

Marx, Marxism and Maoism: An Outline

The point of departure for this essay is the exchange in *Modern China* (Vol 3, Nos. 1 and 2, Jan/April, 1977) between Andrew G. Walder, Stuart Schram and Frederic Wakeman. It is extremely useful since it shows, clearly if I am right, what is wrong with most discussions of the very important matters it addresses. The direct motivation for this is the current work of a number of my students.

1. Some obvious problems can be first cleared away.

First, while all of the writers would acknowledge problems in understanding Marx, all have a view and, if I am right, none of them have got it quite right. (I return to this; Walder, it turns out, is very close to being right, but where he misses is, I think, critical.) The point here is not merely to challenge readings of Marx, but to emphasize that one cannot talk about Marx without having *some* view and that these days, there are more options available than these scholars suppose. (Missing, critically, is the view propounded by 'realists,' Roy Bhaskar, Derek Sayer, Norman Geras and others).

Second, it is critical to separate Marx, Engels, and Marxism. That is, not only have interpretations of Marx proliferated, but so too have interpretations of Engels. At issue is the relation of 2nd International Marxism to both of these. (See my essay "Engels's Philosophy of Science," mail resources.) Mao could hardly have appreciated the problems here, since most of the materials which provoked this fairly recent debate were not available when he was attracted to Marxism. Of course, Mao knew some central texts, e.g., *Capital*. But he read these through the eyes of a combination of first, 2nd International Marxism, which was powerfully influenced by 'positivism' and Darwinian naturalism, second, 'Leninism,' third, Stalin's understanding of Marx and Lenin--and, finally, of course, he understood all of this through the eyes of his own Chinese experience. 'Leninism' is in quotation marks, because, as above, the issue is not what Lenin believed, but what people came to understand what he believed. As with Marx, some key texts were not available, e.g., Lenin's notes on Hegel, and after 1917, Lenin had little time to refine or clarify his doctrine. None of these writers seems sensitive to these issues. None recognize the problems of reading Engels against Marx or of Engels against Kautsky or Plekanov. None seems sensitive to the context of the debates and the texts written in response to them. Walder, who is very close to getting Marx right, fails to see the problems created by Engels's later interventions, and, as Schram points out, he is especially impervious to problems of Leninism. Schram, as everybody, conflates Lenin and Leninism.

Third, Walder, but not Wakeman or Schram, seems to forget that Mao is Chinese. But none of them make much effort to say what this means.

2. Walder attacks 'the China field' for assuming a dualism between 'determinism' and 'voluntarism.' The 'China field' referred to seems to be mainly English-speaking writers on China. There is European literature on these topics, but I take it that these do no much figure into the relatively small circle of debates among those who constitute 'the China Field.' It would be worthwhile to explore the sociology of all of this.

Walder's formulation of the way that the 'voluntarism' issue is articulated seems to me to be an accurate characterization. He writes:

'Voluntarism'--in this case denoting a social analysis and revolutionary strategy stressing human will as the primary causative agent in producing desired social change--is thus a commonly accepted characterization of Mao's thought (1: 103).

As I shall argue, the key problem in all of this is the failure to come to grips with causality, both generally and in human affairs. Put bluntly, we need, first, to reject thoroughly empiricist readings of causality and second, we need to acknowledge firmly 'agency' and the fact that everything that happens in society is caused by what we do, even if outcomes are not intended.

We can begin by getting clear about 'determinism': Broadly, in Western philosophy, 'determinism' refers to assumptions regarding causality, that everything is caused. Moreover, and critically, causality takes the form of lawfulness: 'Whenever this, then that.' I call this, (following Bhaskar) 'regularity determinism.' It owes primarily to Hume but is now taken for granted among all empiricists. Critically, empiricist philosophy of science thoroughly dominates thinking about science.

Because science must assume that everything is caused, the 'will,' strictly speaking is not 'free.' Thus, acts are determined if they are caused. But on a regularity determinist understanding this implies that the agent 'could *not* have done otherwise.' If we knew enough, then we could predict acts, just as we predict the location of planets in the solar system. We may 'feel' that we are free ('subjectively'), but 'really' ('objectively') we are not. More generally, then, determinism in social theory means that what happens *had* to happen, that human 'will,' ultimately, is irrelevant. (See below, the sketch of Engels on 'motives.' Not incidentally, Kant's dualistic 'solution' to this problem is at the very bottom of all *anti*-naturalist views of human science. He distinguished two realms, the phenomenal, where causality does operate and the noumenal, where agents can act 'freely.' The consequence of this is that *Eklaren* [causal explanation] is rejected and replaced with *Verstehen* (understanding). Strong forms of so-called 'hermeneutic' approaches are anti-naturalist in this sense).

Seeing the problems of the determinist view, the 'voluntarist' resists. He thinks that 'will' can make a difference. 'Objective' conditions are 'determinative,' but we can overcome these. Yet it is not only 'voluntarists' who are caught in the 'free-will/determinism' chestnut. Almost all writers accept the bifurcation then opt uncritically for some mix of the two. Our acts are caused, but somehow we are still 'responsible' for what we do.

The 'free-will/determinism' dichotomy, however, must be rejected and reformulated. Thus (to go too quickly): 'agency' requires that agents 'could have done otherwise.' But this is not incompatible with causality. On the one side, one needs to reject ontological dualisms (Descartes' or Kants') and put humans squarely *in* nature. (See below for Marx on this issue.) Second, one needs to reject regularity determinism and accept a 'realist' conception of causality. Causes are 'productive powers' which are always operating complexly. Thus unpredictability is a

fundamental feature of the world because outcomes are complexly caused by continually changing configurations of things.

Third, humans, while part of the natural world, have emergent powers, among them, the power to choose. ('Reasons' are causes, even if one can explain them.) On this view, then, our *choices* (as Aristotle argued) are part of the causal nexus which includes existing 'materials at hand.' (These matters are more fully developed in my *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 76-84, pp. 252-257, 294-310.)

