

## SCIENCE AND PRACTICE IN MARX'S POLITICAL ECONOMY

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Criticisms and defenses of Marx have tended to center around the question of the scientific and political character of his work. Depending on one's perspective, Marx can be embraced as scientific or rejected as positivistic, embraced for his political relevance or rejected as ideological.

In fact, Marx participated in the general drift toward positivism, yet remained tied to a notion of science rooted in German critical philosophy. He shared in a general optimism about the politically progressive nature of science, yet saw no contradiction between scientific objectivity and political partisanship.

Still, there is an ambiguity in Marx's work as regards the relationship between science and political practice. It is not altogether clear how his political works and his more strictly scientific works fit together and what the relationship was supposed to be between his work on political economy and the practice of the working class movement. Was science's role to raise consciousness? Was it meant to serve directly as a political argument? Could it demonstrate the necessity or likelihood of revolution? Or merely the possibility of change? In what follows I will try to make some headway in answering these questions and in defining the ambiguity I find in Marx. The general aim is to critically review certain models of the relationship between the "Marxist social scientist" and the working class movement.

First, I will make some very general observations about the development of Marx's notion of science and broadly outline his version of a social science. Then I will discuss his fundamental methodological device—the dialectical method—and the connection he saw between method and politics.

This will be followed by an exposition of two overlapping lines of argument in *Capital* and some discussion of their practical implications. On the one hand, a coherent economic theory, Marx seems to have believed, could directly serve as an argument in the struggle over the length of the working day. On the other hand, a critique of the categories of political economy could at best demonstrate the possibility of change. While this critique is at the heart of the scientific enterprise, its political utility is unclear.

Following this, I will take up a short discussion of the dynamic aspect of Marx's theory, the "laws of motion" of capitalism, and the question of the relationship between these economic laws and the sociology of revolt.

Finally, I will conclude by specifying what I feel is a central ambiguity in Marx, the failure to effectively reconcile evolutionary and revolutionary approaches.

Marx seemed to share with other theorists of the nineteenth century the hope and belief that the study of society could attain the status of a positive science, a body of knowledge rooted in empirical investigation that would have the precision of natural science. He was in part reacting against the speculative philosophy of Hegel and the Young Hegelians. When he first took up the critique of political economy he felt he was leaving "theological family affairs" behind and taking up "a discussion of worldly matters." (Marx, 1964: 263) He could now assert that his results had "been attained by means of a wholly empirical analysis based on a conscientious critical study of political economy." (*Ibid.*: 63) By the time of writing the *German Ideology* Marx was beginning to construct what he thought of as a positive science. "Where speculation ends—in real life—there real, positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men." (Marx, 1947: 15) And by the late 1850's, when Marx had worked out his plans for a comprehensive critique of political economy, he conceived of what he was doing as both a critique of political economy and as a working out, or completion, of that science. (Korsch, 1938: 114)

However, we have to be clear about what "science" meant for Marx. Let us begin with three general considerations. First, the science Marx was trying to complete bore little resemblance to what is now called "economics." Most of the questions classical political economy asked and which Marx aimed to answer, such as "What is value?", are no longer asked, and are considered metaphysical, irrelevant, unscientific.

Second, Marx's conception of science was rooted in the tradition of German critical philosophy, and thus he brought to social theory a fundamental distinction between phenomenal appearance and an underlying essential reality.

Finally, Marx's scientific enterprise was profoundly implicated in his political project. He thought of his critique of political economy as a "scientific victory for our party." (Carver, 1975: 10) In contradistinction to Weber, who wished to clearly separate science from policy, "factual scientific criticism" from political polemics, Marx conceived of his scientific work as simultaneously a political project. *Capital* is meant to be a work of science and, at the same time, a radical condemnation of the existing social order anticipating its overthrow.

