercussions in terms of political action. It is these

¹ c.f. op. cit. *The German Ideology*, pg 47.

collective interpretations which are being referred to therefore in the discussion of consciousness in the rest of this chapter.

2. Class relativism and truth

The fundamental point which Marx stresses when he discusses his method is that "consciousness cannot be anything other than consciousness of existence"² it therefore must be explained as a response to the material life-circumstances of those whose consciousness it is and not vice versa. The material circumstances of different classes differ, however, so that one would expect their consciousness to differ also. On the other hand, if consciousness is simply taken to be a reflection of the specific conditions of a particular class, then the consciousness of each class would simply be a one-sided, partial, and therefore "ideological" viewpoint in the pejorative sense of this term.

Such a view of what Marx is saying would be too simplistic however.³ It contrasts sharply with his view that the proletariat must understand the dynamics of social organisation in order to overcome the alienated condition of capitalist society and thus solve the problems which have beset all societies since primitive communism. In order to do this their perception of social reality must in all essential features be the truth.⁴

The apparent "problem" outlined above could only be set up by interpreting Marx's statements selectively. Almost everywhere the class-relativist statements appear, they are immediately qualified, locating them within a wider realist framework. To interpret Marx's views on consciousness more correctly, we need to examine the issue in greater detail.

² Idem.

³ Although the statement "the truth is proved in practice" from the theses on Feuerbach which seems to beg the question "whose practice?" has led some theorists to this conclusion.

⁴ "Truth" for Marx would be an explanation which can adequately account for all relevant viewpoints, since he is a dialectician.

As indicated in the opening paragraph, there are two principal factors which condition consciousness: the *evidence* drawn from the life-experience of an individual or group which both prompts and confirms ideas, and the *consequences* of holding and acting upon certain ideas, i.e. the existential considerations which condition⁵ commitment. The position of the individual, however, differs from that of the group with respect to these factors.

2.1. The consciousness of individuals

The consciousness of individuals, even within the same class will admit of a significant amount of variation. This is hardly surprising. In terms of life-experience, i.e. the *evidential* element which conditions consciousness, although certain conditions within a class may be common to most of its members, the factors determining life-circumstances apart from these common factors vary considerably. These personal and individual⁶ differences will condition the consciousness of an individual as much as the common ones, in some cases assuming greater significance to the persons concerned, thus creating variation in both the motivation for holding certain views as well as the evidence immediately available to support them.

Also, as far as the *consequences* for the individual of holding certain viewpoints is concerned, an individual can, under most circumstances, hold and express views which run counter to the interests of the class with little or no political consequences to the class and neither, therefore, to him or herself. Indeed, because of the possibilities of social mobility, an individual may feel able consciously to act against the interests of his or her class without suffering the undesirable repercussions which would affect the other

⁵ The word "condition" here does not mean that the individual or group has no choice, it means that they take account of these conditions when they make their choices.

⁶ Intersecting membership of other social groupings, e.g. ethnic minorities, may introduce influences common to these groups which will further condition a person's consciousness as well as purely individual factors.

members. Because of this, some people will adopt the viewpoint of classes of which they are not members but to which they aspire or expect to be members, even if these views are expressly hostile to their own class.

It must be stressed, however, that for the majority in any class, social mobility is not a real possibility and that whatever affects the class as a whole will affect them also. Variation in viewpoint due to this cause therefore should not be overstated.

For adult members of any group, radical changes in their habitual way of life will be problematic since it will face them with the possibility that they may not be able to adjust to the new situation. There are, therefore, countervailing pressures which pre-dispose individuals to adopt views which are favourable to the interests of their class.

The views held by Marx with respect to the possibility of individual variations in consciousness can be seen from the following quotations:

"It is quite 'possible' that particular individuals are not 'always' influenced in their attitude by the class to which they belong, but this has as little effect upon the class struggle as the secession of a few nobles to the *tiers état* had upon the French Revolution"⁷

(this was a response to the charge of "narrow mindedness" by Herr Heinzen), and

"Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven and earth."⁸

and also,

⁷ "Die moralisierende Kritik und die kritisierende Moral. Beitrag zur Deutschen Kulturgeschichte. Gegen Carl Heinzen", in *Deutscher Brusseler Zeitung*, 28th October to the 25th of November 1847.

⁸ *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, op. cit. *Selected Works* p 120.

"Finally, in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour, the process of dissolution going on within the ruling class, in fact within the whole range of old society, assumes such a violent, glaring character, that a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift, and joins the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands."

and from the same section,

"If by chance they (the petit bourgeoisie) are revolutionary, they are so only in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat, they thus defend not their present but their future interests."⁹

These quotes, and concepts such as "false class consciousness" and "Lumpenproletariat", all point to the conclusion that Marx holds a view similar to the analysis outlined above.

His own class origins were petit-bourgeois and his skills would have fitted him for membership of this class also but he chose to adopt views hostile to their interests. The fact that he was a member of an oppressed minority, the Jews, and that his family had chosen to abandon Judaism in order to avoid the civil disabilities to which Jews were subjected, one suspects influenced his radicalism and the atheistic humanistic form which it took.¹⁰ His own case, therefore, is an example of individual deviation. The way that the consciousness of a group, and in particular a class, is conditioned, however, differs from this analysis in crucial respects.

2.2. The consciousness of groups

By attributing consciousness to groups I do not mean to suggest that a group is a person in its own right, an alien being with a mind. A group which is organised, in Marx's terms, "for itself", i.e. consciously pursues collective interests, will have a set of

⁹ op. cit. *The Communist Manifesto* pg 91.

¹⁰ c.f. *Karl Marx: his life and environment*, I. Berlin, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1978, pp 19, 20.

values, viewpoints, theories, etc. in terms of which these interests are articulated. The consciousness of the group, therefore, is the set of values which are expressed by its spokesmen (or women) and propagated by its institutions and the prevalent opinions carried along its communication networks with some degree of formal or informal control of dissent. These views will ultimately rest upon an approximate consensus of opinion within the group.

A common viewpoint has to be arrived at by the members of the group if collective action in pursuit of common goals is to become a possibility. There will be a reciprocal causal relationship between the actions of the representatives of the institutions of the group and the consensus of opinion of the group as a whole. The executive, however, can only exercise political power if the members of the group are prepared to support its actions. This means that it must act in accordance with the consensus of opinion.¹¹

On the other hand, the executive may act to control dissent in order to manipulate the consensus. Consensus can only be "managed", however, within limits, i.e. when the dissent is that of a minority. It is the central role played by consensus which licences the application of the term "consciousness" to the collectively held opinions of a group which are expressed through its institutional structures.

In terms of the life-circumstances which condition the consciousness of the group, since these views must express a consensus, only common features can act as conditioning factors. It is the material circumstances common to the class, therefore, which condition class-consciousness. Individual variations in consciousness due to special conditions will fail to gain the sympathy of the class if they do not accord with common experience and sentiment. The concept of "common experience, however, should be elaborated further.

¹¹ Sometimes collective apathy may allow the institutional leaders to act independently but this assumes that their actions are broadly in line with the expectations of the group, otherwise opposition would arise.

In "common experience" we are dealing with a universal denoting a class of events experienced by many individuals. This universal should be understood as a concrete Hegelian universal rather than in terms of the Socratic notion of universality which is denoted by a single feature possessed by all the members of the class.

Women, children, old people, male workers etc., may all experience the conditions of their class differently, but because of the interdependent relations between these groups the conditions which directly affect one section will indirectly affect the rest. Deprivation, for instance, will tend to affect the whole internal structure of a class wherever it is concentrated. Dangerous conditions of work for a male worker means the threat of widowhood for his wife with all the attendant difficulties this brings. Hardship for the wife disrupts the family life of the male worker (usually increasing his militancy at work). This creates bonds of sympathy and understanding¹² between the sub-divisions of the class (which is strengthened by daily face to face contact), and a common consciousness of the situation. The consciousness of the conditions affecting all is expressed in the consciousness of each.

Sections of the community who for one reason or another identify themselves as outsiders, on the other hand, will not find easy acceptance of their views within the class. The perspectives of those who are successful relative to their fellows, for instance, and who for that reason do not identify with the aspirations of the group as a whole, or of those who are despised by the other members and perhaps are motivated in their views by a sense of revenge, will remain minority opinions.¹³ Once again, therefore, the

¹² The relations of interdependence may create common cause even without real understanding or sympathy. A man who feels responsible for the standard of living of his family is shamed by hardship inflicted upon them. He may actually be uncomprehending and indifferent to the suffering of his wife but will react in her defence for the reasons stated above. In reality consensus is formed via some element of both motivations.

¹³ A further reason for a common understanding occurs when different groups face common treatment by an oppressor, especially when the situation is such that whatever treatment can be meted out to one group can and would be meted out to the rest. Each will then tend to sympathise with the others as oppressed groups, irrespective of the differences between them and make common cause against the oppression, which, if allowed to affect one, would be used against all.

consciousness of the class will invariably have as its major conditioning factor the circumstances "common" to the members of the class.

With respect to the way the consequences of holding certain views conditions class consciousness, unlike the situation for the individual, changes in class consciousness have immediate implications for the goals and objectives of the whole class and hence affect its social and political future. The opinions and perspectives which inform the consensus, therefore, are of direct political interest to the members of the class.

Members of the class will attempt to make sure that the consensus views are favourable to their own interests and since class consciousness is a question of consensus, the majority interests will be the predominant conditioning factor which influences it. Should any group succeed in manipulating the consensus for their own ends, they will do so only in so far as their views are made to appear to coincide with the interests of the majority.

Class consciousness is also, therefore, more susceptible to the determining pressure of class interest than individual consciousness.¹⁴ This latter point allows us to understand why Marx regards the consciousness of ruling classes as inevitably ideological in character.

2.3. The consciousness of a ruling class

Every ruling class claims to rule on behalf of the whole community, despite the fact that its existence as a class presupposes relations of exploitation between itself and other classes.

¹⁴ The degree to which the consciousness of a class could diverge from views which support its material interests, can be estimated by the influence which reformers within an oppressing class can exercise over its policies or the impact of passive resistance aimed at changing the consciousness of the class from without. Marx always tends to suggest that change in policy only comes when the reforming interests coincide with the material interests of powerful groups within the ruling class, e.g. the "10 hours" legislation. Other case studies might include the Vietnamese war or the black civil rights movement in the U.S.A.

The political circumstances surrounding both its rise to power and its consolidation of power, therefore, will dictate that these antagonisms should be concealed or minimised in significance in order to justify its rule both to other classes and to its own members. The political consequences of exposing the exploitative nature of the system, therefore, militate against a ruling class developing or propagating a veridical view of it. As Marx says in *The German Ideology*,

"For each new class which puts itself in the place of the one ruling before it, is compelled, simply in order to achieve its aims, to represent its interest as the common interest of all members of society."¹⁵

It is initially successful, Marx explains,

".... because in the beginning its interest really is more closely connected to the common interest of all other non-ruling classes and has been unable under the constraint of the previously existing conditions to develop as the particular interest of a particular class."¹⁶

In its period of decline, however, as class conflict grows,

"The earlier conceptions of these relations of intercourse, in which the real individual interests were asserted as general interests, decline into mere idealising phrases, conscious illusions and deliberate deceits. But the more they are condemned as falsehoods, and the less they satisfy the understanding, the more dogmatically they are asserted and the more deceitful, moralising and spiritual becomes the language of established society."¹⁷

Victorian hypocrisy is a case in point. It is not necessary for the system to be in a state of decline for the situation described above to obtain. It is merely necessary that

¹⁵ op. cit. *The German Ideology*, pp 65, 66.

¹⁶ Ibid. pg. 66.

¹⁷ Ibid. cited in *Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Philosophy*, T. B. Bottomore and M. Rubel, 2nd edition, Harmondsworth, Penguin 1961, pg 96.

exploitation and therefore the potential for class conflict should take an extreme form in that society. This can occur during periods of rapid growth.

The maxim of an exploitative relation is "do unto others what you would *not* have them do unto you", i.e. it is by its very nature one-sided. The imperatives of class rule, on the other hand, dictate that the actions of the ruling class should be seen to be justified by some universal standard.

The ruling class will be compelled, therefore, in its desire to prohibit reciprocal actions of others whilst reserving them for itself, to promote universal standards which its members cannot keep because of the exploitative nature of its rule. Both the standards and the violations are a product of the same exploitative relations, the ruling class is thus caught in an unavoidable contradiction.

The Victorian ruling class consciously promoted Christian values amongst the working class as a "civilising" influence. They needed to be seen to be adhering to those same values themselves, of course, for the reasons stated. But when they said "thou shalt not steal", they principally meant "thou shalt not steal from the ruling class" and likewise "thou shalt not kill".

If anyone took the trouble to walk around the cotton mills or visit the working class areas, however, they could not fail to see that those who produced the wealth which the ruling class lived from were themselves desperately poor and that the conditions under which they lived and worked, maimed and killed large numbers of them. This situation existed to satisfy the desire for gain of the ruling class.

Anyone who took these values seriously, therefore, must draw the conclusion that the ruling class stood condemned by their own values. The conditions of labour of the working class constituted a kind of robbery with violence. The attempt to apply the universal concepts in a particularistic manner necessarily resulted in a hypocritical consciousness ridden with contradictions.

The case is similar with the Victorian attitude to sex. Chastity was strongly emphasised by the ruling class principally to control the behaviour of the women of their own class who were regarded by their husbands as property.¹⁸ Chastity was also preached to the working class but mainly as a way of accustoming its members to the discipline of an external authority. But if the women of the ruling class were to be kept sexually immature then the sexual needs of the male members of the class had to be serviced elsewhere. Prostitution, therefore reached its highest levels in the Victorian era as working class girls were driven by poverty to perform this role.

The male members of the ruling class once again were forced to break in private the rules which they proclaimed in public. The coincidence of the highest levels of "immorality" and the greatest emphasis on morals is not an accident, it is a consequence of the contradiction between the ideological and the practical requirements of exploitative relations.

The contradiction between the ideological and practical imperatives to which the individual bourgeois was subjected was understood in a one-sided manner as an inevitable conflict within the psyche of the individual. The exclusion of the social dimension of the problem from consideration functioned ideologically to prevent social criticism but in doing so it also prevented the cause of the contradiction from entering the social consciousness.

The situation was therefore understood as uncaused, a metaphysical absolute common to all men, an insoluble problem within the mind of the individual. This view was expressed in literature in the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.¹⁹ Victorian society was all too aware of the fact that the public face of the moral, respectable individual masked the potential for private evil but this was understood a-historically as part of the human

¹⁸ cf. F. Engels' discussion of monogamy in *The Origin of the Family Private Property and the State*. pp 494-498

¹⁹ *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Robert Louis Stevenson, 1886.

condition rather than following from the imperatives of Victorian upper class rule.

A divided consciousness of this kind, however, is common to all societies founded upon antagonistic relations of production. It is generally interpreted in a one-sided metaphysical fashion, for the reasons described,²⁰ as a struggle between the flesh and the spirit, nature and consciousness, mind and matter.

The contradiction was sharper in Victorian society, however, not only because of the severity of the exploitative relations but also because it subscribed to the ideals of individualism. Standards applied to all individuals, there was no possibility therefore of publically applying different standards to the behaviour of different groups. This situation necessitated a hypocritical consciousness with respect to the treatment of subordinate social groups.

In general, moral codes express the consensus of opinion on what actions will bring desired results for some group or other.²¹ There may be conflicting moral views within a society corresponding to the conflicting aspirations of different groups. The consensus is experienced as an "alien" external constraint, however, only when the social organisation of a group combines cooperation and conflict within the same relations. "The general interest" then has to be imposed from without,²² often in the abstract mystified form of an absolute "ought".

The conflict between moral and sensual interests is the conflict between social imperatives and individual goals.²³ To represent this conflict as a metaphysical absolute

²⁰ This situation is not necessarily a product of the contradictions affecting the consciousness of a ruling class with respect to exploitation, the more general phenomenon whereby in a competitive society the desires of individuals bring them into conflict with each other thus threatening social cooperation is sufficient to explain the ascription of good and evil in this fashion.

²¹ Morality is usually a public matter although Nietzsche envisaged "self-overcoming", i.e. the formation of private moralities, as crucially important for the future of western culture.

²² c.f. op. cit. *The German Ideology* pg 53.

²³ There may be a conflict between immediate gratification and long term satisfaction, as in Plato's *Protagoras*, the latter there being identified with both the rational and the moral. In this case however, the "moral" is still "sensual", their absolute opposition is represented by Kant's moral theory.

is, therefore, to suggest that the antagonism between individual and social requirements is similarly unavoidable. This is true only for societies founded upon an antagonistic form of the division of labour. A society organised in such a way that individual and communal imperatives coincide, would simultaneously unite the demands of the "flesh" with those of the "spirit" also.²⁴

2.4. Proletarian consciousness and class relativism

Having looked at the way in which the consciousness of a ruling class is conditioned, we can return to the question of relativism. In *The German Ideology*, Marx says,

"On the other hand, each class in turn achieves an independent existence over and against the individuals we have already indicated several times how this subsuming of individuals under the class brings with it their subjection to all kinds of ideas, etc."²⁵

and later,

The subsuming of individuals under definite classes cannot be abolished until a class has taken shape, which has no longer any *particular* class interest to assert against a ruling class.²⁶

and also,

"The whole semblance that the rule of a certain class is only the rule of certain ideas (morality, ideology, etc.), ends of its own accord as soon as class domination ceases to be the form of social organisation: that is to say as soon as it is no longer necessary to represent a particular interest as general or the 'general interest' as ruling."²⁷

²⁴ It is the Hegelian perspective which allows us to search for such a synthesis despite the arguments which represent the demands of the individual and the society as inevitably antithetical.

²⁵ op. cit. *The German Ideology*, pg 82.

²⁶ Ibid. pg. 83 (my italics)

²⁷ Ibid. pg 66 (the words in brackets were added by me)

Marx regards the proletariat as a "universal" class, a class whose interests do not lie in setting itself up as the exploiter of other classes but in abolishing exploitation and class rule altogether. As such its consciousness will not suffer from the constraints and contradictions described above.

I will return to the question of the factors which condition the consciousness of the proletariat later but the discussion above gives some indication of why the consciousness of this class need not necessarily be one-sided and therefore class relative in the manner of previous ruling classes.

3. Four questions

In attempting to understand Marx's account of the historical development of consciousness to the point where the causes of alienation, class conflict, artificial scarcity, repression of the individual by the group etc. can be understood and the problems solved, three main questions have to be answered. First, how do the material conditions of society evolve in such a manner as to permit the nature of the problem to be correctly perceived by any individual who considers the issues seriously? Secondly, why is it possible for the proletariat and only the proletariat as a class to adopt this view as its class perspective? Thirdly, Given that the proletariat can achieve such a view what factors predispose it to do so? Why should the proletariat attempt to solve "the riddle of history"? The remaining and all-important question which follows from this analysis is: what kind of social organisation will produce a solution to these problems? I will argue that the key to the answer to this latter question, as Marx realised, lies in the forms of social relations which existed, already developed, in his own time within the working class.

3.1. The mechanisms which determine consciousness in general.

In answer to the first of these questions, adequate knowledge of the world is gained for Marx, as it is for Hegel, when apparently accidental and unrelated phenomena are found to be necessarily interconnected and are understood as the manifestations of a single, universal phenomenon. Discovery of the *system* governed by its own laws which unites the apparently individual phenomena and hence the identification of the universal which manifests itself in each particular, alone gives the practical understanding which allows mankind to address and attempt to deal with the *root* causes of things. Science is characterised by the discovery of universality and necessity. This involves the unmasking of what Marx calls "fetishism".

Fetishism is the identification of a god with its physical representation. Marx uses the term more generally to mean the identification of a universal entity with a particular manifestation of it.²⁸ Knowledge is gained when the universal is seen to be more than the particular and therefore not merely identical to it, and the behaviour of the particular is understood as simply one particular manifestation of the universal.²⁹ The unmasking of fetishism allows the knower to grasp the full range of manifestations of the universal and thus to grasp the fundamental pattern of its behaviour. This is crucial where one is attempting to "cure the disease" rather than to "treat the symptom".

²⁸ Engels refers to Adam Smith as the "economic Luther", c.f. op. cit. *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy*, pg 166 and op. cit. *E.P.M.* (Marx's explanation) because just as Luther accused catholicism of worshiping physical representations of God instead of God who appears directly in the human conscience, Smith accuses previous economists of confusing the physical embodiments of wealth with its essence, labour.

The representations of wealth are not always arbitrary as in the case of coins and precious metals, which were identified with wealth by the Mercantilists, but can also be natural objects as in the case of corn, which was identified with wealth by the Physiocrats.

²⁹ The elimination of fetishism, as can be seen, is the elimination of "one-sided" viewpoints in the Hegelian sense. Newton's system was "fetishist" in this sense from the point of view of the theory of relativity, although the parallel with the more familiar usage of the term is not so obvious. The transcending of one-sided viewpoints is a general principle in the acquisition of knowledge.

Fetishism also involves the failure to distinguish between the operative features of the phenomenon which explain its behaviour and the features which are merely present but passive.

Extending the religious parallel further to illustrate the point, for instance, the Israelites under the leadership of Saul won battles using guerrilla tactics in the mountains, the Philistines then said that their god was a god of the mountains who could not give them victory on the plains. Saul was tempted into a battle on the plain at Gilboa and duly lost. David, however, who succeeded Saul, fought the Philistines on the plain of Esdraelon and won.³⁰ This demonstrated to the Philistines that not only was the efficacy of Yaweh more universal in its scope than in the particular terrain of mountainous areas, but also that Yaweh's association with mountains was not the operative factor in affecting the outcome of battles. As far as battle-winning was concerned the connection with mountains was accidental. The point to note here is the way that new experience conditions consciousness both of the relationship between universal and particular and of which are the operative factors responsible for certain effects.

If God speaks to someone from a burning bush then the witness could not be blamed for thinking that God looks like a burning bush. But if God then speaks to that person from a peal of thunder, he or she will know that this particular physical form is not the only form which he can assume. In the same way the historical development of the material conditions of existence tends to enlighten the historical actor as to the real causes of things.

