

Nature, Society, and Thought

**NST**

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**a Journal of Dialectical and Historical Materialism**

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## Aroma and Shadow: Marx vs. Nietzsche on Religion

Ishay Landa

The struggle against religion is . . . indirectly a fight against *the world* of which religion is the spiritual *aroma*.

—Karl Marx

God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.—

And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

The names of Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche, despite all that separates them in other respects, are often mentioned together in relation to a joint atheism, antimetaphysical materialism, and caustic denunciation of religion. Here, it is argued, the ideas of the two mighty nineteenth-century thinkers had much in common. Both, as Foucault classically put it, are the great “masters of suspicion,” along with Freud (1998, 269–78)<sup>1</sup>; both fearlessly deconstruct religion and naturalize the world, purging it of the despotic phantoms of traditional idealist morality, which is replaced by an unflinching materialism, a sober, almost cynical, view of things, weaned of bourgeois sentimentalism. Having a common enemy in religion, Marx and Nietzsche thus fight shoulder to shoulder to bring about secular modernity.<sup>2</sup> This juxtaposition, however, obscures more than it clarifies. It legitimately highlights certain

epistemological similarities, but at the cost of obscuring a crucial ideological discrepancy. My point is not simply that Marx and Nietzsche cannot be said to have embraced a similar political cause; this would be a fairly trivial claim, in spite of the numerous attempts, over the last decades, to bring them ideologically together.<sup>3</sup> Nor do I argue merely that, given that Marx and Nietzsche criticized different facets of religion, their respective critiques are different, or even incompatible. Rather, I claim that Nietzschean atheism is radically *antithetical* to the Marxist one. Far from accompanying or completing Marx in any way, Nietzsche's atheism needs to be understood as a thorough alternative to Marxism, devised specifically to destroy it and take its place.

Nietzsche and Marx were at war (not a personal one, needless to say; there is no indication that Nietzsche ever read Marx, and Marx and Engels, for their part, wrote the *Communist Manifesto* when Nietzsche was four years old). I hope to show how the religious "shadow" that Nietzsche sought to chase away was, at bottom, the *Marxist variant of atheism*; conversely, the Nietzschean brand of atheism should be seen as just one of many odors associated with that religious "aroma" that Marx and Engels found offensive. Indeed, one might go as far as to argue that for both atheistic camps, the fundamental adversary was not so much religion *per se* but the profane *worldly* way in which it was being put to use.

To understand this ideological conflict it is necessary to bring the abstraction of "atheism" into its concrete historical context. I suggest, to start with, distinguishing between two distinctive forms of atheism. Nietzsche became immensely (in)famous following the resonant announcement of the death of God he put in the mouth of the madman in aphorism 125 of *The Gay Science* (1882). This proclamation has gone down in the history of philosophy as the slogan of Nietzsche's ruthless crusade against religion. When "God is dead" is placed back in historical perspective, however, at least some of the iconoclastic significance usually attached to it must be retracted. Western culture at the time *The Gay Science* was published, twenty-three years after Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, was already imbued with atheism, and

a growing secularization was a trend dominating all aspects of contemporary life and thought. Nietzsche's atheism as such could therefore hardly have produced such a shock. And if the public then and generations of subsequent readers since were indeed shocked, one must look for reasons other than the mere refutation of God's existence. Not the fact of God's "death" caused such scandal, but what the madman made of the "historical event" of God's murder, the Nietzschean interpretation of its significance. Such interpretation—the whole complex of conceptions, insights, judgments, and imagery that makes up Nietzsche's particular brand of atheism—was ultimately conceived of in response to, not to say retaliation against, an atheistic tradition that preceded it. To understand Nietzsche's atheism, therefore, we must first of all have at least a general notion of the ideological pith of the atheism it rose up against, namely socialist atheism.

### ***Humanization vs. dehumanization of the universe***

To simplify matters, I would posit Marx and Engels's atheism as representative of the basic tenets of socialist and revolutionary understanding of religion in general (just as Nietzsche's version of atheism could be seen as representative of other "theological" positions of a comparable nature). The ideas are fairly well known, but it would be helpful to summarize them briefly. The founders of Marxism wholeheartedly and unreservedly embraced secularization; it was for them a vital step in deposing religion as a prime means of class domination, the most important Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser's terminology) of the nineteenth century: "The criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism" (Marx 1975a, 175). Within bourgeois hierarchy, God's role was that of the ultimate overseer, keeping a watchful eye on the workers to guarantee their obedience. This was true metaphorically and sometimes even literally, as illustrated by the following catechism of an English Sunday school for working-class children (early nineteenth century):

*Questions.* Is it honest for workmen to waste and destroy the materials and implements which they make use of?  
(Ans. No.) Who do these things belong to? (Ans. Their

master.) Whose eyes see you when your master is not by? (Ans. God's.) . . . Who sees people when they are pilfering tea and sugar and such things? (Ans. God.) Does God approve of such actions? (Ans. No.) What would God do to thieves of all kind? (Ans. Punish them.)<sup>4</sup>

Thus, Marx and Engels understandably rejoiced over Darwin's theories, as they welcomed any blow aimed at the religious exegesis of the universe and of society. Taking on Feuerbach, they believed that to be rid of God would mean to enthrone humanity. This atheism was put in a nutshell by Engels: "The question has previously always been: what is God? and German philosophy has answered the question in this sense: God is man" (1975, 464). If, as Nietzsche would proclaim, God is indeed dead, then the Marxist corresponding claim was from the start, "Long live man!" A fiction told by humans, God has come to dominate its creator; alienated from humanity and raised above it, God became humanity's oppressor, backed up by a corrupt clerical hierarchy. Now at long last, humanity has attained the conceptual and emotional maturity needed to break free of its self-imposed chains and overcome estrangement. It no longer needs the mediation of a divinity to address itself. At last realizing that it was God who was created in the human image and not the other way around, humanity can finally become the measure of its own world, its sole meaning and purpose: "All emancipation is a *reduction* of the human world and relationships to *man himself*" (Marx 1975c, 168). Secularization hence means an ideological and epistemological (as opposed to ontological) humanization of the world. The political implications of this process of humanization are also clear: "the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*" (Marx 1975a, 176). The masses, once awakened from the opiate dream of a blissful afterlife, would rise to claim a paradise on earth, brushing aside those who use religion to shield the status quo. Atheism was on that account deemed a vital vehicle of political transformation, the *sine qua non* of revolution. These two tenets at the heart of the Marxist critique of religion—the revolutionary appeal to

the masses and the humanizing emphasis—are condensed in the following famous passage:

The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism by weapons, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates *ad hominem*, and it demonstrates *ad hominem* as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp things by the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself. The evident proof of the radicalism of German theory, and hence of its practical energy, is that it proceeds from a resolute *positive* abolition of religion. The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that *man is the highest being for man*, hence with the *categorical imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being. (Marx 1975a, 182)

This is the gist of the Marxist endeavor to equip the masses with a radical, secular theory, with the aid of which a new, *revolutionary* and *humanistic* society can be created.

On the opposite pole of the political spectrum stood those who were bound by conviction and interest to the present state of things and did not wish to see it altered, let alone radically turned upside down. For them, to keep the masses piously slumbering was a high priority. Historical developments, however, proved by and large unfavorable to their cause. The Enlightenment's emphasis on rational enquiry and scientific progress, requisite for bolstering the bourgeois social revolution as well as for expediting industrial technological progress, severely limited the sway of religion as a social myth. As Engels could affirm with gratification as early as 1844 (the year of Nietzsche's birth):

[Thomas Carlyle] knows very well that rituals, dogmas, litanies and Sinai thunder cannot help, that all the thunder of Sinai does not make the truth any truer, nor does it frighten any sensible person, that we are far beyond the religion of fear. (1975, 457)

The influential Victorian conservative, John Henry Cardinal Newman, son of a banker, likewise recognized the social effects of liberal atheism, but from a clerical, anxious point of view. Listing a series of logical inferences, he usefully registered the inexorable progress of rational atheism, from the initial refutation of the Church's authority up to the pernicious outcome of mass democracy, as the following selection illustrates:

4. It is dishonest in a man to make an act of faith in what he has not had brought home to him by actual proof.

Therefore, e.g., the mass of men ought not absolutely to believe in the divine authority of the Bible.

5. It is immoral in a man to believe more than he can spontaneously receive as being congenial to his moral and mental nature.

Therefore, e.g., a given individual is not bound to believe in eternal punishment.

6. No revealed doctrines or precepts may reasonably stand in the way of scientific conclusions.

Therefore, e.g., Political Economy may reverse our Lord's declarations about poverty and riches. . . .

16. It is lawful to rise in arms against legitimate princes.

Therefore, e.g., the Puritans in the seventeenth century, and the French in the eighteenth, were justified in their Rebellion and Revolution respectively.

17. The people are the legitimate source of power.

Therefore, e.g., Universal Suffrage is among the natural rights of man. (1986, 1030–32)

As against this objective development, two basic theological responses took shape. The first was conservative, clinging tenaciously to the sacrosanct tenets of religious belief and reaffirming them in the face of danger. The second was more realistic and more ingenious; it took in the unfortunate balance of things and realized the need for developing an adequate, innovative response to the atheistic tide. To the former group belonged those, like the Victorian Bishop Samuel Wilberforce and his followers, who became infuriated over Darwin's publications and struggled to minimize

the damages of the earthquake that ensued; Nietzsche, on the other hand, became one of the principal spokesmen of the latter camp.

Nietzsche's atheism, it is important to understand, was a belated one, atheism after the fact. It was also very much a reluctant atheism, very different from the unconditional endorsement and celebration of secularity of the socialists (or of those proponents of scientific and technological progress who were continuing the rationalistic impetus of the Enlightenment, although less and less in their social views). Nietzsche's reaction to the death of God was by no means one of sheer jubilation. Rather, it included an acute awareness that much that was valuable went under along with the deceased deity, not least of which was religion's priceless capacity to sustain hierarchy. Nietzsche therefore sought—in the aftermath of God's elimination—to harness and divert the advance of atheism, so as to impede its progress towards an egalitarian revolution. If the supernatural can no longer validate the existing social order, the natural may just as well fulfill this role, under the mediation of a social Darwinism combined with Schopenhauerian pessimism. Nietzsche expressed his consternation over this general secularizing process on numerous occasions, making it clear that the secularization of the masses was especially regrettable on account of its political, revolutionary consequences:

The philosopher as we understand him, we free spirits . . . will make use of the religions for his work of education and breeding, just as he will make use of existing political and economic conditions. . . . To ordinary men . . . the great majority, who exist for service and general utility and who *may* exist only for that purpose, religion gives an invaluable contentment with their nature and station, manifold peace of heart, an ennobling of obedience. . . . Perhaps nothing in Christianity and Buddhism is so venerable as their art of teaching even the lowliest to set themselves through piety in an apparently higher order of things and thus to preserve their contentment with the real order, within which they live hard enough lives—and necessarily have to! (1990a, 86–87)

In view of such ideas, we can already begin to appreciate how Nietzsche's assessment of religion constitutes the very ethical mirror image of that expounded by Marx and Engels. We say "ethical," because in terms of a realistic evaluation of the sociopolitical function of religion, their views are remarkably similar. For Nietzsche, just as for the Marxists, religion is one more department of the superstructure, alongside other "existing political and economic conditions," the specific function and "art" of which is to instill servility in the masses and reconcile them to their wretched conditions of life. Whereas the Marxist assault on religion was aimed at its role in upholding the class system, Nietzsche was nostalgic for the good old times when it was still able to "venerably" benumb the masses. Conversely, when Nietzsche turned to criticize Christianity, his reproaches were directed precisely at its other, and far less creditable side—its alleged *undermining* of hierarchy and its ignition of revolution. As in the following quotation, the likes of which could be multiplied many times over:

With that I have done and pronounce my judgement. I *condemn* Christianity, I bring against the Christian Church the most terrible charge any prosecutor has ever uttered. To me it is the extremest thinkable form of corruption. . . . — "Equality of souls before God," this falsehood, this *pretext* for the *rancune* of all the base-minded, this explosive concept which finally became revolution, modern idea and the principle of the decline of the entire social order—is *Christian* dynamite. (1990b, 198)

Nietzsche wanted to exploit the demise of Christianity as a historic opportunity to transvalue egalitarian values. Once God is removed, it becomes vital to ensure that it is the ideal of social equality, and not that of hierarchy, that passes away with him. As Zarathustra declares, it is not the leveling mob that shall profit from atheism but the *Übermensch* (overman or Superman):

"You higher men"—thus the mob blink—"there are no higher men, we are all equal, man is man; before God we are all equal!"

Before God! But now this god has died. And before the mob we do not want to be equal. . . .

Before God! . . . You higher men, this god was your greatest danger. It is only since he lies in his tomb that you have been resurrected. Only now the great noon comes; only now the higher man becomes—lord.

. . . God died: now *we* desire the overman to live. (1995, 286–87)

Nietzsche's atheism was above all a repudiation of what he perceived as the egalitarian legacy of Christianity, and it was only consistent that he had a far better opinion of other, allegedly less egalitarian, religions, such as early Judaism or Hinduism.<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche was thus at bottom not really antireligious, and not altogether anti-Christian either. His critique of Christianity addressed exclusively its perceived function as a slave religion while applauding its historical role of keeping slaves under control.

The main task Nietzsche had to accomplish in his attempt to transform the nature of revolutionary atheism was to do away with its deep-seated humanistic optimism, and install in its place a pessimistic, tragic, and conservative mode of secularization. The event of God's death was hence described, at least in part, as inaugurating a dismal epoch of existential human solitude. This pessimistic, tragic approach to God's death is most eloquently expressed in the renowned passage in which the madman runs into the marketplace and seeks God with his lantern. Here we find poetically encapsulated the clash between the two forms of atheism, the optimistic and humanizing vs. the pessimistic and dehumanizing. On the one side stands in heroic isolation the pessimistic madman who is a despairing, anxious atheist. At the beginning of the scene, as a matter of fact, the madman is not an atheist at all, but still an apprehensive believer, seeking to recover God. He confronts the optimistic, shallow multitude in the marketplace: they, already atheists, belittle the significance of God's absence and jest at the madman's seemingly ridiculous quest.

At this point the madman suddenly acknowledges the death of God: "Whither is God?" he cried; 'I will tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers'" (1974, 181). But of

all deicides, the madman alone experiences pangs of conscience. He alone is intensely aware of the tragic implications of this momentous deed. He discloses a distressing truth that has to do precisely with the place of humans in the world in the postreligious era. After the twilight of God, a new dawn breaks, but one utterly different from the cheerful sunrise foreseen by Feuerbach and the Marxists, who believed that humankind is poised to become at long last master of its destiny. The human hopes of freedom and mastery are categorically refuted. The universe will not gain in humanness after God's dismissal, as the optimists guarantee, but rather be utterly *deprived of it*. Since God was a human invention, his presence had humanized the universe; his love and protection, however figments of the imagination, have endowed the world with a comforting semblance of humanness. Now that the spell was recklessly broken by optimistic and shallow atheists, human beings must face the horrifying emptiness of the bare universe. The madman proclaims the absurdity of existence:

Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up and down? Are we not straying through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? (1974, 181)

Instead of the joyful, proud independence promised by the optimistic atheists, the pessimistic madman decrees humanity's existential orphanhood. The universe is an infinite and empty space, its emptiness asphyxiating, cold, and thoroughly nonhuman. Atheism is profoundly transformed; it is not the human being that succeeds divinity. If God is dead, then long live *nature*! Humankind cannot impose itself on the universe, but must rather yield to the chaotic, amoral, indifferent nature of the cosmos in which humankind is a trifle. The ultimate consequence of such submission would be effectively to *dehumanize* the universe: "When will we complete our de-deification of nature? When may we begin to '*naturalize*' humanity in terms of a pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature?" (1974, 169) But what does such "naturalization" of humanity mean? It is very easy to mistake this suggestion,

especially when presented in isolation, for a typical secular exhortation for humanity to “become natural,” as it were, to get rid of religious inhibitions and prudish self-denial, and to glory in that which is “naturally” human, happy, and healthy. But the truth of the matter is quite different. It was only right that Nietzsche should place the word *naturalization* in quotation marks, for what he proposed thereby was the very opposite of what is conventionally meant by the term. For him, to naturalize humanity meant to *deny* human nature, since nature and humanity have nothing in common. Nature and humans stand as complete opposites; nature is a silent rock upon which all human concepts, ideas, and hopes crash and dissipate like so many feeble waves:

The total character of the world, however, is in all eternity chaos—in the sense not of a lack of necessity but of a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms. . . . [H]ow could we reproach or praise the universe? Let us beware of attributing to it heartlessness and unreason or their opposites: it is neither perfect nor beautiful, nor noble, nor does it wish to become any of those things; it does not by any means strive to imitate man. (1974, 168)

What is important from an ideological point of view in these conceptions of nature is not the denial of the (very romantic) idea that nature possesses human attributes or the assertion that humans tend to project their own needs and emotions onto their natural surroundings, i.e., to anthropomorphize them. It is rather the contention that we must somehow start to “naturalize humanity.” For one thing, what could such naturalization actually mean given the concomitant assertion that humanity and nature are inexorably cut apart? The very idea of such naturalization would seem senseless, unless by another act of anthropomorphism. Indeed it could be argued that the entire passage quoted above, in which nature is described as an eternal chaos, is itself but another, though very subtle, “aesthetic anthropomorphism,” another romantic elegy for nature. The only other apparent option is for humankind to forfeit entirely its unnatural humanity and immerse itself definitely in nature by the act of dying (and, as we shall shortly see, this is not

entirely alien to Nietzsche's argument). But even assuming that such naturalization is somehow possible while humans are still alive, why is it at all a recommendable, indeed urgent, mission that we should set out to complete without delay? What could be the enticement, for a human being, of uniting himself or herself with an entity that is said to be devoid of "order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms"? Thus, when Nietzsche speaks about a "newly discovered, newly redeemed nature" and the need for humanity to conduct itself according to its rules, he actually demands that human nature should be subordinated to nature as such, which is profoundly nonhuman. In a remarkable theoretical move, Nietzsche contends that to become natural we must deny and transcend our humanity. We can see that Nietzsche's interpretation of the place of human beings in the world following God's demise is never just a description; it is equally a prescription. It is not enough for Nietzsche to claim that the universe and nature are indifferent and meaningless, that the universe "does not by any means strive to imitate man"; he rather insists, in effect, that *humans* should *imitate the universe*, bow before the indifference and absurdity of existence and rearrange their lives accordingly. And this second proposition by no means follows logically or necessarily from the first. There is, furthermore, an element of duplicity behind the ostensible despair at God's murder. For Nietzsche, in fact, also celebrates the nothingness of the universe. The "infinite empty space" gaping at humanity may be cold and depressing, but it is also the supreme object of admiration:

*In the horizon of the infinite.*—We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed, we have gone further and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean. . . . [H]ours will come before you realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. (1974, 180)

Thus, it does not suffice to affirm that the world is nonhuman; somehow we must also exult in this nonhumanity, come to applaud the magnificence of the void; we may even wish to consider a glorious plunge into its "chaotic" depths. And here the political

coordinator operating underneath Nietzsche's narrative can be glimpsed. The objective ideological purpose and function become clear. Whereas for the Marxists, secular humanization of the universe meant preparing the ground for revolution, Nietzsche's secular dehumanization is meant to impede it. Socialist atheism was bound with the conviction of human sovereignty and dignity, whereas Nietzsche's theory of nature is directed purposely against such illusions. This is demonstrated in a passage where Nietzsche enumerates several typical human misconceptions that must be redressed. One of these errors is the failure to admit the proper—that is, negligible—place of humans in the natural scheme:

Third, [man] placed himself in a false order of rank in relation to animals and nature. . . . If we removed the effects of these four errors, we should also remove humanity, humanness and "human dignity." (1974, 174)

It is as if Nietzsche's theory was written in specific rebuttal of Marx's contention that "the criticism of religion ends with the teaching that *man is the highest being for man*" (1975a, 182). For Nietzsche, the criticism of religion rather ends by the realization, "One has no right to existence or to work, to say nothing of a right to 'happiness': the individual human being is in precisely the same case as the lowest worm" (1968, 398–99). While Marx has animated his readers "to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being" (1975a, 182), Nietzsche strives to create precisely such a new condition, for which the existential insignificance of humanity will serve as a presupposition. Nietzsche's solution to the political problem of humanizing atheism is to an attempt to develop a dehumanizing atheism. By introducing a form of atheism-cum-pantheism that places nature above humanity, one can deny the political demands of humanistic socialism. François Bédarida, in an informative essay, has characterized National Socialism as an *Ersatzreligion* that was meant to take the place of Christianity. It was, moreover, a "naturalistic religion," substituting immanency and this-worldliness for transcendentalism and the afterlife. At the heart of this "secular religion" lay a project—we may add, a *Nietzschean* project, one that is compatible with Nietzsche's teaching—of a "naturalized humanity":

Such a world stands completely under the sign of naturalism. Man is only a part of nature. "The earth will continue to spin," claims Hitler, "whether man kills the tiger or the other way around; the world does not change. Its laws are eternal." The only thing that counts is to adapt to these laws. (Bédarida 1997, 161)

Philippe Burrin likewise stresses the naturalistic character of Nazi ideology as a means of "re-enchanting" a world that has dangerously gone secular, combined with an effort to dehumanize the world:

The human species is a part of nature and subject to its "eternal laws." The important thing is the struggle for survival and the selection of the strongest. The role of this desacralized and nature-fixated mode of thought cannot be overestimated when considering the crimes of the regime. . . . Auschwitz is the culminating point of a specific anti-humanistic re-enchantment attempt, as the mythical-symbolic inspiration of Nazism clearly shows. (1997, 181–82)<sup>6</sup>

National Socialism as *Ersatzreligion* was but one historical instance of this naturalistic fetishism, though surely the most far-reaching and extravagant one. But the general principle of applying the reputed inhumanity of nature to legitimize the inhumanity of society was an ideological stratagem ubiquitous throughout the West in the form of social Darwinism and its diverse sociological, anthropological, and cultural manifestations. The "divine scheme" of the past was everywhere replaced, or at any rate complemented, by the "natural plan," according to which the strong "naturally" prevail and the weak "naturally" perish, and any intervention in that process amounts to heresy against the pagan yet monotheistic deity of Nature. A degree of "naturalism" was (and remains) an integral part of most hegemonic ideologies under capitalism, and Nietzsche's bid to naturalize humanity, though compatible with the Nazi version of naturalism, is similarly harmonious with other, less extreme, historical realizations. Hence we can establish the part played by Nietzsche's philosophy in the creation of a new, pantheistic, quasi-religion.