To return to Walder: In 'the China field,' there are, he continues, two 'distinct and integrally related senses' (of voluntarism.) 'The first,' a development of the foregoing, 'refers to the relative emphasis Mao places on subjective (sic) human effort in activist politics over objective (sic) economic forces to produce (sic) social change. In this sense Mao is said to inverted Marx's dialectic (sic), so that in his method of analysis "superstructure" rather than "economic base" is the primary, if not sole factor' (*ibid*).

This is very typical and presupposes, of course, a bifurcation of 'base' and 'superstructure.' The language of 'objective forces' is common, but never critically unpacked. This is the problem of agency and the sense in which we 'make' history. To anticipate, 'economic forces' are the economic outcomes (e.g., unemployment) intended, but usually unintended, of decisions made by people acting with materials at hand. Or they are 'imperatives' in terms of which people act, in which case they are either 'system requirements,' holding either absolutely and therefore 'determining' what we do, or conditionally. If absolutely, they *must* obtain. Thus we must *act* in accordance with them. This nonsensical view is typical of functionalist accounts, a feature of much Marxism. It issues in a fatalism: we are all but pawns of "forces." But "forces" are plausibly construed conditionally. If so, then, they may or may not obtain. For example, it is a system requirement of capitalist reproduction that surplus be absorbed. Not only may it not be, but if it is, it is because persons have done something--which, critically, they may not have done. They do not, of course, need to have been intended to do that which, in fact, has the effect of absorbing surplus.

Walder's formulation betrays most of these problems. Thus, agency--the acts of persons--has been replaced with a dichotomy between 'subjective' and 'objective' in which perhaps, the former is 'in the head,' 'reflex,' perhaps epiphenomenal and epistemologically suspect and the later is 'real' (causal), 'out there' and knowable. Political activity (superstructure) is thus 'subjective' since presumably, it is merely 'reflection' of what is 'objective.' One thinks here of Don Quixote.

There is a way, to be sure, to rescue the idea of voluntarism so that is a genuinely useful idea. Thus, voluntarism it plausibly denotes a social analysis and revolutionary strategy which largely ignores enabling and constraining factors with which people, inevitably, act. This simple and obvious way to put the matter has enormous implications, as I shall argue. (Mao is often accused of this. I have argued against this in my "Mao and Utopian Thought," available on the Maile.)

Worth mention, it seems to me that the 'subjective'/'objective' dichotomy is more frequent

in Chinese Marxism than elsewhere, but perhaps not. It would be useful to pursue this issue within the framework of variations of Chinese thought.

In the second sense, Mao is voluntaristic in wanting to 'speed up' 'stages through emphasis on politics' (*ibid.*).

This involves, of course, assumptions regarding Marxist 'stage theory'--the logical consequence of any 'determinist' reading of history, along with the usual bifurcation of base and superstructure. It is interesting that Walder does not say that a 'voluntarist' might try to skip or omit some stage and that he does not bring Lenin here? Surely this is also a characteristic theme of much discussion, at least outside 'the China field.'

2. Walder insists that 'voluntarism/determinism' dichotomy depends on views that Marx did not hold. Walder is clearly correct in this. But one needs to see how Marx escapes this and how, if I am right, Walder does not.

Walder offers a 'dialectical' reading of Marx. The problem is what, in clear terms, this means. Because he is unclear about causality, both generally, and in human affairs (and thus assumes part of the framework of the views he is opposing), Walder's view is at least confusing, if not on the edge of inconsistent. This is why both Wakeman and Schram feel sympathy with it and why both feel that they have been misrepresented. No one is sufficiently clear about the issues. (To repeat, they have not been much represented; the problem lies elsewhere.)

3. Walder, like so many, uses 'dialectics' very uncritically. Indeed, like a magical weapon it appears to dissolve all difficulties. (This criticism, not incidentally was made by Duhring. Engels responded, but critically, the example he gave was from *Capital* and regarded a system contradiction of capitalism--an account which hardly required the famous three 'laws' which (unlike as in Hegel) were presumably 'deduced' (inferred) from 'nature and history and laws of thought.' See my "Engels' Philosophy of Science.")

All Marxists appeal to 'dialectic' and everybody who tries to analyze Marxist thought therefore must assume something about what it means. Unfortunately, it is employed in a wide variety of contexts including: the relation of individual to society, the relation of 'factors' to other 'factors,' including the relation of 'base' to superstructure,' to anything containing contradictions, including 'reality,' 'consciousness' and their relations, to a particular method which involves one to grasp process, and finally (and vaguely, to a 'way of looking at the world.' Bhaskar helpfully suggests a way to organize these various contexts, e.g., into ontological, epistemological and relational dialectics, divisions which, then, can in turn be divided, but I do not pursue this here. (See entry 'dialectics,' Bottomore, ed., *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, pp. 122ff.). Marx, we must emphasize, was not in the least helpful.

In a famous text in the Afterword of the 2nd Edition of *Capital* he wrote:

The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him

from being the first to present its general forms of motion in a comprehensive manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted to discover the rational kernel with the mystical shell.

Unfortunately, however, 'Marx never realized his wish "to make accessible to the ordinary human intelligence, in two or three printer's sheets, what is *rational* in the method which Hegel discovered and at the same time mystified' (Marx to Engels, 14 January 1858, cited by Bhaskar.)

But, as Bhaskar as observed, 'dialectics' is 'the most contentious topic in Marxist thought and his 'two metaphors, the inversion and the kernel--have been the subject of almost theological speculation.' The reason for this clear. 'Dialectics' raises 'the two main issues on which Marxist philosophical discussion has turned, viz., the nature of Marx's debt to Hegel and the sense in which Marxism is a science.' The implications of this are too little appreciated and thus, it cannot be too strongly emphasized. Not only is it difficult to see what Marx did with Hegel's dialectic, but we need to appreciate that there are at least three very different conceptions of a human science at issue, a 'dialectical' *and* an 'undialectical' version of naturalistic positivism and, little noticed, a naturalistic, realist version which also is 'dialectical' (in some sense). (See section 12, below.)

