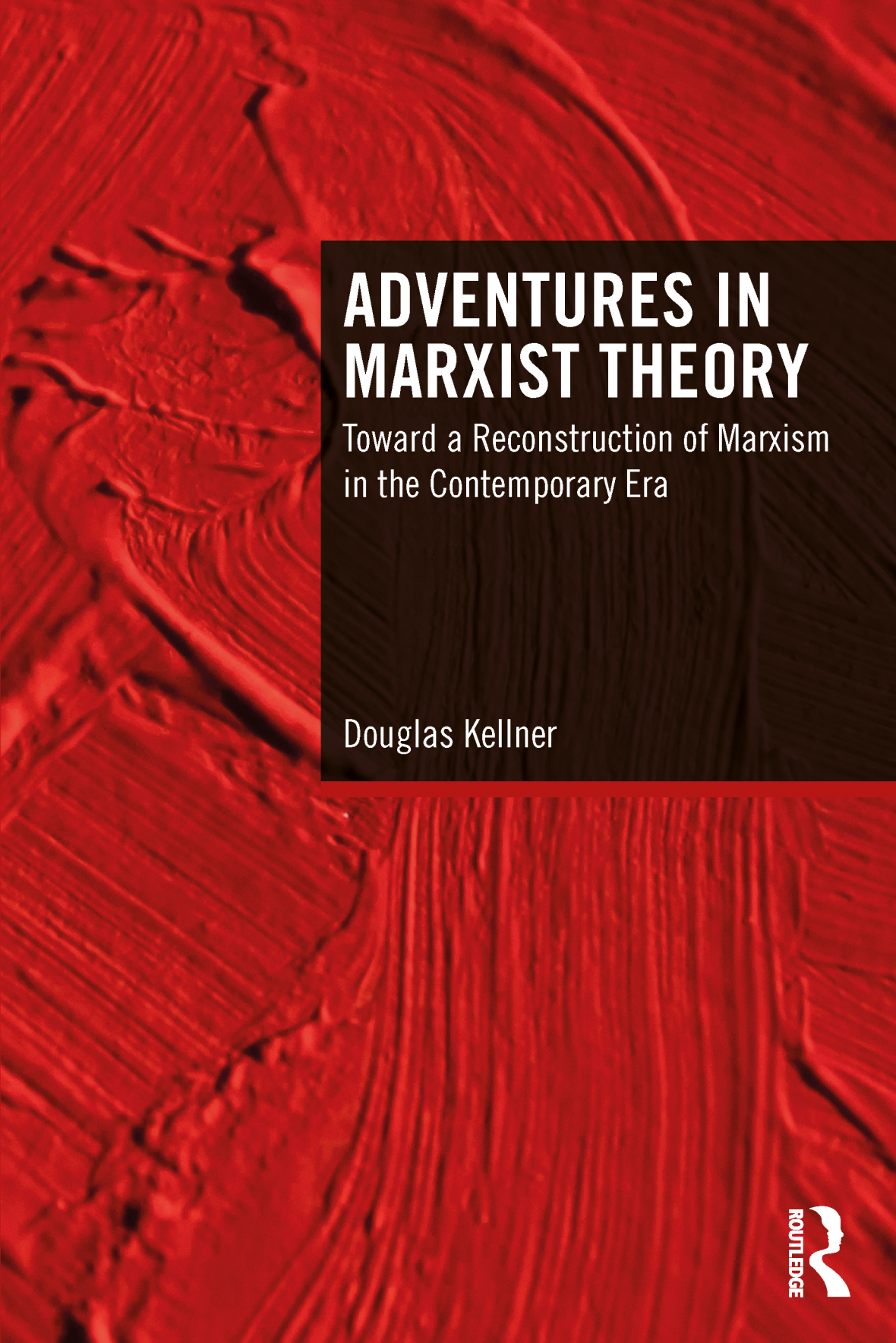
ADVENTURES IN MARXIST THEORY
Toward a Reconstruction of Marxism in the Contemporary Era
Douglas Kellner
ROUTLEDGE

"As a guide to reading and understanding Marxist thought, this is a very helpful pedagogical resource. It brings compelling insights and original arguments in order to contribute to on-going debates in Marxian thought, e.g. did Marx believe in some kind of fixed human nature or essential features of what it means to be human? If so, did he maintain this belief throughout his life or move on from it? I appreciate that the book begins with a personal story of Marx and concludes with Marx's contemporary relevance for understanding 21st century economic and political developments. The review and argumentation on Marxian debates is worthwhile, especially as it illustrates that Marxism is not a monolith but, in fact, a diverse field of study. It is commendable that the author is providing a legible review of Marxian thought while also engaging in serious debates in the field. This accessible review of Marx and Marxian thought will certainly be of interest to a new generation of students and teachers."

Timothy Clark, *Assistant Professor of Sociology, Catawba College*

"Douglas Kellner has developed in this critical study a luminous account of Marxist thought in its myriad philosophical, economic, political, and cultural dimensions. It constitutes both the preservation and concretization for today of a century of dialectical Marxism going all the way back to Lukács. *Adventures in Marxist Theory* is sure to engage a new generation of radicals and Marxists concerned with economic and class exploitation and with imperialism and war, but for whom the Hegelian/Marxian dialectic has been tarnished via attacks from anti-totality and decolonial perspectives. It will also bring Marx in new ways to a generation of critical theorists of various types who were taught to avoid or too quickly go 'beyond' Marx, but who are being drawn back to him by the dire state of the world. I invite all of them to read this book as a rigorous yet clear introduction to an entire world of dialectical and humanist Marxism that is deeply grounded in the study of social life, and its needed transformation."

Kevin B. Anderson, *Professor of Sociology, University of California Santa Barbara*

"*Adventures in Marxist Theory* re-emphasizes the relevance of Marxism for the current political moment and argues that the Marxist theorization of capitalism holds true, despite many of the historical changes in the way the system operates now from the way it did at its inception. This approach is both important and incisive. It rejects ahistorical (and un-Marxist) claims of capitalism being an unchanging set of social relations, while establishing Marxism as theory, or a framework, rather than a set of received truths or empirical findings. The project also makes another important contribution in that it underscores the impossibility of tethering Marxism to any one academic discipline, such as history, or economics. The book will be important for a range of courses, from Introduction to Marxist Theory to historiography and methods."

Tithi Bhattacharya, *Professor of History, Purdue University*

"In his new book, Douglas Kellner convincingly demonstrates that Marxism is still of central importance for a critical analysis of the present and for supporting radical democratic politics in the 21st century."

Rainer Winter, *Professor of Media and Cultural Theory, University of Klagenfurt*

Adventures in Marxist Theory

Adventures in Marxist Theory provides an introduction and overview of Marxian theory to demonstrate its contemporary relevance to social and political theory and a range of disciplines from philosophy to economics in both the humanities and the social sciences. The text argues that current historical developments and the evolution of economics, politics, society, culture, technology, and everyday life demonstrates the contemporary relevance of Marxism in both theory and politics in the contemporary era.

The book presents a twenty-first century Marxism relevant to theorizing contemporary state capitalist and technological societies, critically dissecting their major social and political issues and problems, while advancing progressive social transformation in the interests of increased democracy and social justice. The volume opens with an Introduction describing a multi-disciplinary and critical approach to Marxism and its application to a wide range of contemporary issues, including the alienation of labor in the workplace, social divisions, and injustices such as classism, sexism, racism, and homophobia, and questions of technology, social media, and AI, as well as problems of ecological crisis, autocracy, and state oppression. Specific chapters address the Marxian critique of capitalism and theory of socialism, its concept of ideology and morality, its methodological synthesis of social science, critical theory, and its analyses of globalization, technology, and democracy.

Written by a distinguished scholar of Marxism, critical theory, and cultural and political studies, the volume will be a key resource for instructors, students, and readers in historical and contemporary sociology, social and critical theory, political sociology, political and cultural studies, and Marx and Marxist studies.

Douglas Kellner is George Kneller Chair in the Philosophy of Education at UCLA, and is author of many books on social theory, politics, history, and culture, including *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity, and Politics in the Contemporary Moment* (2e, 2020), *American Nightmare: Donald Trump, Media Spectacle, and Authoritarian Populism* (2016), and *American Horror Show: Election 2016 and the Ascent of Donald J. Trump* (2017), as well as the editor of the multi-volume *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse* (2017) and *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (1984).

Adventures in Marxist Theory

Toward a Reconstruction of Marxism in the Contemporary Era

Douglas Kellner

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Foreword

Kevin B. Anderson

Douglas Kellner's *Adventures in Marxist Theory* offers reflections on Marx's writings from someone who has been deeply involved with the Frankfurt School and related theorizations of modern capitalism, who has critically appropriated the work of a host of other thinkers, most notably Jean Baudrillard, and who has drawn on all this to create a 21st-century social theory of media culture and technology. All of the above has been taken up in Kellner's voluminous and widely discussed publications up to now, many of them translated into multiple languages over the years. To cite one example of the global reach of Kellner's thought, I recall a trip we both took to an international conference at Nanjing University in 2008, during which Kellner discovered that several of his books had already been translated into Chinese and were being discussed widely, including in a seminar in Nanjing led by the noted scholar Zhang Yibing.

Indeed, Kellner stands as one of the foremost theorists in the world today working in the tradition of the Frankfurt School. What makes the present book unique among his writings is his direct grappling at length here with Marx's writings as a whole. In one sense, he is revealing what amounts to the major theoretical foundation of his life's work, but in other ways, particularly in the last few chapters, he is also showing that a direct engagement with Marx's writings is absolutely crucial for navigating the world of today. With this return to a deep consideration of Marx, Kellner is moving in the opposite direction of many other continuators of the Frankfurt School, who have distanced themselves increasingly from Marx and Marxism. In so doing, Kellner is also reaching out to a new generation of scholars and activists increasingly drawn to Marx in a new century that has been marked not by a stable "administered society," let alone a placid "end of history" that would have enabled the global proliferation of liberal bourgeois democracy, but by economic crashes, turns toward fascism, and new forms of aggressive imperialism. These are seen in Vladimir Putin's imperialist war on Ukraine and Israel's genocidal and U.S.-backed war on Gaza, and not least the (re)ascendancy of Trumpist fascism in the U.S., all addressed in Kellner's most recent publications.

Rather than beginning with his theoretical exploration of Marx's writings, Kellner opens this volume with some autobiographical reflections. Let us start here, with the materiality of Kellner's direct experiences in the 1960s, both as

theory and as activism, as recounted in the first chapter. As he was about to become a PhD candidate in philosophy at Columbia University in the epochal year 1968, Kellner was teaching Marx in an undergraduate course just as the student uprising broke out. He then saw one of his professors, the eminent scholar Sidney Morgenbesser, bloodied by a police beating, which had targeted faculty members and graduate students who had formed a cordon to protect students occupying a building. Instead, all of them, professors, graduate students, and undergraduates alike, underwent a brutal assault by the police. In his intellectual life in this period, Kellner was moving from phenomenology and existentialism toward Marxism and critical theory, all the while writing his doctoral dissertation on Martin Heidegger. Kellner recounts from these years an interesting interaction with Herbert Marcuse, who gave a lecture at Columbia in 1969. In a nighttime conversation afterwards, Marcuse convinced some radicals from an ultra-leftist faction of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) not to engage in physical attacks on universities, given the role of the latter, in however alienated form, as loci of critical thought.

If 1968 at Columbia helped form Kellner as a philosopher and a committed intellectual, his experiences in Germany and France during the next few years deepened his philosophical radicalism. In Tübingen, Germany, he attended the Hegelian and Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch's seminars and also encountered Theodor Adorno's withering critique of Heidegger, which helped move him from existentialism toward the Frankfurt School. Then, in 1971–72, after two years in Germany, he spent a year in France. There he met with Claude Lévi-Strauss and attended lectures by a number of other thinkers, among them Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard. Ever since, Kellner has tended toward the critical appropriation of "French thought" into Marxism and critical theory, rather than its polemical rejection, as in the writings of some critical theorists, most notably Jürgen Habermas.

Kellner also recounts here his two decades at the University of Texas in Austin, as well as how the ferment of the 1960s paved the way for the hiring of those like him—and there were several others—to form one of the best pluralist and progressive philosophy departments in the English-speaking world. Kellner's Austin years comprised some of his most influential writings, including his studies of Marcuse and the Frankfurt School, as well as his more critical engagements with Jean Baudrillard and postmodernism. Leaving Texas after conservative political and intellectual winds broke the back of the department's pluralism, he took a position at UCLA's school of education. There, over the past three decades, Kellner has moved more into media and cultural studies, with a particular focus in recent years on the rise of fascism in the context of Donald Trump's attacks on U.S. democracy and Putin's attempt at the erasure of the Ukrainian people.

Considering the fact that Kellner was schooled in Georg Lukács's critique of Engels as a mechanical materialist, it comes as a bit of a surprise that he gives Marx's comrade his due, more so than in many other recent accounts of Marxist thought. For example, he notes that Engels preceded Marx in the critique of political economy, also pointing to their joint development of historical

materialism. He also shows how in the *Communist Manifesto* their acknowledgment/advocacy of the melting away of the old feudal status orders (*Stände*) paved the way for the tendency toward two social classes, bourgeoisie and proletariat. The latter marked a huge difference with their teacher Hegel, who, as Kellner notes, wanted to maintain the *Stände* as a social anchor. Kellner mentions one key difference between Marx and Engels, however, which is rooted in Marx's deeper engagement with Hegel and dialectics: "Marx had a much more extravagant Hegelian concept of the proletariat as revolutionary subject at this time than Engels' more modest sociological and political concept."

Another surprise in this volume, considering that Kellner comes from what some Marxists would consider a "German idealist" background, is the lengthy engagement with Adam Smith's political economy and Marx's critique of it. Marx's critique of Smith is sometimes viewed—and rightly so—through an Hegelian lens, as when Kellner notes Smith's essentialist view of human nature as one of barter and trading, whereas Marx sees humanity as "protean" and always capable of "novel historical development." At the same time, through Smith and others, Marx moves to a greater engagement with empirical research, but one rooted in the broad Germanic concept of "science" as *Wissenschaft* rather than a narrow form of empirical science. In fact, as Kellner demonstrates, Marx attacks Smith's abstractions concerning the benefits of the modern capitalist division of labor, based upon his actual—and those of Engels—empirical and well as philosophical investigations of the alienation and exploitation of the modern worker.

Some of the most engaging chapters concern the philosophical Marx, not surprising given what Kellner's work of a lifetime brings to the discussion. One key example is where Marx's concept of critique is shown to have six(!) different forms, ranging from assessing social reality from the standpoint of ideas to political and economic critique, and, finally, based upon a normative conception of the good society. It would be hard to equal the depth and range of this "definition." In these chapters, Marx is also shown to have a highly developed concept of individuality, of the human capacities and aspirations of these individuals, and of how this is stifled under capitalism, especially for the proletariat. At a strictly philosophical level, Kellner notes that Marx's standpoint involves "a mixture of materialist and idealist and naturalist and utopian conceptions."

At this juncture, Kellner expands the classical Frankfurt School conceptualizations of the terrain of Marxist thought to include "intersectional Marxism," i.e., the dimensions of colonialism, race, and gender, to wit: "Marx and Engels anticipated [contemporary] theories of intersectionality in their analyses of colonialism, slavery and the U.S. Civil War, and Engels' analysis of family and gender oppression."

All of this, from the more purely philosophical to the more grounded discussion of race, gender, and colonialism, is tied to the overcoming of capitalism, to its sublation or *Aufhebung*. In true Hegelian fashion, Marx sees the new gestating inside the old, which forms the basis of his "moral-humanistic conception of socialism." In this study, Kellner connects Marx's Hegelianism to his

concept of the alternative to capitalism: "Utilizing rigorously Hegelian modes of thought, Marx … sees the higher potentials trapped in their capitalist form." Thus, he does not critique capitalism using a yardstick based upon other class regimes, but from an idealist/materialist concept of a liberated future. Few can equal Kellner here in how he joins together Hegelian critique with the palpable materiality of the reality of oppression under capitalism and the quest to overcome it on a positive humanist basis. Moreover, Kellner presents all of this as no mere idea floating above social reality; rather, it is based for Marx upon very concrete changes like the shortening of the working day. Looking at the whole, Kellner concludes: "Marxian theory is at bottom both a theory of capitalism, rooted in the political economy of the existing social system, *and* a theory of the transition to socialism."

The last chapters return to cultural and media critique, focusing especially on the rise of Donald Trump. Kellner acknowledges that many aspects of social media render it particularly useful for his kind of fascist demagoguery. But in dialectical fashion, Kellner points as well to how "insurgent intellectuals and activists are also making use of these digital technologies." This kind of perspective and research program, which Kellner has honed over the past several decades, builds upon but also differs from the bleak view of modern mass media "as totally controlled by capitalist corporations" as theorized by Horkheimer and Adorno, as well as from the less sanguine democratic public sphere notions of Habermas.

Kellner has developed in this critical study a luminous account of Marxist thought in its myriad philosophical, economic, political, and cultural dimensions. It constitutes both the preservation and concretization for today of a century of dialectical Marxism going all the way back to Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*. *Adventures in Marxist Theory* is sure to engage with a new generation of radicals and Marxists concerned with economic and class exploitation and with imperialism and war, but for whom the Hegelian/Marxian dialectic has been tarnished via attacks from anti-totality and decolonial perspectives. It will also bring Marx in new ways to a generation of critical theorists of various types who were taught to avoid or too quickly go "beyond" Marx, but who are being drawn back to him by the dire state of the world. I invite all of them to read this book as a rigorous yet clear introduction to an entire world of dialectical and humanist Marxism that is deeply grounded in the study of social life, and its needed transformation.

Preface

Douglas Kellner

Marxian theory and politics has been a global force throughout the 20th century and into the 21st. However, its monumental critique of capitalism and theory of revolution and socialism has been immensely polarizing, with multitudes of advocates and detractors throughout the world continuing to produce heated polemics for and against Marxism. No other critical theory of society and history has been as influential as Marxism, and it continues today to win its adherents and opponents on every continent and throughout the world of cyberspace (and an Internet search for "Karl Marx" and "Marxism" will find a multitude of links and topics).