Such a view of nature as the silent, omnipotent opposite of the human being has indeed established itself as the predominant modern conception, enjoying almost uncontested supremacy, at least in secular circles. It has become so much the accepted outlook that one would hardly think of linking it, even potentially, with an ideological position of any kind. It is postulated as a mere fact, a transhistorical given, bared before us with the advances of science. Even a Marxist and Hegelian like Frederic Jameson embraced this view, in reference to the stance of Marxism vis-à-vis existentialism: “that life is meaningless is not a proposition that need be inconsistent with Marxism, whose affirmation is the quite different one that History is meaningful, however absurd organic life may happen to be. The real issue is not the propositions of existentialism, but rather their charge of affect” (1981, 261). For Jameson, what separates a Marxist from an existentialist (Nietzsche, for our purposes) on this point is not an ontological disagreement but an epistemological, more specifically an ideological, one. The question is: once the objective place of human beings in the universe has been asserted, what should be their response, how should they live their lives and configure their society in the aftermath of metaphysics?

Original Marxism, however, was more ambitious. It should be remembered that for the young Marx it was quite pertinent to attempt to transcend the rigid dichotomy of humans and nature and bring about a Hegelian reconciliation between them. Far from being an eternal fact of life exposed by modernity, the separation of human beings and nature was for Marx *a symptom of modernity*, a social problem of the first degree that his vision of communism was to overcome.<sup>7</sup> It is illuminating to recall Marx’s remarks on the matter from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which throw into vivid relief the ways in that his version of naturalism differs from the modern take on nature:

This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between

objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution. (1975b, 296–97)

For the youthful Marx, therefore, more was at stake than a simple “charge of affect.” Communism, for him, offered the concrete possibility of a grand utopian resolution of human estrangement from nature. To modern ears this may sound like a beautiful epiphany that ugly history has grimly discarded. But we ought, perhaps, to remind ourselves that Marx’s idea of communism in these passages was a political order that would eventually supersede “crude communism,” whether “despotic or democratic,” attaining a true abolition of private property and going beyond capital materially, spiritually, and psychologically. It remains difficult, however, to grasp how eliminating private property might possibly impinge on, let alone heal, the rift between humans and nature, which we now understand as two strictly separate sets of problems, the one political and social, the other existential or spiritual. But for Marx, the issue of the human being’s position versus nature is not at all a “natural matter,” so to speak, decided a priori by some given natural laws, but rather a thoroughly sociopolitical question that humanity itself must resolve by way of conscious revolutionary action. For Marx, the notion that nature was something “out there,” an alien, nonhuman, or even antihuman essence, was but another aspect of the modern situation in which, for the isolated individual monad, society is felt as inhuman, alien, and oppressive:

Activity and enjoyment, both in their content and in their *mode of existence*, are *social*: *social* activity and social enjoyment. The *human* aspect of nature exists only for *social* man; for only then does nature exist for him as a *bond* with *man*—as his existence for the other and the other’s existence for him—and as the life-element of human reality. Only then does nature exist as the *foundation* of his own *human* existence. Only here has what is to him his *natural* existence become his *human* existence, and nature become man for him. Thus *society* is the complete unity

of man with nature—the true resurrection of nature—the accomplished naturalism of man and the accomplished humanism of nature. (1975b, 298)

Just like Nietzsche, Marx calls for a “naturalism of man,” but for him it is the same as calling for a “humanism of nature.” The antithesis (the conceptual resemblances notwithstanding) could not be more complete. Since humans are not properly social under present conditions, but enclosed within the egotistic shells created by private-property institutions, *therefore* the “human aspect of nature” does not exist for them. For Marx, to humanize nature makes perfect sense for the simple reason that human beings themselves *are nature*, and, while transforming and humanizing themselves, they are consequently, and by necessity, transforming and humanizing nature as well. To claim, like Nietzsche, that humans must adapt themselves to nature, which is inhuman—chaotic, senseless, indifferent, etc.—would be from Marx’s viewpoint not only an impossible or undesirable proposition, but first and foremost an *unnatural* one. Humans would become thereby unnatural, not natural, for they will be banished from their natural habitat of history and society and thrown into some reified vacuum where no development is possible. The whole drift of Marx’s argument is to supersede dialectically the distinction between nature and humanity and perceive their actual unity. It is in this sense that we should understand his famous claim that even the senses, allegedly bequeathed to humans by alienated nature as they are once and for all, to remain unchanged, are in fact subjected to historical transformation and undergo inexorable humanization; this is not some offense against nature but the most natural thing, for humans:

The abolition of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and qualities; but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, *human*. The eye has become a *human* eye, just as its *object* has become a social, *human* object—an object made by man for man. The *senses* have therefore become directly in their practice *theoreticians*. They relate themselves to the

*thing* for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an *objective human* relation to itself and to man. . . . Need or enjoyment has consequently lost its *egotistical* nature, and nature has lost its mere *utility* by use becoming *human* use. (1975b, 300)

And, similarly:

Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man's essential being is the richness of subjective *human* sensibility . . . either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.), in a word, *human* sense, the human nature of the senses, comes to be by virtue of *its* object, by virtue of *humanised* nature. (301–2)

Finally, and most expressively: “All history is the history of preparing and developing ‘*man*’ to become the object of *sensuous* consciousness, and turning the requirements of ‘man as man’ into his needs. History itself is a *real* part of *natural history*—of nature’s developing into man” (304). We need not, at this point at least, necessarily decide between Marx’s naturalism and Nietzsche’s. All we have to do is distinguish between them as fully as possible and register their radical difference at all points, epistemological as well as political. For Marx, naturalism meant the dialectical unity of humans and nature, resulting in the call for the humanization of nature and the naturalization of humans; for Nietzsche, nature and humans are divorced and the latter must submit to the former. The sociopolitical significance is likewise diametrically opposed. For Marx: recognition of the social nature of humans and the building of a human society by the abolition of private property relations. For Nietzsche: a denial of the social nature of humans (denounced as herd-mentality/morality), defense of the status quo, and vindication of property relations:

But there will always be too many who have possessions for socialism to signify more than an attack of sickness—and those who have possessions are of one mind on one article of faith: “one must possess something in order to *be* something.” But this is the oldest and healthiest of all instincts:

I should add, “one must want to have more than one has in order to *become* more.” For this is the doctrine preached by life itself to all that has life: the morality of development. To have and to want to have more—*growth*, in one word—that is life itself. (1968, 77)

### ***The tarantulas of equality***

There can be no doubt that Nietzsche was deeply aware of the significance and role of his atheism as a *counter*-atheism. Perhaps nowhere in his writings is the difference between the uprightness of his unique brand of materialistic atheism and the perversity of the socialist one as energetically and militantly broadcast as in the passage dealing with what Zarathustra bitterly refers to as “the tarantulas.” Nietzsche’s prophet takes great care to distinguish his position from theirs: “My friends, I do not want to be confused with others or taken for what I am not” (1969, 124). He makes a distinction between two doctrines of life, a genuine and a counterfeit one: “There are those who preach my doctrine of life: yet are at the same time preachers of equality, and tarantulas.” Like most founders of new religions, Zarathustra makes a claim for originality and primacy; he declares that the tarantulas, as false prophets are wont to do, preach and pervert *his* doctrine of life. For the sake of historical justice, however, it should be stated that it was rather Zarathustra (Nietzsche) who has reacted to the life-doctrine, spurious or not, of the tarantulas (the socialists). But who are the tarantulas and what does Nietzsche find so reprehensible about them? For one thing, as we have heard, they promulgate the creed of equality, the very anathema of Zarathustra’s doctrine.

I do not wish to be mixed up and confused with these preachers of equality. For, to *me*, justice speaks thus: ‘Men are not equal.’ Nor shall they become equal! What would my love of the overman be if I spoke otherwise? (1995, 101)

The upholders of equality, namely the revolutionaries and socialists, can pretend to speak on behalf of life only because they rise up against the current establishment, founded on Christian morality:

Although they are sitting in their holes, these poisonous spiders, with their backs turned on life, they speak in favor of life, but only because they wish to hurt. They wish to hurt those who now have power, for among these the preaching of death is still most at home. (1995, 101)

Zarathustra acknowledges that the tarantulas possess some power of persuasion. Their life-rhetoric is effective because it is directed against Christianity, which is a life-denying religion. It is only in comparison to the lifeless Christians that the socialists can gain the appearance of liveliness although, in truth, they themselves “sit in their caves with their backs turned on life.” With the demise of religion, socialism, with its promise of earthly happiness, becomes an enticing option. And it is here that Zarathustra intervenes to offer an alternative to the alternative. Against socialism he musters two main arguments, which happen to be contradictory, but their joint effect, in spite of the inconsistency, is quite powerful. The first argument is negative, dismissing what the socialists have to offer. Zarathustra claims that the socialists are frauds and hypocrites; they speak of justice and are ready to punish the strong and overturn the social order while they themselves are motivated by revengefulness and lust for power: “when they call themselves the good and the just, do not forget that they would be pharisees, if only they had—power” (100). Thus the revolutionaries can be condemned from the point of view of conventional pre-Zarathustrian morality, from *within* the bounds of *good and evil*: they are *evil*, firstly, and their evil, furthermore, expresses itself in their *obsession with power*; they promise justice and happiness but will fail to deliver, proving themselves to be tyrannical. This argument remains quite consistent with the habitual, conservative critique of revolutionaries since the French Revolution, directed at their cruelty and inhumanity, as they exact and mete out punishment against their betters:

I counsel you my friends: Mistrust all in whom the impulse to punish is powerful. They are people of a low sort and stock; the hangman and the bloodhound look out of their faces. (100)

But Zarathustra is not merely an advocator of old times; such timid admonitions, purely negative, cannot serve as a good defense against the optimistic tide of the socialists. It is difficult to defend present iniquity simply by the prediction of a future one. If Zarathustra is to justify his claims for a radical New Testament, and exceed the worn-out cautions of a Burke, a Bonald, or a de Maistre, he has to offer the masses a merchandise at least as exciting as what the socialists publicize, something bold and affirmative as opposed to passive and preventive. And at this point Zarathustra becomes the prophet of life. It is principally for this reason, no doubt, that the metaphor of the tarantulas was applied in the first place: the revolutionaries must be denuded of their glamorous, if ruthless, halo. They must be exposed as true enemies of life; venomous, weak, and disgusting creatures; necessarily hiding their true, pathetic selves. A lantern in hand, Zarathustra escorts the reader to the dark hiding-place of the socialist enemy of life and invites him to establish the latter's true nature: "Behold, this is the hole of the tarantula. Do you want to see the tarantula itself? Here hangs its web: touch it, that it tremble" (99).

The socialist is thereby deprived of power and stature; he is not only wicked but also weak and despicable. The tarantulas are the hateful forgers of materialism, who have done away with God but not to enable the development of natural, ascending life; instead, they launch a neomoralistic, neo-Christian crusade against life, in the name of the feeble and the sick. Zarathustra is the one who truly celebrates life. This is Zarathustra's assertive proposal, which happens to contradict his former, negative caveat. Earlier, he has claimed that the socialists will only replace power as it now exists with a new tyranny; their pledge for the abolition of injustice and suffering was therefore dismissed as unrealistic and illusory. But presently, Zarathustra tacitly acknowledges that such elimination of strife might actually materialize. Socialism is now deemed feasible but—*undesirable*. This is a point to reckon with, particularly in the context of Nietzsche's enthusiastic reception by numerous interpreters, who have praised his prophetic utterances against the horrors of twentieth-century communism, the totalitarian abuses of state

power.<sup>8</sup> Leaving aside the relative value of such forewarnings on the part of a philosopher who encouraged the elite to subjugate the majority scrupulously and who made it perfectly clear that such subjugation will entail not only the exploitation but also “the annihilation of millions of failures” (Nietzsche 1968, 506), it is important to take heed of the fact that this critique of totalitarianism was only Nietzsche’s *first line of defense*; that beyond the possibility of socialist *failure*, Nietzsche apprehended the prospect of a socialist *success*; and that he found the likelihood of a socialist *abuse* of power no more intimidating than the scenario of a socialist *elimination* of power. Put in Marx’s terms, Nietzsche was targeting not only the dystopia of “despotic communism” that we have come to know during the twentieth century, but also “true communism,” *the socialist utopia* as such.<sup>9</sup> For if, according to Zarathustra, the revolutionaries succeed and truly and abidingly eliminate conflict, exploitation, and war, this will prove humanity’s catastrophe, since peace and equality, once attained, will cripple life, not enhance it:

They shall throng to the future, and ever more war and inequality shall divide them: thus does my great love make me speak. In their hostilities they shall become inventors of images and ghosts, and with their images and ghosts they shall yet fight the highest fight against one another. Good and evil, and rich and poor, and high and low, and all the names of values—arms shall they be and clattering signs that life must overcome itself again and again.

Life wants to build itself up into the heights with pillars and steps; it wants to look into vast distances and out toward stirring beauties: therefore it requires height. And because it requires height, it requires steps and contradiction among the steps and the climbers. Life wants to climb and to overcome itself climbing. (101)

The tarantulas turn their backs on life, for they refuse to admit the necessity of strife and suffering; they become ascetic enemies of life who, by suspending conflict and imposing equality, check the rise of ascending life:

And behold, my friends: here where the tarantula has its hole, the ruins of an ancient temple rise; behold it with enlightened eyes! Verily, the man who once piled his thoughts to the sky in these stones—he, like the wisest, knew the secret of all life. That struggle and inequality are present even in beauty. . . . [L]et us be enemies too, my friends! Let us strive against one another like gods! (101–2)

This is Zarathustra's innovation and the crux of Nietzsche's *Lebensphilosophie*. To minimize conflict and danger is to downgrade life; war produces the sublime *Übermensch*, whereas peace leads to the pathetic last man. But the paradoxes underpinning such *Lebensphilosophie* also come into view. To start with, it becomes clear that, in social terms, Nietzsche's *Jasagen zum Leben* means accepting, rather than combating, life's cruelty, injustice and, ultimately, life's termination—death. Thus, a *yes-saying to death*, indeed a cult of death, is never too far away from the philosophy-of-life. Consider, for example, section 109 of *The Gay Science*, where Nietzsche warns us against “thinking that the world is a living thing” (1974, 167). He then argues that the world has no “instinct for self-preservation,” and proceeds to question the traditional dichotomy between life and death: “Let us beware of saying that death is opposed to life. The living is merely a type of what is dead, and a very rare type.” These are not merely philosophical ruminations; rather, they are also a prescription as to the way humanity must take in accordance with nature. The section ends with the above discussed call to finally “‘naturalize’ humanity in terms of a pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature.” And if humans are to be naturalized, it follows logically that they must renounce self-preservation as a supreme value. Once “demonstrated” to be lacking in nature as a guiding principle, self-preservation must be correspondingly abolished as a *social* principle. As Zarathustra will exclaim, against the mob rule of democracy and socialism:

What is womanish, what derives from the servile and especially the mob hodgepodge: *that* now would now become master of all human destiny. O nausea! Nausea! Nausea! *That* asks and asks and never grows weary: “How is man

to be preserved best, longest, most agreeably?" With that—they are the masters of today.

Overcome these masters of today, O my brothers—these small people: *they* are the overman's greatest danger!

You higher men, overcome the small virtues, the small prudences . . . the "happiness of the greatest number"! (1995, 287–88)

Here we find an indispensable clue to decipher the otherwise totally obscure death cult of fascism, quintessentially expressed by the Francoist battle-cry of *¡Viva la muerte!* To counter socialist and liberal humanist doctrines, the sanctity of human life had to be devalued. Self-preservation at all costs was consequently denigrated as a kind of superstition, a human, all-too-human weakness. Real, authentic life does not shun death as its opposite; only decadent, cowardly life does. Humans have to live grandiosely, courageously, healthily, and "naturally"—that is, in imitation of the universe: above pain, above "petty" emotions, and, finally, above life. It is in the context of such programmatic dehumanization that even death, the ultimate negation of human existence, is vindicated as at least as "natural" as life. In some senses, it is even more natural; life is an exception, a passing illusion, a mere *phenomenon*; death is the rule, the abiding reality, the *thing in itself*.

A further paradoxical feature of *Lebensphilosophie* is its fetishizing of life. With Nietzsche, life turns into something independent of the many concrete cases of living organisms, into a metaphysical, disembodied essence. Though formerly warning us against anthropomorphisms, Nietzsche now avows that life "wants," "needs," and "raises itself." It is as if each individual organism contains a piece of life and for that reason falls into the illusion of identifying itself, the means, with the goal, with *life* as a general, abstract force. Consequently the organism strives to preserve the life in its possession at all costs. But the cause of *life* is greater than the cause of all the little lives. From the lofty perspective of *life*, individuals having a share of it are merely tenants, expedient instruments, "steps and pillars" that it uses in order to ascend and overcome itself. In order to serve *life* in the abstract, therefore, it is sensible to sacrifice innumerable lives *in the concrete*, to have them perish in conflicts and wars. This

is also the logic behind the idea of the *Übermensch*: since he is the utmost expression of *life*, its finest masterpiece, it makes sense for lesser people to sacrifice themselves for his sake: “I love those,” says Zarathustra,

. . . who sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth may some day become the overman’s.

I love him who lives to know, and who wants to know so that the overman may live some day. And thus he wants to go under. (1995, 15)

And it is from the same vantage point that the weak and sickly are amiably entreated to forsake their pitiful, insignificant lives, so that *life* be advanced.

To create a new responsibility, that of the physician, in all cases in which the highest interest of life, of *ascending* life, demands the most ruthless suppression and sequestration of degenerating life—for example in determining the right to reproduce, the right to be born, the right to live. . . . When one *does away* with oneself one does the most estimable thing possible: one thereby almost deserves to live. . . . Society—what am I saying! *life* itself derives more advantage from that than from any sort of “life” spent in renunciation, green-sickness and other virtues—one has freed others from having to endure one’s sight, one has removed an objection from life. (1990b, 99–100)

Nietzsche thus discards self-preservation, the instinct of clinging on to life, as an *antilife* instinct. Ironically, the party of antilife socialists and egalitarians is the one that seeks to preserve life, whereas the philosopher of life, promoting a *Partei des Lebens* [party of the life], sanctions the sacrifice of countless lives: “The degree of ‘progress’ can actually be *measured* according to the mass of that which had to be sacrificed to it. Mankind in the mass sacrificed to the prosperity of a single *stronger* species of man—that *would be* a progress” (1988, 315). *Life* becomes a new absolute monarch, in fact a new God, to whose eternal glory every individual must dedicate his or her (little) life, which he or she must be ready to sacrifice if need arises. This is another

subtle way by which the atheistic humanization of the world can be circumvented by use of dehumanizing atheism. The scheme can even boast of an odd egalitarianism: everyone, “good and evil, rich and poor, noble and mean,” remains equally the humble servant of a greater cause, the perfection of *life*. Hence Zarathustra’s kindly, amiable gestures, his talk of his “great love,” and the frequent appeal to his readers/listeners with the cordial “my friends.” We learn that, deceptive appearances aside, there is nothing self-serving in the social hierarchy, with its corresponding unequal division of pleasures and privileges, as well as toils and hardships. One is paid, rather, in accordance with the service rendered to *life*:

The natural value of egoism depends on the physiological value of him who possesses it: it can be very valuable, it can be worthless and contemptible. Every individual may be regarded as representing the *ascending or descending line of life*. . . . If he represents the ascending line his value is in fact extraordinary—and for the *sake of the life-collective*, which with him takes a step *forward*, the care expended on his preservation, on the creation of optimum conditions for him, may even be extreme. . . . If he represents the descending development, decay, chronic degeneration, sickening . . . , then he can be accorded little value, and elementary fairness demands that he *takes away* as little as possible from the well-constituted. He is not better than a parasite on them. (1990b, 97)

The vast usefulness of such a *Weltanschauung* for justifying capitalism is obvious. Exploitation is metaphysically vindicated. What to the unaided eye seems simple “egoism” reveals itself, under the scrutiny of *life*’s superior lens, as “elementary fairness.”

### ***Marx and Engels’s refutation of the Übermensch***

So far, I have argued that Nietzsche’s critique of religion was an attempt to corner the market of Western atheism with a new, dehumanizing product, devised specifically to bankrupt the socialist

competitors. However ingenious such a move was, I contend that it did not catch its adversaries completely by surprise. As a matter of fact, both Marx and Engels, the latter perhaps more patently, foresaw the outlines of such a development and even provided essential arguments with which to counteract it.

In their first collaborative book, written in 1844, *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism* (1975), Marx and Engels dedicated a chapter to a detailed analysis of one of the most popular novels of the time—Eugène Sue’s *The Mysteries of Paris* (1844). This chapter, written by Marx, contains material that is highly valuable for our purposes, as it can help substantiate our understanding of the similarities as well as the crucial discrepancies between the Marxist and the Nietzschean critiques of religion.