4. Some history: I have elsewhere argued that after Marx and Engels made clear their philosophical position *vis a vis* Hegel and the Hegelians--in *The German Ideology*, they turned away from philosophy. (See my *History*, pp. 105-108.) This text is surely the key text as regards the general philosophy of Marx (and at least at this stage, Engels), and its relation to both Hegel and to the question of what constitutes a human science. (I discuss this below.) Unfortunately, this text was not published until after Marx died. To this day, most people read only Part I, on Feuerbach, and ignore both rest and the context of their treatment.

In the intervening years, however, socialists who were materialists (in the classical sense) were insisting that Marx and Engels make clear their relation to Hegelian philosophy and make clear why *their* socialism was 'scientific.' It was important to represent one's position as 'scientific,' but the conception of science was not settled. (For example, Marx often used 'dialectical' as a *synonym* for 'scientific.') These issues were a critical feature of the debates and struggles within the First International and within 'left' parties, particularly in the German speaking parts of Europe. For example, Duhring, an old-fashioned materialist and Ernst Mach, a phenomenalist (and later object of Lenin's polemics) were both socialists who had important conceptions of science.

Engels responded in two main tracts: *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* (1886; 1888) and *Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science* (1877;1888). (*Dialectics of Nature* was not part of the initial historical argument since it was not published until 1927.) Engels's *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* (1892) is three chapters from *Anti-Durhring*. Engels introduction to the English edition (1892) perhaps finalized the codification of 'dialectical' and 'historical materialism.' The latter term was introduced in this text. Thus, Plekhanov, speaking in 1908 for the mainstream of the 2nd International (founded in 1889 and controlled by 'Marxists'), asserted that with the *Anti-Durhring*, Marxist doctrine has taken 'its final

shape.'

Engels had answered the Hegelians and materialists by insisting (to make a long and complicated story short), that Hegel is an idealist; Marxists were materialists; but the 'old materialism' could not overcome two problems: restricted to the science of mechanics, it could not treat chemical and organic processes (it was 'reductionistic') and it could not 'comprehend the universe as a process--as matter developing in an historical process.' 'Old materialism' was surely reductive. [Indeed, Marx who had done his doctoral dissertation on Democritus, had made a devastating criticism of of the 'one-sided' character of materialism, most critically, that it was 'misanthropic' in that (unlike Hegel), it could not treat man, society and history. (See above, the theses on Feuerbach, and discussion my *A History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences.*)]

But Engels's remark that matter develops 'in a historical process' should put us on our guard. Engels needs to avoid materialist reductionism. The three 'dialectical laws' presumably make this possible. Presumably, mind and matter are 'opposites,' joined 'dialectically' but with matter primary. (Bodies can exist without minds; minds cannot exist without bodies; cf. base and superstructure, where the same relationship is thought to hold.). Thus, 'dialectical materialism'--a term probably used first by Plekhanov in 1891.

Lenin added his powerful force to this view with his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908), a track directed at the anti-realism of the Machists who had come to dominate thinking about natural science. But despite Lenin's best intentions (and here following Engels), a defense of realism is not necessarily a defense of materialism, dialectical or otherwise. Briefly, all 'realists' are in agreement that 'nature' exists independently of mind. They are anti-idealist. But 'materialism' almost always implies a great deal more. Thus, not all naturalists are materialists. (I give an account of Marx on this issue, below).

Dialectical materialism, of course, became the official philosophy of the Soviet Union and thus appeared in all the standard texts. When we consider the hundreds of millions who have cut their teeth on this--including, of course, the Chinese, our sensitivity should be aroused. For better or for worse, Mao's writings are full of terms and formulae which have all the look of the 'orthodox' view. To the extent that 'diamat' texts are thought to represent Engels and to the extent that Engels is thought to have put into final form Marxism, the historical issues I have mentioned are anything but unimportant.

5. This is not the place to offer an extended criticism of 'diamat.' We can note, however, that as regards the mind/body problem, it must accept either epiphenomenalism, eliminating mind as causal (see Engels, below) or it must be a dualism, and accept some sort of mind/body interaction with body 'primary.' This has been, I think, the more comfortable view for Marxists. It is betrayed, as noted, by the 'objective'/'subjective' dichotomy--a dichotomy rooted in Western philosophy in Descartes, the outstanding influence on 'French materialism.' (Cf. Marx and Engels: *The Holy Family.*)

As regards science, Engels aimed 'to show, in effect, that Marxism could formulate laws of

nature and that a single ontology could embrace nature and humanity' (Bottomore, *Dictionary*, p. 129). This was never a project of Marx, who, as noted, having 'settled issues' with Hegel, Feuerbach, etc., abandoned philosophy after 1848.

Engels does this with his three dialectical laws. They are, he says, *generalizations* from 'nature, history and thought.' As I have argued, they are, accordingly, exactly on a par with Spencer's evolutionary generalization that there is a 'change from an incoherent homogeneity to a coherent heterogeneity, accompanying the dissipation of motion and the integration of matter.' They conform fully with the naturalistic monism which had been profoundly accelerated by Darwin and which was eagerly picked up by materialists, e.g., Ernst Haeckel and by 'agnostic' naturalists like Spencer.

There are many difficulties with Engel's version of 'naturalism,' but one is obvious: At some level of abstraction the 'three laws' catch the idea of process (as, of course, does Spencer's famous 'law') and, perhaps, they give us a way of looking at the world. But at this level of abstraction such generalizations are entirely vacuous. There is, accordingly, a tendency to hold everything that happens or could conceivably happen is 'explained' as an outcome of the three 'laws'--without even making the effort to grasp the concrete causal mechanisms involved. (Natural selection, for example, is a mechanism realizing Spencer's 'law.') On the other hand, if change is truly to be explained, 'dialectically,' as the outcome of contradictory processes (see below), then one needs to theorize the relevant mechanisms. It was just this, of course, which Marx did in *Capital*. On the other hand, based on everything that Marx wrote, both 'early' and 'late,' I have absolutely no doubt that he was not a 'dialectical materialist,' indeed, that the philosophical naturalism sketched out and presupposed in the *German Ideology* was a (successful) effort transcend the idealist/materialist dichotomy.