In this book, I will present Marxism as a critical theory of society grounded in political economy that continues to be relevant for critical theory and radical politics today. I will begin by depicting my own adventures in Marxism that provide the grounding for the studies that constitute this book. I then present in-depth studies of Marx and Engels to provide background and knowledge of the Marxian theory rooted in Marx and Engels' own life and work. I include Engels as a key figure in the development and propagation of Marxism, in opposition to all-too-many books and readings of Marxism that exclude Engels and solely focus on Marx, or that celebrate Marx as a great theorist and historical figure while denigrating Engels. Both these practices, I argue, are historically inaccurate, for we shall see that Engels was the co-creator of Marxism from the beginning and continued his close collaboration and friendship with Marx until the end of Marx's life.

I will also show how Engels was a crucial figure in the development of Marxism, although I also want to highlight the key role and importance of Karl Marx. Hence, after two largely biographical/historical/theoretical presentations of Marx and then Engels, I devote Chapter 4 to Karl Marx and Adam Smith. This juxtaposition is appropriate and highlights, I argue, how Adam Smith is the first great theorist of capitalism and remains one of its most important theorists and defenders, while Marx gains part of his historical importance by developing one of the sharpest critiques of Smith and capitalism, as he was developing an alternative theory of political economy, socialism, and revolution. This opposition between Marx and Smith continues to be important to this day as, since the 19th century, there have been fierce debates over

capitalism and socialism, with Smith and Marx as key figures in the debate up through the present.

The following chapters—"Marxism, Morality, and Ideology: Toward a Critical Marxian Humanism" and "Marxism, Colonialism and Modernity: Toward an Intersectional Marxism"—highlight the specificity of my own interpretation of Marxism that distinguishes it from other versions of Marxism, and which makes Marxism continually relevant to contemporary critical social theory and radical politics. Against readings of Marxism as "scientific socialism" that eschew morality and values, presenting a strictly objectivistic analysis of capitalist political economy and history, I argue that Marx and Engels provide both a moral critique of some elements that are profoundly wrong in capitalism and present socialism as a good society, where one can live a life worthy of a human being.

To be sure, Marx and Engels present a powerful critique of bourgeois society and morality, and do not provide an ethical theory per se that can be lived as Marxist morality, although they used moral values and rhetoric to critique capitalism, grounded in a philosophical humanism that shows how capitalism degrades human life and human beings, while socialism provides a superior form of labor and mode of life. Marxian humanism, however, is critical of a universalistic and idealist humanism, and is grounded in a concrete socio-historical and materialist analysis of how capitalist labor relations of production degrade and even mutilate human life, whereas socialism for Marx and Engels provides a more cooperative society based on associative labor and humane social values and relations.

Chapter 6 engages Marx and Engel's critique of modernity and globalization, which is of significant importance for contemporary arguments about modernity and postmodernity and globalization. Their work figures in a central way in these debates as they argue that modernity follows the trajectory of capitalism, political economy, and class struggle. Moreover, they were the first to theorize that capitalism and class struggle are global in nature in the era of colonialization and imperialism, which by the 20th century were increasingly dividing the world into the haves and the have-nots, the colonialists and the colonized. In this chapter, I argue that Marxism's critical theory of modernity is intersectional in that it engages the interaction and relationality between class, gender, race, and ethnicity. Marxism is often criticized as being class-reductionist and excluding gender, race, ethnicity, and other components of the human personality as key constituents of social beings and human life. This is absolutely false as from the beginning Marx and Engels recognized the importance of the family and gender, calling in "The Communist Manifesto" in 1848 for the abolition of the family, right after their demand for the abolition of private property in a socialist revolution, thus highlighting both class and gender relations in their key work.

As I discuss in Chapters 3 and 6, in his first published book, *The Condition of Working Class in England* (1845), Friedrich Engels focused on the factory work and living conditions of working men, women and children, documenting

their oppressive living and working conditions. Engels provides a sharp analysis and critique of the exploitation of laboring men, women, and children in the capitalist labor process, while Marx analyzes the role of men, women, and children in the labor process in *Capital*.

In their political writings and agitation, Marx and Engels were ardent supporters of women's rights, as were Marx's wife Jenny and daughter Eleanor. Moreover, in his late book, *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, 1884, Engels highlighted the importance of the family in terms of gender relations, property ownership, and political rights, highlighting the oppression of women and supporting their emancipation. Engels analyzes here the historical roles of women in the family, economy, and polity in different epochs of history. Hence, throughout their studies and writings Marx and Engels engage the situation of women and gender relations, a theme taken up by major theorists in the Marxist movement and socialist-feminists in the contemporary era that I discuss in Chapter 6.

The Marxian theory also engages the intersection of class, gender, and race, which Marx and Engels explored in their diverse critical writings on colonialism while analyzing the exploitation of non-Western people and regions of the world. In exile in London, the capital of the British empire that spanned the globe, Marx and Engels were in an excellent position to observe British imperialism, and thus became among the first major critics of colonialization and globalization. In his prolific journalistic writings of the 1850s, Marx wrote on India, Indonesia, Russia, Turkey, Ireland, and British colonies in the four corners of the world, producing studies that gave his theoretical works grounding in global knowledge and theory. Thus, Marx's magnum opus, *Capital*, was grounded in his prolific journalistic-sociological writings, his decades-long study of political economy, and in the sociology and politics of British industry and colonialization.

Hence, in their critical theory of capitalism and colonialization, Marx and Engels engaged the intersectionality of race, gender, ethnicity, and class, thus producing a critical intersectional global theory of colonialism and imperialism. Chapter 7, "Marx's Critique of *Capital* and the Consumer Society," Chapter 8, "Marxism, Technological Revolution, and the Contemporary Era," and Chapter 9, "The Continued Relevance of Marxist Theory and Socialist Practice in the 21st Century," all argue for how Marxian theory provides the basis for a critical theory of contemporary society.

Against static models of "Marxist science," I argue that Marxism is a sociohistorical theory that analyses contemporary conditions to provide a critical theory of contemporary society and radical politics. Marx and Engels, and many in the later Marxian tradition, continually revised their theories in the light of new historical conditions, changes in political economy and society, and the vicissitudes of contemporary politics and history. Marx and Engels spent decades studying political economy and the political struggles of the day, and continually revised their theory in light of contemporary conditions and political upheaval so that their theory remained relevant to the issues,

developments, and conflicts of the day. Hence, Chapter 7 traces the trajectory of Marxian theory engaging the transformation of market capitalism into state capitalism in the 20th century, and then consumer capitalism whereby consumption becomes a major force of life in the consumer societies that emerged in the 1950s in the Western regions recovering and rebuilding after World War II and then spread throughout the world as capitalism became increasingly globalized.

Likewise, Chapter 8 focuses on economic and technological change in the 20th and 21st centuries. I argue that the Marxian theory presents a dialectic of economy and technology in which economic forces promote and create new technologies, constantly developing and even revolutionizing the forces and forms of production. I argue that this dialectic of the economy and technology avoids the pitfalls of economic or technological determinism that undermine many economic theories and theorizing about technology today, and thus presents an appropriate model for engaging the current interaction of technology and economy in constructing contemporary societies.

Chapter 9 sums up the key arguments of the book and shows how Marxian theory is relevant to both theoretical and political issues of the present day. Here I engage the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s and debates about the end of Marxism, arguing that the Soviet Union did not follow the democratic model of socialism promoted by Marx, Engels, and the tradition of democratic socialism, and therefore, its collapse cannot be attributed to deficiencies of Marxism. On the contrary, it shows the weaknesses of autocratic states and repressive societies, and their vulnerability to resistance and even revolutionary upheaval—thus illustrating one of the key features of Marxian political theory rather than undermining, much less refuting, the Marxian theory tout court.

Finally, the Epilogue, "The Limitations and Contributions of Classical Marxism," sums up of Marxism's contributions to critical social theory and radical politics. The focus is on the methods, theories, and concepts still useful for contemporary critical theory and practice, and some of the elements of the classical Marxian theory that need to be questioned, such as belief in the industrial proletariat as the agent of revolutionary socialism. Building on the last chapter, it suggests ways that the Marxian theory continues to provide models of critical social theory and radical political change that is democratic and emancipatory.

Hence, *Adventures in Marxist Theory* is not merely an object of study of relics in the past, but involves a confrontation with the conflicts, problems, hopes, and possibilities of the contemporary era. With the rise of autocracies throughout the globe (including the United States from where I write), as Donald Trump begins his second presidency, radical social theory, critique, democratic transformation, and liberation are needed more than ever to create a democratic and equalitarian society based on social justice, sound ecological theory and politics, and visions of a good life that will lead us into a freer, happier future.

1 My Road to Marxism

Karl Marx is one of the most influential intellectuals who ever lived, and his writings and ideas continue to circulate in all the major languages and countries of the world, as well as in crevices and unexpected places where his ideas continue to live. Capitalism has been the dominant economic system since the days of the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism that Marx and Engels wrote about. If anything, Marxism has conquered regions of the world beyond the purview of Marx and his collaborator, Friedrich Engel.[1] Yet the Social Democratic and Communist parties and regimes that established themselves under the banner of Marxism have failed to realize the democratic and emancipatory dimensions of Marxian theory; and, with the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe, Marxism was declared dead and was blamed, along with fascism, for some of the atrocities of the 20th century.[2] Nonetheless, neo-Marxist theorists and activists soon proclaimed, correctly in my view, that the versions of Soviet Communism that so spectacularly collapsed after the horrendous epoch of Stalinism were not genuinely Marxist societies in ideology and reality, and were long opposed by critical Marxism that had long contested the dogmatic versions of Marxism that had vitiated communism and social democracy.[3] Soon after the collapse of Soviet Communism in 1989, journals and books began proclaiming a "new Marxism" based on the writings of Marx and Engels and a tradition of critical Marxists who were developing the Marxist critique of capitalist societies and rethinking socialism and revolution.[4]

In this book, I will argue that Marxism continues to provide salient and powerful critiques of contemporary "technocapitalism," the capitalist state, and dominant forms of the consumer society and culture. Capitalist ideology remains a dominant ideology throughout the world, even governing the practice and world view of many in so-called communist societies. Resistance to capitalism and the Marxian theories of revolution and socialism continue to animate the struggle for democracy, social justice, equality, and a better world; and ideological struggle between capitalism and socialism continues to be intense and volatile.

Most important, the Marxist critique of capitalism and theory of socialism remain vibrant forces in the contemporary world—with labor just as alienated, the working classes just as exploited, imperialism just as robust, and revolt,

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social and political struggle, and revolutionary yearnings and hope just as powerful as ever. In this book, I will argue for the continued relevance and use-value of Marxism in social theory, critique, and political struggle. I begin by discussing the origins of Marxism in the life and work of its founders, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, in Chapters 2 and 3, and will then turn to its relevance in the contemporary world by expounding its theory and critique of capitalism, its concept of method and critique of ideology, and its theories of socialism, revolution, and liberation that reverberate throughout the key works and historical practice of Marxism. I will also point to the limitations of classical Marxism, its errors, and where it is outdated and needs to be revised and reconstructed to be relevant for the contemporary moment, and will attempt throughout to demonstrate its relevance for the construction of critical theory and democratic reconstructive practice today.

First, however, I want to describe how it has been grounded in my own study, teaching, writing, and socio-political practice over the past decades since my first encounter with Marxism in graduate school. I will thus proceed in this opening chapter to describe my road to Marxism and its introduction to my generation in the 1960s and 1970s in an era of intense struggle around the Vietnam War and imperialism, the civil rights movement and development of critical race theory, the rise of feminism and sexual liberation, concern with the environment, and anti-capitalist struggle across a wide terrain of issues. During this exciting epoch, I argue that Marxism provided resources of analysis and critique, resistance and social reconstruction, and the vision of a better society and a life worthy of human beings—themes I will flesh out in later discussions.

In the following chapters, I will thus discuss the key ideas and continued relevance of Marxian theory and practice, and contribute to developing a new Marxism that overcomes the limitations of the classical tradition and is relevant to the challenges of contemporary state capitalist, technological, consumerist, and administered autocratic societies that continue to exist throughout the world. In this introduction to my studies of Marxist theory and revolutionary politics over the past six decades, I will recount, first, my studies and initial teaching experience as a graduate student in philosophy at Columbia University during the 1968 student uprising, when I first encountered Marxist theory and practice. This is followed by discussion of my studies of Marxism and neo-Marxism at Tübingen University, Germany, in the late 1960s and 1970s after I received a German Government Fellowship to study for two years in the country. Next, I tell how I was hired to teach Marxist philosophy at the University of Texas (UT) in Austin, and describe my experiences of teaching Marxism and critical theory there from 1973 to 1995, and then describe my subsequent teaching experience at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) from 1995 until my retirement in 2021. Finally, I suggest that, in the era of Putin, Trump, and other rightwing autocrats and dictators throughout the world, reading, studying, teaching, and engaging Marxism are of crucial importance and relevance in the contemporary moment.

The Columbia Uprising and My Introduction to Marxism

While a graduate student in philosophy at Columbia University in the mid-1960s, I received a coveted assignment to teach the famous Great Books course to first-year students. In my first day as an instructor in 1968, I entered the classroom modestly, with long-hair and blue jeans, sitting in front of a class of undergraduates, many from prep schools who had read the classics I was supposed to teach, perhaps in their original languages. I confessed to the students that I hadn't previously read many of the books on the syllabus, but had read Homer and Plato and the Greek dramatists, and was looking forward to working with the class to read these books together. I sat on top of the desk, provided introductory remarks, and attempted to engage the students in conversation, sometimes successfully. Later, when I read Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (English translation 1970), I learned that I was practicing spontaneously a proper dialogical teaching method, learning from the students as I taught, and I have followed this pedagogy ever since.[5]

The Marx text in the Great Books course was Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*, and it can indeed be read as a great literary text, as well as philosophy of history and theory and critique of capitalist society. The dramatic opening, citing "[a] spectre that is haunting Europe," and the evocation of the specter as communism sets the world-historical significance of the text announcing a new revolutionary force and moment in history. The striking proclamation that the history of existing societies has been class struggle and the delineation of the two classes—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—facing off against each other and the evocation of revolution as the lever to socialism, with socialism as the goal of the existing communist political movement, dramatized the text's contemporary significance in 1848 revolutions that emerged as "The Communist Manifesto" was written and published, and continues to provide a powerful vision of politics and history today.

The famous text that launched Marx and Engels as revolutionary theorists would come to be known around the world, translated into multiple languages and appearing, even during their lifetime, in multiple versions. In the Great Books class, when I first taught the "Manifesto," we discussed in every case the contemporary relevance of the Greek, Roman, medieval, and modern classics, and how they continued to provide insight into contemporary politics and history and guidance for the development of individual lives, relations with others, portraying both admirable and destructive visions that individuals and social groups sought, and presented differences between life-enhancing and life-negating values. Once again, I was anticipating a key Marxian axiom that theory and ideas should shape practice, and that the test of the relevance and productiveness of ideas is found in human practice—an argument also made by John Dewey, whose portrait hung over us in our philosophy seminar room, since he had long taught at Columbia University.

In 1968, I was studying for my philosophy comprehensive exams at Columbia and teaching my first course when a student uprising erupted, with Students for

a Democratic Society (SDS) radicals occupying the president's office, while black radicals occupied another campus building. A series of protests during 1968 against the Vietnam War, against racism and sexism in U.S. society, and against the country's oppressive class system led to a series of dramatic student occupations of key buildings at Columbia and other universities throughout the United States and elsewhere that continued for some years in the 1960s' global upheavals.

A student activist with the SDS, Bob Feldman, discovered documents indicating Columbia's institutional affiliation with the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) research corporation, and it was also found that Columbia University professors were doing research for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and aiding in the Vietnam War effort.[6] There were also ongoing protests about Columbia's plan to take over New York City park land bordering Harlem and build a gymnasium in which the bottom half would be open to Harlem residents, while the top half was reserved for students and members of Columbia faculty and staff.

On April 23, 1968, students attempting to enter the main administration building, Low Memorial Library, were rebuffed and marched to the Harlem gym site, where they clashed with police. The protesters then returned to the Columbia campus to occupy Hamilton Hall, which had both classrooms and the offices of the Columbia College Administration. In the occupation of Hamilton Hall, the SDS students were joined by members of the Society for Afro-American Students (SAS). To the surprise of the SDS and white students, the African American students in Hamilton told the white students to occupy another building since their agendas were different. After both groups deliberated, the SDS group and other white students decided to take over Low Memorial Library, which housed the president's office. Since the occupation closely followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, which resulted in riots throughout the country, including New York, the administration was reluctant at first to use force to evict the students, and a dramatic standoff and media circus followed.

Other student groups took over a number of campus buildings at Columbia in one of the first and most dramatic student insurrections and occupations of the era. Rock band the Grateful Dead came on campus to give us a free concert, and one day Stokely Carmichael, R. Rap Brown, Eldridge Cleaver, and other black radical leaders marched up from Harlem and came on to campus to tell the white students that we needed to get serious and join with the black students to carry out a real revolution, and not just a campus shutdown.

As I was beginning teaching in Columbia College, I joined a group of professors, some from the Great Books program in which I was teaching, as well as some of my professors from the Philosophy Department, who began meeting and decided to ring the occupied buildings to protect the student occupiers from getting beaten up by conservative student groups of mostly jocks and frat guys who were themselves converging on the occupied buildings threatening to physically remove the students within.

At first, my faculty group confrontation with the rightwing students, who adopted the name "Majority Coalition," was tense, with the short-haired

conservative students declaring that they wanted to "kill the long-haired punks" who had taken over the campus. However, the faculty quickly convinced them that the protesting students had the right to oppose policies with which they disagreed. The conservative students backed down at this point, and perhaps the respect that they had for faculty and authority led them to call off their threats and a standoff occurred, preventing violence among the opposing student groups.