Marx confronts religion as the main ideological accessory of the ruling classes in the nineteenth century. Although a power in decline, it is still able to exercise a strong influence on the popular imagination. Christian moralizing is a predominant ingredient in Sue’s novel, which Marx regards as deeply conservative. The novel recounts the adventures of the worthy Prince Rudolph in the Parisian underworld, and his dealings with a host of low-lives. Some of these criminals—like Fleur de Marie, the prostitute, or Chourineur, the bully—he is able to reform and recruit to the ranks of righteousness. Others, like the demonic and irredeemable “*Maître d’école*,” he brutally punishes. And both reward and chastisement are doled out in the name of Christian morality and in accord with bourgeois ideology, educating the lower classes about the benefits of virtue. The bulk of Marx’s atheistic critique is directed at the sanctimony of the novel’s “pious” message. In doing so, he speaks in a language that occasionally bears striking resemblance to the future Nietzschean demolition of Christianity, for instance when pitying the wretched Marie, who is “*enslaved by the consciousness of sin*” (Marx and Engels 1975, 174), or when denouncing the priestly debasement of nature and its smothering of life’s exuberance:

The priest has already succeeded in changing Marie’s immediate naive pleasure in the beauties of nature into a *religious* admiration. For her, *nature* has already become

devout, *Christianised* nature, debased to *creation*. The transparent sea of space is desecrated and turned into the dark symbol of stagnant *eternity*. She has already learnt that all human manifestations of her being were "*profane*," devoid of religion, of real consecration, that they were impious and godless. The priest must soil her in her own eyes, he must trample underfoot her natural, spiritual resources and means of grace, in order to make her receptive to the supernatural means of grace he promises her, *baptism*. (172)

This rings akin to Nietzsche's condemnation of Christianity as an antilife religion, subjecting existence to the yoke of metaphysical morality and banishing all natural drives. But, in crucial distinction to Nietzsche, Marx at all times sees religion as a *dehumanizing* force in the service of hierarchy. Nietzsche, as we saw, highly praised the aptitude of religion to sedate the masses and teach them "to preserve their contentment with the real order." This "holy lie" was needed to keep the multitude dutifully serving the elite, so that the latter would be free to elevate *life*. But Marx sees nothing life-enhancing about the Church's administration of tranquilizers to the poor. He disdainfully cites the priest's sermon to the former prostitute as the expression of the hollow Christian promise of the hereafter:

The grey-headed slave of religion answers: "You must renounce hope of effacing this desolate page from your life, but you must trust in the *infinite mercy of God*. Here *below*, my poor child, you will have tears, remorse and penance, but one day *up above*, forgiveness and *eternal bliss!*" (174)

Far from finding such a ploy honorable, as Nietzsche did, Marx dismisses it as "hypocritical sophistry." Importantly, in *The Holy Family* we can also find Marx proposing to go beyond the conventional Christian dichotomy of good and evil, again in apparent consonance with Nietzsche. But for Marx, the moralizing discourse of good and evil is not a stratagem devised by the weak slaves to resist the power of the strong. On the contrary, it is one more means of domination wielded by the ruling classes, who

loftily preach to the poor the commandment to do good, while simultaneously imposing upon them the material necessity to commit crime:

[The priest] proves, as the commonest of bourgeois would, that she could have remained good: "There are many virtuous people in Paris today." The hypocritical priest knows quite well that at any hour of the day, in the busiest streets, those virtuous people of Paris pass indifferently by little girls of seven or eight years who sell *allumettes* and the like until about midnight as Marie herself used to do and who, almost without exception, will have the same fate as Marie. (172)

In opposition to this notion of good and evil, Marx advances what may be counted as their own version of *beyond good and evil*:

*Good and evil*, as Marie conceives them, are not the *moral abstractions* of good and evil. She is *good* because she has never caused *suffering* to anyone, she has always been *human* towards her inhuman surroundings. She is *good* because the sun and the flowers reveal to her her own sunny and blossoming nature. She is *good* because she is still *young*, full of hope and vitality. Her situation is *not good*, because it puts an unnatural constraint on her, because it is not the expression of her human impulses, not the fulfillment of her human desires; because it is full of torment and without joy. She measures her situation in life by her *own individuality*, her *essential nature*, not by the *ideal of what is good*. . . . [Marie] is neither good nor bad, but *human*. (169–70)

To move in a Marxist way *beyond good and evil* is to access the *human, all too human*. Superseding dehumanizing Christian morality equals quitting the realm of metaphysical and supernatural injunctions, and asserting the natural and the human. Nature is not posited as the cold, senseless antithesis of humanity, as in Nietzsche, but rather as a mirror in which humanity can legitimately recognize its own reflection. Anthropomorphism is

therefore sanctioned, not in an ontological sense but as a legitimate human need. Marie is fully entitled to measure “her situation in life by her *own individuality*, her *essential nature*.” The human perspective is consciously given priority. It never occurs to Marx to suggest that men, or women, should *naturalize* themselves, in Nietzsche’s sense of *denying* their own human nature, of becoming the *Übermensch*. On the contrary, Marx at all times espouses the effort to *humanize* nature, a process for which he used the term “objectification” (*Vergegenständlichung*): “man’s natural means of projecting himself through his productive activity into nature. . . . [It] affords a free man the possibility of contemplating himself in a world of his own making.”<sup>10</sup>

This is an example of how Nietzscheanism was not a clean break with nineteenth-century mores and norms, but also a continuation, in many regards a tactical adjustment more than a strategic transformation. If, in the nineteenth century, the priest was above humanity, urging it to go beyond its nature, in the twentieth century, this role was entrusted to the *Übermensch*. Nietzsche substituted atheistic dehumanization for a religious one. In this way he sought to repel the danger that atheism would proceed to revolutionize society, and to divert its potentially radical thrust into favorable channels.

Although Marx’s proposals in *The Holy Family* are seen to contradict Nietzscheanism, they are nonetheless still posited vis-à-vis the old morality, the traditional defense of hierarchy. Only indirectly and in retrospect can we read into them an alternative to Nietzsche’s new morality, preempting the beyond-good-and-evil gospel. Remarkably, however, Engels has provided us with what can be counted a well-nigh explicit rejection of Nietzscheanism and the ideal of the *Übermensch*. One of Engels’s early pamphlets is a discussion of an embryonic form of Nietzscheanism, the ideas of Thomas Carlyle. In his social sympathies, Carlyle, like Nietzsche, was essentially an aristocratic antagonist to capitalism, coming from the ranks of the Tories. As Engels establishes, it is only his position as an outsider to the bourgeois world that enables him to criticize it. The Tory, “whose power and unchallenged dominance have been broken by industry . . . hates

it and sees in it at best a necessary evil" (1975, 447). The Whigs, in comparison, being as they are wholly committed to English industry, the firm bedrock of their socioeconomic prevalence, cannot rise above their vested interests and critically confront the social order. This is the class standpoint that permits Carlyle to unfold his ruthless critique of English society, the profane cult of Mammon, the material as well as moral degeneration brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Engels accepts, even applauds, the diagnosis as such:

This is the condition of England according to Carlyle . . . a total disappearance of all general human interests, a universal despair of truth and humanity and in consequence a universal isolation of men in their own "brute individuality," . . . a war of all against all, . . . a disproportionately strong working class, in intolerable oppression and wretchedness, in furious discontent and rebellion against the old social order, and hence, a threatening, irresistibly advancing democracy—everywhere chaos, disorder, anarchy, dissolution of the old ties of society. . . . Thus far, if we discount a few expressions that have derived from Carlyle's particular standpoint, we must allow the truth of all he says. He, alone of the "respectable" class, has kept his eyes open at least towards the facts, he has at least correctly apprehended the immediate present, and that is indeed a very great deal for an "educated" Englishman. (1975, 456)

Engels is even willing to assume that the shortcomings in Carlyle's diagnosis are not a result of an inherent reactionary standpoint, but merely of a romantic failure to come to terms with Hegelianism as a genuine, rational, and historical overcoming of religion. It is against the background of such a favorable overall evaluation that Engels's *firm rejection* of Carlyle's *positive* project stands out with particular clarity. Carlyle, like Nietzsche after him, confronts the bourgeois reality with deep aversion. And, like his German counterpart, he finds repulsive above all else the moral and cultural conditions dominating under bourgeois rule. These for him form the basic problem, rather than any material suffering, however acute, endured by the proletariat.<sup>11</sup> Carlyle

conceives of modern “atheism” as a symptom of a general process that is very similar to what Nietzsche would later refer to as “nihilism”—namely, an erosion of values and loss of meaning, a gradual sinking into an axiological and epistemological morass.<sup>12</sup> In the words of Engels:

But we have seen what Carlyle calls atheism: it is not so much disbelief in a personal God, as disbelief in the inner essence, in the infinity of the universe, disbelief in reason, despair of the intellect and the truth; his struggle is not against the disbelief in the revelation of the Bible, but against the most frightful disbelief, the disbelief in the “Bible of Universal History.” (457)

The solution Carlyle envisions is not material but some moral regeneration, to be worked out within the existing framework of capitalism. For all his contempt at the rule of money, he does not contemplate the overthrow of bourgeois rule and the abolition of its material premise, private property, but rather emotionally clamors for the arrival of the noble capitalists, the heroic “captains of industry.” He intends to remedy the moral affliction of the age by founding a new religion, a new popular cult, the cult of heroes, under which “work”—made a fetish by Carlyle, having recourse to Goethe’s “religion of work”—will recover its meaning and dignity. Capitalism as a cultural phenomenon is somehow to be eliminated without ousting capitalism as a mode of production:

In order to effect this organisation [of work], in order to put true guidance and true government in the place of false guidance, Carlyle longs for a “true aristocracy,” a “hero-worship,” and puts forward the second great problem to discover the *ἀριστοι*, the best, whose task it is to combine “with inevitable Democracy indispensable Sovereignty.” (460)

For this sort of project, Engels can feel no sympathy and he must part ways with Carlyle. The effort to exceed humanity by way of the hero he regards a neoreligious, pantheistic move, still positing a suprahuman entity above humans instead of accepting once

and for all the human as such: “a new religion, a pantheistic hero-worship, a cult of work, ought to be set up or is to be expected; but this is impossible; all the possibilities of religion are exhausted” (462). As the antidote to Carlyle’s mysticism, Engels advocates the principled acknowledgment of humanity’s intrinsic value, in noteworthy sentences that might have been written with Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* in mind:

We want to put an end to atheism, as Carlyle portrays it, by giving back to man the substance he has lost through religion; not as a divine but as a human substance. . . . We want to sweep away everything that claims to be supernatural and superhuman [*übermenschlich*] and thereby to get rid of untruthfulness, for the root of all untruth and lying is the pretension of the human and the natural to be superhuman and supernatural. (463)

It may be argued that Engels’s notion of what is *übermenschlich* and Nietzsche’s use of the term bear only a superficial resemblance, since Nietzsche meant his *Übermensch* to be non-religious, indeed antireligious, as well as perfectly natural. Yet Engels’s discussion of the residues of the supernatural in Carlyle unmistakably includes the “secular” notion of the *man above man*, the hero. For Engels, this allegedly “natural” hero is just as metaphysical as any entity claiming supernatural origins:

Carlyle has still enough religion to remain in a state of unfreedom; pantheism still recognises something higher than man himself. Hence his longing for a “true aristocracy,” for “heroes”; as if these heroes could at best be more than *men*. (466)

Significantly, Engels does not conceive of “man himself” in terms of a necessary compromise, a down-to-earth acquiescence with austere reality at the expense of the grandeur of heroic fantasy. Rather, the human being is celebrated as being *unsurpassable in magnificence*: “Man’s own substance is far more splendid and sublime than the imaginary substance of any conceivable ‘God,’ who is after all only the more or less indistinct and distorted image of man himself” (465). It seems quite safe to assume that Nietzsche’s

*Übermensch* would have been regarded by Engels as one more exhibit in this stock of possible gods. What is more, as Engels proceeds to ponder the political and social implications of Carlyle's hero, he emphatically impugns the concrete, proto-Nietzschean justification of hierarchy attendant on such a hero:

If he [Carlyle] had understood man as man in all his infinite complexity, he would not have conceived the idea of once more dividing mankind into two lots, sheep and goats, rulers and ruled, aristocrats and the rabble, lords and dolts, he would have seen the proper social function of talent not in ruling by force, but acting as a stimulant and taking the lead. (466)

Though a firm critic of bourgeois parliamentarism, Engels defends the objectives of democracy against Carlyle's attacks:

Mankind is surely not passing through democracy to arrive back eventually at the point of departure. . . . Democracy, true enough, is only a transitional stage, though not towards a new, improved aristocracy, but towards real human freedom; just as the irreligiousness of the age will eventually lead to complete emancipation from everything that is religious, superhuman and supernatural, and not to its restoration. (466)

Finally, Engels puts his finger on the decisive difference between his own critique of capitalism and Carlyle's, a difference that is not confined to the realm of philosophical theory, but comes down to their respective approaches to the social question of property relations. Carlyle's ultimate failure to go beyond the superhuman and affirm the human is ascribed to his inability to envisage a move beyond capital. "Carlyle recognises the inadequacy of 'competition, demand' and 'supply, Mammonism,' etc. . . . So why has he not drawn the straightforward conclusion from all these assumptions and rejected the whole concept of property? How does he think he will destroy 'competition,' 'supply and demand,' Mammonism, etc., as long as the root of all these things, private property, exists?" (466). This decisive allegiance to capital, then, is what conditions, according to Engels, the hero-workshop that Carlyle—and, at a second remove, Nietzsche—advocates.

And so, if Nietzsche regarded the socialist tarantulas as still lurking in the shadow of God, the socialists themselves could just as surely sniff God's aroma emanating from the concept of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*. Strangely, this is a theological debate that is not really about religion, but about its profane uses here on earth. But this, perhaps, is the true nature of all theology. The general perseverance of the superhuman that Marx argued against was also that of the *Nietzschean* superhuman and the elitism-cum-capitalism attendant on it, while the God that Nietzsche sought to expel was very much the persistence of Christianity through socialism. This is not to say that we are permitted to reduce Nietzsche's (proto)existential composite of yearnings and anxieties, like those of his generation and of subsequent ones, to a clever ruse to parry the offensive of socialism. The anxieties were real enough, grounded in the reality of a disenchanted, desacralized world, just as the yearnings for wholeness and meaning were natural and genuine responses to this very same modern "void."<sup>13</sup>

Not so much were the questions as such ideological, but the answers; not the realization that modernity is indeed an ambivalent "progress" is here analyzed as an ideological means of class struggle, but the proposed "solutions" of principled irrationalism, pantheism, vitalism, etc. Having said that, it should be clear that not even the questions raised by incipient existentialism were simply, as often construed, the universal expression of the concerns of "modern man." The death of God, even to the extent that it can be seen as a universal catastrophe, as opposed to an event of a limited, local scale, must be evaluated in its social, rather than metaphysical, context. Not all classes of society responded equally, as abstract "human beings," to the sight of God's corpse. For it must be borne in mind that with God, the ruling classes had lost not only a spiritual helmsman and guarantor of meaning but also a material provider and social patron. To be sure, for the subordinate classes too, the weakening of religion as a mass doctrine was not bereft of painful consequences. But for them the political implications, at least to start with, seemed very different: a great oppressive force was removed from their path, revealing before them the promising

horizon of a better future. God was too much part of the *ancien régime* to be truly grieved for.

At a later historical stage, as God was being replaced ever more effectively in hegemonic doctrines with a social Darwinist Nature, relentlessly weeding the “misfits” and rewarding “the entrepreneurial spirit,” the ruling classes were conspicuously relieved of some of the early existential desolation to reembrace liberal secularism, whereas the masses, “stubbornly” and “ignorantly,” often retained belief in a merciful God, pledged to the underdog. Hence the perplexing phenomenon, throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, of God freely shifting alliances and crossing over to the side of the working class and of colonized “Third World” nations, against Western, secular, market-pantheism, as shown by his support for such diverse movements as those inspired by liberation theology in Africa and Latin America, or by the (indeed quite disparate) theologies of what is generally known as “Islamic fundamentalism.” God nowadays—as borne out perhaps most tellingly by the events of September 11, 2001—fights on both sides of the “clash-of-civilizations” divide. It is a schizophrenic God, rising to “save America” from the terrorist attacks he himself had launched, surviving some 150 years of atheistic onslaught. This is, indeed, a God—*both* aroma *and* shadow.

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#### NOTES

1. A comparable position was expressed by Gilles Deleuze (1985, 142–49).

2. For a book-length exposition of such an approach from a Christian perspective, see Merold Westphal’s accessible, well-written and often compellingly argued study (1998). Here Marx and Nietzsche are frequently linked together as advancing different but nonetheless complementary critiques of Christianity (22–24, 228, 232, 236, 243, 245). For a somewhat similar, if shorter, argument, see Hull (1997).

3. For a persuasive general argument against the ubiquitous attempt on the part of “left Nietzscheans” to reconcile Marxism and Nietzscheanism, stressing their essential incongruity, see Gedō (1998).

4. Quoted in Bendix (1974, 67). It is necessary to clarify that this account of the function of religion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe addresses the hegemonic, institutional role of religion, and does not dispute either the existence or importance of counterhegemonic religious undercurrents, embodied—in the case of England—in such dissenting sects as the Quakers, the Camisards, or the Moravians. For a nuanced discussion of the uses and abuses of religion, as a major instrument for instilling quietism and work discipline in the working class, on the one hand, and as preserving a popular ethos of dissent, on the other, see chaps. 2 and 11 of E. P. Thompson's classic study, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1991).

5. On Nietzsche's appreciation of Hinduism, see Smith (2004) and Etter (1987).

6. Consider also the following commentary:

For the Nazis, especially, the concept of "humanity" is biological nonsense, for man, "species-man," is part of nature. . . . [I]n place of God and any ideas of divine humanity, Nazism puts life itself. This in effect downgrades man: "Man is nothing special, nothing more than a piece of earth," Himmler tells us. (Neocleous 1997, 76)

Elsewhere in this excellent introduction to fascist ideology, the author briefly refers to Nietzsche's important contribution to the making of the fascist world-view (3–13).

7. Two fairly recent studies arguing the case for Marx as a pioneer of ecological thought are Burkett (1999) and Foster (2000).

8. See, for example, Roderick Stackelberg's commendation of Nietzsche as "a clairvoyant critic of impending totalitarianism" (2002, 311).

9. This is also the main weakness in Merold Westphal's account of Nietzsche's critique of religion as targeting the self-righteous vengefulness of the weak. This leads him to conclude that Marx and Nietzsche are complementary: "Taken together, Marx and Nietzsche remind us of this truth. Masters may be wicked sinners, but that does not make their slaves into saints" (1998, 230). In an idealist manner, the author believes that the gist of Nietzsche's opposition to religious *ressentiment* was just such an aversion to the self-deception of the slaves, and he credits Nietzsche with all sorts of stringent moral and intellectual virtues. "Nietzsche," we are at one place assured, "treats honesty and intellectual integrity like some kind of Kantian categorical imperative" (1998, 237). He completely overlooks Nietzsche's *social* commitment to the cause of the "masters" and his interest in guaranteeing their rule; Nietzsche's partial *affirmation* of Christianity as a means for ruling is nowhere noted. Westphal fails to grasp that Nietzsche did not level his critique at some excess of Christian-cum-revolutionary zeal, but rather at the revolutionary project as such. His ultimate aim, in other words, was not to civilize revolution, but to discredit altogether the very movement toward an egalitarian society. It is important to add that, extracted from the counter-revolutionary ideology in which they are firmly embedded, Nietzsche's insights into the potential mendaciousness of radical leaders or preachers, religious or otherwise, and his questioning of the purity of their motives are by no means to be dismissed.

10. Lucio Colletti's exposition of the term (1974, 431).

11. To be sure, Carlyle's critique of capitalism far surpassed anything that Nietzsche ever put forward, if not in regard to substance, then at least as far as apparent sincerity of emotion and intention are concerned. Although a number of Nietzsche's utterances sympathizing with the working class are virtually plagiarized from Carlyle, they never quite generate the same sort of moral indignation, but give the impression of being merely tongue-in-cheek attempts at winning over the workers' trust. For Carlyle's influence on Nietzsche in that respect, compare, for instance, the closing section of Carlyle's *Chartism* (1839), titled "Impossible," in which he analyzes the working-class problem in Europe and proposes the solution of mass emigration, with Nietzsche's section from *Daybreak* (1881), titled "The Impossible Class," in which he analyzes the working-class problem in Europe and proposes the solution of mass emigration. And this "parallel" is by no means a single case.

12. See Nietzsche's distinction between the passive nihilism of the weak, characteristic of mass society, and the active nihilism of the strong, which he saw far more positively (1968, 17, 316–18). For a discussion of the concept of nihilism in Nietzsche see, for example, White (1987).

13. Cf. Fredric Jameson's thoughtful remarks on Nietzschean existentialism as a response to capitalist instrumentalization and the perceived erosion of values during the nineteenth century (1981, 251–52).

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## MARXIST FORUM

Ideological differences have often arisen within and among the parties traditionally associated with what has been called the World Communist Movement. In the wake of the Sino-Soviet split in 1960, the Communist parties in several countries split into two or more competing parties. Events connected with the Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia triggered another series of splits. In most cases, one of the competing groups retained the bulk of the members, while the others vanished from the scene or did not retain enough members to allow them to play any significant role in their countries.

A notable exception was India, where two large parties, each with over a half a million members—the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the slightly smaller Communist Party of India—continue their separate organizations, although they cooperate with each other on most issues.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the European socialist countries brought about the transformation of most of the ruling parties in those countries into successor parties that not only dropped their Marxist-Leninist orientation, but abandoned Marxism and socialism in general.

Parties retaining their Marxist-Leninist orientation, in Eastern and Western Europe and in North America, entered the twenty-first century vastly weakened in membership, the most notable exceptions being in Greece, Cyprus, and Portugal. The two largest Communist parties in Western Europe abandoned their Marxist orientation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The French party retained its name, but the Italian Party changed its name to the Democrats of the Left and ended up supporting the NATO invasion of Yugoslavia. In most cases, however, Communist parties in Western

Europe and North America retained their structures and orientation, although at the cost of a considerable loss of membership.

The Communist Party of Greece has recently taken the initiative in rekindling the international character of the Communist movement by hosting annual conferences of Communist and Workers parties. Seventy-three parties from sixty-three countries attended the most recent conference in Athens, 18–20 November 2005. Although differing in outlook on many questions, they shared opposition to neoliberalism, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the Israeli wall in Palestine. They expressed solidarity with Cuba and Venezuela, support for joint action against the anti-Communist resolution in the Council of Europe, and indicated agreement on most international issues. The next meeting will be hosted by the Communist Party of Portugal in the fall of 2006.

One difference among the parties is over cooperation with social-democratic forces—for example, whether to support the World Social Forum, in which social democrats are a major organizing force. Another concerns solidarity with the Iraqi Communist Party, which, while participating in forming a new government in Iraq, condemns the killing of Iraqis who support the formation of a government under U.S. occupation.

A concern within some Communist parties in developed capitalist countries is the absence in party programs and theoretical discussions of references to the vanguard party and dictatorship of the proletariat. Some critics see this absence as a rightward, opportunistic shift intended to win favor with coalition partners not committed to socialism. They also fear this tendency will lead to the restoration of capitalism in those socialist countries that have switched to mixed market economies as well as blunt the revolutionary spirit of Marxism in the capitalist world.