6. What of the bearing of the foregoing on 'historical materialism? Engels's *Feuerbach* contains an extensive account in criticism of Hegel's philosophy of history. What is most critical is his argument (following Hegel) that 'the many wills active in history for the most part produce results other than those they intended--often quite the opposite; their motives therefore in relation to the total result are likewise only of secondary significance.' Both propositions are true and important and as Engels rightly has it, the second is a consequence of the first. But it is not, then, a premise. With Marx in the *18th Brumaire*, Engels is clear here that people make history, even while they do not make it the way they want to. However, in rejecting Hegel, Engels's is drawn directly into a reductive materialism. He asks: '...what are the historical causes which transform themselves into these motives in the brains of actors?' But this is exactly the wrong question. We do not need a materialist account of person's motives for these are not 'the ultimate causes of historical events.' He had given the right argument: If the unintended consequences are the stuff of history, then appeal to the motives, reasons or intentions of people is largely irrelevant. What is relevant is their actions and the consequences of these. As Marx so famously remarked), we make history but not with materials of our own choosing. The problem for the historical materialist (as is clear enough in the *German Ideology*) is explaining the materials, 'materialistically.'

It is not clear when agency got lost in 'historical materialism.' Kautsky, it seems, had

something to do with it. Neither Plekhanov, Lenin or Bernstein were insensitive to the problem, although none of them, burdened by *The Communist Manifesto*, a 'determinist' reading of the 1859 Preface and perhaps by Engels's remarks (above) had a fully adequate grasp. Bernstein, influenced by Kant, was also sensitive to the issue; but his account is, I think, ultimately anti-naturalistic.

Engels's two critical books were followed by a series of now famous letters (to Conrad Schmidt, Bloch and others) in which Engels spoke directly to the problem of 'base' and 'superstructure.' To Mehring, he repeated the position of the *Feuerbach*, but confessed that he and Marx 'were bound to lay the main emphasis at first on the derivation of political, juridical and other ideological notions, and of the actions *arising* through the medium of these notions, from basic economic facts' (1, 110). He defended the theory against the charge that it assumed an 'undialectical conception of cause and effect as rigidly opposite poles,' and thus completely disregarded 'interaction.'

This language must be emphasized. It seems, at least, to treat dialectics as a version of empiricist causality. (I have argued that it was just during this period that empiricist versions, came to dominate. One critical holdout was Hermann Helmholtz, who held out for a strongly realist view of *Kraft* ('forces') and *Ursache* ('cause'). See my *History*, esp. chapter 9.) Similarly, to Bloch, Engels wrote of 'the interaction of two unequal forces: on the one hand the economic movement, on the other the new political power...which having once been established, is endowed with a movement of his own.' Here agency seems to have disappeared and 'forces' are causes. Since presumably, the economic was temporally prior and of greater force, 'the economic movement' was 'the ultimately determining factor.'

This is perhaps familiar enough, but we need to see here that on the natural reading, Walder's characterization of the view of writers in the 'China field' fits this quite exactly. In summarizing their views, he writes:

Superstructure and economic base are...considered, in the fashion of dominant positivist social sciences, as distinct separable factors or independent variables reacting on one another (1, 105).

It is easy enough to argue that, either in some particular case, or generally, some 'factor' is more important. Indeed, that is just what multiple regression is all about!

Walder is adamant in rejecting *this* view. But he *also* argues that Engels 'spent in the waning years of his life a significant amount of time correcting the common misinterpretations of ..."orthodox Marxists" who systematically ignored the important role Marx attributed to all aspects of the superstructure' (1, 110). He quotes just the letters already noted to support this. But he shows no awareness of the context and relevance of Engels's books, nor of the rather plain meaning of Engels's words, including the likely significance of the remark to Bloch, frequent in Engels, to the effect that 'political, legal, philosophical theories, religious ideas and their development into systems of dogma' are 'reflexes' in 'the brains of combatants.' To sure, these 'reflexes,' 'derived' from 'basic economic facts' 'exercise influence' and even, 'in many cases

predominate in determining their *form*' (1, 112). Unfortunately, this last clause is anything but clear. On one natural reading, at least, 'form' contrasts to *substance* --reality as it really is? (There is another reading: see below.)

Walder is unhistorical. There are no 'orthodox Marxists' until later. Engels is responding to 'ideologists,' who say that Marxists fail to give a role to ideas in history, to good old fashioned undialectical materialists and to sympathetic readers of Marx who, influenced by the famous introduction to the Preface (1859) think that in history there is but a *one-way causal street*.

Engels's letters are open to the reading Walder gives to Marx, and it may be that Engels was not far from the Marx which Walder wants to recover. But even if this is the case, in the absence of clarity between them of the critical issues, we shall never know. But it can hardly be denied that an empiricistic, causal/ interactionist understanding is the conventional wisdom on Engels.

I tried to be clear as to why this is the case. What, then, of the point that the base is 'ultimately determining.' On the view causal/interactionist view just sketched, this becomes an empirical question: Which factors ('forces') have the greater causal weight. One might just be dogmatic here and insist that the 'economic' is always 'primary.' Or one might, as with Engels, offer that it is only 'ultimately' primary or decisive 'in the last instance.' But it is not clear what this could mean? Is it a temporal question? Since the 'economic' is first, what is 'derived' from it is 'determined' by it even if it is 'determining?' But either these other 'factors' are 'relatively autonomous' (as must be assumed for there to be interaction) or they are not. If they are, what remains of the priority?