After a few weeks of drama and accelerating media attention, in the early hours of April 30, 1968 the New York Police Department violently crushed the demonstrations, using tear gas, and then attacking both Hamilton Hall and the Low Library. Ironically, Hamilton Hall was cleared peacefully as the black students had assembled lawyers and media observers, and a largely African American group of police officers peacefully led the black students out. The buildings occupied by white students, however, were cleared violently as hordes of officers wielding clubs and threatening with guns, beat up scores of students and some faculty members who tried to stop the police assault, leading to approximately 132 students being treated for injuries, while over 700 protesters were arrested.[7]

The night of the raid, I was at home sleeping as the faculty support group I was in had organized in 12-hour shifts to circle the occupied buildings and protect the students. As I approached the campus at early dawn, I noticed commotion and the roar of voices, hurried to the campus, and encountered one of my philosophy professors, Sidney Morgenbesser, with a bloodied head, holding white bandages to stop the blood flow. Sidney described how the police had stormed Low Library, which was occupied by students, how he and other professors attempted to stop the police, and how they proceeded to beat up and arrest students and faculty alike.

Classes were suspended for the spring semester at Columbia in 1968, and we were happy to receive A grades even though we didn't have to write final papers; many of our professors joined us in the demonstrations, so a closeness between students and professors, rare in U.S. academia at the time, emerged. Yet, one of my professors, Paul Oskar Kristeller, said he was worried about the student demonstrations because he had seen Nazi student demonstrations previewing the rise of fascism in Germany in the 1930s; but I assured him that the Columbia students were neither fascists nor communists. Kristeller also told me that his teacher at Freiburg University, Martin Heidegger, had gotten him a scholarship to study Renaissance philosophy in Italy during the Nazi period, which saved his life because he was Jewish and thus was able leave Germany when Hitler came to power, eventually departing Italy to emigrate to the U.S. and become a professor at Columbia.[8]

In the euphoria of the accelerating protests of 1968, we had the feeling that we were at the heart of revolutionary upheavals in the U.S. and globally, when representatives from France came to the campus and told us of the French student and worker uprising that was shutting down the whole of Paris and briefly was erupting throughout France in May 1968. The gym in Morningside Park that offended the Harlem residents and black radicals was never built,

Columbia severed its relations with the IDA, and many of us experienced the euphoria of radical upheaval, and were radicalized by the experience.

My philosophical allegiances at the time were primarily to phenomenology and existentialism; and, while I was unprepared for the explosiveness and impact of the student rebellion, I became active in New Left politics, participating in major anti-war and other demonstrations of the epoch. Indeed, students all over the United States and Europe were demonstrating against the Vietnam War, taking over university buildings and even campuses, and a city occupation emerged in Paris in May 1968, and it appeared that a new French revolution was in the making.

Indeed, in retrospect, the Columbia occupation of the president's office and other campus buildings anticipated the Occupy movement of 2011 and student protests against Israel's assault on Gaza in 2023–2025, and helped generate a wave of campus occupations in the decades to come, continuing into the present. To help understand these events, I went back and read the works of Herbert Marcuse; and, by the time of the publication of *An Essay on Liberation* (1969), I both better understood Marcuse's writings and the philosophical underpinnings of the student movement to which I was increasingly attracted and involved. I also received a good grounding in the Hegelian roots of Marxism through my study of Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* (1960 [1941]) and several graduate seminars in Hegel's work stemming from his *Phenomenology of Spirit, Logic*, and *Aesthetics* (1807).

During this time, the Vietnam War was raging and many of my generation were being sent over as cannon fodder for a cause that we did not understand or support. One day around 1968, I went over to Barnard College in New York City and heard a packed lecture by Noam Chomsky. At the time a Professor of Philosophy at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Chomsky was known to students for his controversial philosophy of mind and linguistic theory, but proved himself a brilliant public lecturer, providing an entire history of post-World War II Vietnam, the National Liberation Movement that drove out the French, the raging civil war in the country, and how the U.S. intervened against the communist North in support of a corrupt South Vietnamese government, providing a sharp critique of U.S. interventionism and imperialism. I walked away with a much deeper understanding of the dynamics of the Vietnam War and great respect for Noam Chomsky, who I would later meet and whose writings had an impact on my view of media and politics, providing another model, along with Herbert Marcuse, of a public intellectual and a philosopher employing his/her talents to engaging issues of vital public concern.

The following year (1969), there was an abortive attempt at a replay of the 1968 Columbia demonstrations that quickly dissipated, and some of the disillusioned SDS members formed the Weather Underground, which became notorious after some bombings when their leaders literally went underground. Following the student occupation of Columbia the previous year, we organized reading groups where some professors, graduate students like myself,

and others proposed courses around particular topics or books, and I helped organize a reading group focusing on Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964).

The close reading and passionate discussion of *One-Dimensional Man* sealed the deal, convincing me that Marcuse had the most radical and pertinent critique of contemporary U.S. culture and society of the era and best captured its dynamics. Then, at Columbia in May 1969, I heard Marcuse lecture one evening, and talked with him for the first time the next day during a reception in the Philosophy Department. We were asking Marcuse about Heidegger and his study with him, and what he thought of Heidegger today. Marcuse joked that he heard Heidegger was chiseling his philosophy in stone in Germany, highlighting what he took as the reactionary and archaic nature of Heidegger's current thought, which he expounded upon for a while. We then asked him about Adorno; he replied that "Theodore W. Adorno is one of the most important thinkers of our time," and discussed with us some of Adorno's ideas.

None of the philosophy professors showed up for the reception, and at one point Marcuse asked me and other graduate students to escort him to the West End Bar, where earlier Alan Ginsberg and the Beat poets had hung out, and where at the time my fellow graduate students also ate, drank, and discussed philosophy, politics, and other issues of the day. As we crossed the campus in front of the Philosophy Department, some militants in the Weather Underground approached me and said "We want to rap with Marcuse." So I asked Herbert and he agreed, and we all sat down on the grass, and one of the Weather Underground dudes explained that they planned to burn down the office of a Columbia professor who was doing research for the U.S. government that facilitated certain heinous practices in the Vietnam War.

Almost immediately, Herbert said that he thought this was not a good idea, that it would probably backfire and bring on major repression, and argued that the university should be used as a site to recruit and train revolutionaries. He went on to say that the university was a relative utopia in U.S. society where one could read and study, develop critiques of U.S. capitalism and imperialism, organize radical groups, and prepare for the revolution. He was quite passionate and convincing on this point and, after a brief discussion, the Weather dudes got up, thanked Marcuse for his advice, and went on their way. As they were leaving, Marcuse joked, "Now if you were planning to burn down a bank, I might not be so negative." Shortly thereafter, the Bank of America in Santa Barbara (California) was burned down, the subject of a Newsreel documentary, and the Weather Underground took credit.

My philosophical studies at Columbia were increasingly focused on continental philosophy, and this interest led me to apply and accept a scholarship to study in Germany, a venture I prolonged for two years studying in Tübingen with the utopian Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch,[9] before spending a year in France and then beginning a philosophy teaching career at the University of Texas, Austin, in 1973.

Adventures in Continental Philosophy

In the Fall of 1969, I left Columbia to write my dissertation on "Heidegger's Concept of Authenticity" (Kellner 1973) with the support of a German government fellowship. I choose to pursue this project at the University of Tübingen, in the small southwestern town where Hegel, Hölderlin, Schelling, and other luminaries had studied, and which had a reputation as an excellent place to study a broad range of German philosophical traditions. Tübingen was permeated with the spirit of 1960s' radicalism and I bought pirate editions (*Raubdruck*) of Karl Korsch's writings on Marxism, Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1971), Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972 [1947]), and other texts of the Frankfurt School.

I also became involved in a critical theory study group and sat in on Ernst Bloch's seminars, which alternated between seminars on the great philosophers and on topics such as imperialism, fascism, and other political topics. From Bloch, among other things, I learned that philosophy was highly political, that politics required philosophical analysis and critique, and that Marxist philosophy requires concepts of utopia and hope to delineate what sort of society and life we desired that would maximize positive values like democracy, freedom, rights, justice, and equality.

Near the end of my research on Heidegger, I picked up Adorno's *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (*Jargon of Authenticity*), and also discovered some early essays by Marcuse on his philosophy teacher, Heidegger, that carried out a sharp critique of Heidegger's thought and proposed a synthesis of phenomenological existentialism and Marxism, of Heidegger and Marx, to overcome the respective limitations in these traditions. I found Marcuse's critiques of Heidegger convincing and his proposed amalgamation of Heidegger and Marx fascinating. I also thoroughly investigated Heidegger's relation to National Socialism, and thus was not surprised by the later revelations in volumes by Victor Farías, Hugo Ott, and others on Heidegger's Nazism.[10]

I was thus rapidly moving toward the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, a move intensified by a year in Paris. After two years in Germany, I had more or less completed my dissertation on Heidegger and received a good grounding in German philosophy. I was eager to improve my knowledge of French, and to immerse myself in French philosophy and culture. During a 13-month sojourn in Paris during 1971–1972, subsidized by my paper route savings, I accordingly devoted myself to French language and philosophy, and also drafted the first chapters of a book on Herbert Marcuse, whose work continued to interest me (Kellner 1984).

While in Paris, I met an Algerian philosophy student, and he took me to hear the lectures of Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Deleuze, and Lyotard, inspiring me to read their recent works, as well as the texts of Baudrillard, Derrida, and other French thinkers currently in vogue. Listening to Foucault's lectures was like being in church, as he intently read from lecture notes in a hushed, darkened auditorium. Lévi-Strauss was livelier and was very friendly when another

French acquaintance took me to his office to meet and talk with him. He had lived in the U.S., spoke charming English, and was happy to discuss his work with a young American philosopher who was moving more toward post-structuralism as many of the new French theorists were moving away from the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, and others in favor of more complex theories of language, meaning, social institutions, and power.

One of those poststructuralist philosophers, Gilles Deleuze, was highly animated and used the blackboard to scribble out his main concepts. I later saw him perform his fabled sketching of rhizomatic proliferating categories (avoiding mere dualisms) between modern analytical thought and rhizomatic thought on a blackboard at a Semiotext(e) conference at Columbia in 1975. Deleuze was accompanied at that conference by his writing partner Félix Guattari, who was gaining renown in France for his work at the La Borde experimental psychiatric clinic, which was attempting to abolish doctor/patient relations in favor of group therapy while advancing radical ideas that "madness" was a social construct. Deleuze and Guattari had published the first volume of their critique of psychoanalysis, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, in 1972 and were becoming fashionable in avant-garde theoretical circles in the U.S.

While in Paris in the early 1970s, I also went out to the University at Vincennes to hear Jean- François Lyotard lecture, who would become famous for *The Postmodern Condition* (1978), which was one of the first books to popularize the concept of the postmodern. Lyotard was an extremely engaging lecturer, coming out in blue jeans, lighting up a cigarette, bantering with students about current political events, and then launching into a lecture on Kant or another philosophical theme, usually without notes, and allowing students to discuss the texts, somewhat rare in France at the time.

I initially read Jacques Derrida, who would become globally influential in the 1980s as the father of deconstruction, as a curious version of Heideggerian philosophy, and read Foucault, Baudrillard, and Lyotard as supplementing the Frankfurt School in developing a critical philosophy and social theory for the contemporary era. I saw similar attempts to develop syntheses of Marx, Freud, and critical philosophy in both contemporary German and French thought, and did not see the differences as sharp as they appeared to many in the feverish debates about French postmodern theory that erupted in the 1980s.

Since I had been introduced to radical French theory at about the same time that I had been introduced to German critical theory, and was reading texts from both traditions, I was interested in how they fitted together and supplemented each other, creating a contemporary critical and radical theory. Both the so-called Frankfurt School German theorists and the French postmodern theorists provided critiques of capitalism, of culture and media, of modernity, and of modern theory. So when later a split emerged between postmodernism and French theory, contrasted to Marxism and Frankfurt School critical theory, I had no part of this schism because my philosophical experiences suggested that these traditions could be articulated together, which I was doing at the time and would continue to do all my life. Thus, for me it was not a choice of

the Germans or the French, but of drawing on both traditions to develop new philosophical syntheses and critique of the contemporary era.

I was also introduced to feminism during the early 1970s when the Women's Liberation movement arrived on the scene. As noted, my generation was introduced to the powerful issue of race during the period of the civil rights movement and the rise of Black Power, and was exposed to both at Columbia; I was committed to civil rights struggles from then on. I also was introduced to feminism at Columbia as several of my female classmates became feminist theorists, including T-Grace Atkinson, who moved from the liberal feminism of the National Organization for Women (NOW) to radical feminism, and published *Amazon Odyssey* in 1974 while also anticipating queer theory with her bon mot "feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice."

In December 1972, I offered myself for sale for a position in continental philosophy on the American Philosophical Society (APA) job market, and sold myself to the University of Texas at Austin, where, after successfully defending my Ph.D. on Heidegger at Columbia, I labored in the area of continental philosophy for some 24 years. I remember travelling to Boston, Massachusetts, with a group of other philosophy graduate students and sleeping on the floor in a room where someone could afford to foot the bill. I had only a couple of prearranged interviews so had to hustle to try to organize job interviews. At a "smoker" (a mass gathering of philosophy professors and graduate students), I saw a name tag on a flamboyant-looking man reading "Douglas Browning, University of Texas-Austin." I knew that Texas had a vacancy in continental philosophy, so I cornered Browning, told him of my dissertation on Heidegger, that I had studied at Columbia and then Tübingen and Paris, knew a broad range of continental philosophies, and that I would like a job in Texas. He sized me up and put me on the schedule for a 9:00 a.m. interview the next day.

I had the first interview of the day in the Texas suite, and could see that the group of interviewers were just waking up and drinking cups of black coffee, so I joined in and bantered about Boston Celtics basketball, UT football, and other trivialities until the interview began. I noticed one prominent figure as Ed Allaire, a maven of analytic philosophy, extremely hostile to the continentals, who had taught at the University of Iowa where my brother had studied for a couple of years, and remarked to Ed that my brother had enjoyed his philosophy lectures. When I presented my dissertation in the interview I did so in the language of analytic philosophy, so it sounded like I was a down-to-earth continental theorist who could speak multiple philosophical languages.

Curiously, UT-Austin's position was specifically for someone to teach Marxist philosophy, as some "know your enemy" conservative had funded and managed to get the philosophy department to offer one of the few courses on Marxist philosophy in the U.S. The previous holders of this position had been fired after several years, and it was clear that the department was not seeking a red-flag waving Marxist; so when asked whether I would be willing to teach a course on Marxism, I replied in the affirmative, saying that although most of my work had been in existentialism, phenomenology, Hegel, and contemporary German

and French philosophy, I was interested in Marx and would be pleased to teach the course. Shortly thereafter I was offered a position as Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin, starting in Fall 1973 for a salary of $12,000.

Teaching Marxism at UT-Austin

My studies in Europe had indeed provided a good grounding in the Marxian and continental philosophy traditions, and made the Texas offer attractive; so, although I received a couple of other offers, I decided to go to Texas. This choice was fortunate as Texas had a strong tradition in continental philosophy and a pluralistic department that allowed a broad range of different types of philosophical inquiry (although an anti-continental philosophy department cohort would emerge and become hegemonic in the mid-1990s, purging the department of continental philosophers and ending this phase of my philosophical adventures).

Austin was initially extremely exotic to someone who had spent much of his life growing up in West and East Coast suburbs, and had more recently been studying and living in major urban centers like New York and Paris. Texas was publicizing itself as the Third Coast, and Austin had a growing reputation as a major site on the (counter)cultural and music scene. When I received the job offer, I called up two friends from the world of Marxist and continental philosophy, Dick Howard and Bob Stone, both of whom had studied in Austin and both of whom spoke highly of the city and its cultural scene. Both strongly recommended that I take the job and assured me that I would love Austin (they were right).

From the time I arrived in Austin in the Fall of 1973 until my departure in the mid-1990s, I taught both undergraduate and graduate courses in Marxism and Frankfurt School critical theory. As noted, I was actually hired to teach courses in Marxism, and taught an undergrad course, Introduction to Marxist Philosophy, in my first semester at UT. I used *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert Tucker (1978), and would continue using new editions of the text throughout my sojourn in Austin. My approach was largely contextual and historical, reading the texts in their historical context, although each lecture focused on key ideas and their relevance for political analysis and practice both in Marx's time and in the contemporary era.

I would begin with the early Marx in the context of the aftermath of the French Revolution and Marx's study of Hegel, Feuerbach, and the ideas of the Revolution. I was especially taken by Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which I believed contained the first sketch of his revolutionary synthesis of German idealism, French materialism, and utopian socialism. In addition, Marx's analysis of alienated labor in the *Manuscripts* brilliantly described my two summers during college working for Cinch Manufacturing in Chicago, one summer working in the mail room and another as night janitor (my uncle was corporate lawyer for the company and got me the job). While I could spend some time reading Plato's dialogues at night after all

the supervisors had gone home, during the day I was forced to do busy work because of all the supervisors prowling around, and I experienced that labor under capitalism was indeed external, controlled, specialized, repetitive, and soul-crushing if one found oneself on a factory floor or in an office where one was literarily a wage slave.

As noted above, I was determined to get a Ph.D. in philosophy and be a philosophy professor, as it appeared the least alienating job I could imagine and one that actually seemed cool. It was the 1960s and philosophy was seen as a desirable head trip, consciousness-raising was the rage, and a dizzying array of new philosophical ideas were in the air. Hence, although my uncle tried to talk me into going to Michigan Law School, expenses paid, and joining his law firm in Chicago, and while my next-door neighbor plied me with a stack of Barry Goldwater books and urged me to take a position on the AT&T Junior Executive Program, instead I decided I would go for getting a job in philosophy.

When I was concluding my philosophical studies at Columbia, I got a call from my father to meet him in a bar for a drink. Never had my father called me during the day to meet him for a drink, so I knew something was up. I found him sitting alone in an obscure bar in downtown Manhattan, and asked him what had happened. He answered that his company had just gotten a new boss, who had immediately fired my father, who at the time was a top corporate executive of Arbitron, which compiled TV ratings to sell to stations. There had been previous corporate take-overs in which executives above my father had been fired, and he had ascended almost to the top but then was let go following a new take-over, illustrating the cutthroat and predatory world of corporate America that I wanted nothing to do with.