This Marxist Forum offers two articles reviewing Lenin's theory of the vanguard party and dictatorship of the proletariat. A third article attempts to extend the historical context into the present in order to consider the meaning of these concepts today.

The final item in the Marxist Forum reports on a recent Marxist economics forum in China.

Erwin Marquit

# The Scientific Basis of the Concept of the Vanguard Party of the Proletariat

**Bahman Azad**

The scientific character of Marx and Engels's materialist conception of history was based on their premise that a dialectical correspondence exists between the material processes of nature and the process of the historical development of human society. In other words, the epistemological foundation of historical materialism—that is, its claim to the scientific character of its concepts—is based on the argument that both nature and history obey the same dialectical laws of motion and change, and that they can be apprehended by the human mind. Engels's *Dialectics of Nature* in fact constitutes such an attempt to formulate the general epistemological foundation of historical materialism by demonstrating that the laws of dialectics are immanent in all objective reality, including natural, social, and cognitive processes.

The fact that our subjective thought and the objective world are subject to the same laws, and, hence, too, that in the final analysis they cannot contradict each other in their results, but must coincide, governs absolutely our whole theoretical thought. It is the unconscious and unconditional premise for theoretical thought. (1987b, 544)

In this manner, Marxist epistemology and the scientific status of the materialist conception of history presuppose the dialectical

unity of all nature. The common structure of thought and nature guarantees the possibility of a science that leads to true knowledge of nature and history.

This dialectical conception of nature and the world, however, which in fact constitutes the real foundation of Marxist epistemology, later became a source of much controversy among various Marxists and led to the emergence of divisions within Marxism. The controversy began when Kautsky, Hilferding, Bernstein, and other leaders of the Second International used Engels's epistemological arguments about the dialectics of nature, and above all his *Anti-Dühring* (1887a), to transform Marxist philosophy and epistemology into a deterministic metaphysics that served to justify their reformist policies. Their reformism was based on the premise that the dialectical laws of nature will *inevitably* lead human society to socialism.

This fatalistic attitude is clearly reflected in the writings of both Kautsky and Hilferding. For instance, Kautsky saw the collapse of capitalist society as an *inevitable* natural phenomenon that did not require a *revolutionary* intervention on the part of the Marxists. Rather, for him the outcome of the class struggle was predetermined by the laws of history. His determinism can best be illustrated by the following passage, in which he actually absolves Marxists from the task of organizing a proletarian revolution against the already dying capitalist system.

Capitalist society has failed; its dissolution is a question of time; irresistible economic development leads with natural necessity to the bankruptcy of the capitalist mode of production. The erection of a new form of society in place of the existing one . . . has become something inevitable. (Quoted in Colletti 1972, 55–56)

Hilferding went even a step further than Kautsky. He argued that the scientific character of historical materialism has no intrinsic relationship to the class struggle and the attempt to establish a socialist society. In his preface to *Finance Capital*, he wrote:

It is . . . incorrect . . . to identify Marxism and socialism. Considered logically, as a scientific system alone . . .

Marxism is only a theory of the laws of motion of society. . . . To recognize the validity of Marxism . . . is by no means a task for value judgments, let alone a pointer to practical line of conduct. It is one thing to recognize a necessity, but quite another to place oneself at the service of that necessity. (Quoted in Colletti 1972, 74)

Thus, the class struggle, which was in Marx and Engels's view an objective process based on the antagonistic social relations of production, was reduced at the hands of the leaders of the Second International to a purely subjective and *ethical* element of the superstructure. As a result, an economistic orthodoxy was developed based on the premise of the *direct* and *immediate* reflection of the contradictions of the economic relations onto the political and ideological superstructures. In this economistic orthodoxy, the role of human activity, which constituted the core of Marx and Engels's materialist conception of history, was eliminated in both theory and practice.

The bankruptcy and anti-Marxist nature of this conception of historical materialism, however, as well as the reformist practice that it entailed, were exposed as a result of the crisis of 1914. Marxists were forced to choose between the policies of the Second International, which advocated the support of their capitalist states in their imperialistic wars, and the international workers' movement.

The political crisis, however, involved a yet deeper philosophical crisis. The rejection of the mechanical interpretation of the relationship between Marxist science and class struggle gave rise to the necessity of a reinterpretation of Marxism along lines that could scientifically account for the role of the subjective—that is, political and ideological elements—in the course of the historical development of human society. In fact, it was in the course of the search for answers to the question of the relationship between Marxist science and its class practice that a division emerged between Leninism and Western Marxism, particularly Hegelian Marxism or the “praxis school.”

Grasped in dialectical- and historical-materialist terms, the great fault of the Marxists of the Second International was that they

confused the dialectical-materialist relationship between human beings and nature at the point of production, which involves a progressive development of the productive forces, and which is mediated through different modes of production, on the one hand, and the historical-material processes based on the antagonistic contradictions of the relations within a given mode of production, on the other. They conceived of history as a predetermined sequence of emergence of different modes of production in automatic response to the development of the productive forces.

From this standpoint, the role of the historical class struggle was changed into that of a mere execution of the laws of history. In other words, the Marxists of the Second International dissolved the level of *social* mediation into the level of *historical* mediation. As a result, the productive forces were endowed with an immanent power of self-development independent of, and separate from, the core component of this dialectical process—namely, *living* human labor. Living human labor thus lost its *mediating* role in history at the hands of the theorists of the Second International.

Knowledge developed in this manner was also assumed to reflect *immediately* the dialectical processes within nature and not as processes *mediated* through social contradictions. The task of Marxist scientists was changed to “prophesying” the inevitable emergence of the socialist society and demonstrating how the blind forces of nature operate in human society. A Feuerbachian immediacy was thus established between human beings and nature in the form of a passive conformity to natural laws. History was turned into a playground for natural laws, and humans were once again reduced to *executors* of their predetermined destiny.

In response to this mechanical interpretation of history, with its reduction of the dialectical process of double-mediation into one blind process, the revolutionary Marxists issued a call to return to Hegel. The aim of this new tendency was to reestablish the dialectical integrity of Marxism. The call was based on the realization of the need for a correct formulation of the relationship between the two mediational processes in history and in society.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, the question became one of determining the

relationship between Marxist science (dialectical materialism), on the one hand, and its political class practice, on the other.

***The praxis school and the “historicist” interpretation of Marxism***

The victory of the Bolsheviks in 1917 gave rise to a new theoretical current among Marxists against the “orthodox,” metaphysical Marxism of the Second International. For the proponents of this theoretical current, with which the names of Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, and Karl Korsch are associated, the victory of Bolsheviks “represented the triumph of consciousness, action, and organization over the iron laws of history” (Callinicos 1976, 70). The Bolshevik victory, for them, proved the inadequacy of the mechanical materialism of the theorists of the Second International, and thus established the need for a reformulation of the principles of historical materialism in a dialectical, nonevolutionist manner. The key element in the arguments of these theorists was a firm rejection of the natural determinism that characterized both the theoretical and political premises of “orthodoxy,” and a “return to the Hegelian dialectics.”

The Hegelian Marxists did not aim their criticism, however, so much at the leaders of the Second International, such as Kautsky, as at Engels’s dialectical philosophy of nature. Unlike Lenin, who defended Engels’s dialectical conception of nature as the epistemological foundation of Marxist science and political class practice, the Hegelian Marxists considered the very notion of dialectics of nature as the source of all determinism and reformism of the leaders of the Second International. In essence, the Hegelian Marxists attempted to reinterpret historical materialism along *antinaturalist* lines (Callinicos 1983, 72).<sup>2</sup>

Basic to the antinaturalists’ arguments was the denial of the “reflection theory of knowledge” advocated by Engels in his *Anti-Dühring* and adopted by Lenin in his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1972a). The “reflection theory of knowledge” is based on Engels’s argument that it is “self-evident that the products of the human brain, being in the last analysis also products of nature, do not contradict the rest of nature’s interconnections but are in correspondence with them” (1987a, 34). On this account, Lenin’s

*Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* has been heavily criticized by the Hegelian Marxists and praxis theorists, who have labeled the dialectical assertion by Engels and Lenin that the theory of reflection constitutes the core of Marxist philosophy, as well as the source of its internal consistency, as “mechanistic,” “dogmatic,” “metaphysical,” and, in the words of Petrović, “incompatible with Marx’s conception of man as a creative being of praxis.”<sup>3</sup>

Lukács, for his part, was convinced that “mechanical fatalism” is a logical consequence of the theory of reflection, and that this theory leads to a “deeply abhorrent” passivity in the face of external events. According to him, the view that ideas reflect the processes of reality undermines “the dialectical unity of thought and being upon which Marxist theory is based; the priority of being to consciousness which reflection theory presupposes robs man of the creative, activist role which is surely the essence of Marxism” (Hoffman 1975, 74).

Gramsci’s rejection of the theory of reflection goes even a step further. He denies the existence of a reality independent of human consciousness and activity. Scientific theories, according to him, do not have any truth-value independent of the circumstances of their formulation (Gramsci 1976, 367–68, 440–48). This is based on Gramsci’s conviction, which he shared with the rest of the praxis theorists, that social and cultural phenomena cannot be explained by universal causal laws. Like the other Hegelian Marxists, he insisted that social and cultural phenomena are unique and historically specific experiences that cannot be included in the deductive systems of the natural sciences. Natural science, according to him, cannot be extended to the study of human beings and their social and cultural world, because we are confronted in the latter with humankind’s own creations and not with natural phenomena (Callinicos 1983, 71–72).

In this manner, dialectics, as the “general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought” (Engels, 1987a, 131) was rejected by the praxis theorists. It could not serve as the epistemological foundation of Marxist science. For Lukács and the other theorists of the praxis school, dialectics was reduced to a method that applied only to human society and practice. Thus, in

*History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács stated that the dialectical method must be limited to the realm of history and society: “The misunderstandings that arise from Engels’ account of dialectics can in the main be put down to the fact that Engels—following Hegel’s mistaken lead—extended the method to apply also to nature” (1971, 24).

***“Return to Hegel”: The proletariat and the identity of subject and object***

Because the praxis theorists had rejected the dialectics of nature as the epistemological foundation of Marxist science, the issue of the scientific character of historical materialism became the central problem for which they had to find a resolution. Denied a dialectical foundation in nature, Marxist science had to find a new epistemological base. This was achieved through a return to Hegel. The Hegelian Marxists revived Hegel’s concept of the *identity* of the subject and object as the basis of all social reality. They used this concept as a lens through which to view the two main problems that constituted the core problems of Marxist philosophy after the collapse of the Second International: the relation between *theory* and *practice*, and the relation between Marxist *science* and the *reality* that it seeks to explain. In other words, they raised the question of the justification for Marxism to call itself *scientific socialism* (Callinicos 1976, 17). It is this latter question with which we are concerned here.

Following Hegel, Lukács and other praxis theorists argued that an object that is completely separate from the subject is incomprehensible. For knowledge to be real, then, an underlying unity must exist between the subject and the object, when the subject can see the object as its own creation. As Korsch put it, true knowledge requires that there exist the “coincidence of consciousness and reality” (1970, 77).

For Lukács, however, a mere identity of the subject and object in itself was not enough for a scientific comprehension of the world. Rather, such comprehension resulted when reality was perceived as a *totality*. As he himself put it, to leave the immediate appearances and the “empirical reality behind can only mean that the objects of the empirical world are to be understood as aspects

of a totality, i.e. as the aspects of a total social situation caught up in the process of historical change” (Lukács 1971, 162). The truth of knowledge derives from the fact that it looks at phenomena as parts of a social whole, and this applies also to Marxism.

It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of totality . . . *The primacy of the category of totality is the bearer of the principle of revolution in science.* (27)

Advocating the “primacy of the category of totality” does not in itself constitute a Hegelian bias in Lukács. Marx, Engels, and Lenin agreed that the starting point of historical materialism must be the *totality* of the relations of a mode of production. What makes Lukács’s concept of totality Hegelian is the fact that it is conceived as the “creation” of a “total subject,” and not as the product of a historical process of mediation between humans and nature through productive labor.

Reality can only be understood and penetrated as a totality, and only a subject which is itself a totality is capable of this penetration. It was not for nothing that the young Hegel erected his philosophy on the principle that “truth must be understood and expressed not only as substance but also as subject.” (39)

This *immediate identity* of the subject and object constitutes the foundation of Lukács’s and all Hegelian Marxists’ epistemology. True knowledge is the knowledge of the “total subject-object” of its own being. According to Lukács, “historical materialism . . . means the *self-knowledge of capitalist society*” obtained by the proletariat (229). Only the proletariat, as “the identical subject-object of the social and historical processes of evolution,” is capable of such knowledge (149).

Bourgeois philosophy and consciousness, on the other hand, are, according to Lukács, incapable of comprehending reality as a social whole. This is because the bourgeois perception of the capitalist social system is a contradictory and *reified* one. It can only see society as an aggregation of discrete things, bound together by

the relations of the market, rather than by any sort of conscious control. This reified structure masks the real social relations from bourgeois consciousness. The best bourgeois thought and philosophy can do is to grasp portions of reality in a purely formal manner.

This rationalisation of the world appears to be complete, it seems to penetrate the very depth of man's physical and psychic nature. It is limited, however, by its own formalism. That is to say, the rationalisation of isolated aspects of life results in the creation of—formal—laws. All these things do join together into what seems to the superficial observer to constitute a unified system of general “laws,” But the disregard of the concrete aspects of the subject matter of these laws . . . makes itself felt in the incoherence of the system in fact. (101)

This reification, which transforms the objective relations between men into formal relations between discrete things, makes it impossible for bourgeois philosophy to comprehend society as a social whole, as a totality. The same reification process, however, has the opposite effect on the proletariat. While it plays a “masking role” for the former, it has a revealing effect for the latter. This reification leads the proletariat into a comprehension of society as a historically evolved totality. This is because, as Callinicos has put it, for Lukács the heart of reification lies in the transformation of worker into a thing—that is, of labor power into a commodity. The working class, in other words, is the identical subject-object of bourgeois society, both an absolute object, deprived of any human status, and at the same time the core of the mediations constitutive of the totality (1983, 77).

In this manner, for Lukács, the alienated position of the proletariat in capitalist social relations enables it to obtain a true knowledge, not only of the capitalist system, but also of the nature of class society in general. It makes it a universal class, a total subject, that is incapable of liberating itself as a class unless it simultaneously abolishes class society as such (1971, 70). It is for this reason that the consciousness of the proletariat, which Lukács refers to as “the last class consciousness in the history of mankind,”

must both lay bare the nature of society and achieve an increasingly inward fusion of theory and practice. “Ideology” for the proletariat is no banner to follow into battle, nor is it a cover for its true objectives: it is the objective and the weapon itself. (70)

Lukács’s identification of subject and object, of alienation and consciousness, is a clear return to Hegel’s concept of the absolute subject.<sup>4</sup> As he stated in *History and Class Consciousness*, “it appears as if the logico-metaphysical construction of the *Phenomenology of Mind* had found its authentic realisation in the existence and the consciousness of the proletariat” (xxiii).

### ***Historicism and the scientific character of Marxism***

The praxis theorists’ absolute rejection of the naturalism of the Second International and their “return to Hegel” was in fact a return to a concept of dialectics that had as its core a “universal subject”; only here the “universal subject” was the proletariat, whose being and alienation was the source of both historical transformation and scientific knowledge. In other words, the proletariat, as the total subject-object of history, became the one element that unified science with history. A scientific understanding of reality could only be possible through the identity of the subject and object in the being of the proletariat.

This identification of the epistemological foundation of science with the process of class struggle, which was achieved through the mediation of a Hegelian concept of *class* as the “total subject” of history, is what has been called “historicism.” According to the historicist conception of science, a theory acquires scientific validity to the degree to which it reflects the reality of the being of a particular class in a particular epoch. In other words, a theory is scientific to the extent that it reflects the consciousness of a class and makes explicit what is implicit in the practice of that class. Sciences do not derive their epistemological status from the construction of theories by means of scientific methods, but from their role in the formation of the worldviews of social classes. In this manner, for historicists, the sciences are transformed into ideologies or superstructures (Gramsci 1976, 368) whose validity

depends on the changing course of history and the outcome of the class struggle.

The Hegelian Marxists understood Marxism in the same historicist manner. For them, Marxism is scientific because it reflects the consciousness of the proletariat. Its scientific validity consists in the historical function it performs in articulating the consciousness and political aspirations of the proletariat. The scientific character of Marxism is not based on the development of theories through the utilization of its scientific method, but on the consciousness of the proletariat as the historical subject (see Callinicos 1976, 17–18). This is true not only for Lukács, but also for Gramsci.

Like Lukács and Korsch, Gramsci believes in the identity of subject and object as the source of historical reality. Knowledge as a product of this identity only reflects the needs and interests of the knowing subject. As he emphasized, “our knowledge of things is nothing other than ourselves, our needs and our interests” (1976, 368). By the same token, Marxism is a theory that renders explicit the needs and interests of the proletariat.

If [Marx] has analysed reality exactly then he has done nothing other than systematise rationally and coherently what the historical agents of this reality felt and still feel in a confused and instinctive way, and of which they have a clearer consciousness as result of the hostile critique. (392)

While for Lukács, however, the consciousness of the proletariat was a direct result of the latter’s alienation in the contradictory capitalist relations, for Gramsci these contradictions actually hindered the objectivity of the proletariat’s knowledge. Only through an elimination of the contradictions of capitalism and the establishment of a communist society could such objective knowledge be attained.

Man knows objectively in so far as knowledge is real for the whole human race *historically* unified in a single unitary cultural system. But this process of historical unification takes place through the disappearance of the internal contradictions which tear apart human society, while these contradictions

themselves are the condition for the formation of groups and for the birth of ideologies which are not concretely universal but are immediately rendered transient by the practical origin of their substance. There exists therefore a struggle for objectivity (to free oneself from partial and fallacious ideologies) and this struggle is the same as the struggle for the cultural unification of the human race. (445)

Thus the process of scientific production is reduced to the process of unification of the subject in history.

Objective always means “humanly objective” which can be held to correspond exactly to “historically subjective”: in other words, objective would mean “universal subjective.” . . . What the idealists call “spirit” is not a point of departure but a point of arrival, it is the *ensemble* of the superstructures moving towards concrete and objectively universal unification. (445–46)

By making “universal unification” of the subject the condition of objective knowledge, Gramsci is actually going against Marx’s premise that the task of science is to reveal the hidden structures and relations of objective reality by penetrating beyond mere appearances. For Gramsci, no such objective structures lie beyond the subject waiting to be discovered by the scientific method.

The idea of “objective” in metaphysical materialism would appear to mean an objectivity that exists even apart from man; but when one affirms that a reality would exist even if man did not, one is either speaking metaphorically or one is falling into a form of mysticism. (446)

Ideologies and fallacious appearances are only a result of the internal division of the subject itself and can only be eliminated through a proletarian revolution. Marxism is thus, for Gramsci, a science to the degree to which it is able to *unify* the human race. The measure of its scientific character is not its “method,” but its appeal to the revolutionary classes. The more it is able to mobilize the masses behind it, the more an ideology is proven to be “objective.” This is because such a mass mobilization cannot just happen “arbitrarily,” or as a result of “the formally constructive will of a

personality or a group which puts it forward solely on the basis of its own fanatical philosophical or religious convictions,” but rather takes place when an ideology is able to “respond to the demands of a complex organic period of history” (341). “Mass adhesion or non-adhesion,” argues Gramsci, “is the real critical test of the rationality and historicity” of Marxism as an ideology (341).

In this manner, Gramsci’s denial of the existence of any reality beyond the immediate needs and activities of the proletariat leaves him with no choice but to ground the objectivity of science upon a historical teleology. The objectively real thus becomes a historical goal for the subject to be attained only in communist society.

It is necessary to clarify one additional point with regard to the works of Lukács and Gramsci—the issue of the role of the vanguard party. By now it must be quite clear that the historicist interpretations of Marxism by Lukács and Gramsci do not leave room for any *scientific* function for the vanguard party of the proletariat. In rejecting this scientific role, however, each of these thinkers adopted a slightly different approach.

For Gramsci, who sees objectivity in the universal unification of the subject, the role of the party is defined in terms of facilitating this unification. In this sense, the political role of the party extends into its scientific role. So far as the party’s theoretical activity is concerned, it is reduced to a “clearer” and “more coherent” articulation of the potentials of the proletariat.

If the problem of the identification of theory and practice is to be raised, it can be done in this sense, that one can construct, on a specific practice, a theory which, by coinciding and identifying itself with the decisive elements of the practice itself, can accelerate the historical process that is going on, rendering practice more homogeneous, more coherent, more efficient in all its elements, and thus, in other words, developing its potential to the maximum. (1976, 365)

In this manner, for Gramsci the party becomes a rationalizing element, the historical task of which is to justify the actions of “practical forces” in order that they might become “more efficient and expansive.” Hence, “the identification of theory and practice

is a critical act, through which practice is demonstrated rational and necessary” (365).

Lukács’s case is somewhat different. While Gramsci emphasized the relation between theory and practice more along political lines, Lukács defined the issue more in philosophical terms. For the latter, scientific knowledge can be attained only through the identity of subject and object that is achieved in the being of the proletariat. In this sense, the proletariat is already the carrier of scientific consciousness due to its position within the capitalist relations of production. Thus, for Lukács, the historical task of the party becomes that of “spreading” this consciousness among those sections of the proletariat that may not reach the consciousness appropriate to their position. The role of the party, therefore, is an *ideological* one aimed at compensating for the contingent failures of the proletariat to arrive at full consciousness.

Thus Lukács transforms the political class struggle into an ideological one, a struggle that is fought at the level of class consciousness. Consciousness, in fact, becomes the only weapon at the hands of the proletariat in its struggle against the bourgeoisie. In his view,

the only effective superiority of the proletariat, its only decisive weapon, is its ability to see the social totality as a concrete historical totality; to see the reified forms as processes between men, to see the immanent meaning of history that only appears negatively in the contradictions of abstract forms, to raise its positive side to consciousness and to put it into practice. (197)

It is in its attempt to put its consciousness into practice that the proletariat forms its vanguard party. This party is solely a creation of the proletariat’s free and conscious act and cannot be imposed upon it from outside. As Arato and Breins have put it, for Lukács the party “is an independent *Gestalt* of proletarian class consciousness in its most advanced form, or more precisely, of the objectively highest possible level of class consciousness at any given moment” (1979, 157). Thus, it is the “total subject”—that is, consciousness that, as the driving force of history, both changes the objective reality and, at the same time, creates the vehicles and

means by which these changes are brought about. “‘Ideology’ for the proletariat is no banner to follow into battle. Nor is it a cover for its true objectives: it is the objective and the weapon itself” (Lukács 1971, 70). For Lukács, the return to Hegel is complete.