An example of this has already been given. Prior to capitalism, those who possessed most of the wealth in society owned it in the form of a certain kind of physical object, e.g. land and the produce of the land. Under these conditions it was natural that wealth

³⁰ *The Bible as History: Archeology confirms the book of books (New edition)* Werner Keller, Hodder and Stoughton 1980, Ch 16.

should be identified with the natural objects in which it principally was stored. With the advent of the market system, however, it could be seen that wealth can be held in physical forms which are in principle of unlimited variety and can each be exchanged for another. Value can change its form and therefore appears independent of any particular form.³¹

With respect to the way that historical circumstances condition consciousness, it is not simply that experience allows the conscious subject to perceive a difference between the universal and the particular which could not have been perceived under other circumstances, prompting the conceptual distinction, nor is it just that the separation between the universal and particular is forced under certain empirical conditions on pain of the unintelligibility of the phenomenon, as in the case cited above. It is also the fact that even if someone arrived at the idea through speculation without being prompted by experience, which is a possibility, no evidence would be available to support the claim.

If for instance God *only* appears as a burning bush but someone suggested that he need not appear in this particular form, how could the proposition be demonstrated? The idea would remain speculative and be unlikely to be accepted as knowledge by the group. Historical development, however, provides the evidence to support the correct solution as well as the problematic for which only such a solution will suffice. The mechanisms which condition consciousness in this way are as follows: increasing diversity, rapidity of change, the increasing division of labour and social conflict.

³¹ Indeed in the form of money, as distinct from money tokens, it appears to be independent of all physical forms. Transactions can be carried out in the modern era by simply crediting or debiting accounts held in a bank. These accounts consist merely of numbers on paper or numbers stored in an electronic device. It is not the numbers which one owns; the numbers merely record ones wealth, which apparently does not take a physical form at all in this situation.

3.1.1. Increasing diversity

This topic has been dealt with largely in the previous section. The historical development of the forces of production culminates in a society where wealth takes diverse natural forms each of which can be exchanged for the others as "quantities of wealth". The forms of labour which produce the wealth are similarly diverse and it is precisely under these conditions that they are conceived of as wealth-production in general, i.e. labour in general, the category of modern political economy.

In the introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* Marx says:

"Indifference with regard to a specific kind of labour presupposes a highly developed totality of real kinds of labour, no single one of which is predominant any longer. The most general abstractions arise as a rule only together with the richest concrete development, in which one thing appears common to many, common to all. At this point it ceases to be conceivable in a particular form alone."³²

Not only is it the case that the society engages in diverse kinds of wealth-creating activity, each individual does also. The worker's consciousness of the nature of his own labour changes also therefore.

One's own labour comes to represent something more than a particular kind of labour to each individual as the volatility of the system of production demands ever-changing practices and the redistribution of man-power from one branch of industry to another. Marx continues:

"Indifference towards specific labour corresponds to a form of society in which individuals pass easily from one kind of labour to another, and in which the

³² op. cit. *Preface and Introduction to the Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, pg 36.

specific kind of labour is accidental, and therefore indifferent to them. Labour, not only as a category but in reality, has become a means to create wealth in general and has ceased to be organically tied to particular individuals in a specific form."³³

This latter point is double-edged in its implications. On the one hand, it points to the possibility of the many-sided development of the worker, but on the other, the separation of the specific form of labour from the worker's sense of identity reveals the possibility of his total alienation from his own labouring activity.

Rather than all of the possibilities of his productive potential becoming part of his identity, none of them do, since he is tied to no particular one and his labour is outside of his control. His labour is a commodity to be used by others. In this form it is experienced as an abstract universal, simply effort expended, the particular form of which is irrelevant since it is experienced as a loss.

It is in this form that it is understood by the political economist, who, reflecting the consciousness of the bourgeois, also regards it merely as effort which can be acquired and directed into the most lucrative channels. Once it is no longer conceived of as part of the worker's life-activity, its loss is no longer conceived of as a hardship.

3.1.2. The rapidity of change

Diversity can take two forms, synchronic (contemporaneous) as in the situation described above, and diachronic (succession in time).³⁴ In a slowly changing environment, the fact that a thing will take diverse forms as it undergoes change is not easily appreciated. In a situation of rapid change, however, the diversity of form becomes

³³ Idem.

³⁴ These terms originate in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and are used by Piaget in the discussion of dialectics in his book entitled *Structuralism*. J.Piaget, Routledge, Keegan and Paul, London 1971.

obvious and the kinds of comparison and logical conclusions described above can consequently be made.

A concrete example of how consciousness is conditioned by the perception of change might be the comparison between consciousness in slowly developing societies where division of labour and social reward depend upon hereditary qualification and consciousness in a more rapidly developing market system.

In a system where division of labour is hereditary, the same social status is always combined with the same form of labour to which in turn always accrues the same degree of social reward. In such a system it appears that the structure of authority, the distribution of wealth and the division of labour will always have the same form. Also, it is not possible under these conditions to ascertain which of these three attributes is the operative factor in determining the others, i.e. to comprehend the causal relations existing between them.

A ruling class will claim that social reward and the performance of certain functions is their hereditary prerogative, i.e. that social status is the principal causal factor. In law and custom this may indeed be the case. This contrasts with Marx's analysis, where social status is merely the recognition of consolidated social power which in practical terms rests upon the division of labour.

When the speed of development of the productive forces increases, however, the division of labour undergoes perceptible changes, some branches of industry contract, others expand, some disappear while others come into being in a relatively short space of time. Under these conditions it becomes obvious that those involved in increasingly successful branches of industry acquire wealth and power and eventually status while those whose form of activity is no longer socially important eventually lose these things. The same activity will attract different degrees of status and reward as its relative importance changes. Status and reward, therefore, show themselves to be particular social attributes which an activity may have in varying degrees in the course of the development of the

economic system.

A synchronic universal will manifest itself as a set of interrelated things, a system; a diachronic universal as a set of interrelated stages of development, a process. It is the process of the development of the productive forces manifesting itself in changing patterns of the division of labour which is seen to be the principal causal factor here. Status and social reward are seen *not* to be the principal causes, i.e. the operative factors in determining change, since the relationships between different levels of reward and status can only be understood in terms of the changing division of labour.

In addition, it can be seen that in the struggle to obtain status and reward, it is the position of the individual in the division of labour which is the decisive factor, conferring social leverage, and it is this, therefore, which is the principal cause. Heredity most certainly cannot be anything more than a purely accidental factor since as individuals move from one social activity to another, a necessary feature of a rapidly changing economy, they no longer retain their previous status or level of reward. Heredity makes no difference.

It could be argued, however, that division of labour is the principal cause in a market system but hereditary status is the principal cause in, say, a feudal system. But the point which is being made is that the only difference between the two systems in terms of the question is the speed of development and that feudalism would exhibit the same features if observed over a long enough time scale.³⁵

Capitalism simply makes them observable within a single lifetime, thus demonstrating which factors are part of the central dynamic and which are either accidental or peripheral consequences. This point is illustrated in Marx's famous passage referring to bourgeois society from *The Communist Manifesto*:

³⁵ In fact, all revolutionary transitions exhibit this same set of relationships.

"All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind."³⁶

and also in the discussion in the introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* where he says:

"Bourgeois society is the most developed and complex historical organisation of production. Therefore, the categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, also allow an insight into all extinct social formations from the ruins of which it built itself up, Human anatomy provides a key to the anatomy of the ape."³⁷

In comparing these societies, we are merely looking at different phases of a single process. The later phase is an augmented version of the earlier phases. The same principles are at work but the degree of differentiation and the rate of change is greater, permitting a better understanding of its causal relations.³⁸ This brings us to the next mechanism which gives insight into social processes, - increasing division of labour.

³⁶ op. cit. *The Communist Manifesto* pg 83.

³⁷ op. cit. *Preface and Introduction to A contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, pg 37.

³⁸ In particular, if diversity of the form of property leads to the notion of the rule of property in general, the movement of property gives rise to the notion of the property *system*.

Rapid change demonstrates how capitalists decisions follow changes in market conditions. These changes follow a predictable pattern and thus constitute a process, a diachronic universal which can be seen to be the underlying determining factor in capitalist social relations.

3.1.3. Increasing division of labour

Increasing division of labour creates situations in which it can be discerned which of the functional elements (moments) of a process is responsible for which effects. As Marx says, once different aspects of a process are divided i.e. they are performed by different groups of people, then as separate processes they develop in an uneven, non-synchronised manner producing a potential for conflict between the groups.³⁹

Under these circumstances it is possible to make comparisons between them and to apportion responsibility for certain effects in a manner which is not possible when the functions are combined in the activity of a single group.

Under the feudal system, for instance, the lord of the manor would combine the principal legal, political and economic functions which determine the life of his area in his own activities. It is not clear under these circumstances which of these concerns act as the motive force in determining the actions of him or his class.

The rationale for such actions given by the actors themselves can be either deliberately deceptive or genuinely mistaken.⁴⁰ Explanations which stress legal and political motives, for instance, Marx might well have regarded as ideological.

When these functions devolve upon separate people however, then the activities of the separate groups may be compared. Internal disputes between the judiciary, politicians, and those who are responsible for production and whose viewpoints eventually prevail, are instructive as to which motivations govern the actions of which group and how this is related to their functions within the whole.

³⁹ Citations in Chapter 1 section 1, where he suggests that division of labour leads to conflict.

⁴⁰ One is justified in drawing such a conclusion under the circumstances where the explanation given by the actor would lead one to expect a certain pattern of behaviour from him or her but at some point the person behaves in a manner which is inconsistent with this explanation and possibly more consistent with an alternative explanation.

A good example of how the historical development of the division of labour within a social group leads to a change in the consciousness of the participants with respect to the causes of social behaviour would be a study of the development of the capitalist class from small artisans to factory owners.

Among the small artisans of the 16th century, the functions of ownership of the means of production and personal labour went hand in hand. The small artisan was both an owner and a labourer. The consciousness of this class vis-a-vis the aristocracy and the catholic church at that time was critical and expressed by the work ethic. This was interpreted in religious terms in the idea that love for one's neighbour involved living by one's own labour rather than imposing the burden of tithes or taxes upon others. This criticism was clearly levelled by the petit bourgeoisie from the point of view of their identity as workers. At this stage they advanced the demand for an egalitarian society. All should be equal as "citizens" or "in the sight of God" or whatever, irrespective of social position.

Later, as the functions of ownership and labour separated, wage labour became the dominant economic relationship. Ownership and labour and the interests that flowed therefrom came to be embodied in different groups of people. Still, while these groups had a common enemy in the aristocracy, they remained allies and neither was conscious of the differences between them.

When the bourgeoisie took control, however, then the limits of bourgeois political and social ambitions could be seen. The interests of property owners was to see a polarisation of wealth in society and the concentration of it in their own hands. The interests of the workers lay in the development of a classless society. Not until these functions had separated was it possible to see that they were implicitly opposed to each other.

When the small artisan was both owner and worker it was not possible to see that though, as workers, the petit bourgeoisie might advance the idea of a classless society, as owners, they could not bring it about. Indeed, competition for the possession of private

property leads of itself to inequality and the re-emergence of classes. The obstacle to the formation of a classless society can thus be seen to be property ownership itself but this only becomes clear after the bourgeoisie, as owners, fail to establish such a society.

3.1.4. Social conflict

In the previous section we saw how the separation of functions leads to their separate, uneven development and the potential for conflict between them. Actual conflict between the groups performing these functions focuses attention upon these differences. Thus it was the "June uprising" of the Paris workers in 1848 and its violent suppression by common consent of all the bourgeois parties which made the workers aware of their separate class interests vis-a-vis the bourgeoisie. The willingness of the bourgeoisie to act against the working class served to demonstrate its opposed interests. At the same time certain figures who had expressed radical views and had received unequivocal support from the workers, e.g. Ledru-Rollin, were discredited for backing this action.

This shows a second role played by conflict in the development of consciousness, namely, that it forces hard choices to be made thus exposing the limits of professed radicalism and other opinions. Contradictions, particularly between what people say or allow to be believed and their true motives can remain hidden if they are not challenged. By forcing people to act upon their views, to choose between alternative sides in a conflict one can see their actual motives. This is not only true of individuals but also, more importantly, of classes.

A ruling class is vulnerable in this respect in the area of the contradiction between its one-sided, practical interests and its universal, legitimating ideology. The supposed Christian good-will of the Victorian ruling class towards the working class was exposed as a sham the more it was forced to mobilise to defend its own interests against those it professed to feel sorry for. Furthermore, in any protracted struggle, the attempts to explain actions taken against the exploited classes in terms of a universal morality

become more convoluted and difficult to believe.⁴¹ The simpler explanation that they are pursuing a one-sided, class interest becomes more and more obvious.

Conflict will thus teach in a way that is impossible if the pretensions of a ruling class remain unchallenged i.e. if they are not forced to act in defence of their particular interests. It allows one to determine the real bases of the actions of social groups and thus to ascribe causality more correctly. It selects the correct explanation from a set of plausible ones in a manner similar to a crucial test.⁴²

All four of these characteristics, diversity, rapidity of change, division of labour and conflict, increase as the forces of production increase. With the advent of the capitalist system they increase dramatically, making possible a perception of society in which the sources of its problems can be perceived clearly for the first time.

In Hegel's philosophy, consciousness moves from one-sided abstractions to consciousness of the concrete universal. The means by which this transition is achieved is, however, purely logical. It moves solely within the realm of thought. For Marx on the other hand this transition is mediated by changes in the material circumstances of life which condition thought. The material changes just described play the role which logic plays for Hegel, i.e. permitting this theoretical development to take place, (or rather, more correctly, the logical process is necessitated by the attempt to come to terms with these changes).

One would expect the forms of consciousness corresponding to capitalist society, therefore, to exhibit greater universality and to have as their dominant concerns the

⁴¹ The problem for the ruling class is that it cannot predict the twists and turns of the struggle. An explanation given today, therefore, might well conflict with an action which it finds it necessary undertake tomorrow. The rationalisations thus become more and more transparent and strained as the conflict progresses.

⁴² explanations of events which only serve to obscure the truth and cause people to fall back upon prejudice, e.g. Northern Ireland or the Middle East.

This might justify the post-modern perspective that reality is always ambiguous, against this, however, it might be argued that certain events nevertheless have a decisive effect on the consciousness of the majority e.g. "Bloody Sunday" in Northern Ireland.

problems outlined in chapter one. In chapter seven I shall show that this is in fact the case by analysing the principal "isms" of the 19th and 20th centuries. At this point, however, I shall turn to the second question broached earlier, namely, why it is possible for the proletariat and only the proletariat to have a totally accurate view of the system as its form of consciousness.

3.2. The "universal" class

A partial answer to the question cited above has already been given in the section entitled "The consciousness of a ruling class". The contradictions within the situation of an exploiting class militate against it ever forming an accurate view of its own form of rule. The less defensible its position the more its official pronouncements become an exercise in apologetics. For instance, when capitalism was a progressive movement its spokesmen did not feel the need to obscure its perceived shortcomings. This is why Marx has a higher opinion of Smith and Ricardo than the so-called "vulgar" economists who followed them.

But there is a second argument in Marx's work which suggests that a class whose rule is based upon exploitation cannot form an adequate understanding of the social system and this is because of the narrowness of its outlook. The questions faced and the solutions given by this class are simply related to its own one-sided concerns, they lack the necessary scope and universality needed to understand many of the social phenomena manifested by the system.

This view is implied in the quote in *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* about whether a spokesman is to be regarded as "petit bourgeois",

"What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions which to which material interest and social position

drive the latter practically."⁴³

In contrast to this view, Marx suggests that the problematic faced by the exploited class of the modern era, the proletariat, is unique in that the problems which it faces are universal in scope. The problems of the class are the problems of "mankind", i.e. the the fundamental social and historical problems of human society. The proletariat, as a class, he suggests, is not intellectually limited in the same way as the bourgeoisie by the narrowness of its own material concerns, rather is it driven by circumstances to address wider issues, but this latter point is the subject of the next section.

If this is true of the proletariat the question still remains as to why it should be so. What makes the proletariat special with respect to the two forms of limitation mentioned above? Above all, how can Marx regard it as a class within which there is no latent potential for class division and rule?

In *The German Ideology*, Marx gives the following explanation of why under each new ruling class social relations become progressively more liberal and humanistic, i.e. less restrictive and one-sided:

"When the French bourgeoisie overthrew the rule of the aristocracy, it thereby made it possible for many proletarians to raise themselves above the proletariat, but only in so far as they became bourgeois. Every new class, therefore, achieves its domination only on a broader basis than that of the previous ruling class. On the other hand, the opposition of all non-ruling classes to the new ruling class later develops all the more sharply and profoundly. These two characteristics entail that the struggle to be waged against this new ruling class has as its object a more decisive and radical negation of the previous conditions of society than could have been accomplished by all previous classes which aspired to rule."⁴⁴

⁴³ 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, op. cit. pg 120.

⁴⁴ op.cit. *The German Ideology* pg 66.

Each new class establishes its own "freedoms" as general freedoms, freedom for all. The succession of classes therefore presents us with a cumulative process whereby the abolition of the narrow restrictions which are necessary to the rule of each previous class are progressively done away with. The system therefore, tends towards the cumulative elimination of relations which serve particular interests and appears to be moving towards a humanistic society which serves universal interests.

The explanation given above is not sufficient by itself, however, to make the case. As we have seen, the development of the forces of production leads to an increase in the division of labour. The division of labour is potentially a source of new class divisions. As fast as the old forms of exploitation are eliminated, it is possible that new ones could arise. A humanistic system would never be reached.

According to Marx's own analysis, the demands advanced by an emerging ruling class will be conditioned by their material interests. An analysis of the dynamics of the evolution of the material interests of successive ruling classes, therefore, is necessary to supplement the explanation given above.

Such an analysis has already been given in chapter 5. Beyond a certain point, the increase in the division of labour, rather than increasing the class divisions in society, creates a situation, via increased exchange and the emergence of the market, whereby all forms of property are interchangeable. Under these circumstances class rule is no longer based upon the ownership of a particular form of property or the control of a particular form of labour. Society tends to polarise into "two great classes"; property in general is opposed by labour in general. Hence, division of labour within the working class will not, under these conditions, be a source of new class divisions.

The consciousness of the proletariat, therefore, is conditioned in a manner different from all previous classes, i.e. its interests are not narrowly those of a particular kind of labour and it does not have to hide from itself and others its exploitative relations to another class. This is one of the reasons why this class is able to understand itself and its

own social circumstances without self-deception.

However, whilst this is true within a capitalist system, it need not remain true when the market has been abolished. Division of labour within the new system would remain a potential source of leverage from which one group could establish its supremacy over others. If this is not to happen, everything depends upon the political content of the proletarian movement which builds the new system and determines the form of the solution to this problem to be adopted within the new social structure.⁴⁵

3.3. The proletarian problematic

The problem of emancipation which faces the proletariat differs in character from that which has faced all exploited classes previously. This is a point developed in the previous chapter but restated here with respect to consciousness. Marx differentiates the experience of the proletarian from that of other exploited classes as follows:-

"The division between the personal and class individual, the accidental nature of the conditions of life for the individual, appears *only* with the emergence of a class which is itself a product of the bourgeoisie. This accidental character is only engendered and developed by competition and the struggle of individuals among themselves."⁴⁶

That is to say, since an individual's life circumstances are subject to changes in market conditions, the life-circumstances which might be expected by a person occupying a certain position in the division of labour appropriate to his or her class are not guaranteed. For the proletariat this is something negative, a problem.

This situation did not hold for exploited classes previously. Marx illustrates this by pointing out that the emerging bourgeoisie regarded their condition of existence, movable

⁴⁵ We have seen examples of the problem in the history of putative socialist states in the 20th century, e.g. the problem of bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and technocracy in China.

⁴⁶ *op. cit. The German Ideology* pg 84 (my italics).

property and craft labour

".....as something positive, which was asserted against feudal landed property,....."⁴⁷

and that consequently, these emancipated serfs, which the burgesses originally were,

".... did not rise above the system of estates, but only formed a new estate, retaining their previous mode of labour even in the new situation, and developing it further by freeing it from its fetters, which no longer corresponded to the development already attained."⁴⁸

The proletariat on the other hand cannot emancipate itself simply by gaining control of, and generalising, its own labour process; it must abolish it. As stated before, if workers owned their own production units collectively, i.e. the factories, but continued to produce for the market as before, the conditions which rendered their situation precarious before would still exist.

The capitalists, although their pursuit of gain can be prosecuted more or less ruthlessly depending upon the individuals involved, are ultimately only the servants of the "god" capital whose will is exercised through market forces. Even the most liberal of them will cut wages, increase hours and lay off workers when demand falls.

To remove the servant but leave the master does not solve the problem. Hence Marx continues:

"Thus while refugee serfs only wished to be free to assert the conditions of existence which were already there, and hence, in the end, only arrived at free labour, the proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals will have to abolish the very condition of their existence hitherto (which has moreover been that of all society up to the present), namely labour."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Idem.

⁴⁸ Idem.

⁴⁹ Ibid. pg 85.

The subjection which the labourer experiences to alien forces compelling him to work in conditions of deprivation and uncertainty is the result of the market which is in turn based upon economic relations of self-interest on one hand and the need to cooperate in social production on the other (operating in the context of an advanced division of labour and high productive potential).

It is precisely this coincidence of cooperation and conflict under conditions of increased productivity which was identified in Chapter 1 as the source of all the destructive and repressive social phenomena enumerated there which have been a feature of all societies other than primitive communism. Capitalism is simply their most generalised and developed form.

The proletariat, therefore, has the cause of these fundamental problems as part of its own problematic. Moreover, as Marx states elsewhere, they suffer from all of these phenomena directly. The proletariat will only address the problem of its own emancipation, however, when its conditions are experienced as intolerable and when it can envisage what appears to be an achievable solution.

Before turning to the issue of what kind of social structure might constitute a solution to these problems, I will examine the dominant forms of consciousness of the capitalist era in order to show how they reflect the universal characteristics of the process of social and historical development. In particular, I will attempt to show how the consciousness of the working class prefigures a such a solution.

Part Three

Chapter Seven

Forms of Consciousness of the Capitalist Era

1. Individualism

Individualism is the principal ethic of the capitalist system. It is the value system that has as its ideal the individual acting by him/herself and for him/herself. In so far as society is assumed to be composed of such individuals, the elaboration of this form of consciousness in ethical, legal and philosophical systems will address this putative individual.