These personal stories helped illuminate my teaching of Marxism and critical theory at UT, and invariably students would tell harrowing stories of how they, family members, or friends were screwed over by corporations or bosses. In money-conscious and capital-dominant Texas, Marx's theses concerning the logic of capital ruling bourgeois society were not hard to illustrate, and my students and I recounted copious tales of how capital ruled Texas. Once I went to a philosophy conference for my first trip to Dallas, and my group choose a popular Italian restaurant with a long line waiting to get in. When we finally approached the front of the line, a couple of dudes in flashy faux cowboy clothes and overdressed women pushed in front of us; a fat waddling guy pulled a 100-dollar bill out of a wallet, put it in the shirt pocket of the waiter, and was quickly ushered to the next table. Being a brash newcomer to Texas, I told my group waiting in line that in New York this would never happen, and a Texan gentleman behind me informed the group that: "Son, in Texas we have a saying that money talks and bullshit walks." So I see …

After spending about half of the semester on *The Marx-Engels Reader*, supplemented by a biography of Marx or contemporary book on Marxism that I would rotate from time to time, I would assign varied readers and texts from the history of Marxism so that students could get a sampling of classics like Lenin, Kautsky, Bernstein, Mao, Luxembourg, and Guevara. I would also

occasionally assign a reader on Western Marxism or the *Critical Theory Reader* that Steve Bronner and I co-edited in 1989. Finally, I might end the semester with Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* or a Marxist-feminist text on contemporary society.

My pedagogy in teaching Marxist philosophy to undergraduates was somewhat different from my proto-Freirean teaching of the Great Books at Columbia. I would assign readings from *The Marx-Engels Reader* every class, provide the historical, intellectual, and political context for the readings, and then go through the key ideas. As there were often 80–100 students in the class, I would pass out notes before class with the key ideas, stand lecturing, and then encourage questions and discussion. At first the students were reticent, but as the class evolved, discussions got intense and often I would sit on top of a desk in the front row to more dialogically engage the students.

Once every year or two, I could teach a graduate seminar, and often taught one on classics of Marxism, critical theory, or Marcuse. In the 1980s, I also taught graduate seminars, and even undergraduate lecture courses on post-structuralism and French theory, as well as on British cultural studies, which had become a popular academic discipline.[11] Graduate seminars had at least 20 students and big undergrad lectures could contain 80–100 students, so I needed to present complex critical ideas in a way relatable to undergrad and grad students at Texas. In the graduate seminars, I would hand out notes with context and key ideas, make an opening lecture, encourage discussion, and then have student presentations and discussions. This way I could elicit more student participation. My office was just across from the UT-philosophy seminar room, and I noted that some professors droned on for two hours or more as the students passively sat and took in the discourse; so I resolved to do my best to always keep students actively engaged and to encourage discussion and student voice.

Upon returning from three years studying in Europe and getting the job at Texas, I encountered a relatively new journal dedicated to radical theory, called *Telos*, and I was happy to learn that a group of people in the U.S. were interested in the same continental theories that I'd been studying in Europe. Consequently, I wrote to the journal's editor, Paul Piccone and told him of my interests; he immediately asked me to translate and write an introduction to Herbert Marcuse's "On the Philosophical Foundation of the Concept of Labor in Economics." I did so, and the article was published in issue 16 of *Telos* (Summer 1973), and constituted my first publication. At about the same time, I met the editors of *New German Critique*, which was involved in a similar publishing venture with *Telos* and at the time seemed to be connected. I published "The Frankfurt School Revisited: A Critique of Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination*" in *New German Critique* 4 (Winter 1974), a long review article that laid out my take on the Frankfurt School and differentiated my reading of critical theory from Jay. I later learned from one of his students that Jay had muttered "Marxist asshole" when he read my critical review, which highlighted the neo-Marxian roots of Frankfurt School theory, and which claimed Jay downplayed their Marxism. Later, I became friendly with Jay and

realized what a ground-breaking achievement his introduction to the Frankfurt School had been. I subsequently constantly consulted and referenced his book in my later scholarship while realizing how unfair my critique had been, driven by an excessive zeal to do Marxist ideology critique of contemporary texts in the spirit of Marx.

In the following years, I published two articles in *Telos*—"The Latest Sartre: Reflections on *On a raison de se revolter*" (22, Winter 1974–75) and "Korsch's Revolutionary Historicism" (26, Winter 1975–76)—the latter of which fleshed out some material used in my first book, *Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory*, published by the University of Texas Press in 1977. While I had been working on my book on Herbert Marcuse since the early 1970s, I had decided I would not complete it until Marcuse passed away so I could do an overview of his entire life and work. In the meantime, I continued my Marcusean studies, supplemented by work on Karl Korsch, at the time one of the best-known representatives, along with Georg Lukács and Antonio Gramsci, of so-called "Western Marxism" of the 1920s—all of which seemed to be models of a critical neo-Marxism that engaged the issues of contemporary capitalist societies and radical politics.

A Soviet bureaucratic coined the term "Western Marxism" to disparage the highly Hegelian and philosophical versions of Marxism that were emerging in Western Europe, but it was soon used to describe thinkers like Lukács and Korsch to describe a more independent and critical Marxism from the party and "scientific" Marxism of the Second and Third Internationals. Perry Anderson (1976) interpreted the turn from economic and political analysis to cultural theory in Western Marxism as a symptom of the defeat of European aborted revolutions after the crushing of the revolutionary movements of the 1920s and the rise of fascism. Yet, theorists like Lukács, Bloch, Marcuse, Benjamin, and Adorno were intellectuals who had deep and abiding interests in social and cultural phenomena, and so it is somewhat natural that they would bring these interests into Marxism.

In one of his most influential works, *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács (1971 [1923]) argued that the Marxian vision of totality and its focus on the primacy of the commodity and economic production provided the best methodological tools to critically analyze contemporary capitalist society and discover forces that would overthrow it in the revolutionary proletariat. Lukács asserted that adopting the standpoint of the working class enabled one to see how capitalist society produced *reification*—the transformation of human beings into things—in all dimensions of society, from the labor process to cultural production and even sexual relations. For Lukács, all domains of society, culture, and even intimate relations were pervaded with economic imperatives and became subject to laws of the economy. The proletariat, he believed, was in a privileged position to grasp societal reification and to organize to overcome it, becoming, in an ultra-Hegelian formulation, the "subject-object" of history. Adopting an orthodox communist position, Lukács alleged that working-class revolution and socialism were the solutions to the problems of bourgeois society, and became a life-long adherent to the communist movement.

In Germany, following the abortive revolution of 1918, political activist and theorist Karl Korsch also developed a Hegelian and critical version of Marxism. In *Marxism and Philosophy*, Korsch (1971 [1923]) argued that Marxism should be interpreted as a critical and dialectical theory, providing tools to criticize capitalist-bourgeois theory and society and the forces to transform it. For Korsch, the unity of theory and practice was the criterion for authentic Marxism, and he interpreted Marxism as the revolutionary theory of the working-class movement, developing a concept of "practical socialism." In his later work, *Karl Marx*, Korsch (1938) asserted that the principle of historical specificity was a key criterion of Marxian theory, maintaining that Marxism provided a historically specific critique of capitalist society and alternatives to it.

While Korsch's two major books were available in English, a large number of his essays were untranslated, so the complexities of his life and tumultuous relations to Germany, social democracy, communism, and his turn to ultra-left radicalism were largely unknown (Dick Howard and Karl Klare edited a book on the tradition of Western Marxism in 1972 titled *The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism since Lenin*). I found a lot of Korsch's later work published in English in the University of Texas library, which had an astonishing collection of leftwing journals from the 20th century thanks to a "know your enemy" conservative who donated significant funds to buy Marxist literature for the library. There was a Karl Korsch archive in Hanover, Germany, where I also went to collect material and met with Michael Buckmiller, who had published in German a collection of Korsch's work and a biographical-political study of his life, which I would draw upon in the introduction to *Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory*.

I had met at the time an editor, Iris Tillman Hill, who worked for the University of Texas Press, and scheduled a meeting to discuss what texts and thinkers Texas might publish in a series of books on Marxism that they were developing. I suggested Korsch and she told me to write up a prospectus for the book and quickly guided it through the press review process; and so I published my first book in 1977 with a minimum of hassle. (It would prove more difficult to publish my second book on Herbert Marcuse, as I will relate below.) The Korsch book was well-received as part of a growing number of studies on Western Marxism; but, as the years have gone by, he is now largely forgotten and I have rarely returned to Korsch scholarship as my work turned toward Marcuse, Marx, the Frankfurt School, and related critical theorists.[12]

In other initial journal articles of the 1970s, I paid homage to Ernst Bloch, my philosophy professor in Tübingen, with an article co-authored by one of my University of Texas philosophy students, Harry O'Hara, "Utopia and Marxism in Ernst Bloch," published in *New German Critique* 9 (Fall 1976)—the first of many studies that I would co-author with students and colleagues. While exploring the field of American philosophy, I made contact with the Radical Philosophers Group and published on "Adorno's Social Theory" in their *Radical Philosophers' Newsjournal* 5 (Winter 1976).

Although initially I followed *Telos* very closely, I became one of many who became alienated from its editor and publisher, Paul Piccone. Initially, I had

started out closer to Paul than many people who later split with him. As noted, I published my first article in *Telos* and invited Piccone to Austin when I started teaching there, so he came and gave a presentation. Then he invited me to Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, where he taught, and thus I got to know him on a personal level. In St. Louis, Piccone took me to the house of Alvin Gouldner, a distinguished sociologist who was publishing a new journal, *Theory and Society*, which would become one of the major social theory journals of the day. Gouldner initially ferociously challenged me on my views of Marx and Marxism (something he would soon be writing about), and, as I intelligently defended my position, he then became friendly and asked me to contribute to his new journal, which I said I would be happy to do and soon after was put on his editorial board.

While initially I liked and got along well with Piccone, he became increasingly "crazy" and increasingly rightwing, and many in the *Telos* group were provoked by his behavior and broke with him, including myself. Eventually, Piccone and *Telos* went so far to the right that Perry Anderson once joked to me that *Telos* was representing left-Reaganism (in 1980s' anti-Soviet Cold War tirades, attacks on Marxism, support of U.S. troops and nuclear weapons in Europe, etc.), an astute observation by one of the major historians of Western Marxism.

In retrospect, I had accumulated an enormous amount of cultural capital during my three years in Germany and France that enabled me to write a series of articles, reviews, and books on both the Frankfurt School and contemporary French thought over the next two decades. My books on critical theory include *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (1984), *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity* (1989), and (with Stephen Bronner) *A Critical Theory Reader* (1989). My books *Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory* (1977), *Passion and Rebellion: The Expressionist Heritage* (1983, co-edited with Stephen Bronner), *Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique* (1989), and the many articles I have written on Marx and Marxism were nourished during my two years in Germany and subsequent research trips. My books *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* (1989), *Baudrillard: A Critical Reader* (1994), and two with Steven Best—*Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (1991) and *The Postmodern Turn* (1997)—were all made possible by the work I did on French theory during a year in France and subsequent return trips to France and Germany during my summer vacations in the Austin years.

Just as my early exposure to feminism led me to combine Marxism with feminism, as the civil rights movement had taught me to combine class with race in discussing important issues, from then on I developed a Marxism that was open to issues of class, gender, race, sexuality, and their intersectionality. With the rise of postmodern theory in the 1970s I combined Marxism with postmodern theory, as many other Marxist theorists later do.[13]

In terms of my personal relations at UT-Austin, I found a broad range of continental philosophers and others representing philosophical pluralism in the UT philosophy department, so I found this a congenial environment. My UT-Austin adventures came to an end, however, in the mid-1990s when George W.

Bush became Governor of Texas and a rightwing cabal took over the UT philosophy department. Austin had been a great place to live, with a vibrant counterculture and political culture, and for decades the University of Texas had been an excellent place in which to teach. Yet, as the university became more rightwing during the Bush years, many of us saw the (w)righting on the wall; saw Austin and UT drowning in a sewer of corruption and mediocrity that distinguished Bush family politics and the rightwing Republicans who had taken over Texas; and decided to move on, leaving Texas to Karl Rove, George W. Bush, and their rightwing cronies.

UCLA Adventures: Marcuse, Cultural Studies, and the Philosophy of Education

Fortunately, a job at UCLA materialized and I joined its Graduate School of Education and Information Studies in 1997, along with Sandra Harding, who I had long known from radical philosophy circles. This gave us the nucleus of a strong philosophy cohort at UCLA (we later formed a group with John McCumber, Philosophers Outside of Philosophy, which was active during most of my years at UCLA and kept me in touch with the latest developments in philosophy). Ironically, many of those who I consider the top philosophers of my generation have left philosophy departments, raising some serious questions about the contemporary institutional status of philosophy. On the whole, it appears that contemporary American philosophy has fallen into a state of paralysis in which few new ideas or thinkers have emerged. While the dominant analytical philosophy suffers from theoretical sclerosis, a hardening of the categories, and has long been undergoing a slow public and academic death, the situation of continental philosophy is also dispiriting.

In the 1970s, it looked as though contemporary philosophy was entering a fruitful state of pluralism, with a blossoming of continental philosophy mutating into "Theory," crossing over into every discipline from literary theory to sociology. On the philosophical frontlines there was also a re-appropriation of Dewey and pragmatism and other strands of American philosophy, as well as the move into new fields such as feminism, African American and Latino philosophy, philosophy of technology, environmental philosophy, philosophical media studies, and philosophy of electronic culture, communication, and social media.

These trends continued within the broader philosophical-intellectual world, but often not in philosophy departments, and they have been pushed to the margins of the academic discipline of philosophy. Most distressingly, not only has reaction and retrenchment set in with analytic philosophy, but continental philosophy has been segregating itself into circles in which specific philosophers are revered as the Voice of Truth, leading to cult-like circles of devotees to the revered Word of the Master. Thus the onto-theological dimension of philosophy that Derrida decried has its Renaissance in schools of contemporary philosophy. Living philosophy, however, is always synthesis, always in motion, always taking in new theories and intellectual impulses, absorbing challenging

ideas, trends, and discourses, constantly developing and reshaping philosophy, in dialogue with other disciplines and contemporary culture and experiences.

During my two decades-plus of service at UCLA as George F. Kneller Chair in the Philosophy of Education, I taught an Introduction to Philosophy of Education that initially adopted the Great Books and historical approach that I followed at Columbia. My first seminar I started with Plato's *Republic*, but found it took at least three weeks to cover, and in a ten-week quarter system that didn't allow me to cover key material. I then resolved to teach Philo of Ed in the era of modernity, starting with Rousseau's *Emile*, followed by Mary Wollstonecraft's *Declaration of the Rights of Women*, John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I also resolved to assign a novel in every seminar and choose Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, which has continued to work well up the present as it brings in media, family, and environment as forces of pedagogy and deals in a central way with gender, race, and class in education.

As with my UT philosophy seminars, I would open with an introductory and contextualizing lecture, do a close reading of the opening of the text, and then have student presentations and discussions. The quasi-official pedagogy of the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies was Freirean, so students were prepared and eager to make presentations, and in some cases to engage in discussion. As the years went on, however, I found the Great Books method increasingly unviable as it was clear the students weren't reading many of the books (unless they were making presentations), so I reluctantly cut down the readings assigned from key classical texts, added texts on Latino people and education, Asian education, and multicultural education, and shorter texts from radical thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse, Ivan Illich, Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, and others since many of the students were of color and international students.

Further, I taught courses focused on researching the relevance of media and new technologies to education, politics, and everyday life, as well as continuing work in philosophy, social theory, and cultural studies. In education from the mid-1990s to the present, I have been especially concerned to expand the notion of literacy to include critical media literacy and technoliteracies.[14] By the mid-1990s, it was clear to me that our culture was a media culture, and that the media were becoming increasingly powerful instruments of socialization, political indoctrination, and sources of meanings and identities. Cable and satellite television mushroomed, talk radio and channels of broadcasting expanded as the Internet absorbed video, audio, and the culture of image and spectacle, and new social media and technologies continued to proliferate.[15]

I had long been an advocate of media literacy, once receiving a federal grant during the Carter presidency in the 1970s to teach media literacy to teachers in the state of Texas, followed by a program in the 1980s where I taught the subject in lower-income high schools in the Mississippi Delta area. For months I taught workshops in helping teachers provide curricula that would educate their students to critically read and decode media messages, including representations of gender, class, sexuality, and race. The goal was to help students

and educators discern racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, and other negative representations in the media, while also looking for positive images, meanings, role models, and programming.

At Texas, I devised a course on the Philosophy of Culture and Communication that introduced theories of media and cultural studies, and taught critical media literacy, which aimed at promoting knowledge of media ownership and programming, teaching textual analysis, and developing theories of media power and alternative progressive uses of media for politics, pedagogy, and social transformation. At UCLA, I transformed this course into an Introduction to Cultural Studies seminar that used my book *Media Culture* and a Blackwell reader, *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*, that I co-edited with Meenakshi Gigi Durham (2001; second edition 2012), which brings together key texts in contemporary approaches to media culture and communication, ranging from Roland Barthes and Guy Debord to recent studies of YouTube, Facebook, and social networking. In this seminar, I organized the class around topics like key concepts and methods of cultural studies, and themes such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and other dimensions of media cultural texts.

Reading the media critically involves detecting racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and other biases in media texts, as well as highlighting stronger and more positive images of people of color, women, men, gay and lesbian individuals, class, and other features of media representations and identities. Here students were even more eager participants in presentations and discussion, as media and Internet culture was something they were deeply involved and immersed in, and thus they were able to present perspectives not available in many academic texts.

After an introductory lecture on cultural studies and critical media literacy, I would present Marxist ideology critique as developed by the Frankfurt School and British cultural studies, and discuss how Stuart Hall et al. (1980) and British cultural studies expanded the concept of ideology to encompass gender, race, and sexuality as well as class, which was the focus of the Marxian critique of ideology. I introduced Marx and Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony, and argued that since the 1960s hegemony in the U.S. had revolved around battles between liberals and conservatives, with more radical social movements taking on issues like the environment, gender, class, and race inequality, gun violence, and other hot-button issues.