### *Marxism vs. historicism*

In the hands of the Hegelian Marxists, what started as a rejection of Engels’s dialectics of nature and the reflection theory of knowledge resulted in a complete reversal of the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels and a complete return to the subjectivist dialectics of Hegel. The historicists’ identification of the problem of the relation between science and its object, on the one hand, and the relation between theory and practice, which is centered around the category of the “total subject,” on the other, was possible only through a complete return to the Hegelian dialectics, because, for Hegel, reality was based only on an *immediate identity* (as opposed to a *mediated unity*) of subject and object. In other words, the question of the epistemological foundation of science could be reduced to the level of subjective practice only when the subject was taken in a Hegelian sense: as a subject that had the object as a part of its own being, as an *absolute* subject.

As a result of such Hegelian interpretations, the field of class struggle—that is, the level of social mediation—was expanded to include also the process of the historical mediation between humans and nature. In other words, the whole process of the historical development of productive forces was collapsed into the field of class antagonisms. The proletariat, as an agent of class struggle in capitalist society, was transformed into the grand “subject” of *all history*. In the same way, science, which Marx considered to be a product of the mutual interaction between human beings and nature through productive labor, was transformed into the ideology of various classes in struggle. Such a move, of course, was not simply a rejection of interpretations of Marx by Engels and Lenin, but of Marx’s own dialectical concepts as well—a rejection that is not without its own contradictions.

First, it is a well-established fact that for Marx the proletariat is not a *creator* of capitalism, but rather a *creation*, a *result*, of the

historical mediation process that had culminated in the capitalist relations of production. For him, capitalist production relations, as a whole, are beyond the proletariat's immediate existence and are therefore external to it. Thus, the proletariat's consciousness of the capitalist relations cannot be the *immediate* consciousness that the Hegelian subject requires, but an acquired one.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, even if we accept Lukács's argument that the proletariat is the subject-object of capitalism, there is still no explanation as to how it can transcend its own being and develop something other than a capitalist consciousness. Even for Hegel, the subject through its alienation becomes conscious of what it *is*, and not what it *prefers* to be. In order to determine its place in the capitalist relations of production within a historical perspective, the proletariat must be able not only to transcend its own immediate being, but to transcend the capitalist social relations as well, and see them as a product of the process of the historical mediation between man and nature. This, of course, is not possible for the proletariat even within a Hegelian scheme, because the Hegelian subject is also limited by its own being. Thus, even within such a scheme, the conception of the proletariat as the subject-object of history is self-contradictory. Lukács's attempt to resolve the contradictions of bourgeois philosophy "from within the problematic of the bourgeois society itself," is thus contradictory and unacceptable (Callinicos 1976, 26).

Gramsci, however, avoided this contradiction by arguing that the proletariat's consciousness is the result not of its alienation, but of the *negation of its alienation*—that is, a result of what he calls its "unification." However, this leads him only one step beyond Lukács. By identifying "objectivity" with "unanimity," Gramsci is in effect saying that science is only possible under communism. But he is unable to demonstrate how the proletariat, or at least its vanguard party, is capable of developing any socialist consciousness—and even fight for socialism—under the contradictory capitalist relations of production. In other words, he is unable to account for Marxism itself. The best he can do is to attribute the communist consciousness of the vanguard to its being "ahead of its time."<sup>6</sup>

Thus with Gramsci the proletariat is trapped in a vicious circle. It cannot achieve objectivity until it is unified through the establishment of communism, and it cannot establish communism unless it *objectively* fights for it through its *political* class struggle.

Such a dichotomous conception of objectivity, which divides history into objective (communist) and nonobjective (precommunist) stages, is a result of Gramsci's rejection of the existence of any objective reality outside of the unity of the subject itself. This, of course, is contrary to Marx's conception of science. For Marx, the objectivity of science is based both on the separation and the dialectical unity of subject and object. In fact, the very possibility of science is based on this separation. According to him "all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided" (1998, 804).

Thus for Marx, the objectivity of science is not based on the success of the proletarian revolution, but on the ability of the scientist to penetrate behind the appearances of things and to grasp the real mechanism at work in objective reality. Such a conception of science is *developmental* and not dichotomous. It is based on the recognition of the dialectical interaction between humans and nature through the process of production.

In this manner, the praxis theorists' "return to Hegel" was only possible through a rejection of the scientific character of Marxism itself. The theoretical and practical contradictions they faced proved that a mechanical rejection of the dialectical reality of nature—like the mechanical application of the dialectics of nature to human history by the leaders of the Second International—cannot but violate the principles of dialectical and historical materialism that were developed by Marx and Engels, and were further elaborated by Lenin in his theory of the vanguard party of the proletariat.

### ***Leninism and the relation between Marxist science and class struggle***

Unlike the Hegelian Marxists, who blamed Engels's views on the dialectics of nature as the source of the reformism of the leaders of the Second International, Lenin actually took it upon

himself to demonstrate that Engels's concepts were correct, and that the problem resided in these leaders' undialectical interpretation of Engels's dialectical concepts. Both his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and *Philosophical Notebooks* are clear reflections of Lenin's attempt to prove the dialectical nature of the natural, historical, and cognitive processes. This concern is evident in the following passage from Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*:

The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts . . . the *essence* . . . of dialectics. That is precisely how Hegel, too, puts the matter. . . .

The identity of opposites (it would be more correct, perhaps, to say their "unity" . . .) is the recognition (discovery) of the contradictory, *mutually exclusive* and opposite tendencies in *all* phenomena and processes of nature (*including* mind and society). The condition for the knowledge of all processes of the world in their "*self-movement*," in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites. Development is the "struggle" of opposites. (1972b, 359–60)

It is important to note here that Lenin is describing in dialectical terms *both* the ontological process of development in nature *and* history through the unity and struggle of opposites, and the epistemological process of apprehending this developmental process. By recognizing the unity of dialectical and historical materialism in this manner, Lenin agrees with Engels that dialectical materialism "no longer needs any philosophy standing above the other sciences," and that as a result of the unity of dialectical and historical materialism, what remains from the previous philosophy is "the science of thought and its laws" (Engels 1987a, 26).<sup>7</sup> Thus, in addition to a process of development through the struggle of opposites, which "proceeds in spirals,"

dialectics, as understood by Marx, and also in conformity with Hegel, includes what is now called the theory of knowledge, or epistemology, which too, must regard its subject matter historically, studying and generalizing the

origin and development of knowledge, the transition from *non-knowledge* to knowledge. (Lenin 1974b, 54)

In this sense, then, dialectics includes two distinct processes at once: an objective and a subjective process. While the first process involves the development of the productive forces through class struggle, the second involves the development of the scientific knowledge of the laws of this objective process through dialectical thought. In the latter process, the reflection of the dialectical processes of nature and history in thought leads to the development of the scientific concepts of historical materialism.

Lenin's contribution in this regard, however, is not so much a result of his recognition of this double mediation process itself, as it is of his dialectical conception of the relationship between the process of class struggle, on the one hand, and that of scientific production as an aspect of the historical development of the productive forces, on the other.

Unlike the theoreticians of the Second International, who reduced *social* into *historical* mediation, Lenin maintained the distinction between the two levels, and attempted to conceptualize them in a *dialectical* fashion. And the key element in this dialectical relationship is Lenin's concept of the "vanguard party" of the proletariat.

Lenin's break with the evolutionist approach of the Second International was based on his return to Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach," which stressed the centrality of human social practice and labor as the means for the historical development of human society (1976). On the basis of this dialectical premise, Lenin rejected any argument that advocated the *inevitability* of the collapse of capitalism and the emergence of socialism independently of the process of class struggle. For Lenin, neither the presence of favorable *objective* conditions alone, nor the mere existence of *subjective* will on the part of the oppressed classes, would automatically lead to a revolution. As he himself emphasized, "To the Marxist it is indisputable that a revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation; furthermore, it is not every revolutionary situation that leads to revolution" (1974a, 213).

For a revolution to occur, a combination of both objective and subjective conditions must be present. In his article “The Collapse of the Second International,” Lenin describes the objective conditions that are necessary for the existence of a “revolutionary situation.”

What, generally speaking, are the symptoms of a revolutionary situation? We shall certainly not be mistaken if we indicate the following three major symptoms: (1) when it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the “upper classes,” a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes bursts forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for “the lower classes not to want” to live in the old way; it is also necessary that “the upper classes should be unable” to live in the old way; (2) when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual; (3) when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who uncomplainingly allow themselves to be robbed in “peace time,” but, in turbulent times, are drawn both by all the circumstances of the crisis and by the “upper classes” themselves into independent historical action. (1974a, 213–14)

In the absence of these objective circumstances, which, according to Lenin, “are independent of the will, not only of individual groups and parties, but even of individual classes, a revolution, as a general rule, is impossible” (214). At the same time, a mere presence of these conditions is not sufficient to produce a revolution:

It is not every revolutionary situation that gives rise to a revolution; revolution arises only out of a situation in which the above-mentioned objective changes are accompanied by a subjective change, namely the ability of the revolutionary *class* to take revolutionary mass action *strong* enough to break (or dislocate) the old government, which never, not even in a period of crisis, “falls,” if it is not toppled over. (214)

***The mediating role of the party in the process of class struggle***

The historical task of bringing about the *subjective changes* that are necessary for transforming an objective “revolutionary situation” into an actual revolutionary process, Lenin maintains, falls on the shoulders of revolutionary Marxists and their political party. According to him,

no socialist has ever guaranteed that this war (and not the next one), that today’s revolutionary situation (and not tomorrow’s) will produce a revolution. What we are discussing is the indisputable and fundamental duty of all socialists—that of revealing to the masses the existence of a revolutionary situation, explaining its scope and depth, arousing the proletariat’s revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary determination, helping it to go over to revolutionary action, and forming, for that purpose, organizations suited to the revolutionary situation.

No influential or responsible socialist has ever dared to feel doubt that this is the duty of the socialist parties. (1974, 216–17)

According to Lenin, the social-democratic parties of the Second International, as a result of their “failure to perform” this important duty, guaranteed “their treachery, political death, renunciation of their own role and desertion to the side of the bourgeoisie” (217).

However, in Lenin’s view, *active* intervention of the “vanguard party of the proletariat” was necessary for the revolutionary process to succeed. This active intervention involved two main levels of *organization* and *political consciousness*. At the level of organization, the vanguard was charged with the task of bringing together and organizing the revolutionary class in its struggle against the bourgeoisie. He defined as the “most imperative” task of the Social Democrats and the party that of establishing “*an organisation of revolutionaries* capable of lending energy, stability, and continuity to the political struggle” (1973b, 446). According to him, “In our time, only a party that will *organise* really *nation-wide* exposures can become the vanguard of the revolutionary forces” (431).

When, in the pursuit of a single aim and animated by a single will, millions alter the forms of their communication and their behaviour, change the place and the mode of their activities, change their tools and weapons in accordance with the changing conditions and the requirements of the struggle—all this is genuine organisation. (1974a, 253)

Without such a genuine organization, “masses lack” the “unity of will” that is necessary for a successful revolution (240).<sup>8</sup> It is one of the historical tasks of the vanguard party of the proletariat to guarantee that such an organization is developed among the revolutionary classes.

The other failure of the theoreticians of the Second International, according to Lenin, was a result of their mechanical belief that the development of productive forces would automatically translate itself into a *spontaneous* revolutionary consciousness among the proletariat as a condition for the overthrow of the capitalist system. Such an assumption was totally rejected by him as incorrect and nondialectical.

The spontaneous working-class movement is by itself able to create (and inevitably does create) only trade-unionism, and working-class trade-unionist politics is precisely working-class bourgeois politics. The fact that the working class participates in the political struggle, and even in political revolution, does not make its politics Social-Democratic politics.<sup>9</sup> (1973b, 437)

To nurture the idea of the possibility of a “spontaneous” *socialist* consciousness among the proletariat is tantamount to advocating the existence of an *unmediated* and direct relationship between the *thinking* and *being* of the working class. This, of course, is against the principles of materialist dialectics. Referring to the workers’ strikes in Russia during the 1890s, Lenin argued that for workers’ consciousness to be “Social-Democratic,” it would have to be based on knowledge of the totality of the capitalist social relations. Left in their *immediate* place in the capitalist relations of production, the workers were not, and could not be, conscious of the

irreconcilable antagonism of the interests in the whole of the modern political and social system.

Working-class consciousness cannot be genuinely political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to *all* cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter *what class* is affected. . . . The consciousness of the working masses cannot be genuine class-consciousness, unless the workers learn, from concrete, and above all from topical, political facts and events to observe *every* other social class and *all* the manifestations of its intellectual, ethical, and political life; unless they learn to apply in practice the materialist analysis and the materialist estimate of *all* aspects of the life and activity of *all* classes, strata, and groups of the population. (412)

Such a comprehensive understanding of the totality of the relationships of the capitalist system can only be brought to the workers from outside their *immediate* position in the capitalist relations of production.

Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*, that is, only from outside of the economic struggle, from outside of the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of *all* classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of interrelations between *all* classes. (422)

Therefore it becomes the task of the vanguard party of the proletariat to bring revolutionary political consciousness—i.e., the Social-Democratic consciousness, which is immediately unavailable to the proletariat as a result of its being entangled in the capitalist relations of production—to the workers in order to facilitate the revolutionary process.

Social-Democracy leads the struggle of the working class, not only for better terms for the sale of labour-power, but for the abolition of the social system that compels

the propertyless to sell themselves to the rich. Social-Democracy represents the working class, not in its relation to a given group of employers alone, but in its relation to all classes of modern society and to the state as an organised political force. . . . We must take up actively the political education of the working class and the development of its political consciousness. (400)

On the basis of this dialectical understanding of the *mediating* role of the vanguard party of the proletariat in the process of class struggle, Lenin calls upon all revolutionary Social-Democrats to “‘*go among all classes of population*’ as theoreticians, as propagandists, as agitators, and as organisers” (425) and “dispatch units of their army *in all directions*” in order to “bring political knowledge to the *workers*” (422). The strength and the weakness of the working-class movement, and the success of the revolutionary process for socialism, depend, in Lenin’s view, exactly on the degree to which the vanguard party of the proletariat succeeds in performing its historical task of organizing the proletariat and elevating its class struggle to the level of a revolutionary political struggle against the capitalist system as a whole. According to him, “the strength of the present-day movement lies in the awakening of the masses (principally, the industrial proletariat), and that its weakness lies in the lack of consciousness and initiative among the revolutionary leaders” (373).

This shows . . . that *all* worship of the spontaneity of the working-class movement, all belittling of the role of “the conscious element,” of the role of Social-Democracy, *means, quite independently of whether he who belittles that role desires it or not, a strengthening of the influence of bourgeois ideology upon the workers*. All those who talk about “overrating the importance of ideology,” about exaggerating the role of the conscious element, etc., imagine that the labour movement pure and simple can elaborate, and will elaborate, an independent ideology for itself, if

only the workers “wrest their fate from the hands of the leaders.” But this is a profound mistake. (383)

The political-ideological intervention of the vanguard party of the proletariat in the objective process of class struggle thus constitutes the second integral aspect of Lenin’s dialectical understanding of the social mediation process:

Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the *only* choice is—either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course. . . . Hence to belittle the socialist ideology *in any way*, to *turn aside from it in the slightest degree* means to strengthen bourgeois ideology. (384)

### ***The scientific-theoretical role of the party***

For Lenin, the mediating role of the party is not limited to its objective intervention in the actual process of the class struggle. For the party to be able to perform this revolutionary function successfully, it must also be equipped with the most advanced scientific theory of historical development of human society. As Marx and Engels have emphasized, although people make their own history, they do not necessarily make it according to their wishes. Only a scientific understanding of the laws of nature and history will enable them to realize their objectives. The case of the proletariat is, of course, no exception from this general rule. It is for this reason that Lenin has emphasized in his most celebrated statement that, “without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement” (1973b, 369).<sup>10</sup> For Lenin, “*the role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory.*” According to him, anybody “who realises how enormously the modern working-class movement has grown and branched out will understand what a reserve of theoretical forces and political (as well as revolutionary) experience is required to carry out this task” (370). In this manner, following Engels, Lenin maintains that theoretical class struggle is an integral part of a revolutionary struggle for socialism.

Let us quote what Engels said in 1874 concerning the significance of theory in the Social-Democratic movement. Engels recognizes, *not two* forms of the great struggle of Social-Democracy (political and economic), as is the fashion among us, *but three, placing the theoretical struggle on a par with the first two.* (370)<sup>11</sup>

The significance of Lenin's argument, again, is not so much the recognition of the role of Marxist scientific theory—historical materialism—in the revolutionary processes within the present capitalist society, as is his *dialectical* recognition of the role of the vanguard party of the proletariat in the development of the scientific theory. This is directly related to his rejection of the “spontaneity” of socialist consciousness among the proletariat.

Lenin's theory about the centrality of the role of the party in the process of scientific-theoretical production is based on his correct recognition that socialism, as a doctrine, has historically developed independently of the working class. In this regard, he shares Kautsky's view that

socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions. Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. Indeed, modern economic science is as much a condition for socialist production as, say, modern technology, and the proletariat can create neither the one or the other, no matter how much it may desire to do so; both arise out of the modern social process. The vehicle of science is not the proletariat, but the *bourgeois intelligentsia*. . . . Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without . . . and not something that arose within it spontaneously. (Quoted in Lenin 1973b, 383–84)

In his “The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism,” Lenin demonstrates how in fact Marxist science is “the legitimate successor to the best that man produced in the nineteenth century, as represented by German philosophy, English political economy, and French socialism,” all being the products

of bourgeois culture and society (1973a, 23–24). The revolutionary character of Marxism, however, derives not only from its being the most *advanced* theory developed in the context of the bourgeois society, but also from its serving the interests of the *proletariat as the most revolutionary class* in that society—a class whose emancipation lies in the resolution of the contradictions of capitalist production relations.

The vanguard party of the proletariat thus becomes the historical means by which the proletariat *appropriates* the most advanced scientific achievements of bourgeois society and turns them into a powerful weapon for its own class struggle against its exploiters. Through this appropriation, such scientific achievements are placed at the service, not of maintaining the present relations and social relations of production of capitalism, but of furthering the development of the productive forces of society through revolutionary practice. In this manner, the vanguard party of the proletariat acts not only as a medium for liberation of the working class itself, but also as a medium of the liberation of science from the limitation of the bourgeois relations of production.

The most crucial point here is that it is only through the appropriation by the vanguard party of the proletariat that science—and, in particular, Marxism—becomes transformed into a material force for the liberation of humanity. Marxism is the *most advanced* theory precisely because it is “the theory of the proletarian movement for emancipation” (Lenin 1974a, 222).<sup>12</sup>

At the hands of the vanguard party of the proletariat, Marxist science becomes capable of providing a clear theoretical understanding of “the relationships between *all* the various classes of modern society,” not as “obtained from any book,” but as obtained “from the living examples” of the political life of the most revolutionary class in modern human history (1973b, 413).

In this manner, the vanguard party of the proletariat constitutes for Lenin both the *ontological* and *epistemological* foundation of the proletarian struggle for emancipation and socialism. This *dual* mediational role of the vanguard party—*class political organization* and *scientific production*—is the cornerstone of Lenin’s contribution to the Marxist science of historical materialism. Through the

concept of the vanguard party of the proletariat, Lenin links the two distinct *dialectical* processes of *social mediation* (class struggle) and *historical mediation* (the development of the productive forces). The vanguard party, while leading the revolutionary class struggle of the proletariat, is the medium of the development of Marxist science (historical materialism) through the application of the principles of dialectics (Marxist methodology) to the objective experiences of the proletariat in *its global struggle* against capitalism.<sup>13</sup>

*Piscataway, New Jersey*

## NOTES

1. Alex Callinicos has formulated the two levels of mediation in terms of “the relation between theory and practice,” on the one hand, and the epistemological problem of “the relation between science and reality,” on the other (1976, 17).

2. For a discussion of this issue, see Mendelson (1979) and Jones (1977).

3. Cited in Hoffman (1975, 71). A few important points must be made clear here. First, the praxis theorists’ claim that the theory of reflection originated with Engels is completely erroneous. This view was held also by Marx when he said that for him “the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought” (1996, 19). Moreover, the real originator of the theory of reflection was Hegel himself. In an idealist manner, he used this theory to demonstrate that the material world was a *reflection*, a “mirror image” of the Idea. Indeed, without the reflection theory, the whole of Hegel’s epistemology would collapse. For Hegel, the essence of the Idea would not have been *knowable* without its reflection in the phenomenal world. Hoffman put it this way:

Unless it is understood that consciousness reflects reality, there would be no way of understanding that there is any correspondence between mind and matter: the relation between them would remain simply *unintelligible*, a mere mystery. (1975, 73)

4. In this regard, Callinicos has characterized Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* as an “ambitious attempt to reintroduce the concept of a transcendental subject into Marxism.” He maintains that Lukács “accorded to a collective subject, the proletariat, the status of the Hegelian Idea” (1983, 77). However, he concedes that Lukács’s

last two essays, “Critical Observations on Rosa Luxemburg’s *Critique of the Russian Revolution*,” and “Towards a Methodology of the Problem of Organization” . . . represent a marked shift away from the messianism of his early Marxism, and an acceptance of Lenin’s “revolutionary *realpolitik*.” Thus, the concept of the revolutionary party developed in these essays is that of an organization created by the interaction of theory

and practice, vanguard and class, a view much closer to those of Lenin and Gramsci than the Utopian sect embodying the class consciousness “imputed” to the proletariat of Lukács’s earlier writings. (1983, 78)

5. For Marx, it is the role of science to overcome this limitation of the proletariat. According to him,

the analysis of the actual intrinsic relations of the capitalist processes of production is a very complicated matter and a very extensive work; . . . it is a work of science to resolve the visible, merely external movement into the true intrinsic movement. (1998, 311)

This is because of the fact that the “conceptions which arise about the laws of production in the minds of the agents of capitalist production and circulation will diverge drastically from these real laws” (311).