These problems, of course, are familiar and most recently were treated by Althusser who tried desperately to reformulate historical materialism so as to save 'the primacy thesis.' There are, I think, features of this analysis worth preserving, but 'structure in dominance' is not one of them. (Geras's account in Bottomore, *Dictionary*, is judicious.)

By contrast, G.A. Cohen (who, I think, first referred to the thesis as the 'primacy thesis) can rightly claim to represent the 'orthodox' view. (See his *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense*, 1978). Basing his argument largely on the *Preface*, he succeeds completely in saving the primacy thesis. But then one needs to reject even Engels and accept Cohen's unabashed technological determinist reading of Marx. On his reading, there is no question that history is a one-way causal street. (I will argue that for a version of the primacy thesis, but can do this only by getting rid of some of uncritically held assumptions.)

7. I argued that there are problems in giving a consistent reading of Walder. I have already suggested that he accepts and rejects an (empiricist) causal interactive model. The problem is Engels, of course. Was his reading of 'dialectics' Marx's? But we look at some of these problems from the other side.

Walder points out that Marx (and Engels) have an 'organic view.' Marx undoubtedly speaks

of 'organic unities.' But so as to put oneself on guard, so do positivists, e.g., Comte, Spencer and Durkheim. Marx's unities are, presumably, 'dialectical.' Thus:

superstructure and economic base [are] merely different aspects or sides [why not 'moments'?] of a single unit or conceptual structure (1, 105).

This is much enriched in the second part of his essay where his account draws heavily on the work of Bertell Ollman. (See his *Alienation*, 1971; There are, I think, some objectionable features of Ollman's brilliant analysis. He seems to hold, with Hegel, that all relations are internal and he seems to hold, as well, for a metaphysics of internal relations--a characteristic absolute idealist move. One can argue that there are 'organic unities' and deny that the universe itself is an organic unity. I return to this. But his account of Marx's concepts and of 'dialect' is very helpful.)

Marx, he argues, conceives of society relationally. Many people, of course, say this; but the idea has a very clear and precise meaning in Marx. This is most vivid in *Capital* where 'capital, labor, value, commodity, etc. are all grasped as relations, containing in themselves, as integral elements of what they are, those parts with which we tend to see them externally tied' (Ollman, p. 15).

We can distinguish 'externally tied' (or 'related') and 'internally related.' A relation ' aRb ' is internal if both a and b are what they are by virtue of standing in the relation aRb . By contrast, a relation ' aRb ' is external if ' a ' and ' b ' are what they are independently of R .

Undoubtedly, there are internal relations (especially in society). 'Father of' is one. So, too, in Marx, is capitalist and wage worker. One cannot be a wage worker unless there are capitalists (and conversely), one cannot have capitalist production unless, within the sphere of exchange, labor power is commodified. Ollman demonstrates that many of Marx's key concepts are internally related. Moreover, it is clear that, for Marx, this is an empirical matter. There is only one way to know if a relation is internal or external: one must look and see!

As Ollman says, it is in this context that we must place Marx's (confusing) use of 'determines' (*Bestimmungen*). For people socialized into an empiricistic understanding of causality, ' a determines b ,' means that ' a is the cause of b '; and this means (in standard Humean terms), 'if a , then b .' Critically, however, on standard (Humean) readings of causality, a and b are externally related. If so, their relation is contingent (not necessary). Moreover, if so, it is hard to see how if a determines b , b can also determine a . (If it does, a and b are 'extensionally equivalent' or they have the same 'truth conditions.' E.g., 'a bachelor is an unmarried male.' Such sentences are said to 'analytic,' true 'by definition,' but, in consequence, empirically vacuous: They tell us nothing about the world.

If, however, a and b are internally related, a and b can be mutually determining, necessary and empirical. A change in either a or b is necessarily a change in the other. To say, then, that ' a determines b ' is to focus on one side of the relation and to say that b could not be what it is unless it stood in relation R to a , that there is something about a 's relation to b which makes b what it is. It

does mean that *a* is an efficient cause, temporally or logically prior. Nor does it mean that it is a sufficient condition. It is, of course, a necessary condition. Indeed, Marx often uses 'condition' (*Bedingung*) in just such contexts.

It is easy to see the confusion and why also Walder translates '*bestimmt*' as 'presupposes' and others, e.g., Sayer, as 'entails.' Indeed, both '*a* presupposes *b*' and '*a* entails *b*' are renderable as 'if *a*, then *b*;' but then, 'if, then' is a necessary relation!

The forgoing is nicely illustrated by Walder's account of apparent inconsistency in a long text from Marx's 1859 *Critique* in which Marx discusses the 'links' between production, consumption, distribution and exchange. 'First, [Marx] writes that production "determines" all the others and is "decisive," then he asserts that those aspects "determined" by production in turn determine it' (2, 131). Putting aside for the moment Marx's assertion that 'production is the decisive phase' (a consequence of the primacy thesis, below), it is clear that Marx is talking about the effects of change on these 'inner-related' (*not*, misleadingly, *inter*-related) processes. Thus, 'if the market, or the sphere of exchange expands, then the volume of production grows and tends to become differentiated.' While the relations of these factors is necessary in the sense that capitalist production requires commodification in the sphere of exchange (and conversely!) Marx is not talking about changes in the relations themselves. (If a female is divorced, she is no longer a wife.) Indeed, Marx also says, intelligibly, that 'production is, finally, determined by the demands of consumption.'

There is nothing terribly mysterious about this, even if one must be clear about what is being said. (Indeed, the simultaneous equations of modern general equilibrium theory are best understood in these terms. Its failure lies elsewhere, in particular in its failure to get under the empirical relations and to analyze the causal mechanisms which make capitalism what it is.) That is, there is an 'organic unity' to capitalist reproduction. It was precisely to task of *Capital* to spell out the causes--in the sense of mechanisms--which gave capitalism the (essential) 'organic' character it has.