My argument, as laid out in my 1995 book *Media Culture*, was that popular film, television, music, and other forms of media culture articulated liberal positions, or competing conservative narratives, on political issues such as war and the military, state, corporations, and other key social issues. And I highlighted that the media often showed conflicting representations of gender, race, class, and sexuality, either promoting biased representations or more positive ones. Of course, many media representations and narratives were contradictory, but reading media critically—and thus gaining critical media literacy—was crucial to producing active and engaged consumers or producers of media culture.

Concluding Comments

Consequently, to conclude, I would argue in the contemporary moment of Donald Trump and a global movement toward autocracy that reading, studying, and teaching Marxism is of crucial importance and relevance. Marx provides a theory of capitalism that contextualizes the infrastructure of the existing system of U.S. society that Donald Trump and his cadre of billionaires and other ruling-class cronies represent. Every day, Trump provides an aggressive version of the dominant ideology, highlighting the importance of Marx's notion of ideology and ideology critique. Trump also represents the culture industry that the Frankfurt School sharply attacked, and embodies the authoritarian personality that has also been a target of neo-Marxist critique.[16] Trump's fascist tendencies disclose the continuing relevance of the Marxian theory of critique and opposition to capitalism and authoritarian political forms.

Returning to Trump and capitalism, I should point out that there are, however, problems in seeing Trump as a pure embodiment of capitalism, as to a large extent he is a con artist and, as has often been argued, more a P.T. Barnum, a carnival entertainer, than a Rockefeller and industrial capitalist of the sort Marx described. Likewise, we are in a historical moment when we are forced to ask if the president of the United States is a criminal, as in August 2018 Trump's lawyer and fixer Michael Cohen was indicted on eight criminal charges (included tax fraud, making false statements to a bank, and campaign finance fraud), while Paul Manafort, one of Trump's campaign managers, was convicted the same week of five counts of tax fraud, two counts of bank fraud, and one count of failure to disclose a foreign bank account. Moreover, the next day, it was revealed that Allen Weisselberg, the longtime chief financial officer of the Trump Organization, was given immunity to testify in investigations that might go after Trump.

Since then Trump received four indictments containing over 90 felony charges for his role in the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.; for his pilfering of classified documents from the White House and storing them in Mar-a-Lago and his other properties; for his interference in the Georgia presidential election and other states, where he tried to impose fake electors after losing the electoral count; and, finally, for sex crimes in New York involving abuse of E. Jean Carroll and pay-offs to porn star Stormy Daniels to keep her quiet about her affair with Trump so it would not become an issue in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

So we see that Trump was the sort of capitalist/bourgeois scoundrel that Marx described in his journalism and historical studies, such as *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*. Marx presented Louis Napoleon as a usurper who attempted to overthrow the gains of the French Revolutions and recent 1848 revolution, and described him in terms that could be used to describe Trump, as when Marx writes in the *Brumaire* that Louis Napoleon

> throws the entire bourgeois economy into confusion, lays hand on everything that seemed inviolable to the revolution of 1848, makes some tolerant of revolution, others desirous of revolution, and produces actual anarchy in the name of order, while at the same time he divests the whole state machine of its halo, profanes it and makes it at once loathsome and ridiculous.
>
> (cited in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 617)

Tragically, Trump was re-elected in 2024 as I write this book, and he and his Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement require the most radical Marxian critique to understand his appeal, his MAGA movement, his administration, his policies, and his embodiment of the worst features of predatory capitalism.

Finally, in what follows, I will illustrate the contemporary relevance of Marxism with chapters that show how key concepts in Marxian theory illuminate the development of capitalism, the capitalist state, society, politics, and everyday life, as well as providing powerful critical perspectives on contemporary society and the type of movements and alternatives to capitalism that could provide a society more worthy of human beings, as Marx put it. I shall also indicate the limitations of Marxism that require reconstruction of the Marxian critical theory of society and theories of socialism and revolution to make this work more relevant to the contemporary historical situation.

I begin, however, with two chapters explicating the lives and times of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, highlighting the evolution of their critiques of capitalism, their theories of society and politics, and their perspectives on socialism and revolution. I will then in Chapter 4 contrast Marx with the major theorist of free market capitalism, Adam Smith, highlighting Marx's critique of Smith's theory of human nature and capitalism that remains part of the dominant ideology of capitalism today. Subsequent chapters will engage key Marxian categories and show their application to contemporary capitalism, the consumer society, and to critiques of the contemporary state, legal systems, media, cultural systems, and the dominant ideologies while also suggesting the contemporary relevance of the Marxian concept of socialism.

Notes

1 See Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
2 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
3 Western Marxism goes back to the 1920s and 1930s with Karl Korsch, Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, and the Frankfurt School, and continues to develop throughout the world, becoming a major oppositional force in both Western capitalist countries and developing countries from the 1960s and 1970s, which were eras of revolt, insurrection, and even revolution. In this and a further volume on Western Marxism, I will discuss these struggles and attendant theoretical developments in terms of developing a new critical Marxism for the 21st century.

4 See, for example, Marcello Musto, "Revisiting Marx's Concept of Alienation," *Socialism and Democracy* 24, no. 3 (2010), pp. 79–101. Attempts to develop a new critical Marxism also emerged in a variety of books. Another group of theorists including Stanley Aronowitz, Fredric Jameson, Musto, and Kevin Anderson and Marxist humanists have attempted to create a new Marxism and to demonstrate the continued relevance of the Marxian theory; likewise many groups, such as the T.W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, and Herbert Marcuse societies, of which I have been a founding member, as well as Marxist groups in every academic field from philosophy and literature to economics, sociology, and politics.
5 Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and neo-Marxist revolutionary seen as the founder of critical pedagogy, who I read in the 1970s and whose pedagogy I employed in my 50+ years of university teaching.
6 Bob A. Feldman, "Sundial: Columbia SDS Memories: Chapter 8: Discovering IDA, 1967 (vii)," bob's Newsletter, September 24, 2022 at https://bobafeldman.substack.com/p/sundial-columbia-sds-memories-chapter-4c5 (accessed December 7, 2024).
7 See the discussion of the Columbia uprising and police oppression in the Feldman text cited in note 6 above.
8 After his WWII study of the Renaissance in Italy, Kristeller went on to have a long and distinguished career as a Renaissance scholar. See John Monfasani, "Obituary: Professor Paul Oskar Kristeller," *The Independent*, July 23, 1999 at https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-professor-paul-oskar-kristeller-1108254.html (accessed April 9, 2024).
9 Ernst Bloch is especially important for his three-volume magnum opus, *The Principle of Hope* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
10 See Victor Farías, *Heidegger and Nazism* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1989) and Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).
11 See Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern* (1995; 2nd revised edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2020), which was inspired by British cultural studies and Frankfurt School and neo-Marxist critiques of the media.
12 On Korsch, see Douglas Kellner, *Karl Korsch: Revolution Theory* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977). For a more recent study, see Douglas Kellner, "From Karl Korsch to the Frankfurt School." The Politics of Critical Theory, The Platypus Affiliated Society, Zoom Panel, April 3, 2021.
13 See Antoni Callari, Stephen Cullenberg, and Carole Biewener, eds., *Marxism in the Postmodern Age: Confronting the New World Order* (New York: Guilford, 1995).
14 See Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share, *The Critical Media Literacy Guide: Engaging Media and Transforming Education* (Rotterdam: Brill-Sense, 2019).
15 See Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern* (1995; 2nd revised edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2020).
16 On Trump as authoritarian personality, see Douglas Kellner, "Donald Trump as Authoritarian Populist: A Frommian Analysis," *Logos* 15, nos. 2–3 (2016) at https://logosjournal.com/article/donald-trump-as-authoritarian-populist-a-frommian-analysis/.

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2 Karl Marx in Historical Context

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' work is typical of European theorists of the 19th century insofar as their writings combine analysis of contemporary bourgeois society with material from other disciplines to carry out a multi-faceted critique of the present age. European theorists as disparate as Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and, later, Sartre, Marcuse, and Foucault developed original theoretical perspectives on their current socio-historical situation with imposing intellectual inquiry and theoretical construction that often synthesized philosophy with history, social theory, literature, and material from the human and social sciences.

Marx and Engels, of course, go well beyond the confines of traditional university philosophy and theory. Their thought is identified with **Marxism**, a socialist and revolutionary theory and movement that has been a philosophical and politico-historical force since the 1840s, and has often been embraced or vilified because of the embeddedness of its ideas within history, with its theory and politics seen as illuminating and liberating or ideological and destructive—or a mixture of its perceived positive and negative features and complex historical impact.

In this and the following chapters, I argue that while Marxism as a political movement and force was to some extent vitiated with the collapse of "actually existing socialism" in the late 1980s and in the communist societies in the 21st century seen as autocratic and oppressive,[1] as a theory and transformative social-political practice, Marxism still has much to offer. I situate Marx and Engels' thought within the epoch of modernity that they so acutely theorize and the dialectic of European critical theory, interpreted as transdisciplinary interrogation of the contemporary epoch. In this reading, the thought of Marx and Engels emerges from the ashes of communism as one of the enduring modern social and political theories that provides a grand philosophical synthesis of existing knowledge of history, society, economy, politics, and culture and sharp critical perspectives on modern societies. From this vantage point, far from being an outmoded 19th-century philosophy and failed utopian project, Marxism provides dialectical methods of inquiry that contain new ways of seeing and thinking about the world, original theoretical and political perspectives, and radical critique of modern society and culture that are methodologically

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conceived to theorize and critique historical change, development, and upheavals, embedding its theory in history and connecting its theory to radical, transformative practice.

The Life and Times of a Revolutionary Hegelian

Karl Marx was born in Trier, Germany on May 5, 1818, in a provincial region of the Rhineland that was strongly influenced by the culture of nearby France. Marx's ancestors were Jewish, though his father Heinrich converted to Christianity in order to preserve his job as a lawyer and government official.[2] Karl's upbringing was thoroughly secular, and both his father and his schooling immersed the young Marx in Enlightenment humanism, while Ludwig von Westphalen, the father of Karl's childhood sweetheart and later wife, Jenny, introduced Marx to the radical ideas of the French Revolution and to French utopian thinkers.[3]

Thus, young Marx was exposed to modern ideas in a primarily premodern milieu. It was not until his entry into the university at Berlin in 1836 that Marx systematically studied Hegel, and in the heated atmosphere of the Young Hegelian movement became involved in contemporary philosophical and political debates. Marx's Ph.D. dissertation was a comparative analysis titled "The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature," written between 1839 and 1841 and accepted in Jena in 1841. In a thundering conclusion, which anticipated his emerging philosophical-political project, Marx wrote:

> As in the history of philosophy there are nodal points which raise philosophy in itself to concretion, apprehend abstract principles in a totality, and thus break off the rectilinear process, so also there are moments when philosophy turns its eyes to the external world, and no longer apprehends it, but as a practical person, weaves, as it were, intrigues with the world, emerges from the transparent kingdom of Amenthes and throws itself on the beast of the worldly siren … as Prometheus, having stolen fire from heaven, begins to build houses and to settle upon the earth, so philosophy, expanded to be the whole world, turns against the world of appearance. The same now with the philosophy of Hegel. (MECW 1: 210–211)[4]

From Hegel, Marx appropriated a mode of critical and reflexive thought that reworked motifs from Enlightenment rationalism, attacking obsolete forms of thought and society while developing his own mode of dialectical thought and critique. In several early essays, Marx called for, in Enlightenment fashion, the "realization of reason" and a "ruthless criticism" of everything existing (MECW 3: 142). For the young Marx, "realizing the thoughts of the past" meant fulfilling the Enlightenment ideas of freedom, reason, equality, and democracy (MECW 3: 144). When Marx spoke of the "realization of philosophy" in an essay on Hegel, he envisaged the consummation of the Enlightenment project (MECW 3: 187), translating Enlightenment ideas into socio-political reality.

Hegel (1830), by contrast, argued that reason was already realized in the Prussian state, but Marx's early essays assert that conditions in Germany were extremely backward, debased, anachronistic, and irrational (MECW 3: 176ff). Using an analogy concerning the role of the bourgeoisie in the French Revolution and the situation of the proletariat in the contemporary era, Marx argued that the proletariat was a universal class that represented general suffering and the need for revolution (MECW 3: 186f). For Hegel, the monarch and bureaucracy represented the universal interests of the polity, while for Marx these were false universals, refuted by the suffering of the proletariat, whose interests were not incorporated into the bourgeois state (see Marcuse 1960 [1941]). The proletariat, by contrast, represented for Marx universal interests in emancipation, and its mission was to overthrow capitalism—an event that Marx concluded was necessary to fulfill the promises of the Enlightenment.

Marx also took up Hegel's concept of stages of history and expanded on Hegel's notion that the present age was distinctive and original, marking a rupture with the past. In his Preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel (1965 [1807]: 380) wrote:

> It is surely not difficult to see that our time is a time of birth and transition to a new period. The spirit has broken with what was hitherto the world of its existence and imagination and is about to submerge all this in the past; it is at work giving itself a new form. To be sure, the spirit is never at rest but always engaged in ever progressing motion … the spirit that educates itself matures slowly and quietly toward the new form, dissolving one particle of the edifice of its previous world after the other … This gradual crumbling … is interrupted by the break of day that, like lightning, all at once reveals the edifice of the new world.

Hegel's followers in the 1830s and 1840s, after his death, took up the theme of the uniqueness of the present age and the possibilities of ascent to a higher stage of history (see Marcuse 1960 [1941]; Lowith 1967).[5] It would be Marx's lifework to provide an historical account of the origins and trajectory of the modern world. Hegel, by contrast, never really delineated the features of modernity, or produced a detailed sociological analysis of the present age. Marx replicated Hegel's prodigious research in his effort to depict the birth and genesis of modern societies and their key stages of historical development. Marx primarily investigated political and economic history rather than cultural history, which was Hegel's focus.

For the Young Hegelians, the key to individual and social emancipation was liberation from religion; thus Marx and the progressive students of his generation saw modern thought and the modern age as quintessentially secular. They were deeply influenced by the biblical criticism of David Strauss (2010 [1835]) and the anthropological critique of religion developed by Ludwig Feuerbach (1957 [1841]). Strauss put in question the divinity of the Gospels by detailed textual analysis of the contradictions in the life of Jesus in the various Gospels.

Marx's close friend, Bruno Bauer, challenged their authenticity, claiming that the biblical stories were sheer myth. Feuerbach disclosed the anthropological origins of religion in the need to project idealized features of human beings onto a godhead who was worshipped and submitted to. Feuerbach's trenchant critique reduced theology to philosophical anthropology and claimed that humans worshipped their alienated human powers in religious devotion, fetishizing human powers as divine, incarnated in a supernatural being, God, and his alleged son Jesus.

The early Marx followed the Young Hegelians in producing a critique of religion and the state. The American and French revolutions spurred new theories of radical democracy, which inspired Marx and his cohorts to criticize the old autocratic order that still dominated most of Europe. These "bourgeois" revolutions attacked forms of inequality, oppression, and domination and called for democratic republics with constitutions, human rights, and freedom for their citizens.[6] Relations of subordination such as serf/lord, or monarchy-aristocracy/citizen were presented as relations of domination, which young Marx denounced while calling for their elimination.

Association with the Young Hegelian group of philosophical radicals in Berlin meant that Marx could not attain a teaching position in Germany, and so with philosophy Ph.D. in hand he travelled to Cologne in 1842 and got a job with the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, and soon after became its editor at the age of 24. Young Marx discovered the importance of economic conditions and the impact of capitalism in his work with the newspaper, writing articles on freedom of trade debates, bourgeois agitation for extended railways, reduction of taxes, and common toll and custom duties (MECW 1: 224ff). He also discovered the plight of the poor, covering the trial of Mosel Valley peasants accused of stealing wood from what used to be common land, but which was now declared to be private property (MECW 1: 109ff). In addition, Marx championed Enlightenment ideas by attacking new Prussian censorship regulations and restrictions on divorce law, publishing some of the most striking articles ever penned on behalf of freedom of the press (MECW 1: 109ff and 132ff).

Yet, until his move to Paris in 1843, Marx lived in a relatively provincial and premodern Germany and was not really exposed first-hand to the emerging industrial-capitalist society or to the working-class movement until his later encounter with Engels. In Paris, Marx began studying the French Revolution and then the classics of bourgeois political economy. He intended to support himself as co-editor, with Arnold Ruge, of *The German-French Yearbook*, which was terminated after one issue in 1844; it was seized by police on the German border.[7] Marx's article declaring "war on Germany" and supporting proletarian revolution (MECW 3: 175ff) caused him to lose his German citizenship rights, making him an exile first in France and later in Belgium and England, where he would spend most of the rest of his life until his death in 1883.

The *German-French Yearbook* included some important early essays of Marx and a "Critique of Political Economy" by Friedrich Engels, who was to become Marx's collaborator and life-long friend. Engels was born in the northern

German industrial city of Barmen in 1820. His father was a factory-owner and Engels went to work in the family firm at 17. After several years of clerical labor in Barmen and Bremen, Engels spent a year in military service in Berlin in 1841–1842, where he became involved with the Young Hegelians. Engels was then sent to England in 1842 to learn the business of production in his father's factory in Manchester, which was situated in the industrial heart of the most advanced capitalist society of the day. In addition to studying industrial production, Engels explored the new working-class life in England, compiling material for a book that he published in 1845, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (MECW 4: 295ff).

Marx began seriously studying economics in Paris in 1843–1844 and after an encounter with Engels there in 1844, they both intensified their economic studies. Convinced that the rise of capitalism was the key to modern society and history, Marx sketched out his analysis in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. This text, unpublished in his lifetime, presented his initial perspectives on modern societies in terms of a sketch of the alienation of labor under capitalism and its projected emancipation (MECW 3: 231ff). Marx's Paris manuscripts revealed that he had intensely studied classical British political economy, French theories of revolution and socialism, and German philosophy—the three key components of what would emerge as the distinctive Marxian synthesis.

Marx's early theoretical optic viewed modern society as a product of industrial capitalism, criticized alienation, oppression, and exploitation from the standpoint of the ideals of the Enlightenment and German philosophy, and called for revolution to realize the positive potential of modernity while eliminating its negative features. Marx acknowledged Engels' "Contributions to a Critique of Political Economy" in the Preface to his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (MECW 3: 232), and proceeded to develop his own analysis of the class structure of capitalist society, providing an early vision of modernity as a catastrophe for the working class (MECW 3: 231ff).