Since all individuals are considered to have the same humanity, this viewpoint is universal with respect to the range of people to whom it applies. Consequently, it ascribes all rights, duties, entitlements etc. to individuals irrespective of a person's membership of other social groups. Man in general has become the principal object of concern; in this sense, it also appears to be a form of humanism.

This tends to confirm the view expressed in chapter six, that as modes of production develop in productive power and sophistication, consciousness moves towards a transcendence of particularistic views and addresses itself to universal issues, a stage achieved with the emergence of capitalism.

It is not obvious at first sight, however, that this form of consciousness is in any way modern or peculiar to the capitalist system. Those who forced King John to sign the Magna Carta, ostensibly did so as champions of the rights of the people in general and as Marx himself says, every class that aspires to rule claims to represent "the people" rather than its own particular interests. Even earlier, the Ancient Greeks of the classical period, 600 to 400 b.c., referred to the members of the polis equally as "citizens" and in the latter

part of this period the Athenians evolved a democratic system based on the principle of one-man one-vote. Finally, some religions, and in particular Christianity, appear to have preached equality among their followers irrespective of race or class although most of them differentiate according to gender.

To understand why individualism is indeed a modern phenomenon peculiar to capitalism and thus to fully comprehend its nature, it is necessary and instructive to distinguish it from the cases listed above.

1.1. Rights of "the people"

The major difference between the rights conferred by the Magna Carta and those prescribed by individualism, is that the rights granted by the Magna Carta did not exclude nor were they opposed to the feudal obligations which prevailed in the society at that time. Whatever freedoms "the people" in general might have these do not conflict with the rights and obligations which were deemed to hold between hereditary groups.

Individualism, on the other hand, only regards as legitimate, obligations freely contracted between consenting individuals. Rights attach to the individual *alone* and larger groups have no prior claim upon him or her. Even the claim of society over its members has to be justified in the "Social Contract" theory as a relation which is deemed to have been implicitly agreed to by the individual. It has to be represented this way in order to remain consistent with the individualist ethic.¹

Individualism is, therefore, profoundly hostile to all obligations which are imposed² upon the individual by virtue of his or her membership of a social group (i.e. obligations reflecting inter-group relations). Modern individualism is a more radical doctrine, therefore, than any particular defence of the rights of "the people". It would have been

¹ *Second Treatise on Government*, John Locke, section 119.

² An individual might be deemed to have accepted the obligations contracted by a group if he or she chose to join it in full knowledge of these obligations.

incompatible with the social structure of any society prior to capitalism.

1.2. Greek "citizens"

The difference between the ideas informing Athenian democracy and modern individualism consists in the fact that the majority of the people in the city state were not classed as "citizens". Most of the inhabitants of the Athenian state were slaves,³ hence the rights of the citizen were not intended to apply to them. This relationship to a large body of slaves was the typical situation of the city states of antiquity. It is not the case, therefore, that these states had a dominant ideology that was man-centered in character. Their views merely expressed the relationships which were thought appropriate *among the members of the ruling class*. Individualism, on the other hand, in principle extends rights to all persons, though in practice, states who ostensibly subscribe to this view have practiced discrimination on the basis of race, creed, nationality, gender etc. It is a testimony to the universality of the doctrine, however, that it has, at the same time, provided the theoretical basis of a criticism of these practices within such cultures.

1.3. Christian "brotherhood"

Finally, perhaps the most revealing comparison is with Christian theology. It is part of Christian doctrine that "all men are equal in the sight of God" irrespective of race or class etc.⁴ Even non-Christians are to be treated as "brothers" and "neighbours" with the injunction to "love them as oneself" and thus to regard them as having rights equal to one's own. This doctrine was preached 1500 years before the emergence of capitalism. The examination of its historical origins and subsequent development, however, allows us to make a further distinction between it and the modern individualist ethic.

³ op. cit. *Origin of the Family Private Property and the State*, pg 536.

⁴ There is some contradiction between this and the exclusion of women from positions of authority in the church and with some of the statements of saint Paul about female obedience to the male members of the family.

The ostensive originator of these views, Jesus of Nazareth, is portrayed in the gospels as the son of a carpenter and a Jew, a member, therefore, of the lower classes of an oppressed nation. His teaching, that the possession of wealth, status and power is at best irrelevant and at worst an obstacle to salvation, coincides with the perspectives one might expect in any underclass. It is a fairly typical attitude amongst the dispossessed to place value upon personal qualities among individuals rather than differences in wealth, status and power, of which they have very little, and to regard the latter as false criteria by which people should be judged. This is a viewpoint eloquently expressed in Burns' poem:

"The rank is but the guinea stamp,
the man's the guid for a' that."⁵

This view of wealth and power runs through most of Jesus's pronouncements and is antipathetic to the consciousness of more privileged classes who regard respect for their social position as all-important. He also attacked alienated social relations and practices, e.g. the observances of the religious hierarchy and the privileged position accorded to the Jews. These things are, of course, symbolic reflections of the power and status differentials within society and are correspondingly experienced as empty forms from the humanistic value perspective of an underclass.

To this "class consciousness" of Jesus was added the cosmopolitan consciousness of Paul. Jesus's emphasis upon the content of action irrespective of who performs it and his lack of observance of social mores was the principal source of the enmity directed against him. His main attacks, however, were aimed explicitly at the leaders of his own people who were already compromised by their relationship to Roman imperialism. His views remained unforgivable, therefore, only in the backwater of Judea.

⁵ "A man's a man for a' that" - Robert Burns

In order to spread Christianity beyond Judea, where it was proscribed, Paul was forced to attack the parochialism of its Jewish leadership and to further eliminate cultural and national distinctions from its practices. It was these historical pressures, therefore, which conditioned the universality of its outlook.

The above discussion does not offer an answer to the question of what makes modern individualism unique, rather it further specifies the problem. It appears that an oppressed class can evolve a form of consciousness centered upon the individual at any point in history.

It does, however, reveal a surprising and significant feature of modern individualism, namely, that what appears to be the perspective of an underclass has become the dominant ideology. This situation is indeed unique. It is this which distinguishes it from its historical predecessors. This proposition, however, requires further qualification because Christianity also became the official religion of the Roman Empire and of the Germanic states which succeeded it in the West, i.e. it also became a dominant ideology.

There is not enough space here to go into the details of how Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. As the official state religion, however, it became hierarchical, authoritarian and ritualistic. Its beliefs were standardised at the council of Nicea and a single orthodoxy was taught everywhere. There was thus a tension between elements of its teaching and its new form. For example, Jesus had said "call no man father, you are all brothers" but the head of the church was called "Pope".

Under these new conditions, the egalitarian elements of the doctrine were suppressed, at least in so far as they had radical implications for the organisation of church or state. Christianity became the official ideology, therefore, only in so far as it did not emphasise the egalitarian side of its doctrine. This was also the position adopted by the Christian church when Christianity regained its influence after the collapse of the Roman Empire in Western Europe.⁶

⁶ That this was the case is evidenced by the treatment of those who challenged the church on the basis of egalitarian views. For example, John Huss was declared a heretic for saying that the priesthood were not privileged in their knowledge of God but all believers were equally fallible, a

The egalitarian aspects of the doctrine did not find a significant political expression until the reformation and at this time it found support principally among the urban classes whose wealth had been accumulated independently of the feudal order and who were resentful of feudal taxation.

Thus it was in the modern era when Luther spelled out the radical implications of the parable of "The Good Samaritan". This story was used to illustrate one of the two basic rules of Christian life and is, therefore, central to the faith. Anyone who would enter the kingdom of heaven is exhorted to ignore personal danger and social difference, just as the Samaritan did and help anyone who needs such help. This is a similar principle to "from each according to his abilities to each according to his needs".

The implication of this injunction, however, is that anyone who fails to act in a neighbourly way in this sense is acting immorally. Living by the imposition of a levy upon the labour of others cannot be considered a neighbourly act and Luther drew the logical conclusion of the immorality of this, thus launching what was potentially a fundamental critique of the whole feudal order.

Although he aimed his main criticisms at the Roman Catholic church, others, e.g. the levellers and the diggers, drew the more general conclusion.⁷ In the period of chaos that attended the disintegration of the feudal order under the impact of trade and the shift of the economic and political centre of gravity towards the towns and towards trade and industry, many types of people found Protestantism attractive for a variety of reasons. It was the consciousness of the urban bourgeoisie, however, which was eventually to

position later adopted by Luther. This view, of course, undermined the basis of the Church's authority and hence its power. The original position taken by the Franciscans: that Jesus had urged his followers to dissociate themselves from wealth and power so the church should renounce its wealth and power also, was likewise treated as a heresy.

⁷ Jesus may have said, in response to a question about taxes, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's", implying that Christians should not worry about worldly gains or losses. The militant Puritans, however, were attempting to establish "the kingdom of heaven on earth" and "money changers in the temple" were not to be tolerated.

determine the ideology of the new order.

1.4. Individualism respecified

Thus it was only in the modern capitalist era that the individualist aspects of Christianity became part of the dominant ideology. Modern individualism, therefore, is radical, in the sense of attributing rights and obligations to individuals whilst denying the claims of any group over an individual unless the individual has agreed to be so bound; it is universal in scope; and in modern society and only in modern society, it has become the established point of view.

This latter point still poses a problem. One would suppose that only a classless society could accept the equality of all individuals and the individual as the focus of social identity, as its dominant viewpoint.

1.4.1. The consciousness of the bourgeoisie

In previous periods the political possibilities of egalitarianism could lead to no more than the setting up of small, ideal communities outside the mainstream of society. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, could envisage a society made in its own image and the self-image of the bourgeoisie was conditioned by its relation to the market.

The bourgeoisie were originally freed serfs. The freedom of their new urban existence was primarily the freedom to select an occupation i.e. the possibility of becoming socially mobile. Mobility of labour is a prerequisite of a constantly changing system such as capitalism and although this mobility was limited in the first instance, the urban environment stood in marked contrast to the fixed labour system of Feudalism.

Under these changed circumstances, occupation did not inevitably determine one's identity. In theory, anyone can engage in any occupation and the same options are open to all. The bourgeoisie, therefore, were able to conceive of themselves as free individuals with equal opportunities.⁸

⁸ In capitalism, any controls which an occupational group may seek to exert over its members cannot be allowed to override the individual's right to opt out on pain of restricting the develop-

Secondly, the bourgeoisie lived by trade. Social remuneration and therefore, access to wealth and power, depended upon the fluctuations of the market. In the long run, the rate of profit between different types of production tends to equalise. Any advantage enjoyed by a particular type of production is, therefore, transitory. To accumulate wealth consistently, one would need to constantly change the type of product in which one's money was invested in line with changing patterns of demand. It follows, that as owners of products, no individual enjoys any advantage over any other and that the type of production itself, confers no special privilege.

Again, the universality of forms in which wealth can be acquired and the interchangeability of one form for another leaves each individual owner in potentially the same position as any other. It is the ingenuity of the individual which determines whether he becomes wealthy or not, not the particular form of his property.

Mobility of capital, like mobility of labour, is a prerequisite of the capitalist system. Equality of opportunity between owners, therefore, is also conditioned by the basic form of the mode of production. The bourgeois thus understands equality between individuals in terms of equality of opportunity. Since each faces the totality of options each is in the same position as any other. This applies for both sides of the bourgeois self-image, i.e. as worker and as owner. Individualism, therefore, is the complementary aspect of the universalising tendency of capitalism.⁹

To the early theorists of capitalist society, social structure appears unnecessary.¹⁰ Impersonal market forces rather than human interventions control social relations. This

ment of the system. By changing occupation, an individual can negate all other claims which the group might have upon him. All rights, must ultimately rest with the individual in order to guarantee mobility of labour between competing groups. The universality of the possibilities of occupation, therefore, conditions both the sense of equality and the understanding of the need for equality of opportunity between individuals.

⁹ The total system of possibilities, i.e. the whole division of labour, is expressed in the opportunities available to each individual (in principle) - vis. Hegel.

¹⁰ e.g. *Principles of Sociology*, Herbert Spencer, Williams and Northgate 1883-5, pg 808.

alien form of control appears at first as a liberation from humanly imposed (and arbitrary and unjust) social differences. To bourgeois consciousness, it seems to be yet another dimension of equality and freedom. External control can be reduced to a minimum. Each individual may do anything that he or she chooses providing that it doesn't interfere with the right of any other individual to do the same.¹¹ This is the libertarian side of the doctrine.

Social relations of this kind mark a watershed in human history. The problem of the relationship of the individual to society is consciously addressed in an overt form, unmediated by a particularistic, fetishist, ontology. The contradictions in the bourgeois solution, however, are equally clear.

1.4.1.1. Liberty, equality and fraternity

In capitalism's revolutionary period, this individualistic viewpoint was understood in a humanistic way by some. Liberty and equality would lead to fraternity - positive and mutually supportive relations between individuals. Unlike Christianity, however, which enjoins positive obligations towards others upon its adherents, the individualist ethic only prescribes the negative obligation of non-interference. This is because relations between individuals in a market system are adversarial, being based upon competition.

Competition, however, tends towards the polarisation of wealth and power in society, those with an advantage use it to gain greater advantage and those with little advantage lose even what they have, thus equality and fraternity disappear and exploitation becomes the normal practice. Competition, polarisation and exploitation destroy fraternity, equality and liberty respectively. If modern individualism is similar to humanism in that it focuses upon the individual as a human being, the relations which it envisages

¹¹ This formulation is somewhat unclear. In practice it means where there is a conflict of interest the status quo wins.

between these human beings is negative rather than positive. It is a kind of negative humanism prescribing universal rivalry.

Equality of opportunity which is based in the fluidity of the system is negated by competition and the polarisation of relative advantage. Both fluidity and competition are the result of the acquisitive dynamic which is the system's driving force. Polarisation reduces the majority of people to propertyless labourers who have little chance of social mobility. Universality of options, therefore, exist only for the more successful members of the society and consequently, equality of opportunity remains convincing only to *them* as a description of the way that the system functions.

With respect to liberty, the right to pursue one's own aspirations as long as this doesn't impinge upon the right of others to do the same is an impossible demand in a society based upon acquisitiveness and competition. Each, by acquiring as much of the social wealth as he or she can is diminishing the ability of others to do the same, reducing their life-chances.

As for the ideal of non-intervention by authority, as Durkheim pointed out, market agreements are based upon a pre-contractual understanding not to break the contract.¹² As soon as there are perpetual winners and perpetual losers, the temptation to reverse the losses by non-market means is so powerful that the bourgeois authorities have to intervene everywhere to prevent this occurring. Activities that are thus criminalised are many and various.

Since competition penetrates to the most minute levels and activities take the most diverse forms, the state is obliged to exercise corrective control on almost everything. The labouring classes in particular are subject to discipline at every turn, particularly at work. In the struggle between different capitals, sacrifices are made principally by this

¹² *The Division of Labour in Society*, Emile Durkheim, Free Press, Collier MacMillan Publishers Ltd. 1964, pp 215, 216.

class, whereas their rewards are slight. The tendency for the worker not to cooperate with such a system, therefore, has to be countered by authoritarian forms of labour organisation. In such a system, capital alone is free. Even the capitalist is constrained by the imperatives of the market. Individual freedom in a competitive system leads to its opposite, collective authority,¹³ being imposed.

At the level of the world market there is uncoordinated movement and sporadic violence as states settle economic differences by the use of force, while within the institutional structures involved in this competition there is tight authoritarian control precisely to prevent such anarchy breaking out and preventing them from competing effectively. Two undesirable options condition each other. It is the worst of both worlds.

1.4.1.2. Liberalism and Conservatism

The reflection of this contradiction¹⁴ in the consciousness of the bourgeoisie takes the form of, on one hand, an affirmation of the commitment to individual freedom whilst on the other, lamenting, but nevertheless affirming, the need for a strong central authority. The commitment to the latter ought to be seen as an admission of the failure of the aspiration towards the former. To affirm both is surely to attempt to have one's cake and eat it. The political representatives of the bourgeoisie nevertheless tend to affirm both positions, oscillating between them according to the context of the argument. The political parties of the ruling class, although each in their own way guilty of this "double-think", differ from each other by the relative emphasis placed by each upon freedom and

¹³ Where opposed but equally essential activities are a feature of some real situation, if institutionalised practices are founded upon just one of them, then the other will be encountered as an external disruptive factor. Furthermore, if the principle governing one activity entails the principle which governs the other, then in practice one activity will *engender* the other activity. This is why, at the material level, one-sided practices "veer round" into their opposites. A stable institutional framework therefore, must include in the form of a synthesis the opposed pair, e.g. liberty and authority (individual and collective interest), equality and difference, fraternity and rivalry. This arguably is what capitalist institutions do not do. See also section 2.3.3

¹⁴ Since anarchic competition and authoritarianism stem from the same source, the acquisitive motive which governs economic activity.

authority: conservatives placing more upon the latter, liberals placing more upon the former.

The contradiction within the position of conservative parties is evidenced by the fact that on one hand they represent themselves as the party that recognises the need to strengthen the power and scope of authority, the party of "law and order", but also on the other, as the party which abhors state intervention in the affairs of individuals. Liberal parties on the other hand, represent themselves as the party which defends individual freedom but which, in order to do so is forced to enact protective legislation. The positions taken by these parties can only be interpreted consistently as the one-sided defence of the interests of the classes they represent.

The liberals, as representatives of the petit-bourgeoisie,¹⁵ use authority to restrict the polarising tendencies of the system which negate their constituents freedom. The conservatives, as representatives of those who possess the most wealth and power,¹⁶ use authority to defend the natural tendency of the system to polarise in order to preserve the freedom of their constituents to accumulate wealth. Both, however, are committed to the defence of the same contradictory system in the last analysis.

The theoretical defenders of capitalism argue that the interests of the individual and the society are inevitably opposed and therefore, that there has to be a compromise between liberty and authority.¹⁷ They argue that the compromise represented by capitalism is the best of all possible alternatives.

The Hegelian response to a situation where two necessary aspects of something oppose and limit each other, however, would be to search for the synthesis which can give free play to each. For Hegel this means a new idea in which opposed principles can

¹⁵ This is the original social base of liberalism but a broader definition of it as a political movement is given in a later section.

¹⁶ In developed capitalism this is the large capitalists.

¹⁷ *On Liberty*, J. S. Mill, John W. Parker and Son, London 1859, pg 134.

be seen to coincide and upon which a new form of social organisation can be based. For Marx it means a new system of social relations which allows the opposed principles based upon opposed interests to be able to coincide in practice. A solution along these lines to the opposition between liberty and authority, the collective and the individual interest, would address the fundamental problem stated at the beginning and thus constitute a solution to the so called "Riddle of History". As stated before, however, the key to the solution to this problem is to be found in the social relations already developed among the proletarians.

2. The consciousness of the working class

Although the preceding section is labelled "The consciousness of the bourgeoisie", it is, in fact, more specifically an account of the ideas which inform its consciousness in the period of its supremacy, i.e. the ideas which fully and adequately articulate its interests as a class. During its rise to power, by contrast, the views expressed by its spokesmen and accepted by its institutions contained an admixture of free-market ideals and those originating in the period of feudal domination. These latter ideas still retained some relevance in a society not totally transformed to one dominated by capitalism. An ideological battle was carried on within the class itself between the more radical "free-market" thinkers and conservatives who were influenced by the rationale of a system based upon patronage and landownership.

Similarly, in the period prior to the supremacy of the proletariat, both the ideals of capitalism and those of socialism will have some influence within the class as the ideological struggle is fought out. In this section, however, I shall only give an account of those views which, originating from the experiences of the class, appear to provide a credible solution to its problems and an alternative to capitalist society in which it is exploited and its interests subordinated. The justification for this approach is that only views which both address and provide solutions to the problems arising from the

subordination of the class can be deemed to express its class interest.

Secondly, in so far as these views do appear to provide solutions to both the problems of the class and those of all modes of production subsequent to primitive communism, they alone can be regarded as anticipations of a future mode of production, since they alone can offer an acceptable alternative.

2.1. Consciousness of the problematic

The consciousness of the working class is conditioned by both negative and positive features of its collective experience. The negative features of its experience are the shortcomings of capitalism from which it, as an underclass, suffers most and of which, therefore, it has greater consciousness than other classes. These negative features plus the awareness of the mechanisms governing the social order define the problematic of its politics. The positive features, on the other hand, are the strategies adopted to cope with these problems and which foreshadow new kinds of social organisation and new and more satisfactory kinds of social relationship. In the remainder of this section I will briefly recapitulate the problematic.

First of all, the mobility of capital and the substitutability of labour demonstrate, respectively, that capitalists and labourers each form a single interest group. Furthermore, general changes in economic conditions affect the vast majority of workers in a similar way and the vast majority of capitalists in a similar way, though with differences in degree, reinforcing the point made above.

The rapidly changing economic conditions reveal to the workers that the behaviour of the capitalists towards the workforce is itself dictated, within a limited variation, by impersonal market forces and therefore, the question of competition for the possession of property and the profit motive has to be addressed and not just that of class rule.

When capitalism is in crisis they are its first victims. They suffer the most from poverty, intra-communal violence, casualties in warfare, etc. When capitalism is

prospering, they are overworked and others take the "lions share" of the benefits.

It is obvious to them that equality of opportunity is not available to them because of the polarisation of advantages in society. Personal liberty is more of a phrase than a reality as far as they are concerned because it is restricted both by poverty and by authoritarian structures within and outside of work organised primarily to control their possible reactions to being exploited. Finally, they are aware that competition undermines fraternal relations and leads to a level of malicious and petty behaviour which, for those whose individual isolation is not compensated for by wealth, endangers their already weak position and ruins their quality of life.

One important negative feature of their environment which has not been dealt with so far, however, is the way that the capitalist system, which is ostensibly founded upon individualism, represents a radical negation of individuality for the proletarian. It is the attempt to reclaim this individuality which is one of the mainsprings of the socialist movement and the reason why Marx regards it as "humanistic".

2.1.1. The negation of individuality and the humanist response

For individualism to be possible, each person must be in a position to develop his or her particular potentialities (ideally to the full), so that each can make their contribution to society in their own *individual* way. The conditions inflicted upon the proletarians, however, force them to renounce control over their own actions, which amounts to a renunciation of their individuality in principle both at work and in order to find work.