If then we apply this to historical materialism, it is clear that the base/superstructure dichotomy must be *in toto* rejected. Thus to quote Ollman's summary:

If we accept that Marx's theory requires a separable determining factor carefully distinguished from what it is supposed to determine, we arrive by a process of elimination at productive technology, not because it satisfies all the conditions but because it does so better than other possible factors. What is popularly known as 'economic determinism' becomes on this interpretation technological determinism...The sustaining model for [this] interpretation is supplied by Marx's claim that 'The hand mill gives you society with the Feudal lord; the steam mill society with the industrial capitalist' (p. 7).

Indeed, as Ollman and then Sayer (both *Marx's Method* (1979) and *The Violence of Abstraction* (19) demonstrate, a wealth of texts show that we must reject that assumption (or accept with Marx's critics that no theorist was sloppier with his concepts). Thus, even in the *locus classicus* of

the empiricist view, the Preface, it is hard to see how property relations, which presumably are juridical and thus superstructural can also be essential to constituting the mode of production, which then also 'determines'--in the empiricist sense--the superstructure.

8. There are, however, still several huge problems, including a positive conception of historical materialism, the primacy thesis, and the concept of dialectic in Marx. We should begin, however, by recalling what Marx was arguing against.

Philosophically, as noted, it regarded the opposition between idealists and materialists. Although Engels (and following him, Lenin), were to insist that these were only alternatives, Marx saw virtues in both. Although I cannot develop this here, nor defend the assumption that Marx never abandoned these originating ideas, in writings versus Hegel, Marx sketched an alternative 'naturalism.' Some long texts will give the taste of his resolution:

The outstanding achievement of Hegel's *Phenomenology*...is, first, that Hegel grasps the self-creation of man as a process, objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and transcendence of this alienation, and that he therefore grasps the nature of *labor*, and conceives objective man (true because real man) as the result of his *own labor*. The *real*, active orientation of man to himself as a species-being (i.e., as a human being is only possible so far as he really brings forth all his *species-powers* (which is only possible through the cooperative endeavors of mankind and as an outcome of history)... (in Bender (ed.), *Karl Marx: The Essential Writings* (Westview, 1986), p. 133).

Idealism sees that humans are self-creating and that this process and the *realization* of human powers requires society. It was precisely the materialist incapacity to deal with historically constructed 'human sensuality' that was expressed in Marx's first thesis on Feuerbach.

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is the the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism--which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity.

Marx here rejects the Cartesian epistemological problematic of 'subject' and 'object,' the problematic which generates the idealism/materialism dichotomy. (It is of some significance to scholars in the 'China field' that John Dewey totally shared in rejecting this problematic.) Idealism correctly sees 'the active side,' the role that socially constituted human consciousness plays in constituting the experienced world. Materialism, which recognizes the independence of objects from thought is unable to adequately deal with this. But the idealist collapses 'reality' into 'reality as known.'

Hegel, Marx says, made 'a double error.' First, he conceives of 'entities alienated from the

human being' 'only in their thought form.' The consequence was the reconstitution of reality as 'absolute knowledge.' This is the defining feature of absolute idealism. Second, 'the vindication of the objective world for man...appears in Hegel as the recognition of *sensuousness, religion, state power, etc.* as *mental* phenomena, for *mind* alone is the true essence of man' (p. 132). Thus the Hegelian 'dialectic' is a dialectic of 'the Idea:'

Universal history...shows the development of the consciousness of Freedom on the part of Spirit. This development implies a graduation --a series of increasingly adequate expressions or manifestations of Freedom, which result from its Idea (Hegel, quoted in Manicas, *History*, p. 95).

Putting these points together, we can see what Marx was up to when he asserted:

We see here how consistent naturalism or humanism is distinct from both idealism and materialism, and at the same time constitutes their unifying truth. We see also that only naturalism (sic) is able to comprehend the process of world history.

Man is directly a *natural being*. As a natural being, and as a living natural being he, on the one hand, endowed with *natural powers* and *faculties*, which exist in him as tendencies and abilities, as *drives*. On the other hand, as a natural, embodied, sentient, objective being he is a *suffering, conditioned and limited being*, like animals and plants. The *objects* of his drives exist outside of himself as *objects* independent of him, yet they are *objects* of his *needs*, essential *objects* which are indispensable to the exercise and confirmation of his faculties...

But man is not merely a natural being; he is *human* natural being. He is a being for himself, and therefore a *species being* and as such he has to express himself in being as well as thought. Consequently, *human_objects* are not natural objects as they present themselves directly, nor is *human sense*, as it is immediately and objectively *given, human sensibility* and *human objectivity*...And as everything natural must have its *origin so man* has his process of genesis, *history*, which is for him, however, a conscious process and thus which is consciously self-transcending (Bender, p. 136).

The Preface and opening pages of Part I of *The German Ideology*, 'Feuerbach: Opposition of Materialist and Idealist Outlook' provides the transition to the problem of history.

Until now men have constantly had false conceptions of themselves, about they what they are and what they ought to be. They have related themselves to one another in conformity with their ideas of God, of normal man, etc. They, the creators, have been bowing to their creations. (Easton and Guddat, eds. and trans., *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, Doubleday, 1967, p. 404).

This is, of course, Feuerbach's criticism of Hegel--and, so far, Marx agrees. The problem, however, is that

in the Young Hegelians' fantasies all the relationships of men, of all their actions, their chains and their limitations are products of their consciousness. Consequently they give men the moral postulate of exchanging their present consciousness for human [Bauer], critical [Feuerbach] or egoistic [Stirner] consciousness to remove their limitations. This amounts to a demand to interpret what exists in a different way (p. 407f.)

Indeed, 'a clever fellow once got the idea that people drown because of they possessed *the idea of gravity* (p. 405). Cf., of course, *Thesis 11: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is, to change it.* For this we need to understand history.