For Marx and Engels, capitalism transformed the worker into a commodity who was forced to sell his or her labor power. The worker's labor power thus belonged to the capitalist and their productive activity was forced, coercive, and unfree, in the interest of capitalist production. Since the product of labor belonged to the capitalist, the worker could not get satisfaction that their activity produced something for themselves, and thus felt alienated from the product, their labor activity, other workers, and their own human needs and potentialities.

Marx's 1844 vision reconstructed Hegel's master–slave dialectic and conceptualized the alienation of humans in terms of, first, the alienation of the worker from the object of labor. In the capitalist mode of production, the objects and system of labor appear as something "alien," an independent power over the worker, as no doubt the early industrial factory system appeared to the working class. Secondly, the alienation of labor involved loss of control over the labor process (and over life activity) in a form of "wage slavery" in which

the worker existed in a state of "bondage" to the capitalist master. Humans under capitalism were thus alienated for Marx from "productive activity," which appeared external, non-essential, coerced, and unfree. Labor in the capitalist system was thus not only unpleasant but also constituted an alienation from one's very humanity, defined by Marx as free and productive activity, for alienated labor yielded no self-realization or satisfaction, constituting an alienation from one's "species-being," other people, and nature.

Whereas Marx, with Hegel and Feuerbach, envisaged species-being as universal, free, and creative activity that differentiates humans from animals, labor under capitalism for Marx is fragmentary, one-sided, and unnatural. The capitalist labor system enslaves individuals in factories, using up their time, the very medium of life. Marx's critique of capitalism thus presupposes a concept of human nature and non-alienated labor in which labor is conceptualized as essential life-activity, an enterprise through which one satisfies distinctly human needs and develops human potentials—or fails to develop them. Non-alienated labor for Marx is defined as free and conscious activity, developing human potentialities, and thus enabling individuals to realize their "species-being," or humanity.

Consequently, for Marx capitalist production is the basis of human alienation, leading to a dehumanization of human beings that requires revolution to overcome. Marx had not yet envisaged how capitalism was to be surmounted, though it is significant that even in his early manuscripts he polemicizes against a "crude communism" that is "leveling," destructive of individuality, and fails to cultivate the full range of human powers (MECW 3: 82). Marx does, however, call for elimination of the system of private property which is to be replaced by a "truly human and social property" where "objects of use and enjoyment" (MECW 3: 102) will be provided to individuals to enable them to engage in free and creative productive activity.

Marx's philosophical accomplishment was to concretize the conceptions of alienation and human beings developed by philosophers such as Hegel and Feuerbach, transforming philosophical concepts into social and political terms, thus taking universal concepts and reconfiguring them into historically specific ones. For Marx, alienation is neither a subjective nor an ontological concept, but a socio-historical normative category that points to a deplorable state of affairs concerning the working class under capitalism that should be overcome. Delivery from the alienation of labor for Marx is therefore a critical revolutionary project involving the transcendence of capitalism and class oppression.

In *The Wealth of Nations*, by contrast, Adam Smith (1937 [1776]) conceived of humans as bartering animals in which self-love or egotism was seen as the primary human trait, and competitiveness the natural condition.[8] For Marx, by contrast, humans were primarily social, cooperative, many-sided, and protean, capable of novel historical development and creativity. Whereas Smith described labor as "Jehovah's curse" and an ontological burden, while valorizing rest, leisure, and tranquillity, Marx saw productive activity and labor as distinctive human traits. For Smith, the division of labor is the source of the wealth of nations, whereas for Marx it is a catastrophe for the working class. For Marx,

humans are many-sided beings who require a wealth of activities and free-conscious self-determination to realize their basic human powers. Since, for Marx, individuals are social and cooperative, capitalism is in contradiction with human nature and requires a new social system to emancipate humanity and create a society worthy of human beings.

While for Adam Smith the capitalist market society provides the proper framework for human beings and capitalism is compatible with human nature, for Marx capitalism and human nature stand in contradiction, requiring a new human and social system. Marx, however, does not have an essentialist theory of human nature in which human being is conceived as fixed, unchanging, and invariant. Rather, Marx is a historicist who sees humans developing throughout history, with distinctive needs and potentialities but no fixed essence. For Marx, human nature is constantly changing and evolving, in tandem with development of the forces and relations of production.

Thus Marx undercuts the essentialism/historicism dichotomy that plagued previous philosophy, suggesting in effect to philosophers that they need to combine anthropology, history, the social sciences, and philosophy to properly theorize human beings, their alienation and oppression, and their potential emancipation. Marx never fully developed his philosophical perspectives, turning to political economy as his major intellectual focus; though I would argue that a theory of human nature, its alienation under capitalism, and potential emancipation underlies Marx's entire work. Marx's philosophical reflections from his 1844 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* connected with his developing a critical theory of contemporary society that situated philosophical issues in the context of the contemporary historical situation. In his *1844 Manuscripts*, for instance, Marx posed with trenchant insight the key questions that the alienation of labor under capitalism raised:

1 What in the evolution of mankind is the meaning of this reduction of the greater part of mankind to abstract labor?
2 What are the mistakes committed by the piece-meal reformers, who either want to raise wages and in this way to improve the situation of the working class, or regard equality of wages (as Proudhon does) as the goal of social revolution? (MECW 3: 241)

Marx's answer to the first question was that, although labor was a universal activity through which individuals satisfy their needs and distinguish themselves from animals, under capitalism labor takes the specific form of wage-labor in which individuals "alienate" themselves by selling their labor power to the capitalist, thus producing for another and submitting to coercive control that renders their labor activity and unfree. Consequently, the emergence of a modern industrial order was a catastrophe for the working class that Marx perceived as a qualitatively unique situation in history. Marx concluded that increased wages are only "higher wages for slaves," suggesting that wage

slavery itself must be abolished in order to allow the full development and realization of individual human beings (MECW 3: 295f).

Marx assumed that humans were free subjects who could potentially control and enjoy objects of the world. In the emerging industrial system, however, objects controlled subjects and individuals were thus dominated by the objects and system of labor. Even the bourgeoisie failed to control the capitalist mode of production that spiraled into periodic recessions and depressions. The capitalist economy was out of control and subject to periodic crises, and Marx and Engels envisaged a condition in which individuals self-managed and directed the system and products of their labor instead of being controlled by them. Their concept of socialism thus presupposed a modern concept of sovereignty in which associated individuals would control the conditions of their life and labor in cooperative forms and egalitarian social relations.

Dialectics, Philosophy, and Science

Marx's emerging project combined philosophy, history, and what we now call the social sciences. It is perhaps Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach," penned in Brussels as he was working with Engels on *The German Ideology* in 1845, that provide the most concise summary of his distinctive philosophical perspectives. The famous Thesis 11 articulates the activist thrust of Marx's concept of philosophy: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (MECW 5: 8).

Thesis 1 articulates Marx's particular blending of idealism and materialism in a dialectical overcoming of one-sided positions:

> The chief defect of all previous materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that things, reality, sensuousness, are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice … Hence it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to materialism, was set forth by idealism—but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. (MECW 5: 6)

Marx affirms Feuerbach's materialism, with its emphasis on the body and the senses, but also Hegel's emphasis on the reality of thought and subjectivity, thus aligning himself with Hegelian dialectics without the idealism and linked to a critical Enlightenment tradition that stresses the senses, social critique and transformation, and materialism. Marx's twist on the Enlightenment is that he radicalizes Hegel's emphasis on critique and negation and conceptualizes transformative activity as "revolutionary practice" (MECW 5: 6–8).

Appropriating Hegel's concept of negation, Marx asserted that the dialectic of negativity "is the moving and generative principle" in Hegel (MECW 3: 332), whereby thought criticizes partial and one-sided views, overcomes contradictions through negation, and attacks institutions and forces that oppress and alienate human beings. Marx followed Enlightenment critique and Hegel's

dialectics in systematically negating one-sided or oppressive thought and existing forms of oppression, while attempting to overcome all contradictions and conflicts in higher syntheses. He also follows Hegel in seeing conflicts overcome through breaks and ruptures characterized by suddenness and novelty—a distinctly modern way of seeing.

Hegelian–Marxian dialectics reject continuity theories of history, stressing discontinuities within a process in which human beings continually develop their modes of production until crisis erupts and new modes of production come into being, as in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Marx in particular focused on the breaks in history, which produced upheavals that generated turbulence, violence, and suffering in distinctly modern forms. "Critique" for Marx thus delineated outmoded, contradictory, and oppressive forms of thought and social conditions that were to be negated and overcome. Marx privileged the concept of critique, making it a central aspect of his theory and subtitling several of his major books "A Critique of." Freeing Hegel's dialectics of idealism and of an uncritical positivity toward existing society, Marx transformed dialectics into a mode of materialist investigation, social critique, and radical social transformation.

Dialectics for Marx was also connective, showing the relationship between different sectors of society and phenomena usually seen apart (i.e. like culture and consciousness and social conditions). His dialectic was also negative and revolutionary, analyzing contradictions as well as connections, and delineating conditions in need of transformation. The Marxian theory was historical and materialist as well. "Contradictions," for example, referred to real historical conditions of tension and inequality, such as the relation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, which required resolution through social struggle (as opposed to mere oppositions in which opposites, such as up and down or either/or, are mere linguistic constructs that are equal and symmetrical, without tension or explosive force). And, as I show in a later section, the Marxian vision also condemned existing modern societies from the perspective of a form of socialist society with more freedom, justice, and social wealth than in previous societies, in which he takes norms of fundamental socialist values as critical standpoints to disclose the limitations and oppressive features of capitalist societies.

Marx's philosophical-dialectical perspectives, moreover, moved beyond Hegel in turning toward empirical science as the proper method of inquiry and source of knowledge. To be sure, "science" for Marx is always *Wissenschaft*, in the German sense, which implies a historical, normative, and broad comprehensive mode of theorizing, tempered by rigorous empirical research, the testing of ideas in practice, the modification of concepts and hypotheses based on research, and a constant refinement, development, and systemization of results. Hence, following his early work in philosophy, Marx championed science over philosophy, calling for investigation of real individuals "in their empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions" (MECW 5: 37).

Further: "Where speculation ends, where real life starts, there consequently begins real, positive science, the expounding of the practical activity, of the

practical process of development of men" (MECW 6: 37). Philosophy thus loses its self-sufficient medium of existence, is absorbed into real history, and disappears as an autonomous discipline, thus producing a sublation, or *Aufhebung*, of philosophy into science. This move provides a model of an interdisciplinary space and method that investigates the interconnection of the economy, state, social institutions, and culture in the constitution of capitalist societies, criticizing the institutions of modern societies from the normative perspectives of ideals of a better society and more human life under an alternative form of social organization.

From a methodological standpoint, Marx began a reconstruction of philosophy and science and development of a critical social theory fusing a new epistemology of radical historicism that contextualized inquiry within its specific socio-economic context, providing broad historical perspectives and detailed empirical research. By decisively breaking with Adam Smith and bourgeois political economy, Marxian theory broke with previous conceptions of social science and inaugurated a new form of critical social science that privileged practice as the criterion of truth and rejected all ideas that could not be confirmed in practice, that could not be experimentally validated.

Marx's turn toward materialism was influenced by Ludwig Feuerbach, who defended perception and empirical knowledge against Hegelian idealism.[9] In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx insisted that his results were attained by "wholly empirical analysis," and that his critique of capitalism proceeded "from an actual economic fact"—the alienation of the worker under capitalism (MECW 3: 231 and 271). Yet Marx never really distinguished between science and dialectics, arguing that: "Empirical observations must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculations, the connection of the social and political structure with production" (MECW 5: 35).

This passage brings out the combination of empiricism and dialectics in the Marxian conception: following the model of empirical science, the investigator is directed to describe the facts of experience without speculation or distortion, and to connect social and political phenomena with the structure of the economy in a specific historical context. In turn, ideas are to be tested in practice, as "Man must prove the truth, i.e., the reality and power, the this-worldliness of his thinking in practice" (MECW 5: 6).

Yet the facts that Marx described are always historical, always subject to change and development, and the Marxian optic focused on the structures and movement of history, and the development and transitions of modern societies. Thus Marx constructed his theory of history and critical theory of society through concrete empirical and historical study, although his framework for the presentation of his analyses was arguably neo-Hegelian and dialectical. As he later put it in *Capital*, Hegelian dialectics "is in its essence critical and revolutionary,"[10] showing societies as riven with contradictions and crises that lead to their breaking up and collapse, and thus movement to a higher stage of society. Developing this view of history would occupy Marx for much of his life.

Historical Materialism and Modern Societies

The early Marx represents a synthesis of Hegel and Enlightenment critical rationalism, influenced by the radical democratic wing of the French Revolution. While working on his economic studies, Marx was expelled from Paris in 1845 for publishing in a socialist émigré newspaper and associating with a group of European radicals, so he moved to Brussels, where he began his collaboration with Engels. Together they travelled to England to observe the new factories and industrial living and working conditions. Upon their return, they began developing their sketch of the genesis of the modern world and what became known as "historical materialism" in *The German Ideology* (MECW 5), written in 1845–1846 and never published in their lifetime.

The text is important for it articulates some of their first formulations of the differentiated structure of modern societies, as well as sketching out their historical materialist perspectives on human beings and society. Marx and Engels also published a joint attack, *The Holy Family* (MECW 4: 1845), on Bruno Bauer and their former young Hegelian associates, who they now considered pseudo-radical and idealist. Marx published in addition a critique of the economics of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1846), declaring the French writer to be trapped in the idealist verbiage of Hegel (MECW 6: 105ff), thus mystifying the concrete economic phenomena that Marx and Engels were attempting to analyze.

In investigating the origins and genesis of modern societies, Marx and Engels developed a new historical materialist theory of history and society, introducing the concepts of the mode of production, forces and relations of production, division of labor, ideology, and class struggle as keys to understanding society and history. They also produced a conception of history as a succession of modes of production, leading to the emergence of modern bourgeois society and its future transition to a communist society. For Marx and Engels, the highly differentiated mode of production associated with modern bourgeois society makes its appearance "with the increase of population" and presupposes the "intercourse *(Verkehr)* of individuals with one another" (MECW 5: 32). They write:

> Every society is constituted by definite social relations [which] are just as much produced by men as linen, flax, etc. … Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill with the industrial capitalist. (MECW 6: 165–166)

Although this passage is often taken as an example of an alleged technological determinism in Marxism, one can also read it as stressing the importance of social relations and differentiation in the constitution of modern societies. Social differentiation is in turn connected to the division of labor that begins in

the family, leading to a division between mental and material labor and serving as the motor for further social differentiation (MECW 5: 46f).[11] Differentiation, further, takes the form of relations of subordination and domination, and Marx and Engels developed one of the first critical theories of modern bourgeois society, attacking its oppression and exploitation.

Although Marxian theory is often accused of limiting domination and oppression to class and neglecting such forms of oppression as gender and race (Balbus 1982), Marx and Engels argue that inequalities begin "in the family, where wife and children, are the slaves of the husband" (MECW 5: 46). They also refer to the "latent slavery in the family" and constantly criticize "patriarchal" forces, thus providing the conceptual space for critique of the oppression of women.

Indeed, Marx and Engels frequently describe the production and reproduction of social life as the basis of society and history (MECW 5: 42, 43, 46, passim), and thus attribute conceptual importance to the family and social reproduction. Of course, their main focus would be on production and the oppression of the working class, though Engels would eventually write a book on the family in 1884.

Marx and Engels' dialectical theory also articulated the relationships between the economy, polity, society, and culture in modern social formations. Their critical theory of society thus unfolds in an interdisciplinary space connecting economy, social structure, state, and culture. "Political economy" for Marx and Engels referred to a structure that combined politics and economics, describing a mode of social organization that they delineated as the "base" (*Unterbau*) for the set of modern legal, political, social, and cultural institutions and practices that they designated "superstructures" (*Überbau*).

For Marx and Engels, modern societies were highly differentiated ones, divided between state and civil society, classes, and an increasingly complex economy. Following Hegel, they distinguished between state and "civil society" (or "bourgeois society"), whereby "bourgeois society" referred to the sphere of private life in the family and economic domain, while the "state" described the sphere of public life. As a member of the state, one was a *citoyen* with universal rights in a realm of freedom and equality, whereas in the sphere of bourgeois society one was a mere *bourgeois*, a self-centered private individual in a fragmented and competitive domain of self-interest and competition.

Whereas Hegel posited the Prussian state as the realization of reason, which harmonized the contradictions of the socio-economic order, Marx and Engels developed a more critical optic on the organization of the state in the modern world. In their view, the fragmentation and divisions that Hegel described were not overcome in the modern state. Rather, society was bifurcated into distinct spheres in which the individual

> leads a double life, a heavenly and an earthly life, not only in thought, in consciousness, but in reality, in life: life in the political community where one regards oneself as a communal being, and life in civil society where one

> is active as a private individual, treats other human beings as means, is oneself reduced to a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers. (MECW 3: 154)

For Marx and Engels, the socially differentiated bourgeois society was a conflicted one, characterized by a "sphere of egoism and of the *bellum omnium contra omnes*." It is no longer presented as a community as by Hegel, but by differentiation, conflict, and class struggle and upheaval. Thus, "it has become the expression of man's separation from his community, from himself and from other men" (MECW 3: 155).

Marx and Engels were among the first to describe the social contradictions and differentiation of the new bourgeois-capitalist society and to anchor the state in its structure. They adopted the category of differentiation from Hegel, for whom it was mainly a concept of logic, of thought, while for Marx and Engels it was a category of social analysis. For Hegel, "differentiation" (*Differenzierung*) signified a process of the creation, division, and externalization of categories, first in the realm of thought (Hegel's logic) and then into the fields of nature and spirit. In analyzing the realm of spirit (*Geist*), Hegel describes differentiations in the social and political sphere, arguing that these differentiations are overcome (*aufgehoben*), and are absorbed and harmonized in his philosophy.