Furthermore, the work they are forced to perform is stultifying in its nature and squanders their human potential, thus making it impossible to fulfill the condition for individualism stated above. This renunciation is thus both a denial of individuality in their current circumstances and of the possibility of developing their individual potential in the future. It amounts to a suppression of their human nature.

Despite the increase in material wealth and the freedom of the labourer to withdraw his or her labour from a particular employer, in the respects just cited, the condition of the worker is very much inferior even to that of workers in previous modes of production.

In the condition of slavery, for instance, the worker is forced to sacrifice his or her time and effort to obey the will of another. The proletarian on the other hand has to compete with others in order to attain this condition.¹⁸ The slave who is sold on the slave-market as property is oppressed by external circumstances. The proletarian is required to perform this act his or herself, to "sell himself" to an employer, and is thus responsible for his or her own condition of exploitation.

The demand of servility and submission to the will of another is, therefore, more radical and more subtle than in any previous mode of production. It exacts a psychological requirement from the worker not just his or her physical compliance. Those who appear half-hearted and unwilling to alienate themselves in this way will fail in the competition for work. Unable to find work, they will be marginalised and punished in a system based upon wage-labour. Thus psychological pressure is placed upon the worker to become submissive in his very identity. Only thus does a worker become acceptable.

A basic requirement of capitalist employers is that the worker should show him or herself ready to "conform", i.e. to relinquish his or her will to another. In the modern era, certain privileged workers who do this become "organisation men", their identities malleable to the needs of the firm. The rewards of these workers are luxuries such as better than average housing, foreign holidays, modern conveniences of one kind or another. These rewards are nevertheless on the scale of human satisfaction no more than "animal" comforts, i.e. they induce pleasant feelings. They do not allow the worker to discover his

¹⁸ The degree of control exercised by the owner of labour over the labourer varies both under the institution of slavery and of wage-labour. For instance, the Grand Vizir was the second richest and most powerful man in the Ottoman Empire although legally he was the slave of the Sultan. In contrast the early factory owners claimed the right to regulate the behaviour of workers in all respects, both in work and out, and could exercise this right because of the threat of dismissal.

individuality, nor do they develop the potentialities of the worker as a significant social actor. Since most of the worker's time is given to the firm, his work activities constitute his identity. He has neither the time nor energy to discover within himself anything else. The result of this is necessarily "Philistinism".¹⁹

"Conformism" for the majority of workers, however, means to accept without protest or even without acknowledging the justification of protest, the use of their time and effort in mind-crushingly meaningless tasks, i.e a basic waste of life. Marx refers to certain forms of human activity as productive of "idiocy". He talks about the "idiocy of rural life"²⁰ and of "craft idiocy" when discussing the one-sided development of the craftsman of the guild system. But the capitalist practice of splitting work into minute repetitive tasks to be performed for extended periods of time, often at the speed of a machine is surely more conducive to idiocy than any of them.

Furthermore, the control of the worker's activities is more intensive. Competition between capitalists ensures that the firm lays claim to every second of the workers time. It was the use of supervision and the threat of dismissal rather than technology which initially raised the productivity of labour in the factory system. Capitalism is, therefore, by its very nature tyrannical as well as destructive of individuality. The repression of individuality here is extreme, a person whose capacities are formed by these trivial, servile and all-pervasive activities alone would arguably be sub-human. A subterranean defence of their humanity is thus forced upon the workers.²¹

¹⁸ Such activities as can be engaged in are recreational and relegated to leisure time, i.e. they give the actor pleasant feelings.

¹⁹ Capitalism produces Philistinism as a general phenomenon. The capitalists themselves, although they have relative freedom of choice, develop (and often value) only the aggressive and acquisitive side of their potentialities, since they are not directly involved in creative activity.

²⁰ *op. cit.* *Communist Manifesto*, pg 84.

²¹ Against this, one has to add that the rapidly changing conditions of capitalism and the perpetual insecurity of the worker in a complex system, sharpens the workers wits. In addition to which, the capitalists provide the workers with the basic education necessary to perform their roles within the society. Nevertheless, this doesn't invalidate the assertion that most of their adult life is spent in the stultifying manner described.

Another factor which suppresses individuality and thus dehumanises the worker, is the evaluation of all forms of productive activity in terms of the commercial motive, reducing the significance of the workers contribution simply to that of a money-making activity. The specific nature and particular qualities which the worker brings to his work, i.e. the manner in which the individuality of the labour is expressed, are regarded as irrelevant and unworthy of respect. As a consequence, the worker himself is merely regarded as exploitable labour irrespective of what he does.

Individual responsibility is also rendered problematic by this situation. A worker who acknowledges responsibility for the result of his own labour, is opposing the right of the capitalist to dispose of it as he wishes.²² By seeking to retain some proprietary control he will marginalise himself in a market system. If such attitudes were prevalent they would be at odds with a system operating on a purely commercial basis.

Finally, This stultification of human development is represented as something which the worker is morally obliged to accept by virtue of "the work ethic". A parallel rationale would suggest that the slave is morally obliged to accept his slavery because if he ran away he would have to beg or steal to survive. It is surely a questionable assertion that one can be morally obliged to accept a situation which is itself immoral. One could equally argue that the worker is morally obliged to *refuse* to accept such conditions in order to defend basic human freedom both for himself and for the sake of others.

The work ethic, applied to exploitative relations, as can be seen engenders a contradiction of which the capitalists emphasise only one side. The solution to this problem would be to transform the social context in which the ethic is applied to one in which human freedom and self-development are given primacy in social activity.

²² e.g. scientists who wish to restrict the use of their inventions on moral grounds or the Lucas Aerospace Combine who proposed an alternative range of socially useful products to the weapon systems produced by their company.

These circumstances condition the aspirations of the workers and inform their politics. The squandering of potential and the waste of life in subjection to a system whose narrow goal is the accumulation of wealth in the abstract, i.e. money, is something which they are forced to struggle against. Their own ideals, therefore, are humanistic, in the sense that they value the development of human capacities and abilities as a means to their own personal fulfillment.²³ The complete realisation of these goals, however, would require that each individual should have freedom of choice over his or her own activities²⁴ and unrestricted access to the resources of the society. This is the positive humanism which capitalism appeared to promise but could not fulfill. These aspirations are taken up by the proletariat who have no stake in protecting the existing system and whose own intra-communal relations prefigure an alternative which would make this situation a real possibility.

That these ideals should form the content of proletarian demands is important because the formal means, collectivism, which makes possible their achievement, nevertheless, does not by itself guarantee the pursuit of humanist ends. It is also the case, however, that cooperative activity, reinforces these humanist susceptibilities and attitudes as will be seen below.

The significance of this latter point is that such attitudes are not, therefore, merely grounded in the reaction to the alienating conditions of capitalism, (and thus liable to disappear when those conditions disappear), but also in the relations and practices which form the basis of the new system itself.

²³ This has been expressed in such events as "The Great Kinder Trespass" whose object was to open up the countryside for the benefit of city dwellers where it had been closed by landowners and the political demand for the provision of education as a good in itself rather than as an instrument for the development of the economy or some other narrow goal.

²⁴ Only the individual can judge whether his or her life is satisfactory, guidance may be given, but the final decision must be their own.

2.2. Defensive strategies and alternative social relations

Marx claims that "Capitalism developed within the interstices of the Feudal System", that is to say it grew in the "spaces" where feudal relations did not, and indeed could not operate. These spaces were created by virtue of the fact that unlike peasant agriculture, craft production always exceeded the amount that could be consumed by the lord and the craftsman himself.²⁵ The craftsman, therefore, had a semi-independent income from the market which could be taxed but not easily controlled. It was this anomalous relationship which made possible the growth of the market towns and eventually their power.

By contrast, capitalism does not have any "spaces". There is no foreseeable form of production which could not, in principle, be adapted to the end of the marketing of saleable commodities.²⁶ The proletarians, therefore, in order to emancipate themselves, have to create spaces within capitalism where capitalist relations cannot operate. In doing so they create an alternative social system in the microcosm.

This is not to suggest that these new relations of production arise in a manner which is unconnected to the growth in the forces of production. The proletariat and its conditions are themselves a product of the forces of production which have created the market system. Also, It is Marx's contention that, whereas with Feudalism the new forces were incompatible with the relations of production only in the particular area of the economy where they developed, in the organically connected, universal system of production of capitalism they become generally incompatible. Proletarian independence is won,

²⁵ An early example within the Manorial System itself was the miller, who ground corn for the whole village not only for the lord. Millers were traditionally self-assertive which was a result of their monopoly position and their independent income.

²⁶ There are isolated products such as road repair and maintenance, whereby collection of revenue is most easily done in the form of taxation. Other utilities such as railways cannot be run on the basis of competition because the profit margin is too low. Public monopolies in the main, however, can also be run as private monopolies, so increasing scale does not necessarily favour public ownership.

therefore, in and through these general crises.^{27 28}

2.2.1. Collective bargaining

One strategy for partially negating capitalist relations of production is the creation of trade unions and the practice of collective bargaining. This removes the competition between individual workers (i.e. the market relation) which would weaken their bargaining position with an employer and create mistrust between them.

The power relation between an individual worker and an employer in a bargaining situation always favours the employer because if the contract is terminated, the employer only loses the services of a single worker, whereas the worker loses his livelihood.²⁹ Collective bargaining, on the other hand, threatens the employer with a temporary loss of his source of income and thus goes some way towards correcting the balance of power.

The logic of the situation, as far as the workers are concerned, is that if each only looks after his own interests, then collectively they will be weak. Each individual will lose. This is an example of the paradox of competitive individualism. Whereas, if each defends the interests of the others, this seemingly altruistic behaviour will make them collectively strong. Each individual will benefit. This is the counter-paradox of collectivism. By this method, they can resist the de-humanising effects of capitalist social relations.³⁰

²⁷ Their claim to authority as a class stems from the fact that they produce the material wealth of society and that the crises which cause unemployment, racism, wars, etc. are a result of their being *too good* at what they do in the context of capitalist relations of production. The perceived injustice of the fact that they have to pay for this situation provides the incentive for them to take control and to transform society closer to their own ideals. It was just such a sense of injustice which spurred the bourgeoisie to challenge feudal relations.

²⁸ The proletarians may be driven back in a crisis, just as in the early days, the bourgeoisie would lose to feudal classes in confrontations that had been provoked by the restructuring of the economic system. This restructuring, however, in both cases favours the emerging class, until a point is reached where they cannot be driven back.

²⁹ The only exception to this situation is that of the skilled worker at times when his labour is scarce.

³⁰ Bargaining takes place on a range of issues, not simply the question of the workers share of the product of his labour. There is the question of how precisely the nature of the work is to be

Collective bargaining represents only a partial negation of market forces, however. Collective bargaining also makes use of market forces. The competition between workers is negated but competition between the workers and the capitalist continues as usual. The limits of this strategy can be seen in the fact that its strength depends upon general market conditions.

The significance of trade union activity for the workers' consciousness, however, consists in the fact that it extends cooperative activity beyond production in the workplace. What is more it does so with a significant modification. Cooperation in the workplace is imposed by the firm and organised by management, it takes an alien form.

specified. The employer will want to be as flexible as possible on this in order to be able to alter working practices in response to economic changes. The worker, on the other hand, will not want to see the intensity of work arbitrarily altered, or the requirement to work extra or unsocial hours imposed, without a renegotiation of terms. The attempt by workers to make the work situation predictable and subject to negotiation is regarded by employers as a "restrictive practice" since it interferes with their right to dispose of the labour power they have bought in any way they wish, i.e. their rights over labour as a commodity. Another issue is what kind of activities are the concern of the employer and relevant to the wage contract. Should the worker's beliefs or his activities outside of the workplace or his moral behaviour or even his appearance be subject to the employer's control? Employers have and still do attempt to intervene in these areas of a workers life, the workers, on the other hand, will try to create a sphere of individual freedom for themselves and limit the employers power. There is the question of safe working conditions, which invariably costs the employer money. The question of whether management have the right to subject workers to verbal abuse and degrading treatment to which the worker cannot respond in kind without the possibility of dismissal. Employers associate this "macho" attitude of management with the enforcement of discipline and their own power. The question of the amount of informality and "fraternisation" which is allowed to take place in working hours. Work without sociability is abnormal and imposes psychological strain upon the workers but employers believe that it also absorbs time and reduces output. The question of the length of the working day and whether workers should be obliged to perform work which is physically and mentally debilitating, (this also includes the issue of breaks in the working day). In short, the workers attempt to create a humane and civilised environment in which to work and over which they have some control. All these issues, however, are points of conflict with the employers since they reduce "efficiency" and/or weaken the employers' control, i.e. they blunt the edge of exploitation.

Capitalists will sometimes argue that the interests of the employer and the worker coincide since they both depend upon the prosperity of the economic enterprise. The preceding list is an illustration of the areas where this is not the case.

³⁰ In a recession, because of economic stringency, employers will attempt to break the power of trade unions with increased ferocity and the use of draconian measures. At the same time unemployment will make workers afraid of losing their jobs and provide a supply of non-union labour which can be substituted. There is also the possibility that employers may simply close increasingly unprofitable firms, all of which weakens the ability of the union to create the conditions described in footnote 24.

Cooperation in trade union activity, and in particular in industrial action, on the other hand, is voluntary; unpopular industrial actions can never be maintained. This self-organisation of the workforce is held together by a sense of the need for solidarity, i.e. a sense of moral obligation, based upon the rational appraisal of circumstances and entered into voluntarily. Collectivism, therefore, is more than just a formal means to an end, its content forshadows new forms of association.

The description above is highly significant because, as Marx could hardly have failed to notice, it corresponds to the situation which it was the aim of the whole "German Idealist" tradition to bring about: moral obligation, based upon reason and entered into freely.³¹ Kant suggested this as a "rational ideal", Hegel believed that "Reason" would bring it about by acting mysteriously through history. Here it occurs as the rational response of workers to their own circumstances. There is a general sense of obligation to act collectively for the reasons mentioned above, within which particular strategies will be argued for in a fraternal manner. The worker's pursuit of "individual" interest is here simultaneously "social" in character, since it takes into account the fortunes of the group as a whole.

A general definition of a *socialist* consciousness would be one in which there is an understanding of how individual actions, in their aggregate effect, create collective conditions and imperatives which then reciprocally affect the possibilities of life for each individual (e.g. the paradoxes noted earlier). Such an understanding acts as a mediating influence upon the actions of each individual via the comprehension of where their self-interest really lies.

³¹ Although not the abstract rational ideal of Kant, it nevertheless has a social, i.e. potentially universal, dimension as will be seen below.

³¹ If the majority regard them as misguided they will not be persisted in, since that would probably strain the sense of solidarity beyond breaking point.

Trade union solidarity is one example of this. The following sections will attempt to complete the picture. Socialist consciousness permits development away from social institutions based upon the "accidental" consequences of individual actions, i.e. capitalism, to one whose institutions are based upon a consensus which comprehends such causal relations.³²

2.2.2. Self-help organisation

Even more important to workers' consciousness is the organisation of mutual aid within working class communities. The principle "from each according to his abilities to each according to his needs" was coined by St. Simon and reiterated by Marx. Its real basis in working class consciousness, however, is not the ideas of a particular theorist but the practices which the workers successfully adopt to deal with the problems inflicted by the capitalist system.

If for instance, in a mining village, a worker was killed or injured in the pit, the rest of the miners families would support the family of that worker according to what was possible in their own situation.³³ No family would know who might be affected in this way but each would underwrite the position of the others. In this way the worst effects of the system would not fall on any particular individual but would be borne by the community as a whole. These practices were the forerunners of the welfare state. The principle which governs this collective practice is "from each according to ability, to each according to need".

³² Note the similarity of this rationale to the form of the Hegelian argument in *The Philosophy of Right* which suggests that it is rational to support laws against theft, since one would lose more from the general practice of theft (in terms of freedom) than one would gain by being free to steal from others.

³³ At a later period the trade union partly took over this function although extra support would still be given.

This strategy is not "charity" as the bourgeoisie understand it, i.e. the "privileged" giving to the "underprivileged", it is a strategy for survival for the group, by maintaining the viability of each of its members, the group preserves its own strength. It is the basis of fraternal relationships and also of mutual understanding, since each is entitled to and receives the genuine sympathy and support of the others, both because it could happen to any of them and because they need each other.³⁴

This is only one example of this kind of relationship. People living close to the "bread-line" can be overtaken by many kinds of misfortune: accident, illness, redundancy, family breakup, etc. all of which would jeopardise their economic viability. Amongst the working class communities, help will be extended to others in the case of problems in general, in order to ensure the survival of all. This situation produces relationships and a behaviour pattern which permeate to the most mundane levels. It appears as a willingness to help, a generalised goodwill.

The mutual support given is moral and psychological as well as physical and unlike village communities of a previous era, it includes people who are strangers to each other. This is necessarily so since it is an urban phenomenon and embraces large aggregates of people.³⁵ It is part of the communal "shield". It also has a positive value, in that it permits the satisfactions of friendship and mutual help as a way of life.

What the members of these urban communities can be seen to have in common, in this instance, is not a sense of obligation to a specific group of people but a common belief in certain strategies and universal principles embodied in their way of life. This makes possible the formation of an immediate rapport between total strangers and indeed between groups of strangers which in turn facilitates collective organisation and

³⁴ i.e. it is a genuinely "universal" problem with a "universal" solution in the Hegelian sense.

³⁵ It is this "openness to strangers, who are immediately made to feel that they have the support and friendship of others, which explains the reputation for friendliness of the industrial areas of Northern England.

collective action.³⁶

Mutual support is not simply a defensive measure, as the worker's attitude to education illustrates. Anyone who could escape from the conditions of the working class through education would be approved of rather than resented and thus could find support within the community.³⁷ This attitude is recorded in novels such as Howard Spring's *Fame is the Spur*. This is because firstly, education is valued by the members of the community as a worthy aspiration and secondly, it is hoped, without guarantee, that members of the working class who become educated will in turn help further the ends of the class.

Added to the humanistic attitude mentioned earlier, therefore, is one which regards the self-development of each individual as of benefit to the whole group. This is to be contrasted with the competitive relations of capitalism where the success of another, is the success of a competitor and potential rival, and hence is resented. The supportive relationship, therefore, extends not only to those who are less able to survive but also to those that have greater ability. This is again the same principle of "from each according to ability to each according to need" although in this case "need" is understood in the sense that Marx tended to use it, namely, to cover human requirements in general.

Where the political representatives of the working class have achieved power, they have introduced structures which institutionalise these relationships. Municipal socialism consists in providing services for the whole community partly on the basis of a local property tax which is considered to be roughly related to individual ability to pay. Thus such things as transport may be supplied cheaply or even free at the point of use since it is paid for from progressive taxation. At the national level, a health service available to all

³⁶ The implications of this were well appreciated by the bourgeoisie in the 1st World War, when at Christmas, the opposing armies arranged a cease-fire, exchanged presents and played football. The military then began to regularly move companies to different locations and to deploy snipers to foment mistrust between the combatants.

³⁷ This is not to suggest that one could not also find envy and rivalries within these communities. Competitive relations and the structured insecurities of capitalist society ensure that these attitudes are present also.

who need it, income support to those who are unemployed or sick etc. is paid for by national taxation, also related to the ability to pay, and education is provided from the same public funds on the basis of ability to benefit. The principle which operates here is "from each according to (roughly speaking) ability to pay, to each according to his needs". "Ability" here pertains to the ability to help, i.e. the distribution of relative advantage in society, (in a capitalist system this is a question of wealth and income rather than natural ability).

Because the communal institutions are redistributive, they counteract the polarising tendencies of capitalist society. The "mixed economy" is a compromise between systems acting in opposite directions. At a certain level, this works in favour of capitalism because it prevents the worst social and political problems caused by poverty from arising.

This is true especially where there is a culture of mutual support which is not funded by the state. In this situation problems are ameliorated at no cost to the capitalists and thus paradoxically it stabilises the capitalist society. One should not lose sight of the fact, however, that the principles of distribution involved in each system are diametrically opposed.

Both have a view of equity which is based upon a notion of equal exchange. In a market system, equality in exchange is reckoned on the basis of the "value" of the goods irrespective of how they have been acquired. Questions of the contribution of social advantage and disadvantage to this process, therefore, lie outside the scope of this principle, which is precisely why the acquisition of these advantages confers unequal leverage in the distribution of wealth in society.

Distribution on the basis of the principle of "from each according to ability to each according to need", on the other hand, also operates on the basis of judgement of equality.³⁸ What is equalised here, however, is the degree of sacrifice (taking into account

³⁸ Marx argues in *Critique of the Gotha programme* I section 3, that any rule applied equally in unequal circumstances, i.e. to different needs and abilities, will be unequal in its effects but that distribution on the basis of "From each according to ability etc." rectifies this inequality by taking

differences in ability) made by each individual and the degree of benefit or satisfaction (taking into account differences in need) accruing to each. Exchange is "equal" in this case, therefore, at the level of human experience, it is experienced as equal.

It is "fair" in terms of human cost and benefit which is ultimately what "fairness" is about. Thus, I would argue, it is precisely because this principle takes such differences into account (that all men are not equal in ability or need) that it prescribes true equity.³⁹

This kind of communal provision is often represented as "state control" and a limitation of choice, since the form of provision is decided by the administrative body and hence a limitation of the "freedom" of the individual.⁴⁰ In a free market, however, choice is limited by the ability to pay, you cannot choose what you cannot afford.

It is true that the choice of those who are relatively better off is limited to some extent by this system due to the reduction of their disposable income but this is simply to say that the basis of payment, taxation, is redistributive. The choice of those who would not be able to afford such provision is enhanced, as is their freedom to make a decent life for themselves.⁴¹

Over and above the question of redistribution, however, there is a net gain in individual freedom from this system for all users. In a society where each individual competes for resources with others, the environment of each individual is potentially hostile since others will place obstacles in his or her path. Each individual is isolated and weak, their freedom to act limited by the rivalry with the rest.

the differences into account. I take this to mean that it equalises the sacrifices and the satisfactions in terms of the way they are experienced. - op. cit. Selected Works pg 320.

³⁹ Socialist egalitarianism is sometimes crudely attacked on the grounds that it fails to recognise that all men are not equal. It is the capitalist principle of equality, however, which disregards both natural and social inequality which is why its system of distribution is inequitable.