The scope of Marx's project was broad and inclusive, and his approach rested on certain methodological assumptions. In outline: for Marx a social science consists of a study of the existing social totality, i.e., society conceived as a definite, historically specific, social formation. It studies the "life-process" of this society as if it were an organism bound to decay and die. One best initiates this study with an investigation of society's "anatomy," its economy, which consists of a particular complex of production relations corresponding to a certain level of development of productive forces. The essential pattern of these relations is revealed by a critical analysis of economic categories. These categories are mere "forms of appearance" of the production relations and have to be examined for their historically specific social content. In this way it can be demonstrated that the relations are not natural and can be changed; and, moreover, it can be implied, given certain value judgments, that they should be changed. This analysis is joined by another, the construction of a theoretical model of the economy which can account for its basic character, and of "laws of motion" which demonstrate its inherent tendencies to decay.

The idea that a social formation has a life-process and is bound to decay derives from what Marx calls the "rational form" of the dialectic and gives his version of political economy its "critical and revolutionary" character. (Marx, 1967a: 20)

The dialectical method consists of approaching the study of capitalism with a general model of social formations derived from a study of history. According to this model, each social formation is transitory, "works towards its own dissolution" and inevitably breaks up. At some point its production relations become an obstacle to the development of productive forces, and an era of social revolution ensues, culminating in the abolition of those relations and the establishment of production upon new bases. Capitalism, thus, has to be understood both as a currently functioning system and as something which contains internal contradictions leading to its negation and supercession. It was primarily this methodological approach which Marx felt allowed him to surpass the bourgeois political economists' ahistorical perspective and reject their assumption of harmony.

The assumption of harmony, Marx argued, led them to "reason away the contradictions of capitalist production." (Marx, 1952: 376) Thus, for example, they tended to deny the possibility of what had in fact begun to occur in 1825, periodic general crises of overproduction. "In world market crises," says Marx, "the contradictions and antagonisms of bourgeois production break through to the surface. But instead of investigating the nature of the conflicting elements," the political economists deny the very possibility of general crises of overproduction. They do this by "asserting unity where there is opposition and contradiction." (*Ibid.*: 376-402)

Marx uses "contradiction" in various senses. He is here referring to Say's claim that whatever was produced would be consumed.\* Marx argues that theoretically this is not necessarily the case. Production and consumption are in fact two phases of a process which may be rendered independent of each other.

The fact that crises "disconfirm" Say's theory is not enough for Marx's purpose. He aims to trace down the theoretical source of the error. At bottom, he believes, "crises are reasoned out of existence through losing sight of or denying the first pre-conditions of capitalist production, the nature of the product as a commodity." (*Ibid.*: 376-88) Because of his ahistorical perspective Say failed to recognize a *species differentia* of capitalism. In a capitalist society, the purpose of production is to expand value irrespective of whether human needs are satisfied. In this historically specific social characteristic lies the theoretical possibility of crises.

This sort of methodological mistake is not simply the expression of the intellectual limits of this or that individual theorist, Marx believed. It expressed an inherent weakness of the bourgeois perspective. Even those who preceded Say, the "classical" political economists (e.g., Smith and Ricardo), who developed the labor theory of value, saw capitalism as the final form of social production, not as a passing historical phase. Although they studied "social forms" (e.g., value, wages, profit, rent), they did not clearly recognize these as the expression of historically specific social relations, and thus found it natural, for example, that means of production should have the social form of capital (Rubin, 1979: 301) As a result, Marx claimed, a classical economist like Ricardo—who influenced Marx a great deal—"as a bourgeois, cannot help making blunders, even from the economic point of view." (Marx and Engels, 1955: 104) Although Ricardo began to develop a theory of the falling rate of profit, he was unable to fully unravel this "mystery" because of his "horror" over its implications.

For Marx, the *bourgeois* science of political economy had, with Ricardo, "reached its limits, beyond which it could not pass." (Marx, 1967a: 14) Ricardo had introduced class struggle into the theory, but as periodic crises developed, and the class struggle grew more threatening, further scientific advance became politically dangerous to the bourgeoisie.