For Marx and Engels, by contrast, the differentiations under analysis referred to the concrete social-historical development of a structurally articulated bourgeois-capitalist society, state, and forms of culture and everyday life, which they described in the language of social theory rather than philosophy, consequently inaugurating a classical critical social theory of modern societies. On their analysis, in the newly fragmented bourgeois civil society, individuals were split into egoistic atoms, opposed to each other and driven by class-based self-interest and greed. The "rights of man" established by the bourgeois revolutions guaranteed that each individual maintains a certain sovereignty and rights vis-à-vis the state and society. Individuals were thus split between their life in the state, where they were free and equal, and everyday life in society, where inequality and unfreedom reigned. While from the standpoint of the state the individual was a *citoyen*, possessing universal rights and equality with all other citizens, within civil society the individual was a mere *bourgeois*, or proletarian, characterized by particular interests, posed in a competitive struggle for existence with others.

Marx and Engels always recognized that the individual was an important product of bourgeois society that socialism would preserve and develop.[12] Yet they also saw that bourgeois society produced an atomized, fragmented form of individualism, limited and ruled by the demons of private interest. In addition, they believed that modern civil society destroyed the communal ties of feudalism, and that community needed to be reconstituted in the modern world. Therefore, "political emancipation" was but a partial and abstract individual emancipation from the limitations of feudalism, which Marx and Engels ironically described as the "democracy of unfreedom" (MECW 3: 32).

By contrast, Marx and Engels called for "human emancipation," which involved transcending the egoism, private property, and religion of civil society and thus, ultimately, the liberation of society from capitalism (MECW 3: 170f). Their vision of history from the 1840s was presented in the "Communist Manifesto," which sketches in dramatic narrative form the view of the origins and trajectory of modernity (MECW 6: 477ff) and concretizes the stress on "revolutionary practice" in their previous works with conceptions of class struggle.

The "Manifesto" appeared in early 1848, anticipating the sequence of revolutions that erupted throughout Europe shortly after its publication. It provides one of the first critical visions of capitalist globalization and a gripping narrative of the origins and unfolding of capitalism. For Marx and Engels, the rise of a global market system characterized by a world market and the imposition of similar relations of production, commodities, and ideas on areas throughout the world was crucial in creating modern capitalist societies: "Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way" (MECW 6: 486).

In turn, the "need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere" (MECW 6: 487). As Marx once wrote in a letter, the railway, steamer, and telegraph "finally represented means of communication adequate to modern means of production" (cited in Hobsbawn 1979: 32), making possible a world market: "The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian nations into civilization … In a word, it creates a world after its own image" (MECW 6: 488).

In the Marxian vision, the bourgeoisie constantly revolutionized the instruments of production and the world market generated immense forces of commerce, navigation and discovery, communications, and industry, creating a potentially new world of abundance, diversity, and prosperity. Marx and Engels also indicated how, as "the intellectual creations of individual nations become common property," nationalist "one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible" (MECW 6: 488), in a passage where they underestimate the growing power of nationalism which continues unabated today.

Pointing to the resources and positive creations of the world market that provide the basis for a higher stage of social organization, Marx and Engels indicate that the world market also produced a new class of "world-historical, empirically universal individuals in place of local ones" (MECW 5: 49). This class of individuals—the industrial working class, the proletariat—was reduced to abstract labor power, rendered propertyless, and standing in contradiction to the "existing world of wealth and culture" (MECW 5: 48–49).

Having nothing but their chains to lose and a world to win, Marx and Engels believed that the industrial proletariat would organize as a revolutionary class to overthrow capitalism and produce a new socialist society that would abolish poverty, inequality, exploitation, and alienated labor, making possible the full development of individuals and social wealth (MECW 5: 48f and MECW 6: 490f).

The Marxian theory was thus one of the first to posit a global market system that would encircle the world. Marx and Engels also envisaged the possibility of world global crisis and revolution, which would envelop the earth in a titanic struggle between capital and its opponents. Their working-class revolutionaries would be resolutely internationalist and cosmopolitan, seeing themselves as citizens of the world rather than members of specific nations. The Marxian theory thus shared the illusions of many market liberals that the development of a world system of free trade would generate prosperity and cosmopolitanism, with both downplaying the importance of nation states, nationalism, national rivalries, and wars that had characterized previous centuries and would continue to be important forces through the present—forces that later Marxists like Lenin, Trotsky, and Luxembourg would theorize as contradictions within an imperialist capitalist system that would lead to war, destruction, and ultimately revolution and socialism.

Capital, Revolution, and Counterrevolution

In the exciting revolutionary year of 1848, Marx and Engels travelled, first from Brussels to Paris and then to Germany, where the turbulent situation had gained Marx an amnesty. Marx returned to Cologne, where he gathered support for a newspaper, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, which he published for the next two years. Marx and Engels sided with the bourgeois democrats who were fighting the old feudal powers for a modern parliamentary system. They envisaged a two-stage theory of revolution in which the workers would initially ally themselves with the bourgeoisie and then fight for a socialist republic. The counterrevolution prevailed, however. Marx's newspaper was shut down, and he was once again forced into exile.

Following his participation in the German and European revolutions of 1848–1849, Marx emigrated to England and Engels joined him. It was the fate of Engels to work for the next 25 years in his father's manufacturing firm in Manchester, while Marx studied and wrote in London. During the 1850s, Marx and Engels were embroiled intermittently in the quarrels of the radical exile community, and both wrote regularly for the *New York Tribune* and other newspapers, keeping abreast of international political affairs.

Marx, however, was primarily devoted to his economic studies in which he analyzed in minute detail the economic structure of capitalism, refining his arguments concerning capitalism as the foundation of modern societies. During the 1850s and 1860s, Marx spent much time poring over economic texts and documents in the British Museum Library in London. Convinced that the capitalist economy was the key to the structure and processes of modern societies, and that only a major crisis of capitalist society could lead to a higher form of socialist society, Marx diligently studied all the salient economic documents and literature of the day, carrying out a systematic critique of previous economic theory while producing his own.

Marx engaged in his economic studies during the period that Hobsbawm (1979) described as "the Age of Capital." From his London vantage point, Marx

was in an excellent position to chart out the unprecedented economic expansion that took place from the 1850s until his death in 1883. This was the era of the proliferation of new modes of mechanization, in which machine production produced immense quantities of goods and expanded trade generated a dynamic world market. In addition, science and technology grew rapidly, constantly revolutionizing production. It was an era of great wealth, but also tremendous divisions between rich and poor that generated intense class conflicts that Marx and Engels chronicled.

Marx charted these developments, going daily to the British Museum Library, where he kept abreast of the economic and political vicissitudes of the epoch, sketching out his system of economics in an unpublished *Grundrisse*, or "Fundamental Outline" (1857–1858; MECW 28), and publishing an introduction to his economic theory in 1859, *Toward a Critique of Political Economy* (MECW 29). After years of poverty and relative obscurity, Marx eventually achieved a certain renown and notoriety. He was elected President of the International Workingmen's Association and gave its inaugural address in 1864. And, after working on his economic studies for over 20 years, Marx finally published the first volume of his magnum opus, *Capital*, in 1867 (MECW 35), which provides a critical analysis of the structure of modern societies.

Capital was translated into many languages and was eventually recognized as a classic text of modern economic theory. Marx's magnum opus brought together decades of prodigious research into the origins, genesis, and structures of capitalism. Modern capitalist society for Marx is a commodity-producing society that is characterized by large-scale industry, an ever-proliferating division of labor, and contradictions rooted in capitalist relations of production, in particular the relation between capital and labor, the bourgeoisie and workers.

Beginning with analysis of the commodity, Marx sought the secret of capitalist "surplus value" and profit in the unpaid labor-time extracted from workers. This theory of exploitation was combined with minute analysis of the power of the capitalist industrial system over the worker. In some of the more powerful passages in *Capital*, Marx notes how the division of labor

> seizes upon, not only the economic, but every other sphere of society, and everywhere lays the foundation of that all engrossing system of specialization and sorting men [producing] development in a human being of one single faculty at the expense of all other faculties, which caused A. Ferguson, the master of Adam Smith, to exclaim: "We make a nation of Helots, and have no free citizens."[13]

With the publication of *Capital* in 1867, Marx had thus come to conceptualize the present age as a system of capitalist domination whereby the commodity form comes to dominate society in its totality, in which the worker is reduced to commodity status, and in which production is geared toward commodity production in order to produce profit and surplus value, expropriated by the capitalist. Thus, modern societies for Marx are those ruled by capital, by

abstract social forces, that impose a system of domination and exploitation on contemporary individuals.

For Marx, capitalism is fundamentally a commodity-producing society and modernity is an era in history organized around the production and consumption of commodities. Whereas in premodern societies fetishes were made out of trees or other animate or inanimate objects, under capitalism commodity fetishism metamorphized value into exchange value. In this condition, use value and the development of human beings was minimized, and value resided primarily in the ascendancy of abstract exchange-value in the form of money and exchange which was controlled by the capitalist class.[14]

Within the history of civilization, capitalism thus constitutes a unique mode of social organization, structured by the production, exchange, distribution, and consumption of commodities. Modernity for Marx thus is bound up with the triumph of capitalism; his book *Capital* is a testament to the power of capitalism, and a sign of the extent to which the working class was held in thrall by the power of the industrial system and hegemony of the capitalist class over labor. Itself a sign of the times, *Capital* was researched and published during an era of unprecedented economic expansion, and before the working class had organized and provided a counterforce to the "juggernaut of capital." Marx's treatise was thus an expression of the victory of capital in an era of counter-revolution when capital reigned triumphant and did not yet face a powerful countervailing oppositional force. Marx himself, of course, was involved with a nascent movement that would contest capitalism and would militate for an alternative economic system and mode of social organization.

Socialism and Revolution

For Marx, modern capitalist societies constitute a form of social organization in which individuals lack conscious control and mastery of their social relations, and in which individuals are alienated from and subordinated to an oppressive social system. A communist society, by contrast, would overturn

> the basis of all earlier relations of production and intercourse, and for the first time consciously treat all natural premises as the creations of hitherto existing men, strip them of their natural character and subjugate them to the power of the united individuals.[15]

Thus, against the individual monadic subject of modern theory from Descartes throughout the Enlightenment and Kant to positivism, Marx envisages a collective organization of society that will consciously control production and social life. Marx accordingly analyzed the new forms of social cooperation and association, the new interdependencies, that bound individuals together in the emergent bourgeois social order and which produced the potentialities for better, more free and egalitarian, forms of social association. For Marx:

> the real intellectual wealth of the individual depends entirely on the wealth of his real connections. Only this will liberate the separate individuals from the various national and local barriers, bring them into practical connection with the production (including intellectual production) of the whole world and make it possible for them to acquire the capacity to enjoy this all-sided production of the whole earth (the creations of man). All-round dependence, this primary natural form of the world-historical co-operation of individuals, will be transformed by this communist revolution into the control and conscious mastery of these powers, which, born of the action of men on one another, have till now overawed and ruled men as powers completely alien to them.[16]

The division of labor, system of property relations, and competitive market system of the modern economy thus separates individuals from each other and from control over their labor activity, producing alienation and oppression. Yet the modern economy also brings individuals together, producing an expanding "wealth of real connections," novel forms of cooperation, and innovative forms of association that will make possible control of economic, political, and social conditions and a higher stage of history in which associated individuals could master their economy and society. Voluntarily associated individuals under socialism will, Marx claims, come to control their social production and apply their social power and productive forces to satisfy their needs and develop their potentialities.

Thus, the genesis of modern society produces not only alienation and oppression for the working class, but also the preconditions of its emancipation. This is a major theme of *The German Ideology*, and Marx and Engels's analysis culminates in a vision of world revolution in which capitalism will be replaced by communism. They characterize "communism as the real movement of history" and revolution as "the driving force of history," producing an especially revolutionist view of history.[17]

Further, in addition to conceptualizing new forms of class conflict and differentiation, Marx and Engels were among the first to see that capitalism was engendering new modes of cooperation and solidarity at the same time that it was dividing society into classes. In an 1853 article on imperialism in India, Marx argued that:

> The bourgeois period of history has to create the material basis of the new world—on the one hand the universal intercourse founded upon mutual dependency of humanity, and the means of that intercourse; on the other hand the development of the productive powers of humans and the transformation of material production into a scientific domination of natural agencies.[18]

Marx thus characterized "universal intercourse" and "mutual dependency," or interdependence, as defining features of modern societies that produced new modes of association as well as differentiation and conflict.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx described the immense emergent sources of social power (over nature) contained in accumulated "scientific labour" and "technological application of natural science," combined with "the general productive force arising from social combination."[19] Marx's special contribution was that he identified complex cooperation as the secret "social force" propelling capitalist development and the rise of modernity. In his famous discussions of "Co-operation," "The Division of Labour and Manufacture," and "Machinery and Modern Industry" in *Capital*, Marx analyzes the powers of the capitalist mode of production as deriving from modes of cooperation and the new forms of association in the factory that produce new social powers and the basis for a yet higher form of social organization.

In the chapter on "Co-operation," Marx writes that "the starting point of capitalist production" is the bringing together of a "greater number of labourers working together, at the same time, in one place … in order to produce the same sort of commodity under the mastership of one capitalist." The early forms of capitalist cooperation involved "the conversion of numerous isolated and independent processes into one combined social process." In this analysis of the labor process, Marx puts his emphasis on capitalist command, its "directing authority," as "counterpressure" to working-class resistance, and on the development of an "industrial army of workmen" under the control of supervisors and managers.[20]

In Marx's vision of political emancipation, he envisaged the workers themselves appropriating the social powers of cooperation for their own purposes, eliminating the capitalist owner and retinue of supervisors and managers, themselves taking over the process of production to develop their own potential and to produce for their own needs. In stressing the social powers of cooperation and the division of labor, Marx thus describes at once the new potentialities generated by capitalism, the capitalist appropriation of these powers to exploit and dominate workers, and a vision in which the workers themselves utilize the new powers of association and cooperation for their own purposes. Hence, while Marx analyzed the productive and social power of the new modes of cooperation and association produced by capitalism, he also pointed to the alienating and despotic side of capitalist specialization in the same pages that he praised its powers.

Moreover, Marx advocated a form of radical democracy. For Marx, unlike Hegel, sovereignty lies with the people and not the state or monarch. The constitution under democracy "is a free product of man" and represents "the self-determination of the people."[21] Popular sovereignty thus involves the self-government of the people in all realms of social life.

Marx, "the Battle for Democracy," and the Realm of Freedom

In "The Communist Manifesto," Marx and Engels champion the modern form of state, urging the workers "to win the battle of democracy" and to fight for establishment of a democratic republic. It is in his speech on the Paris

Commune, however, that Marx most fully developed his views on democracy. The Paris Commune lasted for two months after the Franco-Prussian war in 1871 before the combined German and French forces crushed it and killed thousands of its supporters. Marx wrote that "the Commune was the positive form" of the workers' "social Republic" and represented "the self-government of the producers," serving "as a model to all the great industrial centres of France."[22]

The Paris Commune was constituted by popular assemblies and its representatives were workers who were "revocable at short terms" and who received the same wages as other workers. The Commune would create a people's militia and police force and an elected judiciary. As Marx writes:

> In a rough sketch of national organization which the Commune had no time to develop, it states clearly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet, and that in the rural districts the standing army was to be replaced by a national militia, with an extremely short term of service. The rural communes of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris, each delegate to be at any time revocable and bound by the *mandat imperative* (formal instructions of his constituents). The few but important functions which still would remain for a central government were not to be suppressed, as has been intentionally misstated, but were to be discharged by Communal, and thereafter strictly responsible agents. The unity of the nation was not to be broken, but, on the contrary, to be organized by the Communal Constitution and to become a reality by the destruction of the State power which claimed to be the embodiment of that unity independent of, and superior to, the nation itself, from which it was but a parasitic excrescence.[23]

Marx therefore advocated a radical form of popular sovereignty and democracy in which the people would govern themselves. In place of representative democracy, a form of popular sovereignty would represent the self-government of the people: "instead of deciding once in three or six years which member of the ruling class was to misrepresent the people in Parliament, universal suffrage was to serve the people." A people's militia and police force would guarantee that no permanent state apparatus would stand above and over society. The Commune constituted "the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour."[24]

In his most advanced vision of an emancipated society, Marx envisaged a realm of freedom made possible by the developments of modern technology and industry. In the *Grundrisse*, the sketch of his book *Capital* that he worked on in the 1850s, he presented a theory of a possible rupture between capitalist and post-capitalist societies that would be as radical as that between pre-capitalist and capitalist ones. On his account, capital generates factories, machine production, and eventually an automatic system of machinery. In his famous

analysis of automation, Marx produces an audacious vision of the development of a fully automated system of production under capitalism that brings capitalism to an end and which forms the basis for an entirely different social system. In Marx's vision, the "accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain," is absorbed into capital and produce machinery which "develops with the accumulation of society's science, of the productive force generally."[25] As machinery and automation evolve, the worker becomes more and more superfluous, standing ever-more powerless alongside the growing power of machines and big industry.

On the other hand, machines free the worker from arduous and back-breaking labor. In this situation:

> Labour no longer appears so much to be included within the production process; rather, the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to the production process itself … He steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor.[26]

The capitalist system thus makes possible "a large quantity of disposable time" which furnishes the space for the development of the individual's full productive forces. Free time allows for more education and development of the social individual who can then enter "in the direct production process as this different subject."[27]

> This process is then both discipline, as regards the human being in the process of becoming; and, at the same time, practice [*Ausubung*], experimental science, materially creative and objectifying science, as regards the human being who has become, in whose head exists the accumulated knowledge of society.[28]

Thus capitalism produces the basis for a new society of non-alienated labor in which individuals will possess the free time to fully develop their human capacities; and labor itself will be a process of experimentation, creativity, and progress in which the system of automation produces most of society's goods, and individuals can thus enjoy leisure and the fruits of creative work. Such a society would be a completely different social order from that of capitalist society which is organized around work and the production of commodities. Marx acknowledges that the new society would have a totally "changed foundation of production, a new foundation first created by the process of history."[29]

In the third volume of *Capital*, Marx described this radically new social order in terms of a "realm of freedom," writing:

> Freedom in this field can only consists in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature.[30]

Marx's most distinctive vision of socialism thus envisages socialism as constituting a break in history as dramatic as the rupture between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies that produced modernity. While capitalism is a commodity-producing society organized around work and production, socialism would be a social order organized around the full development of individual human beings. Marx formulated this radical vision of a new society in his late text, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, as the product of a transition to a higher phase of communism. In the first phase, the "prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society" would limit the level of social and individual development; but:

> In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the spring of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banner: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs![31]

Crucially, Marx saw the potential for socialism rooted in the very historical trajectory of modernity. Eschewing moralistic and utopian concepts, Marx theorized that just as historical forces had produced capitalist modernity, so too would history provide the possibilities of constructing a socialist society. Yet such a transition would involve political choice and struggle, and henceforth much of Marx's attention was devoted to analyzing the class forces and material conditions that could produce socialism. Consequently, from the mid-1860s into his final years, Marx devoted much energy to nurturing a socialist political movement. He sought political organizations and strategies that could produce a socialist revolution and a new stage of history that as radically broke with the previous stage as capitalist modernity broke with previous pre-capitalist social formations.