⁴⁰ The involvement of the consumers in decisions about provision, however, can be done on the basis of consultation, a procedure which makes sense for large scale projects. Also, the administrative body is subject to democratic control.

⁴¹ There is a utilitarian argument based on the notion of the diminution of marginal utility with increasing wealth, which suggests that redistribution from rich to poor increases the total satisfaction in society.

In a society with collective provision, however, the environment is supportive and obstacles are removed from the path of individuals. They are freer, therefore, with more power to pursue their personal goals without hindrance, making use of the support of others and of the collective resources of the society as a whole.

Since the principle of "from each according to ability to each according to need" takes individual differences into account, those whose actions are governed by it must learn how to appreciate each other's individuality simply in order to judge when it is being fulfilled. Hence, once again this behaviour pattern can be seen to promote a humanistic perspective.⁴²

People who help others, for instance, will have a good idea when need is genuine and when they are being taken advantage of. Nevertheless, they will tend to err on the side of generosity. This occurs for two reasons. Firstly, it is imperative that the community as a whole should extend help to those who genuinely need it. In order to maintain this system, those who receive help have to be given the benefit of the doubt. Each member of the community knows this.

Secondly, such are the sensibilities of each individual that although being cheated is regarded as a source of irritation and annoyance, to allow others to suffer without helping is worse because it makes the individual feel responsible for that suffering. Alleviation of need is understood to be the main priority. Taking a risk in order to help others is regarded as a sign of strength and goodwill and is socially approved of, although it will not be remarked upon since it is the norm. Refusal to help when one could easily do so, on the other hand, is regarded as a sign of personal weakness and one can lose the respect

⁴² This situation stands in contrast to that described by Marx in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, op. cit. pp 74-75, where he explains the alienation of social relations as the result of the dehumanising of the individual who can then only regard others in a similar fashion to him/herself and treat them equally inhumanly. Here, however, the reverse obtains, the consciousness of the humanity of others provides the working class with the basis of a moral critique of inhuman treatment and dehumanising conditions.

of others for being "mean" or "selfish" if one behaves in this way. Contrary to the belief of bourgeois commentators, these relations are quite stable and will not be undermined by selfish individuals taking advantage of them.

Not only is this illustrated by their duration in those areas where they have occurred historically, but it is also underpinned by the following rational consideration. Any individual who attempts to accumulate material benefits for his or herself but gives nothing to anyone else loses the respect and possibly the support of others, forfeiting the availability of the greater resources of the whole community for a smaller amount of personal possessions. Such a person would be poorer thereby. It would be suspected that someone who isolates themselves in this way is perhaps compensating for social inadequacy.

2.2.3. Cooperation in the labour process

Although distribution in a capitalist economy is based upon competitive social relations, production, narrowly understood as the labour process itself, is purely cooperative in character. Also, despite the fact that the division of labour at work is imposed upon the workforce by management, within that division, which the workers do not control, there are patterns of cooperation which are spontaneously arrived at by the workers themselves. These social relations are the model not only for workers' solidarity, but also are the natural organisational form for all their collective activity.

In the Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1857-8), Marx points out that the distribution of the product in an economy is determined by the distribution of the means of production within the production process, i.e. it is determined by the organisation of production itself (capital-profit, land-rent, labour-wages etc.).⁴³ *If a new form of distribution, "from each according to his abilities to each*

⁴³ *op. cit. Preface and Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, pp 23, 24.

according to his needs", is to be achieved, therefore, one would anticipate that this would presuppose a new distribution of the means of production, which would in turn entail a new form of the division of labour.⁴⁴ I will argue in the following paragraphs that the organisational form which the workers spontaneously adopt could form the basis of this new division of labour.

When a task has to be performed by a number of workers, the form in which they organise themselves tends to have certain distinct, if somewhat obvious, characteristics. Firstly, if there is a job which one person can do but which others cannot, then that person will take charge and do it. If a job requires strength, then the strongest person will take the heaviest part. If it is a question of knowledge of how to do something, then the person who can see a solution will attempt to explain it and to organise the others. This flexibility of organisation is based upon the primacy of the common purpose and is guided by the principle "from each according to ability".⁴⁵

It is a naturally occurring organisational form when a job has to be done and when everyone benefits from its accomplishment and no one benefits from failure to accomplish it. Other organisational practices which are common are the "spelling" of others when an unpleasant or difficult task has to be performed by one person, i.e. the sharing of the task so that the burden does not fall too heavily upon a particular worker, and conversely if relations within the group are good, allowing each worker to have a chance of performing a particular task if they want to do so. No one will be allowed to "struggle" at a job if others can help them out. In this way, the task is accomplished with minimum strain on the individuals concerned.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Redistribution*, via a central administration, although following the same principle, presupposes an original distribution of a different type and is, therefore, only a stage on the path to the achievement of a society based upon the principle of "from each according to ability to each according to need."

⁴⁵ The ability to organise in this way depends upon a facility for rapidly achieving a consensus based upon a rational appreciation of circumstances.

⁴⁶ This is also a case of to each according to need.

The differences in ability are acknowledged and appreciated by all the members of the group since everyone benefits from the capacities of each member. These distinctions, although acknowledged, are not divisive, as they would be if the social relations within the group were competitive, because in these circumstances they do not confer leverage towards the acquisition of differential rewards. Their significance here is totally different.

The relations between the workers are fraternal and this fraternity is itself valued to the point where if differences were to result in rivalry the more gifted would feel themselves to be worse off, having lost the support and friendship of others. The organisation is one one hand meritocratic and on the other egalitarian since each is equally valued as a contributor to the collective effort.⁴⁷

The same relations can be seen in collective activity outside of work. If, for instance, a group of workers are going somewhere, say to play football, but some do not have transport, the others will take them. Those without resources will not be made to feel bad about accepting help from others. Rather, the object of the exercise in which they are all taking part will be emphasised, their value as participants will be regarded as outweighing the issue of the difference in means. On the other hand, where cost inflicts undue hardship on some rather than others, then cost will be shared in such a way that no one has to contribute very much (the proverbial "whip round").

This is also the most effective form of organisation as the following example illustrates. In "The Ten Peaks Race" held by the army in the early eighties,⁴⁸ by the end of the race, just two teams were in contention, a team of Gurkhas and a team of Territorials. The time of the third member of the four-man team counted as the score. The Gurkhas, as individuals, are proud men, none of whom would wish to be thought not to be "pulling his weight". The Territorials were made up of men of diverse occupations and abilities.

⁴⁷ There is an excellent study of this phenomenon in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

⁴⁸ Televised by Granada Television.

Gradually, due to natural differences in strength, some of the Gurkhas fell back. But when a member of the Territorial team, an accountant, began to struggle another member who was a scaffolder and used to carrying weights carried his pack, i.e. carried two packs, until the accountant got his second wind. The Territorials won the race. The collective result justified the means.

No one thought less of the accountant. The informal organisation of workers which is mutually supportive and makes the best use of ability is the most effective form of organisation. Crucially, however, it is only possible because of the fraternal relations in which differences are not divisive.

This form of organisation is also non-hierarchical, there is no monopoly of decision making and no *fixed* chain of command. Bureaucratic organisation has, however, under certain circumstances, a technical advantage over other forms and the workers will adopt it in these situations. This is the case when information about the collective activity is not available to everyone. Central control under these circumstances ensures the coordination necessary for concerted collective action. Lenin was impressed by the workers capacity to operate in a disciplined and effective manner within this kind of organisational structure.

Marx, on the other hand, more often praises the capacity of workers for self-organisation based upon fraternal and egalitarian relations such as those within the political organisations of which he had first hand knowledge and of the Paris Commune. Whatever the advantages of bureaucratic organisation, it is this latter form which has the most potential for the reorganisation of society along socialist principles and the provision of a solution to "The Riddle of History".

For the bourgeoisie, however, bureaucracy is indispensable for another reason. In forms of organisation in which there are potential antagonisms between leaders and followers and between the followers themselves, the activities of individuals must be forcibly subordinated to the leadership by an authoritarian chain of command. Each person in

authority must be controlled by someone higher and decisions monopolised by the leading elite. This is because under the competitive form of organisation of bourgeois society, individuals cannot be relied upon to act in accordance with organisational goals. The corresponding forms of consciousness are the ethic of automatic submission to authority and the cult of the worship of leaders.⁴⁹

In the form of organisation which has been attributed to the workers above, in contrast, decisions are taken by whoever can supply the initiative and the others will cooperate by taking up appropriate roles. This requires that knowledge of what the collective activity itself requires should be diffused throughout the group so that each can play a socially responsible role. Discipline relies upon a sense of collective purpose and is also "managed" by the relationships between members.⁵⁰

The game of football (soccer) is a good illustration of this form of organisation (which may partially account for its popularity amongst the working class). Because the game is fluid with situations changing rapidly at distances too remote for any individual to take charge all the time, control by a central decision maker, the captain, is not effective and is indeed unnecessary.⁵¹ Players "read" the game and play the appropriate role according to the circumstances. Everyone is a strategist and each plays in response to the initiatives of the others. Discipline is maintained by the common purpose and intra-team relations. Effectiveness depends upon the knowledge and ingenuity of *all* the members of the team.

In some places, where the Labour Party is in control of the local authority, one can see an attempt to reflect these kinds of relationship at an institutional level. There is an attempt to make local government into a cooperative enterprise with the officials merely

⁴⁹ This was discussed in Chapter 4 in the section entitled "Unity and kingship".

⁵⁰ Criticism is usually open but often tinged with humour to deflect any sense of confrontation.

⁵¹ Captains in football are merely a vestige of bourgeois prejudice as far as control of the game is concerned. Workers play without them.

taking the role of co-workers doing a particular job in cooperation with the rest of the public whose interests they serve. To this end they increase the flow of information on what decisions are being planned, make the government offices more accessible to the public, information on services which are available being displayed inside them, and consult well in advance those people who government decisions affect, acting only with their approval.⁵² Input from the public is encouraged since it is regarded as crucial to the collective enterprise and relations with the public are intimate and fraternal rather than remote and authoritarian. This engenders trust on both sides.

Possibly some worker cooperatives also attempt to institutionalise these relationships. If the economy were to be organised on this basis, however, one might perhaps envisage certain workers maintaining particular necessary social organisations on a semi-permanent basis with others contributing how and where they can. This would require that knowledge of what the economy requires at any given time should be available to all.

Organisations would attempt to make the best use of the labour force which they happen to have at any particular time. The variability of the personnel would not present a peculiar difficulty. Turnover of labour is equally a feature of capitalist organisation, the difference between them lies in the motivation for workers to join or to leave.

A discussion of forms of consciousness is not the appropriate place in the thesis to discuss alternative social structures so I will not pursue this issue in greater detail at this point except to make the following observation: In any society that claims to have solved the problem of "alienation", labour must be voluntary. If it is not, then by definition "society" or some part of it has become an alien entity constraining the individual worker.

⁵² Sometimes the local authority will be placed in the position of arbiter between interest groups and if no compromise can be found will generally act on the principle of defending the most vulnerable party, i.e. on the basis of other socialist principles.

Labour, however, is not in principle very different from consumer activity, both involve the expenditure of effort to attain some desirable end. The difference between them is that in societies based upon exploitation one is performed voluntarily and the other is not. A socialist society, therefore, would attempt to develop a social system in which labour is performed voluntarily by the individual for rational purposes and which is intrinsically satisfying. I shall return to this topic later in chapter eight.

Mutual tolerance between workers is inevitably a part of cooperative practice. This is true of cooperation both in work and out, i.e. in all spheres of life. One can rarely pick and choose who one works with even if the work is voluntary (since in this case those willing to work select themselves). In any form of cooperative activity it is necessary to make allowances for each other's shortcomings because squabbles are invariably counter-productive. Living with others in a community requires the same attitude.

In the labour process then, a form of understanding of others is gained which accepts the possibility of both human frailty and human achievement without the strict apportioning of blame. In a community, an understanding and sympathetic attitude to the variations in human behaviour is what binds the members together as a community and is also crucial to the functioning of self-help organisation and any form of communal action.⁵³ This form of consciousness is universal in two respects. First, it recognises the full range of human responses, secondly, the potentialities which it recognises apply to everyone. It is, therefore, sophisticated and humanistic in character.

In circumstances where cooperation is all-important, personal weakness in most cases will not put an individual beyond the entitlement to the sympathy and the support of others. This is an important complement to the positive evaluation of individual

⁵³ This understanding is deepened in conditions of hardship when collective survival is paramount. Each individual can identify with the problems and potential inadequacies of others because each knows that the same problems could affect them also and they too might be found wanting. Equally, they are also aware of the potential for strength in the face of adversity within the community which is a source of pride both in themselves and the others.

differences in providing a solution to the opposition between the individual and the society as will be seen below.

The extent of this tolerance can be estimated by examining its limits, i.e. those cases which are not tolerated. The most obvious case of this is strike-breaking. Here an individual deliberately acts in a manner which is ostensibly to the detriment of the rest by undermining their bargaining position. The punishment for this is to be "Sent to Coventry", but when one considers what this entails, however, it can be seen that this is merely the withdrawal of the support of the rest of the community. Often this is simply an acceptance of the logic of the individuals own attitude, i.e. where he or she holds to the individualist beliefs of the bourgeoisie. It is an object lesson on the fallacious nature of these views since it demonstrates the extent to which the individual relies upon the community. If this is the typical form which discipline takes one can see that the limits of tolerance are quite broad.

2.3. The theoretical and historical implications of this form of consciousness

The theoretical significance of these practices is that they are concrete examples of social behaviour which resolve what from the point of view of exploitative modes of production would be unresolvable conflicts and in which simultaneously, irreconcilable oppositions are reconciled, i.e. they present us with examples in practice of Hegelian syntheses.

2.3.1. "Means to an end" and "ends in themselves"

One example of such an opposition is the Kantian distinction between treating others as "means to an end" (i.e. exploitatively) and treating them as "ends in themselves". The latter is not only considered to be a desirable pattern of behaviour on the grounds

⁵³ op. cit. *The Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*, section 63, pg 52.

that it respects individual freedom and the welfare of others but also because for Kant it is the only "rational" course of action.⁵⁴

In reality, however, in societies based upon competition and exploitation, treating others as a means to an end is necessarily the dominant form of social relationship. Kant does not supply an explanation of how his rational ideal is to be realised in practice, except that others should be convinced by his argument. Here, however, we see the reconciliation of this opposition in practice.⁵⁵

In a culture based upon mutual aid, the lesson has already been learned that the generalisation of egoistic, competitive behaviour creates a society where each individual is surrounded by ill-will, is less free and is generally weak and that by contrast, the generalisation of mutual support and goodwill creates an environment where each individual has greater security and has greater freedom to develop a personally fulfilling life.

By treating others as "ends in themselves", each person guarantees that he or she will be treated likewise. Such behaviour is therefore simultaneously a means to one's own ends. This is not merely a theoretical ideal but a cultural practice developed as a rational response to the oppressive conditions of a competitive society.

2.3.2. The individual and the social

According to liberal bourgeois social theory, the interests of the individual and those of the society are always potentially opposed due to the fact that individual desires are many and various and their pursuit cannot be guaranteed to be in the public interest. According to this viewpoint, if individual decisions are completely subordinated to the collective interest, this is regarded as tyranny but if individual decisions have complete

⁵⁴ Because (according to Kant) it alone can be held as a general principle of action without contradiction.

⁵⁵ Individuals naturally attempt to manipulate their environment in such a way as to realise their personal goals. This includes other people with whom they come into contact. This tendency cannot be eliminated but it can be rationally directed.

priority over the collective interest, the result will be the disintegration of social order. Both these alternatives are undesirable. Therefore, according to this view, the best one can hope for is to trade off some individual freedom against some social control, i.e. the best solution is a little of each.

However, we see in the solidarity shown by the workers in their trade union activity a commitment to the collective interest in so far as it serves the interests of the individual members. This reflects a form of consciousness in which the individual interest is understood as being *furthered* by the pursuit of the collective interest (the collective interest appearing as an expression of the individual interests). The same commitment is evident in the institutionalisation of mutual aid and also in the spontaneous form of cooperation within the division of labour.

Also, reciprocally, the collective interest is understood as being furthered by the pursuit of individual interests. As we have seen, the self-development of the individual is a collective goal of the working class not only because it represents freedom from the stultifying effects of capitalism, but also because it is the only rational goal of an economic system.⁵⁶ In addition to which, free, individual self-development is regarded as a resource for the society as a whole, both in the wider sense of demonstrating the possibilities of life for each as well as in the narrower sense of enhancing communal production.

These attitudes are supported by the fact that it is part of the practice of cooperation to tolerate individual differences in behaviour as the price of maintaining unity in collective activity. For all these reasons, the pursuit of individual interests furthers the collective interest. In the circumstances described, therefore, the interests of the individual and those of the community are not opposed. The consciousness of the individual is

⁵⁶ A situation which is negated in the capitalist economy because of the "alien" driving force of competition and profit to which individual needs are necessarily sacrificed.

simultaneously both individual and social in character.

2.3.3. Liberty, equality and fraternity

As we have seen, in a society based upon competition, individual liberty "veers round" into its opposite, to use the Hegelian phrase. Not only does collective unity have to be imposed from without, but each competitor limits the freedom of action of other competitors and the polarisation of society into winners and losers, exploiters and exploited, leaves the losers and the exploited constrained disproportionately by poverty and by authoritarian control.

The relations just described, however, avoid these consequences. Here, the collective interest is understood to be a prerequisite of individual freedom, the relations between people are based upon mutual support rather than rivalry and distribution according to need avoids the problem of the polarisation of wealth. Individual liberty is a stable feature of these relations because its opposite, the collective interest or the interests of others are taken into account. In capitalism, by contrast they are encountered as an external limit to freedom.

Similarly with equality, if individual differences in the capacity to acquire wealth or differences in need are ignored, then a system of equal opportunity will become increasingly unequal as these external differences create a cumulative advantage for some over others. Distribution on the basis of from each according to ability to each according to need, however, takes into account these differences and thus ensures equality at the level of individual experience.

Fraternity, in capitalist society, despite a notional equality of opportunity, is destroyed by rivalry between competitors and by polarisation of advantages. However, in a situation where an individual's ability is an asset to others rather than a source of competition there is a basis for real fraternity.

This kind of fraternity can accommodate comparisons of ability and even friendly rivalry because the security of the individuals concerned is not threatened by the outcome. These relations, therefore contain the potential to realise the goals which capitalism promised but could not fulfill.

2.3.4. Historical problems of social organisation

These relationships also provide the key to the problems outlined in Chapter one (taken from *The German Ideology*) namely, artificial scarcity, class and class conflict, the repressive state, alienation and the privatisation of property itself.

Clearly distribution according to need will do away with artificial scarcity, which is a product of competitive distribution and polarisation of advantage. Abolition of a fixed division of labour prevents class formation on the basis of the monopoly of the means of production (since it presupposes free access to the means of production) and also the corresponding class conflict which is rooted in exploitation.

The state, in so far as it represents the collective interest which has to be imposed upon civil society, becomes superfluous in this role when there is genuine communality of interest (as do authoritarian relations in the workplace).

Alienation, which is the result of collective activity becoming a power in itself over and above individual interests, will disappear once the individuals both understand the social cause of the phenomenon and also become capable of acting collectively to change things rather than as an aggregate of separate individuals.

Individual power, wealth and self-determination which have been lost to the system can then be regained through collective institutions which enable the individual to freely contribute according to ability and consume according to need thus realising his or her individuality within and through the collective life of the community.

Private property is abolished under these circumstances in the sense that goods cannot be possessed in such a way as to confer social leverage by virtue of others being

(de)prived.

2.3.5. Abstract oppositions

The quotation "Communism is the riddle of history solved" is the concluding summation of a passage that claims that communism represents the resolution of a series of abstract oppositions. These oppositions are as follows: man/nature, man/man, existence/essence, objectification/self-confirmation, freedom/necessity and individual/species. Each opposition reflects an antagonistic relationship within all modes of production based upon class divisions.

The opposition or conflict between man and nature can be understood in two ways, as the exploitative relationship of man to the non-human world and as the struggle of man within himself against his own nature, i.e. the flesh/spirit dichotomy. The latter opposition, as shown in chapter six, rests upon the conflict between individual desires and collective, moral imperatives which have been internalised.

Where pursuit of the collective interest is the means to the realisation of individual interests (and v.v.), no such conflict will occur, the moral imperative will not be experienced as something external to the will and irrational but as a rational means of achieving individual goals. Morality thus becomes based transparently upon rational considerations and individual interests.

With respect to non-human nature, men are as much objects of nature for each other as non-human nature is and in an exploitative society, both are treated as objects of use. Amongst the working class, however, the relations between people are not in the main exploitative and each treats the other as someone whose individuality, i.e. their nature, is an asset. There is a tendency within the working class to generalise this perspective to the rest of nature as we shall see.

In the early part of human history, man was subject to nature, it dominated him, but in the recent period he increasingly controls and dominates it. The present danger is that

the dynamic towards exploitation will destroy the natural foundation on which human well-being rests. In capitalism the satisfaction of need is only a means to the end of the accumulation of property, nature is used to satisfy certain basic needs without taking into account either the totality of man's potential relations to it or the limits to which exploitation can be driven.

Within the urban working class, however, who are deprived of nature in their surroundings, there is a need and an appreciation for nature which shows itself in the attitude to the countryside, gardens and to animals as pets. Nature is valued as psychologically and emotionally important to them.⁵⁷ It is true of nature in general that in so far as one destroys or suppresses and distorts it, it becomes incapable of standing in a complementary and mutually enhancing relationship to one.

Upon the basis of the type of consciousness which sees nature as complementary to man, however, can be built a relationship to nature which neither destroys nor suppresses and distorts it.⁵⁸

The opposition between man and man is founded upon exploitative human relations, i.e. individual egoism within the framework of social cooperation. The kind of social relations described above, however, transcend the limitations of such a society and thus solve this problem.

By the opposition between existence and essence, Marx is referring to the fact that in a society where the worker is subservient to the imperatives of competition he or she is not able to fulfill their human potential (essence) as it exists at that level of the

⁵⁷ Animals in particular are regarded as companions and their suffering is regarded as unacceptable. This relationship shows a dimension of human sensibility which is denied by the purely exploitative relation.