Marx continues: 'Not one of these philosophers [i.e., neither Hegel nor his 'materialist' critics] ever thought to look into the connection between German philosophy and German reality, between their criticism and their own material environment' (p. 408). The section which follows, then, is the heart of what we now call 'historical materialism.' Its point was to show that the 'chains and limitations' cannot be removed short changing the social world which we have made--along with, to be sure, those forms of consciousness which are its historical product.

10. Marx (and Engels) will begin with 'real individuals, their actions, and their material conditions of life, those which they find existing as well as those which they produce through their actions.' This is the 'first premise of all human history,' a premise which 'can be substantiated in a purely empirical way.' The first act of these individuals is that 'they begin to *produce their means of subsistence*. The first fact to be established, then, is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relationship to the rest of nature...All historiography must proceed from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history through the actions of men' (p. 409). There is no clearer statement of 'the primacy thesis.' Indeed, even if, as above, there is no 'separable, determining factor,' if we are understand history, we must establish this 'first fact.' Moreover,

In each particular instance, empirical observation must show empirically, without any mystification or speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production (p. 413).

There is here no *a priori* commitment to the *nature* of this 'connection' and no concern for efficient causality, for what causes what. The primacy thesis holds only that the social and political are 'connected' to production and that this must be our first concern. The contrast is to 'ideologists' and, if you will, to the social scientists who still today think that 'ideas' of political forms or forms of the family, etc. have *independent* histories, unconnected to what is produced and how it is produced. (See below.)

Indeed, failure to fully appreciate that, for Marx, in capitalism these 'connections' are very different than they were in pre-capitalisms has contributed to confusion over the base/superstructure bifurcation. In *all* societies, including capitalism, 'superstructural' elements are involved in the very constitution of the mode of production. In some, there is no 'state' and, e.g., as Durkheim demonstrated, religion is often *constitutive* of production modes. Marx, of course,

offered but sketches of the 'connections' in pre-capitalist societies. He concentrated on capitalism. It is, however, a critical part of his analysis that *only* in capitalism is there a bifurcation of 'civil society' and the state, of 'bourgeois' and 'citizen.' Only in capitalism is there, strictly speaking an 'economy.' It was thus easy to think of the 'base' as 'the economy' and the state, etc. as superstructure, separate from it (and 'determined' by it). (For ancient societies, see, e.g., M.I. Finley; for more recent discussion of the importance of the separation of civil society and the state in capitalism, see Poulantzas and Giddens.)

Marx's emphasis on the activities of real individuals makes his view strongly agency centered. It assumes the philosophical naturalism of the earlier criticism of Hegel, an account which is expanded, in 'dialectical' terms, in a section which repeats the claim that 'as far as Feuerbach is a materialist he does not deal with history, and as far as he deals with history he is not a materialist' (p. 419).

The language shifts to 'moments'--aspects of an internally related (dialectical) process. There are four: (1) the production of means to satisfy biological needs; (2) the production, attending this, of new needs; (3) their reproduction; (4) the 'appearance' (manifestation) of a double relationship regarding production and reproduction. That is, the relation manifests itself, on the one hand, as 'natural' (i.e., as quite inevitable, and *not* 'conventional') on the other as 'social.' Marx explicates 'social.' 'The latter is social in the sense that individuals co-operate, no matter under what conditions, in what manner, and for what purpose.' 'Consequently,' Marx continues, 'a certain mode of production or industrial stage is always combined with a certain mode of co-operation of social stage, and [NB!] this mode of co-operation is itself a "productive force"' (p. 421). It is not wrong to say, I think, that the mode of co-operation is the *essential* relation for Marx. It quite literally *defines* the 'mode of production.' Contrast here, of course, the slave mode of production with capitalism in which co-operation is mystified 'freedom.'

All of this *presupposes* consciousness. Following Rousseau (if not directly?), 'language, like consciousness, only arises from the need and necessity of relationships with other men...The animal as no "*relations*" with anything...Its relation to others does not exist as a relation. Consciousness is thus from the very beginning a social product and will remain so as long as men exist' (p. 422). Of course, animals are related; but they are not *socially* related. Social relations require consciousness: shared meanings, self-awareness and awareness of others--a 'species-life.'

But, 'in direct contrast to German philosophy, which descends from heaven to earth...', 'the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is directly interwoven with the material activity [i.e., production in satisfaction of need] and the material relationships of men [i.e., social relationships constituting the organization this production]; it is the language of actual life.' That is, 'consciousness does not determine life, but life determines consciousness' (p. 415). In contrast to the 'ideologists' ideas have no independent existence--the key insight of any serious sociology of knowledge.

Moreover, 'the ideas which these individuals form are ideas either about their relations to nature, their mutual relations, or their own nature' *and* 'it is evident that in all these cases these

ideas are the conscious expression--real or illusory--of their actual relationships and activities, of their production and commerce, and of their social and political behavior' (p. 414). We need to keep in mind here that people do not have one 'consciousness' when working, another when arguing about politics and another when praying or playing with one's family. That is, ideas about themselves, their relations to one another, and to nature are implicated in all their activities. And we need to emphasize that these ideas need not be true. Indeed, with the division of material and mental labor,

consciousness can really boast of being something other than consciousness [real or illusory] of existing practice, of *really* representing something without representing something real. From this moment on consciousness can emancipate itself from the world and proceed to the formation of "pure" theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc.(p. 423).

This sketch of an explanation of 'ideology' and the distinction between real and illusory forms of consciousness, is perhaps the most distinctive feature of Marxian social science.

11. We can, at this point, consider some other issues usually confounded in discussing the 'base/superstructure' metaphor. We see some of these in Wakeman's response to Walder. Wakeman is rightly concerned that Walder's account smacks of Lukacs's Totalitat in which 'the totality of relations' overwhelms those it 'enmeshes.' Then, he continues, 'truly critical consciousness would be obliterated, and mere idealism or false consciousness would prevail. The Marxian dialectic, in other words, would yield to a Heraclitan [Parmenidean?] or Taoist conception of interaction within what is given (2, 163).