[Class struggle] sounded the knell of scientific bourgeois economy. It was thenceforth no longer a question whether this

\* Jean-Baptiste Say (1767-1832) was a French economist who argued (along with Ricardo) that production creates its own demand. If any additional commodity appears on the market, there is created an additional demand for other commodities of equal value. Therefore, only partial crises arising from mismanagement were possible, not generalized crises where all branches of production suffer from a shortage of demand. For a concise discussion and criticism, see Rubin, 1979: 337-39.

theorem or that was true, but whether it was useful to capital or harmful, expedient or inexpedient, politically dangerous or not. In place of disinterested inquirers, there were hired prizefighters; in place of genuine scientific research, the bad conscience and the evil intent of apologetic. (*Ibid.*: 15)

This apologetic Marx termed "vulgar" political economy, to distinguish it from classical. Say was one of its representatives.

For Marx, vulgar economy did not deserve the name of science, because it never went beyond the surface; it merely generalized the everyday outlook of the practicing capitalist. In contradistinction, Marx aimed to penetrate this surface reality, i.e. to carry on political economy as a *science*. However, to do so at this stage would be inherently *political*, because it meant, according to Marx, demonstrating the unstable and transitory character of the system, something the bourgeoisie would rather not admit, even to themselves. Briefly then, Marx's argument is that social science requires penetrating appearances, that there is an objective reality to be revealed, and that capacity, or willingness, to reveal social reality depends on one's political perspective. At this stage in capitalist development, as Karl Korsch put it, "A strictly scientific investigation of social development was possible only from the standpoint of that class whose task in history is to transcend the narrow bourgeois horizon and, ultimately, to do away with classes altogether." (Korsch, 1938: 102) For Marx, then, scientific advance *required* a specific political partisanship.\*

In *Capital* Marx develops simultaneously two lines of argumentation which are evaluated differently with regard to their political utility. The first line of argument is based on standards of theoretical coherence. In brief, it goes something like this: The basic theoretical assumption of political economy that on the market commodities of equal value are exchanged, is, says Marx, a correct assumption, a good basis from which to construct an abstract, theoretical model of capitalist society. But given *this* assumption, classical political economy is hard put to explain the origin of profit. If equal values are exchanged, from whence arises this extra value?

Marx criticizes various attempts to explain profit, notably those that argue it arises in circulation. In short, the thrust of Marx's argument is that the existing explanations lead to one or another form of incoherence. A coherent theory, Marx claims, has to postulate a special commodity, a use-value which creates *new* value. This is "no arbitrary assumption," Engels argues, because only on the basis of

\* For an argument that *all* existing notions of understanding or explanation in social science are conceptually connected to political perspectives and practices, see Fay, 1975.

this assumption can capital accumulation be explained. (Engels, 1937: 15) Marx, then, discovers this commodity in labor-power. Of course, it's not an empirical discovery, but a theoretical one. This model seems to make sense of accumulation while preserving the original assumption. It also makes sense of class struggle. The argument becomes the theoretical basis for an analysis of the working day as being divided into paid and unpaid portions. The development of class struggle, finally, is analyzed in terms of this division. In trying to increase the unpaid labor he appropriates, the capitalist tends to lengthen the working day. In trying to preserve his own commodity, which has to be resold daily throughout his lifetime, the worker tends to resist this lengthening. However, only by organizing on a class basis, Marx argues, have workers been able to effectively resist the prolongation of the working day, in the 10-hours movement in England.