6. “This implies that the founders of the new philosophy were a long way ahead of the necessities of their period, even of the period that followed, and that they created an arsenal stocked with weapons which were still not ready for use, because ahead of their time, and which were to be ready for service only some time later” (1976, 392). Here Gramsci is in fact contradicting his concept of knowledge as an *articulation* of the needs of a class in a *particular epoch*. Limited in this manner, it is not clear how Marx and Engels could have been *ahead of their time* without utilizing scientific methods that had applicability beyond the immediate consciousness of the proletariat and capitalism.

7. For a brilliant exposition of the principles of dialectical and historical materialism from a Marxist-Leninist perspective, see Konstantinov et al. (1979). Also see Boguslavski et al. (1976).

8. For an in-depth account of Leninist concept of the vanguard party of the proletariat, see Basmanov and Leibson (1977).

9. Lenin’s position is here based on his dialectical premise that the spontaneous consciousness of the proletariat as a class within the capitalist mode of production is limited by the contradictions of capitalism itself and is thus incapable of transcending its immediate ground without being mediated through the whole process of historical development of the productive forces in various modes of production. I return to this point when I deal with the scientific role of the party.

10. See also Basmanov (1977, 111–36).

11. Lenin here quotes from Engels’s *Prefatory Note to the Peasant War in Germany*, where he emphasizes the necessity of theoretical struggle:

For the first time since the workers’ movement has existed, the struggle is being conducted pursuant to its three sides—the theoretical, the political, and the practical-economic (resistance to the capitalists). . . . It is precisely in this, as it were, concentric attack, that the strength and invincibility of the German movement lies.” (Lenin 1973b, 372)

12. See also Blackburn (1976, 3–36).

13. Lenin wrote:

The Social-Democratic movement is in its very essence an international movement. This means, not only that we must combat national

chauvinism, but that an incipient movement in a young country can be successful only if it makes use of the experiences of other countries. In order to make use of these experiences it is not enough merely to be acquainted with them, or simply to copy out the latest resolutions. What is required is the ability to treat these experiences critically and to test them independently. (1973b, 370)

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# **The Class Nature of the State and Revolution in Classical Marxist Theory**

**Berch Berberoglu**

As we enter the twenty-first century, the state continues to play a central role as the sole authority with a monopoly on the use of force and violence in society. The capitalist state, as the state of the dominant capitalist class, continues to facilitate the exploitation of labor and the accumulation of capital on a world scale and engages in all sorts of activities to advance the interests of the capitalists to maintain and extend their rule throughout the world.

The advanced capitalist state maintains its global posture today as an imperialist state to secure conditions that provide an environment in which transnational capital and the world capitalist system grow and prosper at the expense of the working class and other exploited and oppressed sectors of society. The contradictions of this process, however, are such that the forces that have maintained the rule of capital and repressed labor to prolong the latter's exploitation have at the same time reignited the class struggle against capital and the capitalist state. This struggle is now threatening the very existence of capitalism by revolutions in many countries throughout the world.

The arguments presented by the Marxist classics offer a theoretically rich historical materialist perspective from which to examine the relationships among class, state, and revolution. This perspective provides a closer look at the contradictions of

the capitalist state and the prospects for revolution in the early twenty-first century.

The study of the works of classical Marxist theorists is especially important at this critical juncture in history. The contradictions of capitalism and the capitalist state unfold with exceptional speed under conditions of globalization and global interimperialist rivalries. The resulting crises and conflicts are now forcing the agents of change to confront underlying conditions—conditions that necessitate successful counterattack by generating a revolutionary response from labor and its allies, rather than the current stream of reformist politics that generate piecemeal changes.

The basic writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and other classical Marxist theorists are thus of paramount importance if we are to learn from the lessons of the past and promote winning strategies that can lead to major social transformations in the period immediately ahead.

### *The class nature of the state*

The state is the most powerful and most pervasive social and political institution in the world, as it holds its sway over vast territories populated by millions of people. Each state does so in proportion to its size and strength relative to other states that claim the same rights in their respective spheres of control and influence around the world.

The state exercises a monopoly on the use of force and violence through legal sanctions that allow it to raise armies and declare war; to maintain police power and preside over the legal system, arresting, trying, and imprisoning people (even imposing the death penalty); to print money and collect taxes; and to exercise other forms of official control in governing and regulating society through a vast network of political bureaucracy. No other societal power supersedes its authority. It is for these reasons that the state, regardless of regime, is both feared and revered by the citizens of a given society, who have come to accept the rule of the state over their lives and who sanction the legitimacy of that rule under “normal” conditions.

While the dominant ruling class controls and uses the state as an instrument to advance its class interests, rival groups and classes

struggle to wrest power from the ruling class. The legitimacy of the state's rule, however, is seldom questioned, and the powers that control the state are scrutinized even less, except when the state's authority is called into question during crisis periods when it fails to resolve the fundamental social, economic, and political problems of society. A period of decline in legitimacy of the state, and of the ruling class that controls it, follows upon the heels of crisis—such a period of great turmoil sometimes leads to social revolution. Such revolutions have occurred in the past, and will continue to occur in the future, in direct relation to the state's failure to meet the needs of the people and to represent their will. In this sense, the state has become the scene of class struggle, where rival class forces have fought over control of this vital political organ.

The great social revolutions have always been fought for the overthrow of the dominant ruling class and the prevailing social order by the capture of state power to effect change in a new direction in line with the interests of the victorious forces that have succeeded in coming to power.

The rise to power of the despotic rulers of past empires, the emergence of a slave-owning class and its reign over the state and the people under the slave system, the rule of the landed nobility over the serfs under feudalism, and the triumph of the capitalist class over the landlords and its subsequent reign over wage-labor, as well as the victory of the proletariat against the landlords and the capitalists—all, throughout the course of human history, have occurred through revolutions waged against the dominant classes and the state.

The critical issue in the analysis of social revolutions is the class nature of the state and the class forces involved in the revolutionary process leading up to the taking of state power. Applying class analysis to the study of the state and revolution, we can understand the nature and dynamics of the class struggle unfolding in societies that have gone through a revolutionary process. Of special importance here is the class nature of the organization of revolutionaries and the level of class consciousness and political education of the oppressed and exploited classes, as well as their links to and mobilization by organizations that are fighting for

their liberation. On the other side of the equation in assessing the balance of class forces in the class struggle, one needs to know the nature and degree of cohesion among the dominant class forces, the state's response to the deteriorating social and economic conditions, and the political options the ruling class is prepared to exercise through the state to control the unfolding situation. These factors are extremely important in understanding the nature and direction of a revolution in the making, and also in discerning the nature and complexities of the new postrevolutionary regime after the taking of state power.

### ***The state and class struggle***

The classical Marxist theory of the state, based on the writings of Marx and Lenin, focuses on the class basis of politics as the major determinant of political phenomena. It explains the nature of the superstructure (first and foremost, the state) as a reflection of the *mode of production*, which embodies in it social *relations of production* (or property-based class relations). Once fully developed and matured, these class relations result in open class struggles for state power.

In all class-divided societies throughout history, Marx and Engels argue, "political power . . . is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another" (1976a, 505). Political power, Marx and Engels point out, grows out of economic (class) power driven by money and wealth. To maintain and secure their wealth, dominant classes of society establish and control political institutions to hold down the masses and assure their continued domination. The supreme superstructural institution that has emerged historically to carry out this task is the state.

In class society, Lenin notes, the state has always been an organ or instrument of violence exercised by one class against another. Thus, as Engels also points out, "the more it [the state] becomes the organ of a particular class, the more it directly enforces the rule of that class" so that "the fight of the oppressed class against the ruling class necessarily becomes a political fight, a fight first of all against the political rule of this class" (1990a, 393).

The centrality of the state as an instrument of class rule, then, takes on an added importance in the analysis of social class

and class struggles, for political power contested by the warring classes finds its real meaning in securing the rule of the victorious class when that power is ultimately exercised through the instrumentality of the state.

The emergence of the state coincided with the emergence of social classes and class struggles in the transition from the primitive communal mode to more advanced modes of production; an economic surplus then was first generated. Ensuing struggles over control of this surplus led to the development of the state; once captured by the dominant classes in society, the state became an instrument of force to maintain the rule of wealth and privilege against the laboring masses, to maintain exploitation and domination by the few over the many. Without the development of such a powerful instrument of force, there could be no assurance of protection of the privileges of a ruling class that clearly lived off the labor of the masses. The newly wealthy propertied classes needed a mechanism, writes Engels, that

would not only safeguard the newly acquired wealth of individuals against the communistic traditions of the gentile system, would not only sanctify private property, formerly held in such low esteem, and pronounce this sanctification the supreme purpose of every human society, but would also stamp the successively developing new forms of acquiring property, and consequently, of constantly accelerating the increase in wealth, with the seal of general public recognition; an institution that would perpetuate, not only the arising class division of society, but also the right of the possessing class to exploit the non-possessing classes and the rule of the former over the latter.

And this institution arrived. The *state* was invented. (1990b, 21–13)

Throughout history, class divisions and class struggles have shaped the structure of society and social relations. And the struggle between rival class forces to take state power through the overthrow of the state has been the central driving force of history.

Historically, a number of conditions have set the stage for the emergence of capitalism and the capitalist state in Western Europe

and elsewhere. These include the availability of free laborers, the generation of moneyed wealth, a sufficient level of skills and technology, markets, and the protection provided by the state. In general, these conditions were the foundations on which feudal society became transformed into a capitalist one.

With the principal relations of production being that between wage labor and capital, capitalism established itself as a mode of production based on the exploitation of workers by capitalists, whose power and authority in society derived from their ownership and control of the means of production legally sanctioned by the capitalist state. Lacking ownership of the means necessary to gain a living, the workers were forced to sell their labor power to the capitalists in order to live. As a result, the surplus value produced by labor was appropriated by the capitalists in the form of profit. The appropriation of surplus value from the workers over the course of capitalist production in time led to the accumulation of capital and ever-growing profit and wealth by the capitalists. Private profit, generated through the exploitation of labor, thus became the motive force of capitalism.

The contradictions imbedded in such antagonistic social relations in time led to the radicalization of workers and the formation of trade unions and other labor organizations that were to play an important role in the struggle between labor and capital. The history of the labor movement everywhere in the world is replete with bloody confrontations between labor and capital and the latter's repressive arm, the capitalist state. From the early battles of workers in Britain and on the continent in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to the decisive role played by French workers in the uprising of 1848–51, to the Paris Commune in 1871, to the Haymarket massacre and the heroic struggle of the Wobblies in the United States in the early twentieth century, the working class put up a determined struggle in its fight against capital.

### *The nature and role of the capitalist state*

The central task of the early capitalist state in Europe and the United States was disciplining the labor force. Union activity, strikes,

demonstrations, agitation, and propaganda initiated by workers against the employers and the system were systematically repressed.

The capitalist state became heavily involved in the conflict between labor and capital on behalf of the capitalist class, bringing its repressive apparatus to bear on labor and its allies who threatened the capitalist order. Law and order enforced by the capitalist state served to protect and preserve the capitalist system and prevent its transformation. In this sense, the state came to see itself as a legitimizing agency of the new social order and identified its survival directly with the capitalists who controlled it.

Established to protect and advance the interests of the capitalist class, the early capitalist state thus assumed a pivotal role that assured the class rule of capitalists over society and became an institution of legitimization and brute force to maintain law and order in favor of capitalism. Sanctioning and enforcing laws to protect the rights of the new property owners and disciplining labor to maintain a wage system that generated profits for the wealthy few, the capitalist state became the instrument of capital and its political rule over society. This led Marx and Engels to observe that the state in capitalist society serves as a political organ of the bourgeoisie for the “guarantee of their property and interests” (1976b, 90). Hence,

the bourgeoisie has . . . conquered for itself, in the modern representative State, exclusive political sway. The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie. (Marx and Engels 1976a, 486)

Lenin notes in reference to Engels’s *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*:

Every state in which private ownership of the land and means of production exists, in which capital dominates, however democratic it may be, is a capitalist state, a machine used by the capitalists to keep the working class and the poor peasants in subjection. (1965, 485)

Democracy in capitalist society, Lenin points out, is always bound by

the narrow limits set by capitalist exploitation, and consequently always remains, in effect, a democracy for the minority, only for the propertied classes, only for the rich. Freedom in capitalist society always remains about the same as it was in the ancient Greek republics: freedom for the slave-owners. Owing to the conditions of capitalist exploitation, the modern wage slaves are so crushed by want and poverty that “they cannot be bothered with democracy,” “cannot be bothered with politics”; in the ordinary, peaceful course of events, the majority of the population is debarred from participation in public and political life. . . .

Democracy for an insignificant minority, democracy for the rich—that is the democracy of capitalist society. (1974, 465)

“Marx grasped this *essence* of capitalist democracy splendidly,” Lenin continues, “when, in analysing the experience of the Commune, he said that the oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class shall represent and repress them in parliament!” (1975, 302).

“People always have been the foolish victims of deception and self-deception in politics,” Lenin writes elsewhere, “and they always will be until they have learnt to seek out the *interests* of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises” (1963, 28).

In an important passage in *State and Revolution*, Lenin points out that not only is the state in capitalist society the political organ of the capitalist class, but it is structured in such a way that it guarantees the class rule of the capitalists. Short of a revolutionary rupture, its entrenched power is practically unshakable: “A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism,” Lenin writes, “and, therefore, once capital has gained possession of this very best shell . . . it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that *no* change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic can shake it” (1975, 247). But the dialectics of this process is such that the contradictions and conflicts embedded in capitalist society propel the workers into action against the capitalists and the capitalist state. Such a move on the

part of the workers culminates, in its highest political expression, in an anticapitalist, socialist revolution.

***The capitalist state, class struggle, and revolution***

Writing in August 1917, on the eve of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia, Lenin pointed out in *State and Revolution* both the class nature of the state and, more importantly, the necessity of its revolutionary overthrow. “If the state is the product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms,” Lenin writes, “if it is a power standing *above* society and ‘alienating itself *more and more* from it,”

it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, *but also without the destruction* of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this “alienation.” (1974, 393)

Thus, the transformation of capitalist society, Lenin points out, involves a revolutionary process in which a class-conscious working class, led by a disciplined workers’ party, comes to adopt a radical solution to its continued exploitation and oppression under the yoke of capital and exerts its organized political force in a revolutionary rupture to take state power.

The victory of the working class through a socialist revolution leads to the establishment of a socialist (workers’) state. The socialist state constitutes a new kind of state ruled by the working class and the laboring masses. The cornerstone of a socialist state, emerging out of capitalism, is the abolition of private property in the major means of production and an end to the exploitation of labor for private profit.

The theory of the class struggle, applied by Marx to the question of the state and the socialist revolution, leads as a matter of course to the recognition of the *political rule* of the proletariat, of its dictatorship, i.e., of undivided power directly backed by the armed force of the people. The overthrow of the bourgeoisie can be achieved only by the proletariat becoming the *ruling class*, capable of crushing

the inevitable and desperate resistance of the bourgeoisie, and of organizing *all* the working and exploited people for the new economic system. (Lenin 1974, 409)

The establishment of a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat (as against the dictatorship of capital) is what distinguishes the socialist state from its capitalist counterpart. Marx points out in *Critique of the Gotha Programme* that the dictatorship of the proletariat (i.e., the class rule of the working class) is a transitional phase between capitalism and communism. “Between capitalist and communist society,” Marx writes, “lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but *the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*” (1989, 95).

During this period, the state represents and defends the interests of the working class against capital and all other vestiges of reactionary exploiting classes, which, overthrown and dislodged from power, attempt in a multitude of ways to recapture the state through a counterrevolution. Thus, once in power, the proletarian state has a dual role to play: to break the resistance of its class enemies (the exploiting classes), and to protect the revolution and begin the process of socialist construction.

The class character of the new state under the dictatorship of the proletariat takes on a new form and content, according to Lenin, “during this period the state must inevitably be a state that is democratic *in a new way* (for the proletariat and the propertyless in general) and dictatorial *in a new way* (against the bourgeoisie)” (1975, 262). Thus,

*Simultaneously* with an immense expansion of democracy, which *for the first time* becomes democracy for the poor, democracy for the people, and not democracy for the money-bags, the dictatorship of the proletariat imposes a series of restrictions on the freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists. (Lenin 1974, 466)

Lenin stresses the necessity of suppressing the capitalist class and its allies to deny them the freedom to foment a

counterrevolution, barring them from politics, and isolating and defeating efforts to undermine the new workers' state.

Used primarily to suppress these forces and build the material base of a classless, egalitarian society, the socialist state begins to wither away once there is no longer any need for it. Engels points out:

The first act by virtue of which the state really constitutes itself the representative of the whole of society—the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society—this is, at the same time, its last independent act as a state. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies out of itself; the government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not “abolished.” *It dies out.* (1987, 268)

In this sense, the state no longer exists in the fully matured communist stage, for there is no longer the need in a classless society for an institution that is, by definition, an instrument of class rule through force and violence. Lenin writes:

Only in communist society, when the resistance of the capitalists has been completely crushed, when the capitalists have disappeared, when there are no classes (i.e., when there is no distinction between the members of society as regards their relation to the social means of production), *only* then “the state . . . ceases to exist,” and “*it becomes possible to speak of freedom.*” Only then will a truly complete democracy become possible and be realised, a democracy without any exceptions whatever. (1974, 467)

It is in this broader, transitional context that the class nature and tasks of the state in socialist society must be understood and evaluated, according to the Marxist classics.

Thus, for Marx, Engels, and Lenin, the period of transition to communist society is a period exhibiting an infinitely higher form of democracy than that found in capitalist society. For democracy under capitalism is democracy for the few, democracy for the rich

capitalists, whereas under socialism democracy is for the masses, democracy for the great majority of the laboring people working together to build an egalitarian, classless society.

While the transition from socialism to communism takes place under conditions of advanced socialism, when the rule of the working class is on a firm footing and when the democratization of social life among the workers has reached a high point, the Marxist classics, above all Lenin, were very concerned with the initial phase of transition from capitalism to socialism in the immediate postrevolutionary period. This concern centered around two key problems requiring care to prevent the degeneration of the workers' revolution: (1) the ever-present danger of counterrevolution and the necessity of constant vigilance against the overthrown ruling class(es) who resort to all sorts of schemes to foment a counterrevolution in order to regain their lost power; and (2) the danger of bureaucratization among the leadership of the revolution once the revolutionary power becomes established. Lenin went out of his way to stress the urgency of the fight against these two ominous threats to the survival of the proletarian revolution during the transition to socialism.

These dangers were an ongoing concern of the leadership of the various revolutions of the twentieth century; they became very real, derailing the revolution or ultimately overthrowing the revolution through counterrevolution. Since capitalist exploitation and oppression persist, however, and has become intensified today, the working class and the oppressed masses remain the chief agents of revolutionary social transformation. While it is difficult to predict when, where and with what intensity the next revolution will take place, the unfolding contradictions and crises of global capitalism will, sooner or later, propel the working class and its organized leadership to take political action.

In this context of evolving global capitalism, the study of the Marxist classics takes on added significance. The contributions of Marx, Engels, and Lenin on the nature of the capitalist state and the necessity of political action by the workers' movement to bring about the revolutionary transformation of capitalist society are thus needed to help labor formulate responses to effect change. It is high time for progressive voices on the Left to engage in

a new round of discussions to map out a strategy to counter the global capitalist offensive and develop the framework for an alliance of forces that can succeed in taking state power.

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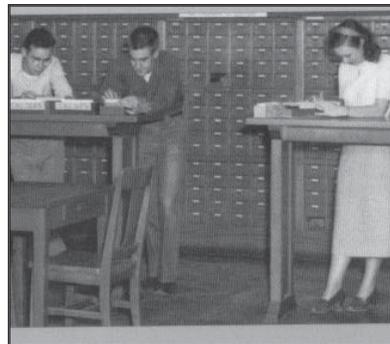
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# ***Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Vanguard Party in Historical Context***

**Erwin Marquit**

The traditional association of revolutionary Marxism with the terms *dictatorship of the proletariat* and *vanguard party of the working class* is what distinguishes Marxist-Leninist parties from social-democratic parties. Nevertheless, these terms are not to be found in the current programs or literature of many parties that consider themselves Marxist-Leninist. This is especially so in a number of parties in the industrialized countries. Why might this be the case?

## ***Dictatorship of the proletariat***

Let us begin with the older term, *dictatorship of the proletariat*. In his description of the June 1848 uprising in Paris in *The Class Struggles in France*, Marx referred to the Paris proletariat's "bold slogan of revolutionary struggle: *Overthrow of the bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the working class*" (1978, 69). It was not uncommon at that time for groups seeking to wrest political power from any ruling body to refer to the existing ruling authority as a dictatorship, even in reference to a parliament or national assembly as a whole. That this is the sense in which Marx understood the term *dictatorship* is clear from his discussion of exploitation of the French peasants by the capitalists:

Only the fall of capital can raise the peasant; only an anti-capitalist, a proletarian government can break his economic

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misery, his social degradation. The *constitutional republic* is the dictatorship of his united exploiters; *the social-democratic, the Red* republic, is the dictatorship of his allies. And the scale rises or falls, according to the votes that the peasant casts into the ballot box. (122)

Here Marx is not speaking about a dictatorship that ends elected governments, but a class rule by an elected government.

Marx's first explicit use of the full term *dictatorship of the proletariat* was in the same work, where he referred to revolutionary socialism as

*the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions generally, to the abolition of all the relations of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionising of all the ideas that result from these social relations.* (127)

Marx's reference to the "*class dictatorship . . . as the necessary transit point to the abolition of class distinctions*" should not be interpreted to mean a limited period at the beginning of the revolutionary reshaping of the relations of production, but rather the entire period of social transformation. This is clear in the wording of article 1 of the short-lived 1850 agreement between the French Blanquists, the revolutionary Chartists in England, and the Communist League on the formation of the Universal Society of Revolutionary Communists:

The aim of the association is the downfall of all privileged classes, the submission of those classes to the dictatorship of the proletariat by keeping the revolution in continual progress until the achievement of communism, which shall be the final form of the constitution of the human family. (Universal Society of Revolutionary Communists 1978, 614)

Marx and Engels signed the agreement on behalf of the Communist League.