⁵⁸ Those who hold that human concerns are more important than the well-being of non-human nature forget the dialectical relationship between them. This view, by devaluing the non-human world, impoverishes their relationship to it. If as Marx says, human progress in history is characterised by the development of higher forms of need and sensibility, by this criterion, such a view must appear limited and barbaric.

development of the productive forces. This situation is remedied in the circumstances where the individual is free to choose their own activities and has access to the resources of the whole community.

By the opposition between objectification and self-realisation, Marx is referring to the alienation of labouring activity which again is remedied when the worker is in control of his or her own activities.

Similarly, the opposition between freedom and necessity, in this context, refers to the fact that labour is not performed freely but constrained by the competitive system itself and minimally, the need to survive. Where the productive forces are developed to the extent that the latter consideration absorbs a negligible amount of labour, any extra effort can be made subject to choice once the problem of alienation has been overcome. Necessity then is "inner necessity" which is the same as free choice.

By the opposition between the individual and the species, Marx is referring to the fact that human skills and ingenuity serve the purpose of expanding the system itself but are not available for individual use. The individual is thus deprived of his or her species-powers. Where alienation has been overcome however, the resources of the whole society are available for individual use so that individual "species being" is reclaimed.

The relations which have been described contain a complete caring, humanistic alternative to the hostile environment of capitalism. The moral force of this in the twentieth century has been responsible for reactions which have manifested themselves in the most atrocious attacks upon such communities around the world. Militaristic regimes typically attack those responsible for the care of others and the women and children of those they classify as left-wing in an attempt to intimidate by torture and fear those whose very existence is a living critique of the sterility of their own regimes. This brings us to another important form of consciousness in the modern period, fascism.

3. Fascism

Fascism is alienated consciousness in the political sphere in its most universal form. It takes its name from the "Fasces", the symbols of punishment and state power in ancient Rome. Fascism may be defined as the belief in the right of absolute power of those in authority over their subjects, it is worship of authority as an ideal in itself.⁵⁹ I have not defined it here in terms of its social and historical basis but in terms of its central concept as a form of consciousness. It differs, however, from mere authoritarianism in a way which both points to the social and historical circumstances which gave rise to it and which also shows it to be a modern phenomenon.

All forms of authority are examples of alienated social relations. They reflect consolidated power relations between social groups. One is required to behave in a certain manner towards someone in authority by virtue of the status of the group of which he or she is a member, not by virtue of any personal relationship which may have been entered into as individuals. The relations are "alien" therefore since they are imposed by social pressures external to the individual and dictated by the social structure.

Authority represents the rights of the "social" over the "individual" and the rights of authority are thus a product of the conflict within the system.

Fascism makes its appearance (historically) at a time of economic crisis when the contradictions in the social structure of capitalist society break out into open conflict and threaten to destroy the basis of the economy. Unable to resolve the contradictions, all the classes who have a stake in the existing order put their faith in authoritarianism and repression to restore that order. This is the response which one would expect from a ruling class.

⁵⁹ This implies the obligation of the subject to be submissive, the right of authority to punish at will and the frequent exercise of this right as a reminder and reaffirmation of it.

Capitalism, however, is legitimated by the ideal of equality of opportunity and success is ostensibly based upon merit, i.e. universal ideals. Under these circumstances, the legitimacy of bourgeois rule derives from their success in making the system work for themselves and everyone else. When the system fails, therefore, there is a crisis of legitimacy.

There is no other particularistic ideology, e.g. "divine right" or traditional leadership" on which they can fall back. Also, the apparatus of direct social control is insufficient to impose authority due to the fact that under normal circumstances the market automatically regulates many social relations. With capitalism, the system itself is in control.

The bourgeoisie, therefore, lack the legitimacy needed to gain assent to the restructuring of society in a more authoritarian direction. It may be attempted in the name of "the nation" or "the people" but the problem is that no group has the prestige to act unchallenged as the representatives of these ideals. The interests and ideals of the various factions of the ruling class themselves conflict. The only ideal which they have in common is the need for order and authority to stabilise the system. It is this ideal, therefore, to which they turn. The lower middle classes, who lose the most, are its most vociferous advocates.

The value of authority can admit no antecedent justification, neither "the nation", "the race", "the people" nor tradition. To allow an appeal to these values would be to invite rival interpretations of these interests and to provide grounds to challenge the rule of the authorities. If argument was permitted the absence of a solution to the problem of the conflicting interests within the capitalist economy would be exposed. This is why the crushing of dissent is a necessary precursor to a fascist take-over.

The rule of authority must be absolute including the power to innovate. The authorities are the custodians of social values and to question their judgement is heresy. The worship of authority here is necessarily irrational in the sense that to ask for reasons for it

is to challenge its primacy. This is the submission of the individual to the social in its most pure, i.e. most universal, form.

Nevertheless, fascists do cast themselves in the role of the champions of the nation, the people, the race and tradition. This, however, is part of the attempt to unite potential support behind themselves, they are not constrained by these values. Fascism, however, also *engenders* nationalism and racism.

3.1. Nationalism, racism and fascism

Fascism demands the subordination of the individual to authority. It denies people the right to follow their personal values and inclinations, i.e. the right to assert and respect themselves as individuals. This loss of self-esteem it replaces with vicarious identification with the prestige of the group to which the individual is subordinated. It thus compensates feelings of personal inferiority with feelings of group superiority and displaces the antagonism between the individual and the group towards outgroup members. This is necessary to ensure group cohesion and individual satisfaction.⁶⁰ Both racism and nationalism serve this purpose. The groups attracted to this ideology are those who cannot assert their own interests in society anyway, i.e. peasants, petit bourgeoisie etc. and those who regard themselves as losers in society and have little to lose, therefore, in the way of self-esteem.

To them it offers association with power which they could not obtain for themselves. Fascism thus has no answer for the conflicts within society, it merely displaces them in certain directions. Its basic principle is conflict.

⁶⁰ The stripping of the individual of self-respect and allegiance to personal values by humiliation and replacing this with esprit de corps is a well tried technique for training those who routinely exercise violence from soldiers to torturers.

4. Liberalism and socialism

The main policy of liberalism, like socialism, is to oppose the tendency of capitalism to polarise wealth and power. To this end, it will champion minority rights and individual freedom and thus liberal and socialist policies frequently coincide. Both envisage a society which is genuinely based upon liberty, equality and fraternity. Traditionally they differ, however, on what kind of social structure could realise these ideals.

Liberalism's traditional constituency was the small capitalist. Its political programme aimed merely at freezing the capitalist economic structure in its early pluralist stage. More generally it draws support from the middle orders of society who, whilst privileged enough not to want major changes are nevertheless relatively powerless and vulnerable. Many liberals, therefore, also fear the collective strength of the working class, either because it threatens capitalism or because it appears to them as a new form of domination.

The broadening of liberal theory to encompass all disadvantaged groups,⁶¹ however, leads to more emphasis on the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity and less to the class objectives. Under these new conditions some liberals who believe that the realisation of these ideals is more important than defending capitalism will become the natural allies of the socialists and in some cases indistinguishable from them.

The intelligensia of the ruling class are particularly prone to this kind of liberalism because each division of labour develops a dynamic of its own and the producers of ideas often take their own pronouncements seriously. Their own type of activity removes them from direct involvement in exploitation and therefore, they find it easier to take a more idealistic viewpoint.

⁶¹ Liberalism's constituency, and hence its interests, have become broader because of electoralism, since it has had to rely upon the most disadvantaged groups for its electoral support.

From a socialist point of view, however, liberalism which is tied to capitalism is self-contradictory because the tendency of capitalism to polarise cannot be arrested without stultifying its development. Competition will always destroy such attempts. Liberalism has successes only where its objectives coincide temporarily with those of large capital, e.g. the welfare state, because it provided stability and a guaranteed market whilst capital could afford it.

5. Christianity and working class consciousness

The ideals of Christianity are much closer to the values and attitudes of working-class consciousness than they are to the values of the bourgeoisie. Competitive individualism, although universal in scope, imposes no positive obligations upon people, indeed it prescribes universal rivalry. According to this doctrine one is not responsible for one's neighbour, each is responsible only for his or herself. Also the rights of property dominate everything no matter how the property is acquired (except by theft).

By comparison, as Donald Soper has often said, the principle of distribution "from each according to ability to each according to need" is the moral of the story of the "Good Samaritan". It is the principle of mutual support given on a comradely basis rather than as charity.

The evaluation of sacrifice in terms of the experience of the individual (i.e. personal loss) rather than the amount given is shown in the parable of "the widow's mite" and accords well with the notion of human equality expressed in this principle.

The understanding attitude towards the strengths and weaknesses of others which is part of mutual support and collective activity is expressed in the statement "let he who is without sin cast the first stone".

Also, There is no doubt whatsoever, despite what Weber says about the protestants accumulating material things by accident, worry about material things pervades capitalist society and gives great poignancy to the verse "Consider the lilies of the field...".

All of this is hardly surprising if one accepts that Christianity originally expressed the consciousness of an oppressed class of an oppressed people. Christianity is also internationalist whereas competition for property divides humanity on the basis of nation, race and class etc. For the Christian however, this relationship is double-edged because for him or her the behaviour described above is a prescription from God whereas for the working class it stems from the rationale of their way of life.

The working class have been resistant to the ideas of Christianity for two reasons. First, because the other-worldly attitude to action condemns them to suffering in this world. The more capable they feel of asserting their rights the less this view appeals, indeed it is seen as hypocritical lecturing on behaviour by those who do not face the same problems. The religious groups that have had credibility with the working class have been the ones whose members shared their conditions of life.

Secondly, because the same behaviour is shown spontaneously within their own communities. The working class see "good" people outside the church. The ideals, therefore, are for them a secular reality and the church has little to offer. On one hand socialism appears to be a way of realising Christian values but on the other hand it has the potential to usurp the belief.⁶²

6. Consciousness and revolution

One can see, therefore, that within the consciousness of the working class is the understanding of how to re-organise social relationships in principle in order to solve the problems which constitute the so called "Riddle of History". These problems can only be solved in reality, however, under conditions where the working class emerge as the dominant class within society. This depends upon the progress of capitalism and the

⁶² The involvement of the non-conformist churches in the early development of the labour movement in this country and Christian Marxists in South and Central America have stressed the former point, whereas church hierarchies tend to pay more attention to the latter.

development of the productive forces within it.

In the next chapter I shall discuss the contradictions within capitalism which Marx believed would provide the same kind of opportunity for the working class to take power as the rapid expansion of trade and manufacture provided for the bourgeoisie in the sixteenth century, i.e. the circumstances which would make the solution realisable in practice.

Chapter Eight

Structural Changes in the Capitalist Era

1. Conditions for a proletarian revolution

The rise to preeminence of the bourgeoisie took place in two stages, their self-emancipation from subjugation within the feudal system - i.e to become an estate in their own right - and their rise to become the class whose interests dominate society, i.e. a ruling class. If the rise to power of the proletariat is supposed to follow the same pattern one would be forced to make the judgement that so far it has largely been engaged in a struggle for emancipation from subjugation within capitalism rather than the restructuring of the world economy along non-capitalist lines.

Communist revolutions have not, perhaps for historical reasons, been able to solve many of the problems engendered by the capitalist mode of production. Relations of production within them bear a striking resemblance to those of capitalism itself. Also, workers' activities within capitalist societies, - collective bargaining by trade unions to control the work situation, the struggle for the franchise and minimum conditions of welfare - are aimed at freeing the the working class from disabilities which are not suffered by the more privileged bourgeois classes, i.e. for emancipation rather than domination.

The economic transformation of the system which would provide the opportunity for proletarian interests to predominate does not appear to have occurred so far. In *The Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx suggests two conditions which must be fulfilled before such a transformation can take place. He says:

"No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there

is room in it have developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself."¹

In this chapter I intend to deal with each of these conditions in turn.

1.1. The contradictions of capitalism

The first condition, namely, that the limit placed on the development of productive forces by the social relations of production will have to have been encountered, implies that any antagonistic mode of production, if not destroyed by external forces, only passes into a new mode because of the development of its own internal contradictions. These contradictions, however, are of two different kinds. Firstly, contradictions within the old mode of production which are driven to the point of breakdown by the new mode of production which is emerging from within it. Secondly, tendencies within the old mode of production which would destroy it irrespective of whether an alternative mode is developing within it or not. An example of the the latter, would be the collapse of the Roman Empire - if my analysis in chapter four² is correct. An example of the former would be the transition from feudalism to capitalism.³

Reading Marx's theory of proletarian revolution one gets the impression, not of a class involved in new forms of economic organisation,⁴ but of one which has defensive organisations which can assume power when capitalism undergoes a prolonged crisis

¹ op .cit. *Preface and Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, pg 4.

² CH4 section 2.3.2

³ The immense wealth realised by merchant capital and the concomitant growth of urban manufacturing created a drift from the land which tended to impoverish the landowning classes. Also, their income could not keep pace with new levels of consumption nor in some cases rising prices. This pressure attenuated feudal relations. The aristocracy increased the exploitation of the peasantry who revolted. Knights revolts occurred as vassals rebelled against the demands of their lords. Feudal dues exacted on the towns were repudiated and monarchs attempted to build independent power bases for themselves from the new money; abandoning, and indeed undermining, their old class base, the aristocracy.

⁴ Unless the forms of cooperation engaged in by the working class are themselves regarded as having economic potential, e.g. syndicalism.

produced by its own immanent tendencies. This crisis does not appear to be provoked either by new economic forms or by the independent action of the proletariat. The proletarians merely respond to it and the severity of their own oppression. The explanation thus seems mainly to invoke the second type of contradiction, i.e. one which does not involve the emergence of a new economic formation.⁵ This impression may not be entirely accurate but Marx does spell out in greater detail the contradictions deemed "normal" to capitalism rather than the way its mature development brings forth proletarian social forms which challenge and inhibit the old system. This he does in his examination of the causes of capitalist economic crises.

1.1.1. Theories of crisis

Marx's detailed examination of the machinery of capitalist crises may, in part, stem from the implications which they have for a solution to "the riddle of history". Capitalism is a system based upon the generalised rule of property (most obviously recognisable in the rule, or power, of the universal medium of exchange - money). The contradictions which come to the fore in capitalist crises, therefore, are the contradictions which beset property in general and solutions to these crises involve the overcoming of contradictions inherent in all forms of property, and therefore, in all previous modes of production based upon particular forms of property.

Marx's analysis of crises is often subsumed under three headings, "crises of overproduction", "crises of disproportion" and "crises caused by the tendency of the rate of profit to fall".⁶ In fact, these are not separate causes.⁷ For this reason I shall distinguish only between the short-term and long-term causes of crises. I shall deal with the former

⁵ This situation is similar to the collapse of the Roman empire and does not augur well for the transcendence of capitalism by the working class.

⁶ cf. E. Mandel's introduction to *Capital* Vol III, Penguin 1981 pp. 38-42.

⁷ Crises of overproduction are also crises of disproportion and result in a short-term, or cyclical, fall in the rate of profit as we shall see below. Similarly, the long-term tendency of the rate of profit to fall will bring in its train the other phenomena. The proper distinction here, therefore, is probably between the short and long-term tendencies of capitalism.

under the heading of "crises of overproduction" and the latter under the heading of "crises caused by the tendency of the rate of profit to fall".

1.1.1.1. Crises of overproduction

Crises of overproduction are essentially caused by an imbalance in the distribution of value within the system between capitalists and workers. The profit motive leads the capitalists to increase labour productivity and to appropriate the increased surplus for themselves. This is then available for reinvestment. If this is successful, however, the means of consumption possessed by the workers will not keep pace with the increases in investment. Hence in the consumer goods industries, whose revenues come mostly from the spending of the workers, the rate of return on investment (the rate of profit) will fall. This will trigger a recession as the least efficient firms collapse. Because demand for capital goods depends on investment by the consumer goods industries, the recession will be general.⁸

Recovery will occur only when the amount of money available for investment is matched by sufficient consumer demand. This state of affairs under free market conditions will occur when some of the value of the amassed capital is destroyed. The capital tied up in buildings and machinery etc. (production capital) will lose value in a recession because there will be few buyers for it, whereas many will want to sell and cease production. Much of the liquid capital will go into banks or the stock market. This money is potentially available for production should a upturn in the economy occur. Crises of confidence in the prospects of the large firms still trading, however, can cause panic on the stock markets, destroying the value of shares. Similarly, the banks can be brought down by bad debts.⁹ By this mechanism of destroying some of the funds

⁸ This can also be regarded, therefore, as a crisis of disproportion or the overproduction of capital goods.

⁹ In this situation, market pressures cause them to lend at any cost. They have a large number of depositors but few will borrow in a recession, in addition to which, those who do borrow are more likely to be firms with liquidity problems (potential defaulters) rather than those wishing to expand.

available for investment and the cheapening of capital costs, the imbalance in the system between consumer demand and investment levels is forcibly corrected.

1.1.1.1.1. The general principles involved

Marx regards this as an example of conflict between the forces and relations of production.¹⁰ As such, it brings into question the adequacy of the relations of production, revealing the flaw within the capitalist system and signaling the potential of the system to fail permanently.

Secondly, in so far as it is a crisis of disproportion, it is an example of how cooperation, represented by a coordinated division of labour between consumer and capital goods production, is in conflict with competition, which produces polarisation and a maldistribution of resources towards the capital goods sector, disrupting the system.¹¹ The latter opposition, between cooperation and competition, is the basic contradiction of all antagonistic modes of production.

Thirdly, the principle of equality of exchange is in contradiction to the requirement to realise a surplus over and above cost, which is the motive force of the system. This problem is solved from the point of view of production by the circumstance that the labourer produces more than his or her cost of subsistence. The problem reappears, however, from the point of view of consumption because, since the workers' labour power is of less value than the value it creates, when the surplus is increased, the workers cannot buy their own products via equal exchange in sufficient quantities to permit profit on the

¹⁰ Capitalists perform the function of assembling the forces of production in ever increasing quantities only in so far as it allows them to extract a surplus from the productivity of labour. Where the accumulation of the productive forces actually prevents sufficient surplus being taken, the system will cease to function. The exploitative relation between capital and labour is then acting as a fetter upon the further development of the productive forces.

This brings the value of exploitative relations into question. Such relations are an inherent part of all systems based upon competition for the accumulation of private property.

¹¹ The interdependence between the sectors reasserts itself forcibly by the destruction of the value of the resources amassed by the capitalists, bringing the system back into balance. This is an example of a forced realignment discussed in chapter four section 2.

reinvested capital to be realised at the previous rate. Exploitation, once more, appears to be the problem.¹²

If, however, as indicated above, spending on capital ultimately responds to consumer spending, the reverse is also true. Capital spending, through increasing employment and wages, increases consumer spending. This raises the question of whether increased capital spending generates sufficient demand to avoid the problem of overproduction.¹³

1.1.1.2. Crises caused by the tendency of the rate of profit to fall

The long-term tendency of the system to become chronically susceptible to crises is explained by my Marx's theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. He explains it in terms of the labour theory of value whereby the value of a good or service is measured by the average socially necessary labour time¹⁴ required to produce it.

Profit is explained as the product of surplus labour, i.e. labour performed over and above what is strictly necessary to produce the equivalent value of the labourer's means of subsistence. Thus the working day is partitioned between the time the labourer works to produce his or her own subsistence and the time when he or she is producing solely for the employer. In this latter period, the worker is considered to be producing "surplus value" which is the source of the capitalist's profit and is subsequently realised when the goods are exchanged in the market.

The ratio of the time necessary for the worker to produce his or her subsistence to the surplus labour time is referred to as the "rate of surplus value"¹⁵ and also, for obvious

¹² This is not the argument of Proudhon ridiculed by Marx in op. cit. *Capital* Vol. I, pg 971ff. The problem is not the absolute lack of demand in the system - Proudhon simply forgot that the capitalists also buy products - but the inadequacy of consumer demand relative to the funds available for investment in that sector. The demand for capital goods is related to the demand for consumer goods and it is this relation which allows underconsumption to cause a crisis in the whole system.

¹³ Clearly, even if the whole amount were spent as wages to the workers, the amount received back in spending on consumer goods could only equal at most the amount invested. This does not allow for profit. The new investment has to generate profit at the same rate as previous investment if the average rate of profit is not to fall.

¹⁴ For a definition see op. cit. *Capital*, Vol 1, pg 303.

¹⁵ op. cit. *Capital* Vol 3, pg 134.

reasons, the "rate of exploitation". It is denoted by the symbols "s/v" in Marx's work. "s" stands for the value of the surplus product (in man-hours); "v" stands for the cost value of "variable capital" which is how the worker is seen from the point of view of the capitalist. Labour is termed "variable" in the sense that the value of its output may vary while its cost value remains fixed. This variation in output may be caused by the increase in the length of the working day or by shortening the time required to produce subsistence (by means of new technology). The raw materials and machinery used in production, in contrast, are referred to as "constant capital" because their cost value is transferred unaltered to the value of the product - passed on in the price. Together, the value of constant capital, variable capital and the surplus product "c+v+s" make up the total value of the product.

The "rate of profit" is defined as the relationship of the surplus to the total investment, i.e. "s/c+v".¹⁶ Marx's point about the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is as follows. Historically and for technological reasons, the ratio of "c/v" increases. This is because capital of increasingly greater value is being used, on average, per worker. For the surplus per worker to increase, however, either the proportion of the working day required to produce subsistence must decrease or the length of working day itself must increase. Clearly, there is a limit to each of these strategies. The working day cannot be longer than 24hrs (in reality the physical maximum is probably 18hrs) and the amount of time taken by the production of subsistence cannot decrease below zero. The surplus value produced per worker is therefore limited but the value of the capital employed per worker is constantly increasing and in principle unlimited.

The ratio "s/c+v" for each worker and therefore, for the total workforce, has a tendency to fall because the constant increase in "c" in the denominator cannot be compensated for either by constant increases of a similar proportion in "s" or by decreases on a similar scale in "v".¹⁷

¹⁶ op. cit. *Capital*, Vol 3, pg 133.

¹⁷ c.f. op. cit. *Capital*, Vol 3, pg 319.