This line of argument was intended to have immediate practical utility for the leaders of the proletarian movement in Germany where, it was anticipated, the length of the working day would soon become an issue. The analysis of *Capital* would give them "in ready form all the material required" for the parliamentary debates on factory regulation, and should, said Engels, become the "theoretical bible" of the Social Democrats, "the arsenal from which they will draw their most substantial arguments." (*Ibid.*: 21) Thus, a theoretically coherent political economy could directly serve the cause of reform to the benefit of the proletariat and perhaps hasten the development of class consciousness. (Marx, 1967: 264-302)

Now, along with this argument runs another, essential to a scientific understanding of society but ambiguous in its political implications. Marx claims that the conceptions used by the participants in the capitalist economy for understanding their own activity are inadequate for grasping the "inner . . . concealed essential pattern" of economic relations. This is because "everything appears reversed in competition." Vulgar economy tended to merely translate and rationally order the illusory, everyday conceptions of the economic agents, the "religion of everyday life." (Marx, 1967a: 817, 838) What was needed was a critique that, by stepping out of the competitive frame of reference, could get at the essential pattern of relations. The discovery of this essential pattern was, for Marx, the heart of the scientific enterprise.

This, for example, is how Marx analyzes the "wage-form." "On the surface," says Marx, the wage "appears" as the price of labor. But the "price of labor" turns out to be an "imaginary expression." "These imaginary expressions . . . are categories for the phenomenal forms of

\* Such an "imaginary expression" can be thought of as a "pure appearance," a mere illusion, to distinguish it from those appearances which are in a sense real, i.e., from fetishism. (Geras, 1973: 298)

essential relations. That in their appearance things often represent themselves in inverted form is pretty well known in every science except Political Economy." (Marx, 1967a: 537) Political economy had made the mistake of borrowing its category uncritically from everyday life. This led to "inextricable confusion and contradiction." Capitalist everyday life is deceptive. Only through theoretical analysis, not through simple observation, can one apprehend the division of the working day into paid and unpaid portions. "The wage-form," Marx points out, "extinguishes every trace of the division of the working day into . . . paid and unpaid labor. All labor appears as paid labor." In comparison, feudal arrangements, Marx points out, are relatively transparent. In the corvée, the worker's labors for himself and for his lord "differ in space and time in the clearest possible way." (*Ibid.*: 539) Not so in capitalism. Here the "phenomenal form," the wage, "makes the actual relation [between master and producer] invisible." The exchange between capital and labor appears to be like any other exchange of commodities. That what workers are selling is a unique sort of commodity is, says Marx, "beyond the cognisance of the ordinary mind." (*Ibid.*: 540-541)

Here Marx uses a kind of *verstehen* to explain why the "ordinary mind" cannot penetrate the phenomenal form. "Let us put ourselves in place of the laborer . . ." Since he gets a certain amount of money for a certain amount of labor, he concludes that the latter is the value of the former, that he's getting paid the "value of labor." On the other hand, the capitalist always thinks he's "cheating," buying below and selling above the value of what he purchases, in this case, labor-power. He thinks his profit comes out of his machinations in the sphere of circulation. Only by looking at the matter from outside the competitive frame can the analyst get beyond the complementary self-deceptions of capital and labor. Here "the same difference holds that holds in respect to all phenomena and their hidden substratum. The former appear directly and spontaneously as current modes of thought, the latter must first be discovered by science." (*Ibid.*: 541-542)

The critique of the categories of political economy aims to show that they obscure production relations among people, making them appear as things, natural characteristics of things, or relations between things. However, the point is not merely to discredit illusions but to say something about reality; namely, that in capitalist society production relations are mediated by things. As I. I. Rubin puts it, "Fetishism is not only a phenomenon of social consciousness, but of social being." (Rubin, 1972: 59)

Marx wants to point out, for example, not only that the identification of the category capital with the productive apparatus hides production relations among people and makes profit seem to grow spontaneously from capital rather than from the exploitation of labor, but also that in a capitalist society the productive apparatus in

fact has a specific social character. It in fact is capital, but precisely by virtue of the fact that it is "monopolized by a certain sector of society." (Marx, 1967b: 815) "It is the . . . severance of the conditions of production, on the one hand, from the producers on the other, that forms the conception of capital" (*Ibid.*: 246), i.e., what Marx believes to be the conception corresponding to the essential pattern concealed from the economic participants.