Marx repeated the same point twenty-five years later in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*:

Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing other but the *revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*. (1989, 95)

In traditional Marxist theory, a distinction is made between the terms *government* and *state*. The social function of the state in class-divided societies is to maintain the stability of property relations and ensure that the organs of government serve the interest of the ruling class in its confrontation with the working class and other sections of the population oppressed by capital. The government, apart from fulfilling these state functions, also administers social needs that transcend narrow interests of the ruling class, such as public education, traffic safety, and disease control. This does not prevent some of these public functions from being exploited by the ruling class. Examples of such distortions in the United States are the laxness of the Food and Drug Administration in dealing with abuses by the pharmaceutical industry or the failure of the National Labor Relations Board to enforce laws protecting the rights of workers.

The ruling class relies on the state to use its coercive instruments to ensure dominance of established class relations. From the time of the adoption of the U.S. Constitution to the Civil War, the slavocracy was the dominant class. No legislation it opposed could pass the Congress. It controlled the Supreme Court. Runaway slaves in the so-called free states of the North could be seized there to be returned to their owners in the South. When the capitalist class replaced the slavocracy as the dominant ruling class, it outlawed slavery. Serfdom and peonage were no longer permitted. Since then, no state has been permitted to establish a nobility to replace its elected government even if its citizens were to vote to amend its constitution. Should a dictatorship of the proletariat be established, it could similarly at some point outlaw the employment of wage labor by capitalists for the extraction of surplus value.

In classical Marxist theory, the concept of a state as a dictatorship of the ruling class refers to the content of the state, not to its form. Examples of different forms of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie in capitalist countries are the French bourgeois parliamentary republic, fascist Germany under the Nazis, the absolute monarchy of Saudi Arabia, the theocratic state of Iran. Classical Marxist theory sees the necessity for a dictatorship of the proletariat to replace the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie as the content of the state, not the form. The political form will vary according to the particular historical circumstances. Most Communist parties in bourgeois parliamentary democracies do not use the term *dictatorship of the proletariat* in their programs even if they accept its necessity as the form of the state in the transition from capitalism to communism. The term *dictatorship* carries strongly negative connotations, especially from its association with fascist states such as Nazi Germany. This association makes it difficult for a public not familiar with Marxist theory to distinguish the Marxist characterization of the *content* of the state from the more usual use of the term to characterize the dictatorial *form* of the state.

Nevertheless, the Marxist theoretical heritage embodied in the term *dictatorship of the proletariat* is as relevant today as it was in the nineteenth century—it is a forceful expression of the Marxist understanding of the class character of the state. The primary distinction today between social democrats and those associated with the Marxist revolutionary tradition is that social democrats do not see the state as an instrument of class domination, but as a class-neutral instrument standing above class interests. That is why even those social democrats *not* corrupted by bribes and favors from the capitalist ruling class see their role when serving as a governing party to seek an arrangement satisfactory to both the working class and the capitalist class. They imagine that the interests of both classes can be served simultaneously. They continue, therefore, to enforce the same capitalist property relations that are the basis for extraction of surplus value; they lack any goal of socializing the means of production and thereby ending the exploitation of labor by capital.

How then, in contrast, do revolutionary Marxists in bourgeois parliamentary democracies relate to the concept of dictatorship of

the proletariat? And in what sense can they legitimately claim to be vanguard parties?

In most bourgeois parliamentary democracies, the revolutionary Marxist parties do not at present have sufficient support to gain electoral victory in alliances in which they are the leading political grouping. They must seek to form coalitions with other left and progressive forces with the primary goal of defeating the right-wing forces of monopoly capital that continually whittle down the gains won by the people in their mass struggles.

Participation in such coalitions is not in itself an abandonment of a party's vanguard role. The vanguard character is expressed by the party's keeping a clear vision of the socialist objective and pursuing policies to develop and strengthen a socialist consciousness in the masses. It must always do these things in a manner that does not weaken, but rather enhances, the cohesiveness of the coalitions in which it is participating. The vanguard character is further expressed by a focus on class analysis to make success more likely for coalition struggles. The revolutionary Marxist parties seek to broaden coalitions to include all strata and classes victimized by the rule of monopoly capital. The immediate goal of such coalitions is the curtailment of corporate control of the state by electoral means. Revolutionary Marxists support this goal, but recognize that if such a coalition succeeds in establishing itself as a ruling power in the state, the state will not have a clearly defined class character.

An analysis of the contradiction that emerges in the event of electoral victory by such a coalition will point to the importance of the vanguard concept.

Lenin projected the need for a vanguard party of the working class in his classic 1902 work *What is to be Done?* (1974). The members of the vanguard party are to be mostly workers with an advanced socialist consciousness who had the task of going among all classes of the population "as theoreticians, as propagandists, as agitators, and as organizers," to bring their knowledge to the working class and others oppressed by capitalist exploitation, since a socialist consciousness does not develop spontaneously out of economic struggles (421–36). The vanguard has a "constant duty of *raising* ever wider sections to its own advanced level" (259).

From the various ways he uses the term *vanguard* in his writings, one can conclude that Lenin would consider a party to be a vanguard party when it has the most advanced understanding of the contemporary sociopolitical conditions and is ideologically and organizationally equipped to give leadership to a transition to socialism when a revolutionary situation arises. As late as 1913, Lenin wrote,

The party is the politically conscious, advanced section of the class, it is its vanguard. The strength of that vanguard is ten times, a hundred times, more than a hundred times greater than its numbers. . . . Any reasonable person will understand that there are historical conditions, objective causes, which made it possible to organise one-fifteenth of the class in the party in Germany, but which make it more difficult in France, and *still more difficult* in Russia. (1973, 406–7)

Lenin cautioned against a party calling itself a vanguard party when it has not yet earned that right. He wrote that

it is not enough to call ourselves the “vanguard,” the advanced contingent; we must act in such a way that *all* the other contingents recognise and are obliged to admit that we are marching in the vanguard. (1974, 426)

Therefore a party that seeks to play a vanguard role, but has not yet achieved recognition as such, cannot declare itself a vanguard party, nor delude itself by isolation from joint struggles that it has achieved that status. None of the revolutionary Marxist parties in the industrialized capitalist countries today can claim such status. They must recognize, therefore, the necessity of participation in people’s coalitions in which they are not necessarily the leading force. Working with social democrats in such coalitions against the excesses of capitalist exploitation and for the electoral defeat of the most reactionary representatives of monopoly capital should not be equated with reformism. Even in revolution by armed struggle, Cuba’s principal Marxist-Leninist party, the People’s Socialist Party (as the party linked to the worldwide Communist movement was called) was not the leading force in the revolution. The revolution was led by Fidel Castro’s July 26

Movement with the support of the People's Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Directorate. The present Communist Party of Cuba became a vanguard party upon its reconstitution in 1965 in the wake of the merger of the three groups in 1961.

If a people's coalition succeeds in wresting control of the state from monopoly capital, the latter will seek to regain full control of the state by any means. From among those forces constituting the coalition, only the working class can provide the principal material basis for repelling any assault by monopoly capital to reestablish its control of the state. In this way, the working class, through its organizations, will emerge as the leading power in the state. The logic of the struggle may be expected to lead to the organizational merging of the various political forces into a consolidated revolutionary party that will continue the process of social transformation.

Neither the former socialist countries nor the present ones have seen a multiparty system of competing political parties as the proper vehicle for a truly democratic political system. They have understood the multiparty system of capitalist society as the means of ensuring that interests of the various sections of the bourgeoisie were adequately reflected in the decisions made at the governmental level. The bourgeoisie, however, has not willingly accorded the working class the right to form trade unions or to establish political parties to defend workers' interests. The working class had to engage in fierce class struggles to secure these rights in all of the bourgeois parliamentary democracies. History has shown that when the bourgeoisie sees that its dominance in the state is threatened, it will not hesitate to transform the form of the state into a political dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

The former socialist countries, guided by Marxist-Leninist parties, took a path for ensuring democratic representation of the working people in their governmental structure that was not based on competing political parties. In theory, at least, the democratic form of the dictatorship of the proletariat envisaged that their elected local, regional, and national councils and parliaments would consist not only of candidates put forward by the party, but also representatives of people's mass organizations. In practice, problems developed. One of the factors that contributed to the collapse of

the former socialist countries was the failure of their ruling parties to allow the mass organizations (trade unions and women's organizations, in particular) the relative independence from party and state bodies that they needed to fulfill their proper role. Another factor, perhaps even more important, was the emergence of a self-perpetuating leadership in violation of the principle of democratic centralism that was supposed to be the organizational basis of the Marxist-Leninist parties. As a result, the parties abrogated their political role as vanguard parties of the working class and became administrative organs of the state and party bureaucracy.

Cuba provides a living example of a politically democratic form of dictatorship of the proletariat. For example, in contrast to the Communist parties of the formerly socialist countries in Europe, the Communist Party of Cuba does not permit higher bodies to recommend candidates for election to lower bodies. Those elected are actually responsible to the people who elected them. Moreover, the mass organizations in Cuba are able to adopt their programs of action without seeking prior approval from the Party.

The necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat is clearly evident in countries with socialist-oriented market economies. China and Vietnam have opened their economies to foreign and domestic capitalist investment to provide the industrial infrastructure for their advance to the future communist society. The capitalist class, however, is excluded from state power, although its representatives can form associations to present its needs to the state. The state uses its regulatory powers and control over the credit system to encourage investment in those branches of the economy it considers necessary for a balanced development to the goal of communism.

In capitalist countries, the goal of the capitalist state is to satisfy the capitalists' appetite for maximum profit. In developing countries, this goal of short-term maximum profit leads to distorted development of the economies, turning them into neocolonies and dependencies of the developed capitalist countries. The goal of the state in a socialist market economy, in welcoming foreign and domestic capitalist investment, is not maximum profit for the enterprises, but maximum balanced development. The capitalist sector grows in parallel with the state sector as the economy develops. The state, through its regulatory structures and its dominance in the

financial sector, must ensure that the state sector is not swamped by the capitalist sector and that the state sector remains the key component in national development. Attention to the vanguard role of the Communist parties in the maintaining the state as a dictatorship of the proletariat is the only way to prevent the restoration of capitalist power in a socialist market economy.

The constitution of the People's Republic of China characterizes its state as "the people's democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants, which is in essence the dictatorship of the proletariat." I assume that this formulation was used because the peasants, who are the majority in the population, would not see a state characterized only as a dictatorship of proletariat as reflecting their interests. In reality, however, it would reflect their interests, because the working class must assume the initiative in guiding the country toward socialism. In the course of this progress, it provides the peasants with the basis for the technological development of agricultural production and the material means for adequate housing, health care, education, and culture.

Although the programs of the parties of the working class in the capitalist and socialist countries do not refer in so many words to the concepts of the vanguard role of the working-class party and the dictatorship of the proletariat, these concepts of classical Marxism remain valid throughout the entire path of transition from capitalism to communism.

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## **Forum and Manifesto of the World Political Economics Society, Shanghai, 1–3 April 2006**

An international forum on the theme “Economic Globalization and Modern Marxist Economics” took place in Shanghai on 2–3 April 2006. The gathering was the First Forum of the World Political Economics Society (WPES), which was formally constituted on the eve of the forum, 1 April 2006, by some seventy scholars from fifteen countries. In the course of the next two days, a constitution for the WPES was drafted and provisionally accepted. Professor Cheng En Fu of the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics was elected president. Elected as vice presidents were Professor David Kotz of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Professor Hiroshi Ohnishi of Kyoto University. A manifesto for the WPES was unanimously adopted, the text of which follows this report.

*Nature, Society and Thought* will be publishing a selection of the forty papers that were presented at this WPES forum, which was cosponsored by the Marxist Research Institute and Economics Institute of the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, the Academy of Marxism of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and the newly constituted World Political Economics Society.

The text of a manifesto adopted at the founding meeting of the the WPES follows on the next pages.

## Manifesto of the World Political Economics Society

*(Approved at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the 1<sup>st</sup> Council of World Political Economics Society on 2 April 2006 and announced at the Closing Plenary of the 1<sup>st</sup> Forum of World Political Economics Society on 3 April 2006.)*

Today the voices for and against globalization can be heard everywhere. The issue of globalization has become one of the most important questions to be studied seriously by the governments of all countries, the general public, and many scholars around the world. We are about seventy Marxist economists from 15 countries including China, the U.S.A., Japan, Russia, Germany, the U.K., France, Canada, Austria, Belgium, South Korea, Vietnam, India, Ireland, and Luxemburg, who have put our heads together in Shanghai from April 2–3, 2006. After discussion of the theme of Economic Globalization and Modern Marxist Economics, we have reached a common ground as follows.

Economic globalization can be described and defined from two sides. Firstly, from the viewpoint of the productive forces and economic relations in general, the term *economic globalization* refers to the increasingly rapid movement of factors of production across national borders and the growing interconnection of economic activities among countries. Secondly, looking at the important characteristics of economic relations in the current period, economic globalization has reflected the increasing control and expansion of the capitalist mode of production, dominated by the United States and other developed capitalist countries. It is undesirable to formulate socioeconomic strategies and policies in accordance with a totally affirmative or negative attitude toward economic globalization.

Contemporary capitalism, which goes by such names as *globalized capitalism* or *neoliberal capitalism*, has produced a growing gap between human social and economic potential on the one hand and the actual outcomes experienced by the people of the world on the other. In some parts of the capitalist world, such as

in much of Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa, there has been a severe economic decline in the contemporary era. In other parts of the capitalist world, some economic development has occurred, but it has been accompanied by severely negative social and economic phenomena, including growing inequality, increasing insecurity and unemployment for working people, declining social services for the population, and worsening environmental degradation. In all the countries of the world, the neoliberal form of the world economy has hindered social and economic progress. Today the global neoliberal capitalist order is facing growing problems and challenges. This is a time when change and reorientation of the world system have moved onto the agenda. Marxist political economy has an opportunity to play a significant role in the debates over the future shape of the socioeconomic systems in the world.

Neoclassical economics typically fails to offer a scientific analysis of economic systems. Instead, it serves to justify and glorify neoliberal capitalism with all of its irrational features. It has become the dominant approach to economics in most of the world, and the policies advocated by neoclassical economics have imposed vast economic costs on the people of the world and have served as a barrier to solving social and economic problems.

Marxist political economy provides the best basis for analyzing the contemporary world economy, as well as for analyzing capitalist and socialist systems. It provides a basis for finding progressive solutions to the severe problems of the current world economy. It can also point the way toward the eventual replacement of capitalism by socialism/communism throughout the world, which is necessary if humankind is to achieve its social and economic potential.

We are resolved to develop Marxist political economy and to apply it to analyze and solve the social and economic problems facing humankind in this era. To this end, we intend to build links among Marxist political economists throughout the world and to facilitate the development of common projects among them. We will strive to expand the role of modern Marxist political economy in scholarly work, public policy debates, and other arenas. While

we recognize the existence of different views among Marxist political economists on certain issues, our commonalities are more important than our differences.

Marxist political economists of the world, unite!

## Book Reviews

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*Marxist Ethics: A Short Exposition.* By Willis H. Truitt. New York: International Publishers, 2005. 119 pages, paper \$7.50.

Notwithstanding the subtitle, “a short exposition,” Willis Truitt’s book provides more than the basics, addressing a considerable range of issues around a topic that has dogged Marxists since Marx. As he shows, the responses to the proposition that there is a Marxist ethic have been varied, and it is to the credit of Truitt and those who share his perspective that the case is repeatedly made that such an ethic can be discovered and can be useful in understanding the necessity for social change. Besides being of interest to Marxists, this book will be helpful to those looking for a critical perspective on the profound social problems in the experience of capitalism. Truitt provides a sufficiently detailed discussion of Marx’s moral perspective, some of the essential debates, connections to the arts, and a brief discussion of ethics in the post-Soviet period.

Truitt begins with a discussion of Marx’s “early moralism,” born of outrage at the conditions produced by capitalism and earlier social systems (chapter 1). Although this did not represent a clear ethical theory, a purposeful, partisan moral perspective was evident. In this context Truitt addresses debates in Anglo-American philosophy about whether Marx had a systematic moral or ethical perspective, or whether one could be developed and sustained from his work (chapters 2 and 6). The views of Richard Miller and Allan Wood, for example, who consider Marx a nonmoralist, are contrasted with those of George Brenkert and Kai Nielsen. Truitt demonstrates sufficient connections between Marx’s orientation and that of bourgeois ethics found in utilitarianism and

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pragmatism. He clarifies this relation later in the book: a Marxist ethic “adjusts or coordinates each [traditional] ethical perspective it appropriates with concrete social conditions and specific historical tasks, thus at once uniting theory and practice and avoiding the empty formality of Kantianism and the apparent moral neutrality of the principle of utility” (51).

Acknowledging that Marx’s political and philosophical arguments were often written as “descriptive, historical sociology” (20, 50), Truitt emphasizes the dynamic character of historical materialism. The historical-materialist method established a dialectical relation between the descriptive and the prescriptive. This relationship is central to his exposition. Marx, he suggests, cannot be said to be simply descriptive or prescriptive; Marxism abolished the dichotomizing of these positions just as it has overcome the separation of fact and value (67–68). Truitt grounds his argument in the compatibility of two passages from Marx’s work, a descriptive passage from the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* describing the “formative influence” of the capitalist mode of production, and a passage from the *Communist Manifesto*. The latter is also a descriptive passage but one that contains an “ethically prescriptive dimension” (48). This dimension is effectively a call to action (50) that sets Marx’s perspective apart from the passive internalization of much of bourgeois ethics. Discussing relations of production, labor, use value, and exchange value, Truitt ably demonstrates how Marx developed the substance of his ethical framework from an analysis of the basis of capitalist economic structure.

This argument, beyond its theoretical import, has practical significance for working people’s systematic understanding of the value-substance of production and exchange, the relationship between economic value and social values. I would suggest that in this “prescriptive dimension” of Marx’s empirical discussions we see what he meant by “being determines consciousness”—the development of possible futures through knowledge and consciousness of the empirical present, but with the proviso that one must have some idea of what to look for.

Truitt’s discussion of determinism in the second and longest chapter in the book is important in this regard. The debates he

selects for analysis are important ones. Some of these have focused on passages in Marx's work that, Truitt argues, have been the source of the problem because of incomplete readings. William H. Shaw and G. A. Cohen are two proponents of Marx as a determinist. Truitt's counterargument is soundly based on an understanding of the influence of productive forces ("causal priority") on human development and society. These forces are properly understood alongside Marx's conception of labor as an expression of purposeful creativity, the human capacity to intervene in order to shape or redirect these forces (22, 35).

The issues of determinism, value and values, and the descriptive-prescriptive relation emerge in the next chapters. Chapter three takes up value, interest, and ideology; chapter four addresses needs, rights, and the individual. These discussions are framed by a historical-materialist demonstration that ethics and morality in different historical periods develop on different economic bases but are legitimized through dominant ideologies. Truitt points out the difference between a rights-based morality and one based on human needs, developing his argument around different conceptions of the individual. This examination is much needed at the present historical juncture, in which rights-based systems of law and morality have become entrenched in much of the industrialized world and the rhetoric of rights is an agenda item in the global trading of commodities. There can be no doubt about the importance of human rights, but in many respects the vacuity of their extension has become quite clear to those for whom the satisfaction of basic needs—for food, disease control, health care, and education, among other things—is either nonexistent or subject to corporate profitability or the opportunist political interests of the state.

While Truitt addresses some aspects of the individual, the development of ethics within the individual is an area in need of more intense focus, as much for its organizational value as for its significance to human society. This is evident in three related discussions in the book: the priority of tactics over ethics, the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the immanence of the working class as the agent of revolution.

Because Marxism realizes its own validity and its potential in action for concrete social change, an essential aspect of Marxist

ethics is to know what measures can be taken to encourage individuals to participate in bringing about that change. Truitt briefly notes the difference between Kant's ethics (54–56) and Marx's position, and rightly argues (developing a point made by Lucien Goldmann) that "Kant's deep rooted pessimism about harmonizing the contrary values of virtues and happiness here on earth is a result of his asking 'What ought I to do?' rather than 'What ought we do?'" (55). When regarded as an *organizational* matter, the former question must be integral with the latter while retaining the ideological distinction between individualist and collectivist perspectives. Meaningful social change can only come about through "we" and not "I"; nevertheless, without the individual component, a movement can neither develop effectively nor move forward. The dialectical relation between the two is an important *strategic* point.

Specifically with regard to the development of a movement, I think it is problematic at this historical juncture to view the working class as not simply the prime mover and major beneficiary of social change, but the *only* one: "Only the proletariat, as a class, can comprehend the material and therefore moral imperative to replace a system of social reproduction and private appropriation with one of social production and social or public appropriation, i.e., socialism" (70–71). This statement contradicts, to some degree, the history of working-class struggles; the United Front in the 1930s and the civil rights movement of the 1960s are two examples of struggles developed with progressive fractions of other classes. It is only possible to speak of the working class as a whole theoretically because of the concrete problems of different levels of consciousness and commitment within the class. Truitt's statement assumes that, given certain objective conditions, the working class is not only able, but willing, to engage in struggles against capitalism and for socialism. Although nothing precludes the development of an adequate level of knowledge and consciousness of the problems posed by capital and possible solutions, it is necessary to avoid the assumption that the "historic role" of the proletariat is immanent in the class itself. The working class as a whole has not always pursued its best collective

interests; interests of benefit to the entire class have historically been pursued by fractions (sometimes large, sometimes small) of the working class.

Truitt is correct to suggest that “in considering certain *short-term advantages*, it, as a class, must look upon every kind of *compromise* as a possible future obstacle to its revolutionary objective” (71; my emphases), but this should not rule out the inclusion (even, theoretically, in leadership positions) of those from other classes whose interests and contributions would assist the development of consciousness and the strategic interests of the majority class. This is a period of time in which access to education and training (increasingly constrained though they are) facilitates the movement of people out of the working class; it also exposes individuals of middle- or upper-class backgrounds to the realities of capitalist relations and the possibilities of more equitable and humane conditions. It may thus be potentially counterproductive to argue that “only the proletariat” can understand the imperative for social change. To do so risks reducing theoretical statements to rhetorical ones.