This situation is further complicated, however, by the consideration that the amount of constant capital per worker used in the production of a particular type of good or service may vary from firm to firm. This means that for each good, assuming the workers productivity to be the same, the same amount of variable capital and the same surplus would be combined with different amounts of constant capital and hence, the total value ($c+v+s$) for the same good would vary between producers. If the total value is equivalent to price, therefore, the price would vary between producers also. This, of course, does not happen because competition establishes a single market price. This means that the prices at which goods are sold are not necessarily equivalent to their values for any particular firm.

However, for the system as a whole, Marx believes that the relative proportions between the aggregate values of constant and variable capital and surplus value is reflected in their money equivalents. This is true on the condition that the establishment of a market price for a good merely redistributes the total value between firms in a way which reflects the average value per item. The total or aggregate value would thus remain unchanged and be equivalent in money terms to the product of the average value (market price) and the number of items, i.e. aggregate price or total revenue. The total cost of constant capital would thereby reflect its total value and similarly with wages and the surplus. In the light of this, the assertion that the rate of profit has a tendency to fall remains valid since it involves total magnitudes.

If the rate of profit falls to a level where the slightest problem with the economy causes losses to be made, this would deter investment and leave the economy in a permanently depressed state. A situation of permanent recession or chronic crisis would create the conditions for revolution. Marx regards this situation as a further example of conflict between the forces and relations of production, in this case a potentially terminal one.¹⁸

¹⁸ For amplification of this point cf. the accompanying footnote to the same point in section 1.1.1.1.1 "The general principles involved".

1.1.2. Is communism the solution to the riddle of history?

The problems of overproduction and the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, are caused by the fact that there is a plurality of owners of private property each competing to acquire the produce of the whole economy. This acquisitive behaviour, causes both the polarisation of wealth responsible for overproduction and also triggers the recessions attendant on the fall in the rate of profit.

The solution would seem to be, for the first problem, the centralised coordination of production, so that imbalances do not occur and for the second problem, the negation of the individualistic competition which destabilises the economy at low rates of profit and/or no longer provides an adequate motive for social production. In short the abolition of the market as the regulator of the economy. This would suggest that communism is the only logical solution to capitalism's crisis. The proletariat would be forced by the logic of the situation to adopt some form of communism. The question remains, however, as to whether this would solve "the riddle of history".

In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, in the section entitled "Private Property and Communism", just prior to the paragraph containing the statement about the "riddle of history", Marx describes three stages of communism. Of the first stage, which simply involves the community taking over the means of production, he says;

"The category of worker is not done away with but extended to all men."¹⁹

and

"The community is only a community of *labour* and equality of *wages* paid out by communal capital - by the *community* as the universal capitalist."²⁰

and

¹⁹ op. cit. *E.P.M.* pg 94.

²⁰ Ibid. pg 95.

"The first positive annulment of private property - crude communism - is thus merely a *manifestation* of the vileness of private property which wants to set itself up as the *positive community system*."²¹

Clearly this situation is not a solution to the riddle of history. It isn't even the abolition of private property. The reason why this is so is because the relations between individuals is still based on acquisitiveness. He says,

"General envy constituting itself as a power is the disguise in which greed reestablishes itself and satisfies itself only in *another way*."²²

As shown in chapter one, it is acquisitiveness and the pursuit of self-interest in the context of cooperative social relations which produces all the problems which constitute "the riddle of history". In this context, the mutual suspicion and hostility which governs social relations produces censorious laws which are imposed by an alien and repressive state. Marx says,

"Crude communism is merely the culmination of this envy and of this levelling-down proceeding from the *preconceived* minimum."²³

Levelling-down is clearly a way of restricting access, i.e. of depriving people of the use of, the property of the community. Not only do private property, alienation and the state not disappear, but even class and artificial scarcity may make a limited comeback. Where society is an alien being, a god, there will be a priesthood, a set of administrators that represent the god and do its will. This crucial role confers social leverage and hence the possibility of the reemergence of social divisions.

The point to be noted here, is that a solution to the contradictions of the capitalist economy is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of a solution to the riddle of history, for Marx. Capitalism institutionalises acquisitiveness in its most generalised form of

²¹ Ibid. pg 96.

²² Ibid. pg 95.

²³ Ibid. pg 95.

competitive individualism. Removal of the institutional structure does not, by itself, change the dynamics of the situation.²⁴ New forms of cooperation and different social relations are required. These he envisages as contained within the workers movement.

His three stages, however, do not appear to contain a dialectical movement. All he says about the dynamic which takes the society towards fully developed communism is that it represents the attempt to overcome self-estrangement. Whilst self-estrangement is a contradiction it is not peculiar to the early stages of communism. The whole weight of the responsibility resolving this problem, therefore, lies with the political and social content of the workers movement. This brings us to the second condition for revolution, namely, that the material conditions for the new social relations of production should already have matured within the womb of the old society. I shall now look at the extent to which this might be thought to have been achieved or be achievable.

1.2. Tendencies which lead to socialist social relations

There are four basic long-run tendencies within capitalism which combine to produce institutional structures and a political constituency for socialist style solutions to the problems of capitalist society. These comprise the increasing centralisation of control over both the economy and economic enterprises, the growing need to intervene to stabilise the system, deepening contradictions which are seen to flow from both the market and competition and the growing sensitivity of the system to disruptive activity by the workforce, leading to the need to incorporate them and their demands.

1.2.1. Centralisation

As the capitalist mode of production develops over time there is a tendency towards greater concentration of both economic and political power. In business there is

²⁴ Democratic control of the means of production does not, of itself, constitute a solution, nor is it to be identified with socialism. The community could be guided by a spirit of meanness and in a majoritarian system, minorities could be consistently outvoted (J. S. Mill's tyranny of the majority).

competitive centralisation as larger firms take over smaller competitors which are particularly vulnerable in times of economic crisis. The size of the largest enterprises constantly grows and, despite the continued existence of many small firms, it is the success or failure of the largest enterprises which determines the success or failure of national economies.

The interests of the state are, therefore, increasingly tied to the interests of these large firms. Since they often have interests which cross national boundaries, i.e they are multi-nationals, their interests also affect foreign policy.

Despite the spreading of ownership via the joint-stock company²⁵ share capital itself becomes concentrated in fewer hands in the sense that the bulk of shares are owned by an increasingly smaller percentage of share owners. Effective control is concentrated within a small group of large shareholders (from which managing directors are usually drawn). Decisions which govern the performance of the whole economy, therefore, are concentrated within this group. Given the connections with government and the way that the decisions that the largest capitalists make affect people's lives, there is an increasing tendency to believe that the administrative decisions they take, rather than market forces, are the appropriate means of solving the problems of social life. This is particularly convincing to the large number of administrators running the corporations and government. These people have a tendency to believe in a form of "managed capitalism".

Competitive centralisation also occurs at the level of national economies. Competition from South East Asia was the underlying cause of the European Single Market. The result of removing barriers to competition is that the largest firms get larger, swallowing up the markets of their smaller competitors. This has the advantage of making them more competitive internationally and hence strengthening the economies of the Single

²⁵ A phenomenon which is by no means new. It was well-known to Marx from his own era.

Market countries. However, because a market needs some regulation, i.e. intervention,²⁶ in crucial areas, decisions have to be taken centrally. This political centralisation, however, involves some loss of sovereignty and provokes the same kind of conflicts described in the section entitled "Unity and Kingship" in chapter four. Individual, internal power has to be relinquished for the sake of enhanced, collective, external power.

The international response to the European Single Market was the attempt by the U.S.A. and Canada to form a North American Single Market and the announcement by the Comecon of their intention to do the same. ASEAN was also considering the idea. The tendency amongst the advanced industrial societies, therefore, is towards larger economic and political units.

At the global level, there has been the attempt by the major economies to pursue a coordinated financial strategy ever since the meeting at Bretton Woods at the end of World War II. Governments now meet regularly and with increasing frequency to plan economic strategy.²⁷

The increasing tendency to try to "manage" capitalism is in part the result of the fact that the growth in the size of economic and political units as well as the growth in the scale of capitalism itself deepens the contradictions of the system rendering more urgent the need for intervention to stabilise the system.

1.2.2. Intervention

It was realised in the nineteenth century that lack of coordination between manufacturing and finance deepened recessions. Governments began to intervene to smooth out the cycle.

²⁶ In the realm of fiscal and monetary policy and also over policing, border regulation and other functions of the state.

²⁷ It would be wrong, however, to suppose that the increased planning to control capitalism makes the world a safer place (as Lenin argued against Kautsky in *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*). When the world economy does go into crisis, the larger and more powerful the economic units, the more destructive the conflict between them. - *Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1975 pp 142-146.

After two major wars in the twentieth century which arguably had economic causes and the growing destructive capacity of the major industrialised countries in the post-war period, it became even more urgent that large scale economic collapse should be avoided at all costs.

Keynesian economics appeared to offer a strategy, demand management, for controlling the cycle and replacing the anarchy of the market with centralised regulation. This raised expectations amongst the public that the government *should* be able to control the performance of economy. Although by the early seventies this strategy had failed, governments still use demand management as a tool for regulating the economy and the public expectation is still that the economy should be managed.

A second area of intervention is that of research and development. Leading edge technology is developed through projects which require expensive equipment. The largest of these are of necessity government sponsored. The U.S.A. develops much of its new technology through the space programme and military research. The Japanese government sponsors research and development which its leading companies feed off. The E.E.C. has joint programmes which are aimed at keeping ahead in the technological race. Advantage in this area will go to the country which can make available the largest pool of centralised funds.²⁸ Where all firms are obliged to do their own research and development, duplication of research will take place and the scale of investment in key areas will be too small to maintain the leading edge position of the country. The trend in this respect, therefore, is towards state capitalism.

It is ironic that at a time when state capitalism in Eastern Europe is supposed to have failed that the rest of the world in some ways is moving closer to it. The underlying cause of the failure of the Soviet and Eastern European economies is related to this ques-

²⁸ In any mode of production, the country which has the largest surplus to use for military or strategic economic purposes will have the greatest international leverage, as I suggested in chapter four in the section on centralisation.

tion of the centralisation of surplus funds for research and development.

At the height of its performance the whole of the communist world together only accounted for 15% of world production. Its surplus was, therefore, at best only one fifth that of the capitalist world (assuming comparable efficiency). Most of the capitalist surplus product was reinvested in the U.S.A. and to a lesser extent in Europe and Japan. The West's capacity for research and development was, therefore, that much greater and a technology gap was bound to develop irrespective of the relative efficiency of the two systems.²⁹

The lesson to be drawn from this is perhaps that socialism isn't possible in one country if it has larger capitalist neighbours with which it has to maintain technological parity. It is interesting to note that in the end both systems had a form of mixed economy with the state setting the parameters in which the market operates and funding its key research.

A third form of intervention is where industry requires long-term capital investment but the market is volatile and unpredictable and/or the rate of profit is low. The paradigm case of this is agriculture. Agriculture in Britain was underdeveloped in the pre-war era. The uncertainty of harvests and hence market prices meant that long-term planning was not possible hence investment in new technology was not forthcoming. The government intervened to guarantee the farmers a constant income by subsidising any shortfall. This

²⁹ The Soviet Union prioritised military development in order to keep pace with the west in this sector and consequently, the domestic sector fell behind technologically and became relatively stagnant.

Eastern Europe, on the other hand, in attempting to industrialise was forced to import its new technology from the West and hence was drawn into the world market system. The collapse of world market prices in the 1980's then forced the Eastern European countries to devote more of their production to export in order to pay debts, and hence, their domestic markets became drastically undersupplied. The resulting shortages, spiraling black market prices and pollution as old technology was pushed to its limit irrespective of environmental considerations produced political instability.

Meanwhile the Soviet Union which usually subsidised Eastern Europe was involved in a rapidly escalating arms race. Notice that this was a competition between two state funded sectors. The Soviets could not keep pace, particularly with respect to the S.D.I. programme and had to turn its attention to the problems of its domestic economy.

made possible the high technology farming we have today which now produces surpluses. Similar procedures were followed in the U.S.A. and the E.E.C. where the governments buy the excess crop to maintain prices. Although the result has been food mountains, surplus is preferable to deficit.

Other heavily capitalised industries may also have problems of underinvestment. This was certainly the case with coal and steel in the pre-war period before the government nationalised them. It remains to be seen whether some of the newly privatised industries will stagnate due to low rates of profit and market uncertainties. The tendency towards instability and downward pressure on profit mentioned earlier should produce increasing necessity for this kind of intervention.

Transport is another area which typically has high overheads, low rates of profit and a highly variable market. It is also desirable that it should provide a reliable and comprehensive service to the rest of the economy. The market does this very poorly, lacking coordination and providing a patchy and changeable service. Nor will industry invest in general education. Its training programmes are likely to be narrowly vocational. The government, therefore, is increasingly required to provide infrastructural support of this kind.

A fourth area of intervention is welfare services. Capitalism tends to produce a polarisation of wealth. Great wealth can coexist with extreme poverty. Driven to the extreme, this can create both political instability and be a threat to the efficiency of the system. In wartime, for instance, societies either become more egalitarian so that sacrifices are shared more equally or risk, like Russia in the First World War, a revolution where the soldiers shot their officers and returned home to fight the Czar. War also exposes the lack of efficiency caused by poverty. Rowntree's studies showed that in Britain at the same time a third of the soldiers were physically unfit to fight.

Robert Owen, in his New Larnark Mills, had shown that one could make more money with a well cared for workforce than with a sick and undernourished one and the

threat of social unrest caused by poverty has been a perpetual since the industrial revolution. Unrest is particularly damaging to employers in a boom when there are profits to be made. In post-World War Two Britain, soldiers returning to join the workforce were not prepared to put up with the deprivation suffered by their parents. At the same time the economy was heading for a boom. These factors among others³⁰ conditioned the introduction of the welfare state.

Countries which are newly formed by unifying smaller states are particularly vulnerable to the destabilising effects of wealth polarisation. The danger is that regional disparities will cause the state to disintegrate into its constituent parts. It is perhaps worthy of note that the first welfare state was introduced by Bismark (a man not noted for his liberalism) in the newly unified Germany. The Social Charter is intended to perform a similar function for the Single Market.³¹

All these interventions simultaneously create a constituency of people who regard capitalism as flawed in some way since their job is to compensate for its shortcomings. These people have jobs which are paid from central funds and are not wedded nor indeed sympathetic to the drive for profit. Their criterion of success is service and they are quite happy to see centrally funded, administrative solutions to social problems. Those who are involved in welfare services also see the effect of poverty which disposes them critically towards the system.³²

³⁰ The beginning of the welfare state can be dated from Lloyd-George's "People's Budget" of 1909. It was designed to fend off growing support for the Labour Party. To that extent, the franchise, which was granted to working-class males at the end of the 19th century in order to incorporate this class (which was of central importance to an imperial economy and increasingly organised), was also a crucial factor. It was mobilised again in 1945 to return a Labour government. "The People's Budget" was also used to break the control of the Tory dominated House of Lords over legislation, c.f. *Post-Victorian Britain: 1902-1951*, L. C. B. Seaman, London, Methuen 1966, pp 26-35.

³¹ The extent of the regional polarisation in the E.E.C. is potentially greater than in the United Kingdom because it is larger and richer.

³² Teachers are also to be included within this group in so far as they regard their role as helping individuals to develop their full potential rather than merely supplying the needs of industry. This is also the central concern of Marx's work and in so far as the system fails to permit this teachers will also be critical.

Capitalism thus of necessity promotes alternative forms of economic activities within itself, just as Feudalism promoted the development of capitalism. Those concerned with these activities have different, and in the case of these involved in welfare, importantly, *humanistic* priorities. The activist within the "New Left" movements are primarily drawn from these "new professionals".³³ They have been described as a "New Middle Class" but all they have in common with the old middle class is that they are well-educated and they work in the non-manual sector. They are wage-workers and, therefore, not liable to defend capitalism if it begins to fail as a capitalist would. They more often than not tend to identify with the interests of those they serve and their views are influential amongst the working class in general.

The amount of intervention depends upon the problems engendered by capitalism's contradictions. As these problems grow, so the non-capitalist sector with its own priorities also grows.

1.2.3. Capitalist contradictions

As capitalism, has continued to expand a set of serious contradictions has been exacerbated by the scale and speed of this development. Conflicts have become more dangerous and less acceptable to the public. The demand for raw materials is outstripping their discovery. Pollution is threatening to destroy the basis of the system of production itself (as well as ruining the quality of life) and the international polarisation of wealth is threatening the third world with starvation conditions and creating political problems for the future. All these problems are global, that is to say systemic, and as such call for solutions at the global level. The market cannot by itself provide these solutions, hence another level of intervention involving international cooperation will be necessary.

In each of these cases there are contradictions which fall into two categories. These

³³ These include not only environmentalists, nuclear disarmers and animal rights activists but also the Red Army Faction, the Red Brigades and Action Direct.

are: processes produced by the system which undermine its viability and the growing disparity between the possibilities of life engendered by the means of production and the realisation of this potential under the existing relations of production. Paradoxically, this disparity is most obvious when capitalism is most successful, i.e. in a boom, because then it can be seen which problems it cannot solve in principle.

1.2.3.1. Conflict

As capitalism grows, so the destructive power of capitalist states increases, i.e. their military capability increases. With the advent of nuclear weapons, the consequence of a global conflict could be the destruction of the system itself. However, because of the relationships of economic and political rivalry which characterise capitalism and the periodic economic crises which heighten tensions within the system, such a conflict becomes increasingly likely.

The ending of the Cold War has not diminished this possibility in principle, in fact the proliferation of nuclear weapons is making a nuclear exchange at some stage more probable. Nor does historical evidence justify faith in deterrence. The combination of two factors tend to undermine deterrence: severe internal economic and political crises coinciding with the existence of new technologies and strategies which might persuade a desperate government to gamble on taking minimal losses in a war.

In the First World War, Germany sought to avoid the consequences of disturbing "The Balance of Power" with the "Schlieffen Plan" in the Second World War, Schlieffen Mk. II was augmented with "Blitzkrieg". Already in the U.S.A., there are those who talk about "winnable nuclear wars".³⁴

Conflict is also increasingly unacceptable to an affluent society. When material problems of the world are solved in principle, it isn't obvious why it is necessary to go on

³⁴ Edward Teller and those at the Livermore institute who developed S.D.I. for just such a purpose.

fighting. This contradiction was felt most acutely by the generation of Americans who, instead of enjoying the affluence of the sixties boom, were forced to fight and die in the jungles of South East Asia.³⁵

The view offered by pro-capitalist commentators is that conflict is inevitable. However, the acceptance of the inevitability of conflict within capitalism stems from the view that if one is engaged in competition to take the most one can from the world economy one has to be in a position to defend it from others who may try to take it back. These are precisely the kinds of attitudes and practices, however, which come to be regarded as an unacceptable intrusion on the peaceful enjoyment of the wealth thus produced.

Capitalism also engenders conflict at the individual level. It promotes hostile and negative human behaviour, narrowing human relationships to those of competition and exploitation. In so far as it does this, it belies its potential for enhancing the quality of life.³⁶

Because of this, the Hippies of the late sixties preferred to forgo the material benefits of the system in order to rediscover positive human relationships characterised by friendship and love. They also regarded working for material benefits in the future as a form of confidence trick to keep people on the treadmill.

The New Left also regarded the benefits offered by capitalism as without intrinsic worth. They regarded them as forms of "alienated consumption". Passive forms of leisure are sold en masse by advertising to a population that is in no position to discover their own likes and dislikes because they are not in control of their own lives. This kind of consumption was regarded by the New left as a de-humanising opiate.³⁷

³⁵ The answer to the question for many was U.S. Imperialism. The Red Army Faction, for instance, originated in the German anti-Vietnam War movement.

³⁶ Indeed, as individualistic competition increases, so does crime, suicide, forms of addiction etc.

³⁷ c.f. *One Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse, Abacus 1964.

Much of capitalism's production is geared to selling the illusion of success and glamour as a compensation to the majority of people to which it denies the reality. Since pretence is unsatisfying, this is an insatiable market of people whose desires can be controlled by advertising and whose attitude towards their own personal identity is easily molded since their actual life-experience is, by contrast, banal and shabby. Furthermore, in pursuit of the illusion of personal worth, precisely because they know that it is an illusion, they become evermore dissatisfied and aggressive towards the world in general. Thus a contradiction between material affluence and personal satisfaction is intensified the richer the society becomes.

1.2.3.2. Environmental problems

As capitalism expands, the increasing levels of production also cause increasing levels of pollution. This is both hazardous to life, and in the case of climatic change poses a serious problem for the survival of the system itself. One aspect of this threat is that poisonous substances can enter the food chain, making the population sick. This is a serious social problem, discrediting the system as well as undermining its efficiency.

Even more serious, however, is the threat of global warming. The increased production of carbon dioxide by the burning of fossil fuels and the depletion of the forests creates the so called "greenhouse effect" where radiant heat can enter the atmosphere but cannot leave. This would melt the ice caps and cause the sea to rise. Populated areas of the world would flood causing a refugee problem on a massive scale. This in turn would seriously disrupt the economic system. Not only would some raw materials be lost in the areas affected, but there would also be political and economic instability in others close by.³⁸

³⁸ The effect of industrial production can also alter the weather system in other ways, creating hot spots over cities, for instance. Any alteration of the weather is likely to affect agricultural production which also would have economic and political consequences.

These perceived threats to the environment tend to discredit the market system because the methods of disposal that cause pollution are usually the most cost-effective ones from the individual capitalist's point of view. It seems, therefore, that there is a positive incentive to pollute built into the system, since cutting costs is always a high priority, if not a necessity, for capitalists. Furthermore, competition ensures that one producer cannot afford to use cleaner but more expensive technology if his/her competitors do not.

If this situation is to be avoided, therefore, some form of collective agreement which disadvantages no-one would seem to be the way forward. At the very least, this would entail a moratorium on certain kinds of activity which damage the environment. Such a moratorium, however, although it applies equally to all, might, nevertheless, still be perceived as unfair. The reason for this, of course, is that the circumstances of all countries are not the same. Some will bear the brunt of a moratorium because the banned activity is crucial to their economy whilst to others it is peripheral.³⁹ Countries which are already disadvantaged are not likely to agree to this further disadvantage.⁴⁰ The only kind of solution that is likely to be perceived as fair is one which takes into account differences in need and differences in ability to pay. An agreement which can hold, therefore, would have to be redistributive. A comprehensive solution along these lines would perhaps entail a central fund into which countries paid in proportion to their G.N.P. and withdrew according to environmental need as specified by environmental experts - a kind of "ecological health service".