Similarly, the fetish character of the commodity derives from the fact that the relation between the different producers (and also the distribution of labor in a commodity-producing society) is established through a relation between products, the relative exchange-value of the products. The social relation between producers is mediated by things.

Exchange-value is, says Marx, a mere "form of appearance" which hides its underlying content, value. (Carver, 1975: 207) Value *appears* (in its exchange-value form) as something "stamped upon the product." (Marx, 1967a: 72) In reality, it is something social and historical, the practice of exchanging goods (unconsciously) according to the socially necessary labor-time embodied in them. When we exchange products in the market, says Marx, "we are not aware" that we are equating different kinds of labor. Instead we see value as an objective property of the product, its exchange-value. A social and historical fact "takes the form" that the products are said to "have value." (*Ibid.*: 73-74)

Marx's approach here can be distinguished from Durkheim's in that he not only claims that a scientific understanding is superior to a "layman's" understanding, but he also has a theory to explain the layman's lack of penetration. The layman's understanding is not so much mistaken as superficial. He is not *wrong* to believe that products "have value." Indeed they do. Where he is wrong is in thinking of this as a natural property rather than a social and historically specific characteristic. This myopia arises from the fact that the layman need not acquire this scientific understanding in order to make his way in the world, i.e., in the market. It makes no practical difference for purposes of trade. And, moreover, engaging in trade day after day establishes and reinforces the notion that the economic categories are natural, not historical categories.

Whereas the lack of penetration of social reality by the "ordinary mind" is not theoretically problematic for Durkheim, it is, or rather it should be, for Marx. His explanation for it seems to limit the possibility of ordinary workers achieving an awareness of the essential realities of social life. As we will see shortly, this "opens the door" to Leninism. But first, let us follow Marx's argument a bit further.

The critique of fetishism by itself appears to have no direct practical consequence. Marx points out that the discovery of essential patterns underlying the fetishistic categories of political economy does not

"dissipate the mist." He compares the discovery of the "substance of value" to the discovery of the component gases of air. In both cases, appearance continues to dominate. The atmosphere still looks the same and commodities still appear to have exchange-value. He compares the law of value (the distribution of labor in society through market exchange) to gravity, which he calls an "over-riding law of Nature." In both cases the effects are perceptible (old houses fall down, labor gets distributed), but discovering laws does not in itself result in control over the respective processes, and the distribution of labor according to the law of value still seems natural to most people. It is in fact a "natural law" of this society and will appear natural as long as this society remains in place. The bourgeois categories are "forms of thought expressing *with social validity* the conditions and relations of a definite, historically determined mode of production. . . ." (my emphasis, *Ibid.*: 76) The critical analysis of these categories doesn't change anything. Fetishism will vanish only when the existing social relations are abolished, i.e., only after a social revolution. (*Ibid.*: 79)

So what difference would it make if ordinary workers did penetrate appearances and achieve a scientific understanding?

Those who know the theory continue to "move about in forms of illusion (Gestaltungen des Scheins)." Things do not *seem* different to the worker who knows Marxism. [But] he knows they *are* different from what they continue to seem to be. A man who can explain mirages does not cease to see them. (Cohen, 1978: 331)

A mirage is a misleading but instructive analogy. A man who knows a mirage is a mirage does not expect to find water there and can steer his course accordingly. But a man with a critique of fetishism does not have the same sort of practical knowledge. He may interpret reality differently, his theoretical knowledge superceeding his immediate perceptions, but how does this transform his practical orientation?