From the present point of view, it is not clear whether Walder's account is vulnerable to this difficulty. But such a collapse is quite impossible if we keep firmly in mind Marx's criticism of Hegel, or alternatively, the naturalistic ground for distinguishing real and illusory forms of consciousness. Marx, ever the epistemological realist, holds that we can come to an understanding of *actual* practices of people and of the *real* relations which obtain in these. Our ideas about these may be either true or false. Indeed, it may well be that some of our activities, at least, require that we have *false* beliefs (false consciousness). This includes, of course, religious practices--criticized by Feuerbach, *et al.* But as Marx insisted, this does not go far enough. It includes, as well, political practice and the social relations themselves. Again, I take it that this is the fundamental burden of *Capital*, Vol. I, but especially the account of the fetishism of commodities, a necessary precondition for the commodification of labor power, and a necessary condition for capitalist reproduction and thence, of a host of other practices 'connected' with these. This an example of 'dialectics.' See below.

In his account of the 1859 Preface, Wakeman sees this, but misconstrues it. Lodged in the causal/interactionist model, he argues that if there is to be 'critical consciousness,' one must give causal priority to 'the real foundation' ('the hard material core of Marx's economic reductionism'). He quotes Marx:

...it is always necessary to distinguish the material transformation of the economic

conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of a natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic, in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out' (2, 163).

This is, admittedly, a puzzling and confusing text. But the main message is clear enough: 'ideological forms' refers precisely to those beliefs which people have--including beliefs about the social relations of production. Some may be true and some false. That is precisely why there is conflict. (It suggests also that it would be wrong to identify 'ideology' with 'false consciousness'.)

Sayer (*Marx's Method*) offers that in the Preface Marx's bifurcation is meant to distinguish between 'essential relations' ('economic structure') and their 'forms' of manifestation ('superstructure'). This is useful, but easily misunderstood. Lenin got it right. And Wakeman misunderstood. Lenin wrote:

...Just as material causes underlie (*Ursache*: which means, as Helmholtz had said, 'that which lies hidden behind the changes we perceive') all natural phenomena [what is manifest], so the development of human society is conditioned (sic) by the development of material, productive forces. On the development of the material, productive forces depend the relations into which men enter with another in the production of the things required for the satisfaction of human needs. And in these relations lies the explanation of all the phenomena [what is manifest] of social life, human aspirations, ideas and laws (quoted by Wakeman, 2, 163).

One reads this an 'economic reductionism' only if one reads 'conditioned' and 'depends' in empiricist causal terms: 'forces' cause 'production relations' which cause beliefs. But it would be very hard to deny that the development of human society is not 'conditioned' by the development of productive forces. Similarly, the development of productive forces 'depends upon' social relations. Notice, please, that he does not say that social relations depend upon 'productive forces'! Finally, Lenin says, rightly, that we can explain beliefs in terms of *real social relations*, relations which are constitutive of what is produced and how it is produced, including, then, not simply the relation of capitalist to wage worker, but the juridical and political relations which are implicated. Again, compare Marx's effort to *explain* 'price' or 'free wage labour' in *Capital*--an effort in 'critical dialects'!

12. As noted, this is precisely the place to see the pertinence of 'dialect' in Marx. As noted, 'dialects' in Marx shows up on many contexts. This has led some writers to argue that it mostly (at least) a way of looking at the world. What way? Roughly, it is an anti-empiricistic, atomistic way, which is the way of Hume, Russell, Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* and of logical positivism--and thus of most mainstream social science (and 'theory' of science). By contrast, then, a 'dialectical' approach emphasizes wholes, unities, relations, *transaction*, epigenesis, process, emergence. This is quite right, but first, as above it is very vague and second, it does not in any way require the materialist dialectics of Engels. Indeed, in my view, this is likely to be either a dodge or a straightjacket. We can, in any case, be more specific than this. Bhaskar argues that in Marx, we can distinguish his *critical* from his *systematic* dialectics (p. 125).

Critical dialectics takes the form of 'a triple critique of (1) the economic conceptions of everyday life which are uncritically appropriated by political economy; (2) a critique of political economy as considering only phenomena as 'given': positivism (NB, the subtitle of *Capital*) and (3) a critique of an existing mode of production (capitalism) which renders these conceptions necessary for the agents who actions constitute, reproduce) and, eventually, transform it.

Marx's systematic dialectics, then, provides the theoretical grounds for his critique. As Bhaskar writes: 'Ultimately...all the contradictions of capitalism derive from the structurally fundamental contradictions between use-value and the value of the commodity, and between the concrete useful labour and abstract social aspects of the labour it embodies' (p. 125). As above, these are '(i) real inclusive oppositions, in that the terms or poles of the contradictions existentially presuppose one another and (ii) internally related to a mystifying form of appearance [i.e., to a real social object]'(p. 125). That is, the 'dialect' appears in two way: first in the structural conditions of capitalism as a system and second, in the analysis of the connection between 'consciousness' and its conditions.

In sum, Marx transformed Hegelian dialectic 'naturalistically,' so that it became a way to grasp 'the causally generated presentation of social objects and their explanatory critique.' For Marx, this involved recognition of those conditions of activity which make humans natural beings and those conditions of activity which, depending on activity, are historically specific. While he concentrated on the latter, he never forgot the former. For Marx 'contradictions' were neither necessary truths (as in Hegel) nor metaphysical postulates (as in Engels). Rather, he aimed his guns at the specific contradictions of capitalism, an analysis which, as Bhaskar says, neither entails or presupposes a 'dialectics of nature.'

13. As regards Mao, then, we can ask at least the following:

What was his understanding of Marx and Marxism?

Did he formulate a view which in some ways 'recovered' Marx (from Stalinists, 2nd International Marxists, Leninists)?

Did he formulate a distinct version of Chinese Marxism (which either was or was not close to Marx)?

Was his philosophy true (adequate, preferable)?

Peter T. Manicas

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