Unless there is such an alteration in global social relations, however, capitalism will experience a serious, if not terminal crisis driven by its own dynamics.

³⁹ This is the same problem as that discussed in chapter seven regarding the bourgeois and socialist concepts of equality. "A rule applied equally to those who are not equal will not be equal in its effects".

⁴⁰ China and India will principally be penalised by a ban on C.F.C's while Brazil will be a loser by a moratorium on the depletion of rainforests (just as Norway is presently by the whaling ban). It is doubtful that in the long run these countries can be *forced* to disadvantage themselves in this way.

1.2.3.3. Depletion of resources

Again, as capitalism expands, its demand for raw materials and other resources increases at accelerating rate. This rate of consumption is presently so rapid that many resources will be exhausted within the next twenty to fifty years. This is occurring, not because most of our resources have *already* been consumed, but because the rapid increase in demand will consume what is left of them in a very short time. The problem, therefore, is the rate of increase in demand.

Nor is the problem merely that the known resources are finite, (this, at least in principle, might be solved by finding new reserves or switching to different technology). The more serious problem is that the speed of acceleration of demand will eventually outstrip our capacity to adapt even if we use these strategies, given that both are difficult and time consuming. Capitalism, without intervention, cannot control its rate of increase in demand for resources and also it must, by its very nature, continually expand.⁴¹

All the problems stated so far have features in common. They stem from the fact that capitalism is reaching the "Malthusian" stage of its development analysed in chapter five. The mode of production has reached a scale where it is encountering the environmental limits to its further development along the same lines. This throws into question the social relations which constitute the dynamics of the system and which are driving it through these limits. The problems posed are twofold: capitalism's inability to coordinate the rate of expansion with the capacity to manage the environmental factors on which the system depends, and the fact that it adjusts to contradictions only in the wake of crisis, though crises such as nuclear war or global warming will not provide a second opportunity.⁴²

Should China and India manage to industrialise, the problem will become very

⁴¹ Recycling of resources merely alleviates this problem somewhat. It doesn't check the demand for increasing quantities.

⁴² Destructive weaponry is equally a problem of scale and limits.

much worse, as the former contains one quarter of the world's population and the latter only a little less. Furthermore, industrialisation is usually accompanied by an initial increase in population which would create even greater pressure on resources. According to the United Nations Population Fund, the population of the world will almost double by 2050 to ten billion people.⁴³ This brings us to the fourth problem - the North-South divide.

1.2.3.4. The North-South Divide

As stated before, any competitive system will produce a polarisation of wealth. This is not denied by capitalism's advocates. They claim, however, that as the system as a whole becomes richer, so its poorest members also benefit. The empirical evidence of recent years, however, would not substantiate this at the global level.⁴⁴ Substantial numbers of people today face starvation and death and the poorest countries have become poorer.

One problem is that mainly agrarian societies, which in the past suffered only from fluctuations in the weather, now also suffer from fluctuations in the world market to which they are linked by their association with capitalism.

Furthermore, the decisions which they are encouraged or coerced into taking by the major capitalist countries are often not in their own best interests but rather in the interests of the aforementioned capitalists.

In the case many of the poorest countries, this can be enough to destroy the fragile basis of the economy. The worst problems occur where recession forces the over-use of resources, destroying the capital base of the country, (for instance, where the over-use of

⁴³ Quoted on Ceefax 13.5.91

⁴⁴ Nor at the individual level in the major capitalist countries where the accentuation of market forces in recent years has led to the formation of an impoverished underclass.

One wonders if, without intervention, collective bargaining or the fact that western workers hold a key position at the centre of a global imperialist system, the absolute immiseration of the western working class would not have occurred as some of Marx's writing seems to suggest.

land causes deserts to grow as in the case of some African countries).

In the post-war boom, countries that were part of the capitalist empires were a highly productive source of cheap raw materials. The relative national prosperity which this brought encouraged indigenous middle classes to agitate for independence.⁴⁵ Faced with costly and difficult insurgencies in more than one country, the imperialist countries cut their losses and adopted a policy of incorporation. Where possible the insurgencies were temporarily defeated so that delegation of power could take place on terms which were satisfactory to the imperialist countries. The newly independent countries were then admitted as full members to international institutions such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the I.M.F. The real power in these institutions, however, lies with the main donor countries, i.e. the major capitalist countries, and economic control over the newly independent countries was, if anything, intensified despite their formal freedom.

The imperialist countries were prepared to lend money for development only in so far as that development provided a market for their manufactured goods or was done by their multi-national corporations. When the recession came, the major capitalist countries were even more anxious to lend money in order to extend their markets at a time when markets were contracting. They were also anxious to lend because the banks were the recipients of large amounts of liquid capital due to the manufacturing downturn.⁴⁶ Western governments hoped the prosperity of the financial sector would cushion the effects of the recession in manufacturing.

To this end, the conventional wisdom propagated by western economists was for developing countries to abandon import substitution, since this would diminish foreign

⁴⁵ The process whereby prosperity causes classes below the ruling elite to assert political rights was discussed in chapter four, section 3.4 headed "Decentralisation" and also in chapter five, section 1.5 headed "'Progressive' classes and the new ruling class", concerning the emergence of nation states from feudal control.

⁴⁶ The oil crises intensified this effect by increasing the energy costs to industry while the oil revenues were deposited in western banks. Money is the banks' capital. If they have it, they need to make it work for them. In times of inflation, this is even more urgent for the banks, since money which is held devalues over time.

markets, and develop their export industries in order to pay for the imports instead. To do this, of course, they would have to borrow. From the point of the developing countries, however, the downswing of the cycle is precisely the wrong time to borrow and the greater their dependence upon the world market in a recession, the worse the internal effects will be. By the time their exports were increased, the world market was unable to absorb them. Prices fell and the developing countries were left with crippling debts.

The effects of this has been to create situations where more and more production is devoted to exporting to repay debt and less and less to the home market. Also, western technology requires continuous imports to keep it running (spare parts and raw materials - fuel, fertiliser etc.) which also absorbs money.⁴⁷ The first casualties are the population whose needs go unsatisfied, in particular the poorest section, usually in the countryside. In economies under more severe pressure, the western technology will breakdown and become useless and the advantage of industrialisation will be lost. In the most severe conditions resources themselves will be destroyed and environmental damage done by the attempt to keep pace.⁴⁸ Populations which may have grown due to urbanisation and relative prosperity in the boom are then left stranded in starvation conditions in the crisis.

This situation undermines the credibility of the capitalist system in the eyes of western public opinion as a system capable of bringing prosperity to the world. For some, the existence of suffering on this scale is unacceptable and undermines the legitimacy of a system which is based upon the individual pursuit of wealth. Liberal (in the non-free market sense) and Christian opinion would favour some measure of intervention and redistribution. Added to this, Third World countries themselves are demanding economic reform, e.g. the proposals for a "New International Economic Order".⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Some countries where people are starving nevertheless have to export food to pay for the means of production of that food.

⁴⁸ This is a vicious spiral. Smaller the productive base the more pressure is put upon it which diminishes its productivity even further.

⁴⁹ Should the world economy enter a boom phase this may well succeed since countries which have preserved their capital will be stronger and may form cartels. Combined with liberal opinion this may force a change.

The fact that a substantial body of opinion is prepared to prioritise welfare above the market augurs well for a transition to a more humane system should capitalism fail to deliver. This may not be sufficient to force a transition, however, without the support of organised labour.

1.2.4. The growth of organised labour

The fortunes of the labour movement and in particular the trade unions, rises and falls with the trade cycle. When labour is in demand, wage bargaining is effective, membership grows and laws regulating the unions are liberalised through political influence and pressure. In a recession, the reverse occurs. The need for draconian measures leads to attacks on the unions (since they pose an obstacle by defending workers interests) unemployment weakens their bargaining position, membership falls and laws are passed removing their privileges and controlling their behaviour as public opinion is mobilised against them.⁵⁰

Over and above these cyclical patterns, however, one can discern a long run tendency towards increasing strength of the labour movement. This occurs for structural reasons. Over time, capitalism becomes more and more integrated, its parts increasingly interdependent. This means that action by smaller groups of workers can have an increasingly greater dislocating effect. Added to this, the centralisation of capital is accompanied by a corresponding growth in the size of unions as they also amalgamate and rationalise in order to cope. The emergence of large unions in key industries has been, and still is, regarded as a major threat by capitalist governments and their supporters. More recently, the need for flexibility in a rapidly changing market has led to an attempt to fine tune production by a method known as "Just-In-Time" management. It operates in such away that there is no need to carry stocks of unused materials, whatever is needed

⁵⁰ The same issues have cropped up over and over since the turn of the century: the Labour Party levy, immunity from damages from the effects of a strike, the legality of strikes in sensitive industries etc. The law on these issues oscillates backwards and forwards according to the political climate, itself determined by the state of the economy.

arrives just in time for use. Needless to say, anything which disrupts this timing will immediately immobilise a whole chain of interdependent producers. This leaves employers dependent upon good labour relations since they cannot easily plan for a protracted struggle.

All this points to the increasing need to incorporate organised labour within the decision-making processes of the firm and the national economy. All the major industrialised countries, with perhaps the notable exception of the U.S.A., have attempted to incorporate organised labour to some extent.⁵¹ The influence and power of the trade unions, however, brings with it the concerns for welfare and security of their membership, i.e. left-liberal politics. Incorporating the labour movement in this way also reduces the capitalists' room for manoeuvre in a crisis and provides a focus for confrontation.

The above analysis, however, principally refers to workers in the first world countries who are in the strongest position, being located at the centre of an imperialist system.⁵² The "Achilles-heel" of the labour movement internationally, is that the workers in the industrialised countries may not support the interests of the workers in the third world.⁵³

2. Outstanding problems

From the discussion above one can see that capitalism is facing crises of essentially two kinds. Firstly, from its own internal dynamics and secondly, from its relation to environmental factors and problems of scale. Nevertheless, at this point in time, it is not

⁵¹ In a boom this is the only way to restrain wages. Only in a recession can the trade unions be ignored. Already, in the mini-boom of the late nineteen eighties, the bargaining power of skilled workers had returned and employers were not able to restrain wages in that sector.

⁵² The stability of the birth-rate also helps strengthen wage bargaining. In the post-war boom the employers were forced to supplement indigenous male labour with immigrant and female labour.

⁵³ This depends, at the moment, on whether they will extend their own ideas of justice to all workers or whether they espouse the capitalist ideology of self-interest. Ultimately, solidarity should be based upon the perception that cooperation will allow them to find solutions to problems, e.g. conflict, which are in the interests of all of them. While capitalism can shield western workers from its more unpleasant effects, however, it can undermine this rationale.

generally accepted that socialism provides a complete answer to these problems. This is because there are a number of outstanding issues for which socialism does not appear to provide a solution. Principally this involves the questions of labour motivation and labour discipline. Also, in the minds of many, there is an association of socialism with the centralisation of power and hence alienation, i.e. to a problem, itself associated with "the riddle of history".

2.1. Centralisation and decentralisation

As we have seen in chapter four, all modes of production based upon competitive social relations begin with a decentralised power structure and end up with an effectively centralised one. However, since socialism would do away with the competitive relations which lead to centralisation, the question arises as to whether it would itself be centralised or decentralised.

We have also seen in chapter seven that bureaucratic control is, in the main, a function of the internal conflict within a social system. Central control is, in essence, a conservative response to the question of social order produced by lack of trust of those at the periphery. Whether a society is centralised, therefore, depends upon the quality of social relations within it. Ideally, socialism is based upon comradeship.

Comradeship implies people working together for a common set of goals, in this case to create and sustain a society where everyone can realise their full human potential in conditions of personal security based on mutual support. It also implies mutual trust. Trust is born out of mutual tolerance and sensitivity to each other's individual needs as well as the guarantee of support. Relationships of this kind imply a sense of responsibility both to others and to the society itself. This would allow a high level of autonomy and decentralised decision-making (rather like the game of football in chapter seven). In principle, therefore, there is no reason why a socialist system should not be decentralised with a high level of individual autonomy, over and above the practical requirement of coordinating collective activity.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ In a socialist society coordination requires open access to information and a sophisticated

2.2. Labour motivation and the problem of alienation

Given that it is quite difficult to characterise the western socialist parties as "totalitarian", capitalism's single claim to superiority in the West has been on the grounds of its supposed efficiency. This is because firstly, competition in a market ensures that what people want⁵⁵ is supplied at the lowest cost, i.e. with the most economical use of resources. Secondly, competition between individuals for wealth ensures that either the desire for personal gain or the fear of poverty forces people to use the maximum effort for the purposes of production, i.e. it ensures labour discipline. Since socialism abolishes this kind of competition, it is argued that it is, therefore, inefficient.

Looked at from a different point of view, the question of labour motivation is the last and most crucial of questions for a complete solution to "the riddle of history". This is because if "society" or "the market" employs sanctions to force people to work then alienation has not been abolished. The question of efficiency, therefore, goes right to the heart of the problem.

2.2.1. Work

Work in the broadest sense is any effort used to change the world in some way (including oneself). Although any form of human activity is work in this sense, this is not a trivial point. Imprisonment, for instance, uses inactivity as a form of punishment, which demonstrates that work is actually a human need. It is only work which does not serve the interests of the worker, work which is forced upon the worker which is a chore. It is not labour but alienated labour which is a source of human oppression.

There are positive reasons why people engage in work independently of being driven by the demands of the market system. People will expend effort where they enjoy

network of communications.

⁵⁵ In practice capitalism generates needs which are merely compensations for problems it itself creates. It sells the solace of illusions of success and power to those it deprives of these things and all kinds of diversions to distract people from the unsatisfactory nature of their existence.

the activity itself, e.g. sports or hobbies. They may also take pride in the finished object as a demonstration of their ability or creativity, (self-realisation in Marx's terminology).⁵⁶ More instrumentally perhaps, they will produce objects which they can consume themselves, for instance, D.I.Y. work around the home.

However, these are all individual activities. Society is organised around collective activity. Nevertheless, people will also voluntarily engage in collective activities where the enterprise appears rational and in their own interest. There are many individual examples of this, e.g. wells dug in third world villages, schools built or the communal effort exerted in Britain during the Second World War.

For this to succeed, however, there needs to be common goals which are generally approved of and which give meaning to the activity. There must also be communication of information by which people can assess the effect of their activities and what still needs to be done, thus involving them on a day to day basis. Also, in a system which is not dominated by an elite, there must be dialogue between the groups and individuals who are cooperating and who give each other mutual support and encouragement. This form of meaningful dialogue draws the individual into the life of the community and overcomes political alienation (with a small "p").

The examples given above, however, describe individual events and exceptional circumstances. Much day-to-day labour is routine in character. Minute division of labour is also thought to contribute to work appearing to be meaningless.⁵⁷ Meaninglessness, however, really stems from two situations: where the link between effort and its result is unclear and where the purpose of the activity is either unclear or disapproved of. Even routine activity can be done with cheerfulness if it is regarded as valuable and important.

Exploitative conditions for labour are largely responsible for the meaninglessness of

⁵⁶ This form of satisfaction is blighted for the worker where the labour is coerced or performed under exploitative conditions.

⁵⁷ See Robert Blauner *Alienation and Freedom* University of Chicago Press 1964 pg 22.

labour under capitalism, since they make the labourer cynical about the purpose of the activity and resentful of the way that it is imposed (they are excluded from all decision making).⁵⁸

So far the motivations described are those of rational self-interest. One should not underestimate human capacity for altruistic motivation, however. On an individual basis people often perform tasks for the sake of children, family or friends simply for the pleasure of giving them pleasure. A substantial number of people in capitalist society prefer to work in "caring" professions for very similar reasons and people will often work unstintingly for a personally held ideal. A socialist society would make use of such motivations which are more likely to flourish where the system is perceived to be fair in terms of distribution and is orientated towards mutual support.

Indeed, it is the fact that capitalism functions on the basis of narrow, quasi-Hobbesian assumptions about human motivation, i.e. people are only motivated by avarice and fear, which is responsible for the stultifying atmosphere of capitalist society. A humane society needs a broader view of mankind to make use of the more generous and indeed rational human aspirations which exist. Socialism provides this opportunity.⁵⁹

2.3. The Price Mechanism

In relation to the points made above, it is often said that socialism cannot estimate the size and nature of demand because it would lack a "price-mechanism". In response to this, firstly, it should be noted that the price mechanism performs a quite different function to the one described above. The rapidity with which retailers need to re-order is all that is required to estimate the changes in demand. The fact that prices rise when shor-

⁵⁸ A similar situation obtains under bureaucratic forms of communism.

⁵⁹ A more liberal perspective is being pioneered within capitalist society. Tom Peters, for instance, argues that unless large firms mobilise the interest and ingenuity of the workforce, under modern conditions, their markets will be cannibalised by small groups of highly motivated people who will target niche markets better than they can. This is still very much a minority opinion, however. See Tom Peters, *Thriving on Chaos*, Alfred A. Knopf 1987 Ch. IV.

tages occur functions to raise the profits of suppliers and hence provide an incentive to increase supply, i.e. it coordinates supply to demand.⁶⁰

In a socialist society, this function would have to be performed by an information network and a positive response to need by producers motivated in the manner described above, rather than by individual pursuit of profit. This, if anything, is the crucial difference between the two systems.

It is not the purpose of this thesis to work out in detail an institutional framework which could perform these functions,⁶¹ rather it is to analyse the logic of Marx's position and to reconstruct his problematic.

3. Conclusion

Communism, therefore, is a system where private property is abolished in the specific sense that in it, no-one is deprived of the use of property in such a manner that this deprivation can be used as a means of exercising power over them.⁶² Labour is organised on a voluntary basis and care is taken that an individual can pursue the development of their own capacities and contribute in their own way. The society underwrites the aspirations of the individual by providing the necessary support in a much wider ranging fashion than at present. Organisation is fraternal in character and distribution is on the basis of "from each according to ability to each according to need". This follows from the way production is organised and also the abolition of private property.

⁶⁰ As well as rationing consumption of scarce resources to the "better-off".

⁶¹ Nor, unfortunately, do I have the space here to attempt this, worthwhile and necessary though it may be.

⁶² This objective can be accomplished by various means. Demand can be saturated for any particular product such that it could be obtained free to all at the point of distribution. In this way no-one can be deprived of the item who wants one. Health care in Britain operates on this basis and some Israeli kibbutzim operate this principle for most goods.

Another method, where appropriate, is the provision of communal goods such as transport, roads, parks, museums etc.

This prescription is not simply a utopian construct, produced in the belief that people should be nice to each other. Each of the points addresses a central problem besetting all modes of production from the era of primitive communism onwards (a more detailed discussion of which is found in chapter seven section 2.3). The crux of the issue is that competition and conflict in the context of social cooperation produces social institutions that are as destructive and oppressive as nature itself before man came to control it. This problem is analysed by Marx in a dynamic historical context as it evolves through successive modes of production. Capitalism, in which this dynamic finds its most universal form, provides the chance to understand this movement and control it. Communism as outlined roughly above points the way to a solution and hence to the solution of "the riddle of history".

In so far as we do not appreciate the nature of our own institutions, however, they appear as alien forces imposing not only their own demands but also their own time scale for the solution to these problems. The world at present is on the verge of a number of crises in which this understanding will be crucial. In the light of this, the salience of Marx's analysis cannot be stressed too strongly.

Conclusion

The Riddle of History Solved?

I began by asking the question of why Marx thought it was possible to make the claim that "Communism is the riddle of history solved and knows itself to be this solution".

The term "communism" in this statement is ambiguous; it could refer to a set of ideas, a mode of production or a social movement. Only the latter could be thought to "know itself to be this solution" whereas only one of the former could be a solution to the "riddle of history" - one in theory the other in practice.

What I have tried to show in the thesis is that certain practices of the working class implicitly embody the principles which Marx associates with communism and that these practices reconcile the oppositions associated with "the riddle of history" in the manner of an Hegelian synthesis. As such they do, in principle, constitute a solution to the problem.

To be a genuine solution, a solution in practice, however, they need to be embodied in the consciousness of a social movement which at some point will be in a position to make them the basis of a new mode of production.

Marx's theory of history suggests that not only does capitalism, because of its fluidity, reveal the essential nature of oppression in all modes of production hitherto and also place its subject class, the proletariat, in a position where it must deal with these problems to reclaim its own humanity, but because of its own contradictions, it also strengthens that class vis a vis the capitalist class itself. This view is the source of Marx's

optimism.

Capitalist economic crises, however, pose the problem for the proletariat in a different way. The same fundamental contradictions lie at the root of both the cyclical and the long-term crises of capitalism. In order to avoid in the long-term the catastrophic collapse of this mode of production, these fundamental problems must be overcome.

The proletariat, because it has already developed means of dealing with these problems, is favourably placed to do this. There is a difference, however, between consciousness of how to create a better way of life and consciousness of what Hegel would have called "the world historical significance" of this behaviour. This conceptual gap is what Marx's theory is intended to bridge.

Marx did not provide a blueprint for communism. In the light of this, it may seem somewhat premature, therefore, to announce that "communism is the riddle of history solved", having no idea what communism would be like. What Marx's theory does provide, however, is a detailed analysis of capitalism in the context of a theory of history from which can be extrapolated the broad outlines of a solution to historical problems.

This is of crucial importance in two respects, first, and most obviously it shows how it is possible to transcend the social relations of capitalism. Secondly, it places this solution in the context of a historical problem, so that its significance can be seen. Without this perspective it would be possible for the proletariat to recreate the same problems as in other modes of production, as I suggested in chapter eight. This is why it is important that communism should be self-conscious, i.e. should "know itself to be this solution". This is a minimal but necessary requirement for not committing the same mistakes as before.

Communism aims to fulfill the expectations which capitalism raised but failed to deliver for liberty, equality and fraternity. Hegel saw the desire for liberty as the driving force of history, in this Marx concurs. It is fraternity, however, which is the crucial distinguishing feature of socialism. Fraternity is important because it represents the negation

of the antagonistic social relations which are the source of the problems discussed above. Thus it is the forms of cooperation which permit fraternal relations to exist between people which are the key to the solution of "the riddle of history".

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