Near the beginning of the book, in distinguishing Marx’s early moralism, Truitt cites a passage in an 1847 article in which Marx opens at least four sentences in a short paragraph with the phrase, “The workers know,” or similar terms (12–13). The context is Marx’s argument that workers know the historical trajectory of their conditions and the possibility of realizing their demands. Truitt regards this as an early “framework” for an ethics because it stresses that ethics is based on action informed by a partisan perspective. Consistent with his overall argument, this passage exhibits that crucial “prescriptive dimension” that denotes the empirical problem but also signals a way out. Brought forward in time, “the workers know” may appear as an empty slogan without the ethical meaning Truitt applies to it. At the same time, however, the meaning Truitt gives to Marx’s passage may itself stand on insecure ground without an organized means of facilitating the appropriation of the ethical standpoint he advocates among people who may not yet be clear about what they can or ought to know. Gramsci provides an example of the problem:

That the objective conditions exist for people not to die of hunger and that people do die of hunger, has its importance. . . . But the existence of objective conditions, of possibilities or of freedom is not yet enough: it is necessary to “know” them, and know how to use them. And to want to use them. (1971, 360)

This goes to the heart of the value of ethics for revolutionary activity: the necessity of developing consciousness and ethical conduct along the way. Marxist ethics offers a way of thinking and analyzing morally the existing conditions and future possibilities—and this is precisely the point, that in the most meaningful sense the working class realizes a historical role for itself and the rest of humanity only when members of the class become conscious of it and accept it as an imperative. It is too easy, and ultimately insufficient, to rely on the “historical role” of the proletariat as it was presented theoretically by Marx, without developing it in relation to historical experience since Marx. I have tried to show necessary qualifications of a similar statement of Marx’s in an earlier article in this journal (Lanning 2002, 146). What makes the working class revolutionary is the development of the potential that lies within its understanding of common conditions experienced by all in the class; what solidifies this group as a class is its historical-materialist analysis of conditions and of consciousness itself. John Somerville has argued that Marx’s meaning of inevitability is valid only if a specified program of preparation and action is followed. This applies to the proletariat’s historical role as well (1974, 277–78).

The problem is evident in the prioritizing of tactics over ethics, in which the former is given priority in the period of revolutionary struggle while ethics acquires its historical significance as an “ethics of duty” (84–85) in the period of building socialism (Truitt returns to this in the final chapter as well). This is somewhat related to Ernst Bloch’s argument of a progression from “freedom of action” to “ethical freedom” (1986, 156–57). But does the “jump out of necessity to freedom” (Bloch’s phrase) constitute the *beginning* of ethical development? Surely there is an “ethics of duty” relevant to the period of struggle that can be distinguished

for analytical and organizational purposes from tactics for organizing trade unions, on-the-job safety, or struggles against racism. Such ethics may be distinguishable, but cannot be fundamentally different, from those that motivate people to build socialism in a postrevolutionary period.

For Truitt, tactics in the period of revolutionary struggle may “determine the continuing conditions of life, and in many instances, the very survival of humanity” (71). He cites a passage from a version of Lukács’s *Tactics and Ethics* in which “correct tactics” are, categorically, ethical; that is, revolutionary tactics and ethics are identical. Truitt also notes such an identity in one of Brecht’s works (85). The use of Lukács’s statement misses something in his argument, the context of which was the preparation of revolutionary cadre (Lukács 1975, 8–10). Lukács’s emphasis on knowledge and conduct as the core of a revolutionary ethics is important in establishing a process obscured by his own problematic assumption of the identity of tactics and ethics in the statement quoted. Lukács’s definition of ethics is more clearly represented in the relation of conscience and responsibility in actions directed toward radical social change. But he notes that this is a “purely formal and ethical definition of individual action,” which moves forward into “a special level of action, that of politics,” when the individual “makes an ethical decision within himself,” a decision derived from the consciousness of common interests and goals. The relation between tactics and ethics is clarified by the requirements of action at this “special level”: knowledge of one’s position within existing historical conditions, the consciousness of the necessity to challenge the power of capital and of a means to achieve it, the necessity of commitment (non-neutrality), and the belief that one’s individual actions can make a meaningful difference in the struggle for socialism. The point here is that the ethical decision of the individual may occur with or without the influence of the movement—the Communist Party in Lukács’s case and perhaps our own—but the movement must present a clear ethical standpoint as a stimulus and a meeting ground for the newly committed individual. The identification of ethics with tactics in a period in which tactics is said to have a priority has certain organizational

risks such as previously experienced in the history of the communist movement where the necessity of the struggle sometimes was, or appeared to be, exempt from ethical considerations.

With Lukács's intervention we arrive at the same place Truitt wants to take us—the period of building socialism—but through a process mediated by the development of consciousness in the education and training of people active in the struggle. Bloch's note on the formation of ethics as character (1986, 157), Parsons's argument that the "key ethical concept in Marx is 'development'" (1974, 262), Markovic's statement that the "concept of value implies a subject who evaluates" (1974, 223), and the insistence that the point of departure for ethical action is in the decision to become self-conscious and self-active (Lanning 2001, 330)—all speak to the same processes that form the base of knowledge and the sense of responsibility *within* the period of struggle and that, in turn, inform an ethics of duty in the period of building socialism.

Giving tactics a priority is particularly problematic if we agree with Truitt that the solution to the problem is the dictatorship of the proletariat (71), although he rightly emphasizes the compatibility of the concept with democracy. Truitt writes that "dictatorship of the proletariat is no more than working class control of the state" (72). The period of the dictatorship of the proletariat presumably would be that period of building socialism in which the "ethics of duty" would be possible and necessary. Does this imply an identity of ethics and the dictatorship of the proletariat? Without negating the theoretical significance of the dictatorship of the proletariat (cf. Marquit 2005, 9–10), it seems reductionist to offer it as a solution without a greater emphasis on the process of developing consciousness in the struggle for power. Historically, the Communist Party has rarely been without some programmatic means of developing class consciousness and, therefore, its advocacy of achieving state control has been to some degree shaped by necessary and comprehensive knowledge for the task that is attainable by working people. If a Marxist ethics is to have meaning for both periods, Marxists must pay greater attention to the *conduct* of the individuals and collectivities throughout the development and

progress of the movement. The utopian imagination of Bloch and Benjamin in art and literature that Truitt discusses in his chapter “The Intersection of Morality, Politics and the Arts” is one means of achieving this.

These criticisms are not intended to detract from the quality and importance of Truitt’s work, but rather to suggest further development of aspects of the issue, especially as these relate to “what is to be done?” His analysis of debates, his critique of the relation between Marx and bourgeois philosophy, and the discussion of the problem of determinism should establish convincingly that there actually is a Marxist ethics. This “short exposition” is a well-written introduction to the topic; it is a book of philosophy unburdened with technical jargon. It is, therefore, an excellent choice for good, old-fashioned study circles.

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*Reflections of African-American Peace Leaders: A Documentary History, 1898-1967.* Edited by Marvin J. Berlowitz, Eric R. Jackson, and Nathan A. Long. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002. 196 pages, cloth \$99.95.

*Reflections of African-American Peace Leaders* synthesizes in a single volume a number of known and unknown voices of Black Americans from the Spanish American War to the conflict in Vietnam. Drawing almost exclusively on primary source documents from several volumes of Herbert Aptheker's *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* as well as Philip S. Foner's *Paul Robeson Speaks, Foreign Affairs Magazine*, and the *Crisis*, the book is a collection of thirty-two documents organized chronologically into three chapters. Included also is a section that provides the reader with biographical information on the authors of most of the documents.

The first chapter, "African Americans and Anti-Imperialism: 1898-1920s," consists of ten documents that address a myriad of peace-related issues ranging from the U.S. involvement in the Spanish American War to an appeal to the United States to recognize the USSR as a legitimate government. The ten documents which constitute the second chapter, "Peace without Justice: 1930s and 1940s," were selected to expose racism, both at home and abroad, as the greatest obstacle to achieving a just society. The basic theme of the last document in this chapter is that without the influence of the Soviet Union, "the anti-imperialist struggle for peace and democracy would not have been possible" (100). The third chapter, "World War II and Its Aftermath: 1950s and 1960s," consists of a dozen documents beginning with Paul Robeson's denunciation of the Korean intervention and ending with Martin Luther King's 1967 condemnation of U.S. militarism in Southeast Asia, "A Time to Break the Silence."

*Reflections* is useful as a resource because in less than 175 pages it documents historically significant initiatives and statements of African American peace advocates. The documents are testimony to the fact that by the middle of the last century, African American peace activists not only were aware of earlier generations

of Black spokespersons for peace, but often reaffirmed such positions. In *Freedom Magazine* in 1954, for instance, Paul Robeson compared Ho Chi Minh's struggle against the French imperialists in Southeast Asia to the heroic exploits of Toussaint L'Ouverture, who led the people of Haiti in the 1790s in a victorious revolution against the French Empire. Robeson implores his readers to "remember well the warning words of a Negro spokesman, Charles Baylor, who wrote in the *Richmond Planet* a half century ago: 'The American Negro cannot become the ally of imperialism without enslaving his own race'" (123).

It should not be inferred that African Americans were monolithic in their approaches to achieving peace. In actual fact, it was not at all uncommon for Black peace advocates to assume contradictory philosophical and tactical positions. When Martin Luther King wrote "Nonviolence and Racial Justice" in 1957, it is not clear that he was familiar with two essays authored more than three decades earlier by E. Franklin Frazier in the March and June issues of the *Crisis*. What is clear is that King's stance on nonviolence and love was in direct opposition to Frazier's posture that "violent defense in local and specific instances has made white men hesitate to make wanton attacks upon Negroes" (24). Furthermore, King's assertion that "in the center of nonviolence is the principle of love" and that "to retaliate with hate and bitterness would do nothing but intensify the hate in the world" (127) stands in stark contrast to Frazier's claim that "the question of love is irrelevant, . . . [indeed] hatred may have a positive moral value," and that African Americans should not accept "an enforced inferior status" but rather "save themselves by hating the oppression and the oppressors" (23).

The issue of African American participation in the U.S. military is another area in which Black advocates of peace disagreed. In October 1951, Pettis Perry argued in *Political Affairs* for "abolition of Jim Crow in the army." Perry's demand that there be "complete merging of Negro and white in every branch of the service without exception" and that "the army should have Negro officers of every rank, including generals" (114–15), flew directly in the face of Paul Robeson, who had addressed a rally sponsored by the Civil

Rights Congress in Madison Square Garden. Robeson declared that no Americans, especially Black Americans, should sacrifice their lives for puppet regimes in Korea, Formosa (Taiwan), the Philippines, and Indo-China. He proclaimed, "the place for the Negro people to fight for their freedom is here at home in Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas—in the Chicago ghetto, and right here in New York's Stuyvesant Town!" (112).

It is clear from these and other documents in the volume that African Americans made important contributions to the dialogue on peace throughout the first half of the twentieth century. What is less clear is the authenticity of their authors as "peace leaders" as claimed in the title of the book. The concept of leadership implies, in most instances, the existence of a following. An organized constituency group must acknowledge the leader's right to represent its issues and interest. Unlike a mere spokesperson, who may be identified as such by the media or another third party, a leader is positioned to be held accountable to her/his constituency. If such a person is called a "peace leader," the implication here is that there is recognition on the part of an organized peace group of the leader's right to lead.

Unquestionably a significant portion of the book contains documents authored by well-known African American leaders such as W. E. B. Du Bois, A. Philip Randolph, Paul Robeson, Prime Minister Eric Williams, Walter White, Septima Clark, and Gloria Richardson. On the other hand, a substantial portion of the book contains documents from individuals whose status as "peace leaders" may, at least, be suspect. For instance, how does the reader know who Lewis H. Douglass is when his name does not appear in the "Selected Biographies of Authors of Documents" section? Is this an oversight on the part of the editors or a reflection of an absence of information about Douglass as a peace leader? A similar question may be raised about Clifford H. Plummer. Is Clifford H. Plummer the same person as Charles H. Plummer, since "Clifford" appears in the table of contents and the text and "Charles" only appears in the selected biography section? If the reader assumes that they are one and the same, it is still not certain that he is a "peace leader." Based on the brief biography, it seems

that Mr. Plummer was the president of the International Improved Waiters' Association, which means he was a labor leader who published an anti-imperialist article in the *New York Tribune*.

Charles G. Baylor is another case in point. Like Lewis H. Douglass, Baylor's name is excluded from the selected biographies section. Interestingly, when Paul Robeson makes reference to Baylor, he refers to him as "a Negro spokesman" (123) and not an African American leader. If publishing an anti-imperialist letter is the only criterion for leadership for African Americans, then every person of color in Massachusetts would have qualified when a letter was sent to President McKinley titled "Massachusetts Negroes to President McKinley, 1899" (14).

Perhaps the question of authentic African American leadership would not be as apparent if more established leaders' reflections were included in the volume. For instance, like Lewis H. Douglass (who in all likelihood was the son of Frederick Douglass), Clifford Plummer and Charles G. Baylor contributed important reflections on U.S. imperialism. The reflections of such established leaders as Bishop Henry McNeal Turner on this topic would have augmented the volume significantly. After serving in Georgia's constitutional convention between 1867 and 1868, Turner was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives. In 1880 he was elected one of twelve bishops in the AME church. In that same year he became president of Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia, where he served until 1900. During the Spanish American War and the subsequent war against the Filipinos, Turner denounced the African American soldiers who fought with the U.S. military to suppress the Philippine insurrection, declaring, "I boil over with disgust when I remember that colored men from this country . . . are fighting to subjugate a people of their own color. . . . I can scarcely keep from saying that I hope the Filipinos will wipe such soldiers from the face of the earth. . . . To go down there and shoot innocent men and take the country away from them, is too much for me to think about" (Hine et al. 2003, 344).

With only thirty-two documents in the entire volume, it seems that the work could be significantly enhanced by the inclusion of writings by more recognized African American peace leaders such as Mary Church Terrell, Bayard Rustin, Shirley Graham

Du Bois, and Wallace and Juanita Nelson. Moreover, in that the editors are cognizant of the fact that for African Americans “the struggle for justice is critical to the achievement of peace” (5), both the breadth and depth of the volume would be embellished by more documents on justice and freedom like the ones written by Septima Clark and Gloria Richardson. If, as the editors suggest, Mary Church Terrell was a cofounder of the Women’s League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), then why did they not include any of her reflections in the volume? Such inclusion would certainly supplement the two meager documents by African American women, which appear to be an afterthought to compensate for excluding women from the first two chapters. Similarly, the editors concede that Bayard Rustin was a cofounder of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), yet nothing by him appears. Carbado and Weise in *Time on Two Crosses* (2003) provide documents that demonstrate that between 1942 and 1967 there were no less than twenty essays, speeches, and interviews by Rustin on peace-related issues, any one of which would have been appropriate for inclusion. For instance, in his 1943 “Letter to The Draft Board,” he justified his resistance to conscription on the grounds that he was “convinced that conscription as well as war equally are (sic) inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus” (Carbado and Weise 2003, 11).

Considering the fact that Rustin was the chief organizer of the historic March on Washington, the editors would have done well to include his 1963 “Preamble to the March on Washington” in the volume. If the volume were so inclusive as to contain actual speeches made on that historic occasion, there could be accompanying commentary on the controversy aroused by John Lewis’s speech that horrified Archbishop Patrick O’Boyle because of Lewis’s reference to the simple word “patience.” In his original version, Lewis declared:

To those who have said, “Be patient and wait,” we must say that “patience” is a dirty word. We cannot be patient, we do not want to be free gradually. We want our freedom, and we want it now.

Because other prominent figures such as the Reverend Eugene Carson Blake of the National Council of Churches, Walter Reuther, Roy Wilkins, and Bobby Kennedy expressed other objections to the speech, Lewis was persuaded to change and “sanitize” the text (Lewis 1998, 220–27).

It can be reasonably argued that, when selecting King’s speech “A Time to Break the Silence” for *Reflections of African American Peace Leaders*, the editors lost a wonderful opportunity by not including Bayard Rustin’s 1967 response, “Dr. King’s Painful Dilemma,” in which he expressed his concern for the future of African American participation in the peace movement (Carbado and Weise 2003, 185). Another missed opportunity is the volume’s exclusion of Shirley Graham Du Bois, the wife of W. E. B. Du Bois, who launched the magazine *Freedomways* which she coedited with her friend Esther Cooper Jackson, the wife of the Communist Party leader James Jackson. After a career as a teacher, writer, musician, and world traveler, Graham Du Bois and her husband moved to Ghana in 1961, where she wrote in Soviet publications on Cuba and Africa (Horne 2000, 160–65). The volume would have been immeasurably enhanced by her critiques of U.S. foreign policy and other writings. Reflections from the distinguished career of Adam Clayton Powell, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from World War II through the civil rights movement, including his participation in the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, Indonesia, would have also enhanced the work. Also valuable would have been *Peacemaker* cofounder Wallace Nelson and his wife Juanita, who in 1952 staged a civil-disobedience action at Cincinnati’s Coney Island that became the hallmark of nonviolent protest during the civil rights movement (Washington 2005, 226).

If “African Americans are virtually unanimous in their subscription to ‘positive’ peace,” the editors fail to provide adequate documentation to substantiate their claim (5). Their premise would have been more powerful had they organized the book according to their paradigmatic distinction between “negative and positive peace” leaders, and clearly identified notable African American historical contributors from both camps. Finally, accuracy demands

that greater attention be paid to the significant contributions of African American women to the cause of peace.

Despite these limitations, the book is a good initial effort to address a long-neglected topic. For college professors, teachers, students, and community activists, it is a useful resource to examine more than half a century of views by African Americans who positioned themselves as staunch advocates of peace.

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## ABSTRACTS

**Ishay Landa, “Aroma and Shadow: Marx vs. Nietzsche on Religion”**—Marx and Nietzsche are often mentioned together in relation to a caustic denunciation of religion. In this essay, the author takes such juxtaposition to task. Nietzschean atheism should be understood as an absolute alternative to Marxism, devised specifically to destroy it and take its place. The religious “shadow” that Nietzsche sought to chase away was, at bottom, the Marxist variant of atheism. Conversely, the Nietzschean brand of atheism can best be seen as just one of many odors of a religious “aroma” so offensive to Marx and Engels.

**Bahman Azad, “The Scientific Basis of the Concept of the Vanguard Party of the Proletariat”**—A consequences of the setback of existing socialism has been the revival of debate over Lenin’s concept of the vanguard party. Many, including some within the world Communist movement, have abandoned this concept on the grounds that it has been responsible for the past “elitist” practices of many Communist parties, which, in turn, contributed to the setback. The author argues that Lenin’s concept is a necessary conceptual product of Marxism’s scientific epistemology. To abandon this concept is tantamount to abandoning the claim to the scientific validity of Marxism itself.

**Berch Berberoglu, “The Class Nature of the State and Revolution in Classical Marxist Theory”**—Highlighting the arguments of the Marxist classics on the nature and dynamics of the capitalist state and its transformation, the author explores the role of the capitalist state in the class struggle. The contradictions of this process, he argues, will lead to the decline of the capitalist state and its ultimate demise. He then turns to the meaning and political implications of the “withering away of the state” in the transition from capitalism to communism.

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**Erwin Marquit, “Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Vanguard Party in Historical Context”**—In capitalist countries with traditions of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, the revolutionary Marxist parties have not yet succeeded in developing a sufficiently socialist consciousness in the people. Marxist parties therefore generally seek to form coalitions with social democrats and center forces to weaken state control by the most right-wing segments of monopoly capital. This should not be viewed as abandonment of the vanguard role of the party or rejection of the recognition of the necessity of a democratic dictatorship of the proletariat in the transition to socialism.

## ABREGES

**Ishay Landa, « L’arôme et l’ombre : Marx contre Nietzsche à propos de la religion »** — On fait souvent allusion à Marx et Nietzsche ensemble par rapport à une dénonciation caustique de la religion. Dans cet essai, l’auteur prend cette juxtaposition à partie. L’athéisme nietzschéen devrait être compris comme une alternative absolue au marxisme, inventé spécifiquement pour le détruire et le remplacer. L’« ombre » religieuse que Nietzsche cherchait à chasser était, au fond, la variante marxiste de l’athéisme. Au contraire, la meilleure vision qu’on peut avoir de la version nietzschéenne de l’athéisme est de la comparer à une de ces multiples odeurs d’un « arôme » religieux si offensif à Marx et Engels.

**Bahman Azad, « La base scientifique du concept du parti d’avant-garde du prolétariat »** — Une des conséquences du revers historique récent du socialisme existant était la reprise du débat à propos du concept de Lénine du parti d’avant-garde. Beaucoup, dont quelques-uns faisant partie du mouvement communiste mondial, ont abandonné ce concept car dans le passé, beaucoup de partis communistes l’ont utilisé pour justifier des pratiques « élitistes »; pratiques, qui, à leur tour, ont contribué aux revers récents. Selon l’auteur, le concept de Lénine est un produit conceptuel nécessaire à l’épistémologie scientifique marxiste. L’abandon de ce

concept correspond à l'abandon de la revendication de la validité scientifique du marxisme même.

**Berch Berberoglu, « La nature de classes de l'état, et la révolution dans la théorie marxiste classique »** — Soulignant les arguments des textes marxistes classiques sur la nature et la dynamique de l'état capitaliste et sa transformation, l'auteur explore le rôle de l'état capitaliste dans la lutte des classes. Il explique que les contradictions de ce processus mèneront au déclin de l'état capitaliste et enfin à sa disparition. Puis, l'auteur s'intéresse à la signification et aux implications politiques de cet « évanouissement de l'état » dans la transition entre le capitalisme et le communisme.

**Erwin Marquit, « La dictature du prolétariat et le parti d'avant-garde dans le contexte historique »** — Dans les pays capitalistes à la tradition démocratique parlementaire bourgeoise, les partis marxistes révolutionnaires n'ont pas encore réussi à développer une conscience populaire suffisamment socialiste. Pour cette raison, les partis marxistes cherchent généralement à former des coalitions avec des démocrates sociaux et des forces centristes, afin d'affaiblir le contrôle de l'état exercé par les formations situées le plus à droite du capital monopoliste. Ceci ne doit pas être considéré comme l'abandon du rôle d'avant-garde du parti, ni comme un rejet de la reconnaissance d'une dictature démocratique du prolétariat dans la transition au socialisme.