The denaturalization of social processes *does* at least make change conceivable and plausible and one can orient oneself politically on that basis, given a certain set of values. Marx asks a question that he says political economy has failed to ask: "*why* labor is represented by the value of its product." The bourgeois economists assume that this fact is a "necessity imposed by Nature," and so the question never comes up. Marx's social science points out that this fact belongs "to a state of society, in which the process of production has the mastery over man, instead of being controlled by him. . . ." (Marx, 1967a: 80-81) But here Marx does not explicitly say that man *should* control production. The mode of presentation is "scientific" in the sense that no value judgements are explicitly made. Of course, one can infer from Marx's work as a whole that he believes that this state of society

should be changed because conscious control would allow human beings to more fully realize themselves. Moreover, he seems to believe that such a society would be preferable because it would be more rational, in the sense that appearance and reality in the social sphere would directly coincide. When "freely associated men" regulate production according to a plan the "mystical veil" will be stripped off. (*Ibid.*: 80) At that point, apparently, Marxian social science will be superfluous. "All science," says Marx, "would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided." (Marx, 1967b: 817) Social relations would once again be transparent.\*

The analysis, then, seems to serve the purpose of demonstrating the social and historical character of the economic categories and thus the possibility of change, and of clarifying *what* needs to be changed. A political orientation is clearly implicit; the abolition of capitalism is all but explicitly proposed. Thus, for example, the discovery of the essence of capital in the monopolization of the productive apparatus by a minority has an evident prescriptive quality! But the prescription is submerged in the scientific mode of presentation.

What do the two approaches I have outlined—a) *Capital* as "theoretical bible" and weapon of debate, and b) *Capital* as critique denaturalizing social processes—tell us about how the working class might come to attain a full understanding of social reality? In the first, Marx's analysis of the division of the working day is closely tied to his analysis of the development of class struggle in England. The "theoretical bible" is a scientific construction which is informed by class struggle and aims in turn to inform class struggle. In the second, the critique of fetishism seems to necessitate some degree of scientific detachment from the market relations of everyday life. This aspect of the science, demystification, seems divorced from class struggle. The natural tendency of the worker to fetishize economic categories needs to be corrected by a scientific critique, one he cannot develop himself on the basis of his daily experiences or with his comrades in the process of struggling against the bourgeoisie.

The matter, I believe, remains ambiguous with Marx, but there is in both these approaches, and especially in their combination, the roots of Leninism, i.e., the view that the working class can only attain class consciousness "from the outside," and that a vanguard party must be the carrier of this consciousness. The party is conceived as a vessel which conveys scientific truth to the working class. Thus Lucio Colletti, at the conclusion of a discussion of fetishism:

This in turn means that the working class cannot constitute itself as a *class* without taking possession of the scientific analysis of *Capital*. . . . This consciousness, through which the

\* Cf., the excellent discussion of these last points in Cohen, 1978: 338-44.

class constitutes itself in political organization and takes its place at the head of its allies, cannot be derived from anywhere but *Capital*. It is in this sense, I think, that Lenin said that the construction of the party also requires something "from without." (Colletti, 1973: 377)

In order to round out this discussion of the relationship between Marx's science and the working class movement, I must say a few things about the dynamic aspect of Marx's social science, the part that deals with the "laws of motion" of the capitalist economy, such as the "general law of capitalist accumulation" (the immiseration thesis) and the tendential law of the falling rate of profit. A full account would have to deal with the empirical foundation, the logical structure and the predictive value of such laws. I cannot hope to deal adequately with these issues here.

The general conclusion Marx draws from his investigation of the dynamic of capitalism is that progressively deepening crises are bound to occur and that the degradation, exhaustion, misery, oppression and exploitation of workers is bound to grow. However, assuming that this conclusion is correct, it is still not clear what follows. As many commentators have pointed out, misery does not necessarily give rise to revolution. Was this Marx's theory? His deterministic mode of expression is famous. He says in the *Grundrisse* that crises are "the most striking form in which advice is given to (capital) to be gone and to give room to a higher state of social reproduction." Of course, Marx knew well that capital would not simply take this advice and be gone. The devaluation of capital in crises "violently (leads capital) back," he says, "to the point where it is enabled (to go on) fully employing its productive powers without committing suicide."\* Nevertheless, he asserts, increasingly serious crises will lead to capitalism's "violent overthrow." The social relation, capital, is "necessarily stripped off as a fetter . . . cast off like a skin." (Marx, 1973: 749-750) This sort of naturalistic and evolutionary imagery is carried on in *Capital*, where we learn that at a certain point the "capitalist integument" will be "burst asunder." With "the inexorability of a law of Nature" capitalist production begets "its own negation," the possession of land and means of production in common. And then in a footnote the *Communist Manifesto* is quoted: "What the bourgeoisie produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable." (Marx, 1967a, 763-4)

\* For Marx, crises are normal to the system; they are even functional, restoring equilibrium for a time. Moreover, they are functional to historical development, being the "urge which drives towards the adoption of a new historic form." (Marx, 1973: 227-228)

Marx here expressed his revolutionary aims in the form of an evolutionary theory.\* Engels seems to have kept some perspective on this, as evidenced by his distinction, in one of his reviews of *Capital*, between, on the one hand, the conclusion that the capitalist mode of production must be abolished, and, on the other, "purely scientific questions." (Engels, 1937: 22) Yet Marx does indeed seem to assert that communist society is an outcome of historical evolution, that social revolution is not merely a desirable goal but an inevitable eventuality, the necessity of which can, at least hypothetically, be demonstrated scientifically.

This evolutionist approach is, I think, closely tied to Marx's notion of science and its relationship to the working class movement. On the one hand, Marx and Engels sometimes talk as if the aim of the scientific enterprise is to raise consciousness. "To impart to the proletariat a full knowledge of the conditions and the meaning of the momentous act it is called upon to accomplish, this is the task of the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement, scientific socialism." (Marx and Engels, 1968: 434) And as mentioned above, *Capital* was supposed to provide weapons to the proletariat's parliamentary representatives, who would utilize its arguments in the debates on the length of the working day. In this conception, theory has a crucial practical role to play in the working class movement. Science is a weapon used by a particular class in its self-organization and in its conflict, on the theoretical plane, with other classes.

Yet, on the other hand, Marx seems to think that the potential for consciousness-raising is severely limited. Capitalist social practice is said to reinforce mystification among worker and capitalist alike. Immersed in competition, selling their labor-power as a commodity, workers cannot attain, on their own, a scientific understanding of social life. If workers did, as Colletti puts it, take possession of the scientific analysis of *Capital*, they would be aware of the possibility of change, but it is unclear whether this would provide an impetus to revolt.

By this interpretation, the theory would be incomplete without its evolutionary component. The dynamic aspect of the theory provides an account of the tendencies in capitalist development which provide a basis for revolt. Certain inevitable historical developments push workers to revolt, and to revolt as a *class*.

Marx suggests a sort of reconciliation of evolutionary and revolutionary approaches when he looks for mechanisms whereby the evolutionary process of capitalist development might create condi-

\* His determinism may be due in part to certain practical considerations. He comments in a letter to Lasalle about an early (1858) version of his critique of political economy that "the presentation that is, the manner of treatment is wholly scientific, hence not in violation of any police regulations in the ordinary sense." (Marx, 1955: 103)

tions favorable to the development of a revolutionary class consciousness. Thus, in *Capital* he speaks of workers being "disciplined, organized, and united" by the capitalist production process. (Marx, 1967a: 763) And in the *Communist Manifesto* he develops a theory of how modern industry concentrates workers in large numbers, equalizes their interests and conditions, and reduces their wages, thereby provoking them to unionize and eventually organize politically as a class. This theory is the basis in the *Manifesto* for Marx's conclusion that proletarian victory is inevitable. (Marx and Engels, 1968: 42-46)

In retrospect, the theory is unconvincing. It can be argued that the production process inclines to submission, not revolt. And although industrial development did indeed lead to unionization and political organization, the overwhelming trend of this organization has been reformist, not revolutionary. The evolutionary process seems to lead to nothing more than the further evolution of capitalism.

I would submit that Marx's reconciliation is evolutionist. This can perhaps be seen more clearly by glancing, in conclusion, at two twentieth century Marxist theorists: one, Henryk Grossman, who attempted to maintain and restore Marx's theory, and another, Karl Korsch, who vacillated between restoring Marxism and breaking with it in order to recover its revolutionary impulse.\*

Grossman explicitly attempts a reconciliation of evolutionism and revolutionism. He argues that economic breakdown does not lead automatically to change; that the latter "will come about only through active operation of the subjective factors," that is, the active participation of workers. "This participation, however, is itself not something arbitrary but follows from the pressure of the objective factors." Capitalist decline sets workers into motion, compels them to act, and it is through their *self-activity* that they attain revolutionary consciousness. This is implicitly a response to Leninism. "The education of the working class to its historical mission must be achieved not by theories brought from the outside but by the everyday practice of the class struggle." (Grossman, 1943: 521-522)\*\*

I think Grossman's approach has the virtue of emphasizing subjective factors without being subjectivist, and that there is indeed evidence that class conflict can be a radicalizing experience. However, the role of theory becomes problematical. For Grossman, theory scientifically demonstrates economic breakdown and also postulates

\* Grossman worked with the Frankfurt School and was mentor of Paul Mattick, who, with Korsch and others, published a councilist journal in the U.S. in the thirties, *International Council Correspondence*, later *Living Marxism*.

\*\* Like Grossman, Colletti argues: "Objective tendencies such as the falling rate of profit make sense only to the extent that they appear as the conditions and real premises of the class struggle, i.e., of the clash at a political and subjective level. . . ." (Colletti, 1973b: 188) However, unlike Grossman, as discussed above, Colletti believes theory must come "from the outside."

the historical mission of the proletariat. It then seems to retire to await the activation of "subjective factors," and, in this sense, appears evolutionist. It is not just that, as the Leninist would point out, there is no guarantee that the "everyday practice of the class struggle" will lead it to discover its historical mission, but that there is no theory of just how this is supposed to occur.

In historicizing Marxism and speaking to what he feels is its crisis, Korsch suggests that Marx's theory is, not so much the result of the special penetration of the scientist, as the outcome in scientific thought of the radicalizing experience of class conflict. At first Korsch argues that Marx's achievement was not to "create proletarian class consciousness" but to formalize ideas which arose from the social conditions of the proletariat "into a solid unity, into the living totality of a scientific system." This system is not a passive reflex of the working class movement but an essential component of it in that it organizes "dispersed and formless feelings and views" and purifies them from the bourgeois views with which they are inextricably connected in their origins. (Korsch, 1977: 135-136) Later Korsch concluded that Marx's theory

. . . grew out of a revolutionary period prior to 1850 as an integral part of the *subjective action* of a revolutionary class, which criticizes in theory and overthrows in practice the false illusions and transient appearances of all existing social relationships. In the succeeding period, it developed into a purely abstract and passive theory dealing with the *objective course* of social development as determined by external laws. (*Ibid.*: 173)

Korsch is suggesting that the critique of fetishism is in fact not the privileged activity of the isolated, contemplative scientist. Rather, the scientist clarifies, formalizes and systematizes this critique as *part of a social movement* which is challenging existing social relationships. Developmental laws may still be important, as Korsch suggests, for specifying "the real conditions for revolutionary class actions" but revolutionary consciousness rather than simply being a reflex of capitalist development is fashioned and clarified through these actions and through reflection upon these actions. Thus Korsch proposes, as the way out of the "crisis of Marxism," making the "subjective action of the working class rather than the objective development of capitalism the main focus of socialist theory." (*Ibid.*: 173-174)

In this conception, science, the discovery of underlying social realities, develops from, depends on, and is disarmed without, social action which challenges appearances in practice. It is less concerned with demonstrating the inevitability of revolution (the evolutionist approach) than with learning from and informing revolt.

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