Capitalist Crisis, Revolutionary Historicism, and the Transition to Socialism

Of course, the big question was how a socialist revolution could occur. At times, Marx envisaged that only a radical crisis and collapse of the capitalist system would generate the possibility of a transition to socialism. In the *Grundrisse*, for instance, Marx posited the rupture in terms of a cataclysmic collapse of capitalism, leading to a violent upheaval:

> [T]he highest development of productive power together with the greatest expansion of existing wealth will coincide with depreciation of capital, degradation of the labourer, and a most straitened exhaustion of his vital powers. These contradictions lead to explosions, cataclysms, crises, in which by momentaneous suspension of labour and annihilation of a great

> portion of capital the latter is violently reduced to the point where it can [not] go on. These contradictions, of course, lead to explosions, crises, in which momentary suspension of all labour and annihilation of a great part of the capital violently lead it back to the point where it is enabled [to go on] fully employing its productive powers without committing suicide. Yet, these regularly recurring catastrophes lead to their repetition on a higher scale, and finally to its violent overthrow.[32]

Yet, in an 1872 *Address to a Congress of the First International*, Marx suggested that a democratic road to socialism "where the workers can attain their goal by peaceful means" was also viable in countries such as America, England, and Holland.[33] To some extent Marx's politics were always ad hoc and oriented toward existing political struggles and movements and, contrary to many attacks on him, were never fixed and dogmatic. In an 1843 contribution to *The German-French Yearbook*, which established the political principles for that venture, Marx wrote:

> we do not confront the world in a doctrinaire way with a new principle: Here is the truth, kneel down before it! We develop new principles for the world out of the world's own principles. We do not say to the world: Cease your struggles, they are foolish; we will give you the true slogan of struggle. We merely show the world what it is really fighting for, and consciousness is something that it *has to* acquire, even if it does not want to.[34]

To a large extent, Karl Marx followed this principle throughout his life. His sketch of socialism in *The German Ideology* written with Engels—where one would "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic"[35]—reflects the ideals of the utopian socialism that predated the concept of communism to which Marx would eventually adhere. Indeed, the principles and ideals of "The Communist Manifesto" summed up the program of the emerging communist movement; and, in the 1848 revolution, Marx joined the struggles of liberals and workers for a democratic republic, projecting communism as an ideal for the future. During the 1860s, Marx articulated the principles of the First International Working Men's Association, putting some of his communist ideals aside, while, as noted earlier, in his writing on the Paris Commune he championed the Commune form of government interpreted as a form of democratic communism.

Thus, Marx tried to connect his political theory with the most advanced political forces of the day and articulated his principles in accord with the most radical struggles and movements. This form of "revolutionary historicism" derives political ideals from existing forces and struggles, rather than projecting an a priori blueprint which is then imposed on diverse movements and contexts.[36] Rather, Marx saw that in distinct political circumstances different forms of struggle and different alternatives were necessary, and thus never

advocated one unitary strategy of revolution or concept of socialism, instead developing his concepts in concordance with existing struggles and potentials.

On the whole, Marxian political theory was oriented toward actually existing struggles as the bearers of hopes for revolution; and, on the whole, he adopted a multi-class model and analysis of class blocs, rather than the "melting vision" that pitted the proletariat against the bourgeoisie as in "The Communist Manifesto." Despite different emphases in his political theory, it was class struggle and a coalition of classes that were necessary conditions of any revolution, or transition to socialism. Much of Marx's focus in his post-1848 works was on class analysis, in which he explicated class differences, alliances, and conflicts.

Indeed, his materialist theory of history suggested that the role of classes was crucial in history, and his theory of revolution indicated that class struggle was a primary vehicle of achieving socialism. While Marx believed that capitalism had developed the forces of production in a more revolutionary fashion than any previous social formation, he envisaged that there comes a time, as he put it in *Capital*, when

> the monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.[37]

Ultimately, Marx believed that capitalist societies would continually revolutionize themselves as they developed their potentials further, but that capitalism's contradictions and crisis tendencies would produce the transition to what he saw as a higher mode of civilization. In the decades following Marx's death in 1883, capitalism underwent many crises and a revolutionary working-class movement emerged, a wing of which embraced Marx's ideas. In addition, revolutionary regimes erupted that carried out socialist revolutions using Marx's ideas to legitimate their policies, and the Soviet Communism bloc that claimed to be a Marxist-inspired regime collapsed. Hence, today Marxist ideas function largely as a critique of capitalism and theory of revolution and socialism that is yet to be developed in Western democracies, as we shall explore in later chapters.

The next chapter will address Marx's collaborator and life-long friend Friedrich Engels; and subsequent chapters will unfold key incidents in the development of the Marxian theory, concluding with chapters delineating its contemporary relevance.

Notes

1 On the collapse of "actually existing socialism," see Bahro (1978).
2 On Marx's historical context, family life, and early political influences, see Heinrich (2019) and McLellan (1973).
3 On Marx's life and times, see Mehring (1962), McLellan (1973), Riazanov (1973), Lichtheim (1961), and Wheen (2000). In this chapter, I use the abbreviation "MECW" to refer to citations from volumes in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels,

Collected Works, published from 1975 to 2004. "MECW 1" thus refers to *Collected Works*, Volume 1, with page numbers following. However, I will turn to the Marxist Internet Archive website for most of this and later chapters as it is the most accessible online source. Two of Marx's earliest texts, preserved from high school, stress the importance of developing one's individuality to the utmost and working for the good of humanity. See MECW 1: 3–9.

4 Karl Marx, "Marx's Notebooks on Epicurean Philosophy (Extracts on Total Philosophy, Praxis, Historiography) [Sixth Notebook]," Autodidactic Project, at http://www.autodidactproject.org/quote/marx-epicurean1.html.

5 Hegel's followers have conventionally been sorted into conservative "Old Hegelians" and radical "Young Hegelians," with Marx, Engels, and their then comrades Bruno and Edgar Bauer and others put in the latter category. See Lowith (1967) and Hook (1994 [1936]).

6 On Marx and the French Revolution, see Michael Lowy, "'The Poetry of the Past': Marx and the French Revolution," *New Left Review*, Sept–Oct 1989 at https://newleftreview.org/issues/i177/articles/michael-lowy-the-poetry-of-the-past-marx-and-the-french-revolution (accessed December 30, 2024).

7 Ruge was several years older than Marx and had the capital and experience to found a newspaper. After the failure of their enterprise, they drifted apart as Marx swerved radically to the left. See Arnold Ruge, *Preussische Revolution seit dem siebenten September und die Contrerevolution seit dem zehnten November. Tagebuch* (1848; Leipzig: Verlagsbureau, paperback, 2010).

8 For a detailed analysis of the connections and differences between Marx and Smith see Chapter 4, "Capitalism and Human Nature in Adam Smith and Karl Marx."

9 On Feuerbach, see Wartofsky (1977) and Feuerbach (1972).

10 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One. "Afterward [sic] to the Second German Edition," at https://www.marxists.org/subject/dialectics/marx-engels/capital-afterward.htm (accessed January 13, 2025).

11 In the next chapter, we shall see that Engels developed a Marxist critique of the family in his ground-breaking work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. We'll also see in Chapter 6 ("Marxism, Colonialism, and Modernity") that, in his writings on colonialism, Marx also addresses the issues of race and racial oppression.

12 See Marx's Paris *Manuscripts*, where he affirms individuality as inseparable from one's social being and valorizes a "real *individual* social being" (MECW 3: 299); and *The German Ideology*, where Marx and Engels also describe the individual as a key component of modern societies and an ideal to realize (MECW 5: 75ff).

13 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, Chapter Fourteen, "Division of Labour and Manufacture," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch14.htm (accessed December 30, 2024).

14 Karl Marx. *Capital*, Volume One, Part I: Commodities and Money. Chapter One, "Commodities," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm (accessed December 30, 2024).

15 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, Part I: Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook. D. Proletarians and Communism, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01d.htm (accessed December 30, 2024).

16 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, "A Critique of The German Ideology" (1845–1846) at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_German_Ideology.pdf (accessed December 30, 2024).

17 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, "A Critique of The German Ideology" (1845–1846) at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_German_Ideology.pdf (accessed December 30, 2024).

18 Karl Marx, "The Future Results of British Rule in India," *New-York Daily Tribune*, August 8, 1853, at https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/marx/works/1853/07/22.htm (accessed December 30, 2024).
19 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Notebook VII. The Chapter on Capital, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch14.htm (accessed December 30, 2024).
20 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, Chapter Thirteen: Co-operation, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch13.htm (accessed December 30, 2024).
21 Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" (1843), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/ch02.htm (accessed December 30, 2024).
22 Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France" (1871), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ (accessed December 30, 2024).
23 Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France" (1871), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ (accessed December 30, 2024).
24 Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France" (1871), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ (accessed December 30, 2024).
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3 Friedrich Engels, Marxism, and Modernity

Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx were among the first to develop systematic perspectives on modern societies and to produce a critical discourse on modernity, thus inaugurating the problematic of modern critical social theory. In many of the narratives of classical social theory, Marx alone is usually cited as one of the major founders of the problematic, while Engels is neglected.

It is Marx who is usually credited as one of the first to develop a theory of capitalist modernity and a critical social theory that links the rise of modern societies with the emergence of the industrial revolution and capitalism and provides a theory of revolution and socialism to address the problems and crises of industrial capitalism. Yet Engels preceded Marx in focusing attention on the differences between modern and premodern society, and then on the constitutive role of capitalism and the industrial revolution in producing a new modern world—phenomena he experienced first-hand in his father's factories and offices in Germany and England.

In addition, Engels was the first of the intellectual partnership to explore the conditions of the working class and to describe the proletariat as the revolutionary class that would lead the way from capitalism to socialism. As I show in this chapter, from the late 1830s into the 1840s, Engels played a leading role in theorizing the distinctive features of the modern world, and he inspired Marx to see the importance of capitalism and the industrial revolution in constructing a distinctively new modern class society divided into workers and capitalists whose interests were in conflict.

Consequently, I argue that Engels preceded Marx in his analysis of the historical originality and novelty of modern societies and their rupture from traditional societies. Study of the work of the early Engels and the beginning of his collaboration with Marx thus provides fresh perspectives on their relationship and the role of Engels in creating the shared theoretical and political positions of classical Marxism. This analysis will also suggest that the critical theory of modern societies and political economy of capitalism remains a major contribution of Marx and Engels to contemporary thought—a theme I will develop in more detail in Chapter 6 on Marxism, colonialism, and modernity and other parts of the book.

Hence, in this chapter I want to overcome the tendency to neglect Engels in playing a major role in the construction of Marxism which has happened in

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various historical periods up to the present by presenting a comprehensive overview of Engels' life, thought, and contributions to the construction of Marxism.[1]

Engels and the Search for the Modern

Engels' father had factories in Barmen and Bremen, Germany and Manchester, England, so his son was able to experience the modern world at the beginning of industrialization in Germany and England. Some of Engels' initial publications concern the new industrial society emerging in Germany and what he saw as modern forms of industry, urbanization, architecture, culture, and thought. In a series of "Letters from Wuppertal," published in a German newspaper in 1839, Engels described the novel industrial conditions in the Wuppertal valley, opening with a description of the pollution of the river, caused by dyes from "the numerous dye-works using Turkey red" (MECW 2: 7).[2]

Engels then describes the town of Elberfeld and contrasts it with its neighboring town, his own native Barmen. Engels lauds the "large, massive houses tastefully built in modern style" that "take the place of those mediocre Elberfeld buildings, which are neither old-fashioned nor modern." The new stone houses appearing everywhere, the broad avenues, the green bleaching-yards, gardens, and the Lower Barmen church were, Engels thought, "very well constructed in the noblest Byzantine style" (MECW 2: 8). He concludes that

> there is far more variety here than in Elberfeld, for the monotony is broken by a fresh bleaching-yard here, a house in the modern style there, a stretch of the river or a row of gardens lining the street. All this leaves one in doubt whether to regard Barmen as a town or a mere conglomeration of all kinds of buildings; it is, indeed, just a combination of many small districts held together by the bond of municipal institutions. (MECW 2: 8)

Engels thus characterizes the new modern world in terms of new industry, new towns, and new working conditions and class divisions, bustling with variety and diversity. He also describes inebriation in the ale-houses, with drunken individuals pouring out of them at closing time and sleeping in the gutter. Engels blames this situation on factory work and describes the lot of the new industrial working class as a miserable one:

> Work in low rooms where people breathe in more coal fumes and dust than oxygen—and in the majority of cases beginning already at the age of six—is bound to deprive them of all strength and joy in life. The weavers, who have individual looms in their homes, sit bent over them from morning till night, and desiccate their spinal marrow in front of a hot stove. Those who do not fall prey to mysticism are ruined by drunkenness. (MECW 2: 9)

Likewise, the local-born leather workers are ruined physically and mentally after three years of work: "three out of five die of consumption" (MECW 2: 9). In sum,

> terrible poverty prevails among the lower classes, particularly the factory workers in Wuppertal; syphilis and lung diseases are so widespread as to be barely credible; in Elberfeld alone, out of 2,500 children of school age 1,200 are deprived of education and grow up in the factories—merely so that the manufacturer need not pay the adults, whose place they take, twice the wage he pays a child. (MECW 2: 10)

Thus, as early as 1839, Engels deplores the horrific working and living conditions of the working class, and depicts them as a reprehensible effect of modern industrial development. Already the young Engels is describing the living and working conditions of the industrial working class, depicting their deplorable poverty, and class differences from the bourgeoisie. In the latter part of his "Letters from Wuppertal," and in many other newspaper articles written over the next few years, Engels describes in great detail "modern" literature, culture, and thought of the present, equating "modern" cultural tendencies with Enlightenment criticism and the contemporary literature of the "Young Germany" movement, which he champions against reactionary Pietistic religion and backwards German literature.

In the voluminous newspaper articles and sketches of the early Engels, he thus reveals himself to be, like Marx, a great partisan of modernity, an avatar of modern ideas, as well as a sharp critic of the impact of modern conditions on the working class (see Engels in MECW 2 and MECW 4). Yet it is in Engels' brilliant early study, *The Condition of the Working Class in 1844,* that he first wins Marx's great respect that helps generate the partnership that will be one of the most productive, influential, and controversial of 19th-century critiques of capitalism and industrial society, and that first establishes Engels as a first-rate researcher, writer, critic, and champion of the emergent industrial working class, upon which he and Marx will eventually pin their hopes as a revolutionary force.

Engels in England: *The Condition of the Working Class in 1844*

Engels was sent to England in 1842 to learn the business of industrial production in his father's textile factory Ermen, whose English branch was situated in Manchester, the industrial heart of the most advanced capitalist society of the day. While experiencing first-hand the new mode of industrial production and way of life that accompanied it, young Engels assiduously studied the writing of German, French, and English socialism, as well as British political economy. In an article on "Progress of Social Reform on the Continent" (1843) Engels describes the new communist ideas as "not the consequence of the particular position of the English, or any other nation, but that it is a necessary conclusion, which cannot be avoided to be drawn from the premises given in the general facts of modern civilisation" (MECW 3: 392).

Indeed, it is generally accepted that Engels preceded Marx in converting to communism, that Moses Hess converted Engels in 1842, at a time when Marx

was still formally a radical democrat who acknowledged that he was not thoroughly familiar with communist ideas (see Riazanov 1973, p. 43; McLellan 1973; Carver 1989, p. 95; and Hunt 2009, p. 74).

Engels, by contrast, began to write newspaper and journal articles promoting communist ideas in early 1843 (see MECW 3: 379–443 and MECW 4: 212–265), as well as attending workers' meetings and making speeches. For Engels, it is British political economy that describes the workings of the new capitalist economy and provides its ideological legitimation. In the autumn of 1843, Engels accordingly began writing an article on the new modern economic theory and sent it to Marx and his collaborator Arnold Ruge for publication in their forthcoming *Deutsche-Französische Jahrbücher*. The yearbook was intended to collect studies by the top German and French radical theorists to help produce a new tendency that would further progressive social change. The first—and only—issue contained an article by "Friedrich Engels in Manchester" titled "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy."

In this study, Engels dissected the forms of private property, competition, trade, and crisis in the newly emerging modern industrial society. His study is fragmentary and highly moralistic, though it contains some important insights into the modern capitalist economy and discloses his early commitments to radical social critique and transformation. Engels opens by relating the genesis of political economy with the rise of trade and industry, and presents it as a product of the new capitalist social relations, anticipating the Marxist critique of political economy and ideology: "political economy came into being as a natural result of the expansion of trade, and with its appearance, elementary, unscientific huckstering was replaced by a developed system of licensed fraud, an entire science of enrichment" (MECW 3: 418).

Engels develops his "outline" as an ideal type comparison between the mercantile system and "modern economics." The new system assumes "the validity of private property" and develops into a system of trade. Competition is the economists' "principle category—his most beloved daughter, whom he ceaselessly caresses" (MECW 3: 419, 420, 422, 431). Yet competition leads to the monopoly of property and produces an inherently unstable economic system full of conflicts and crises.

As noted, Engels' critique of the new modern market economy is literary and moralistic. British theorist Thomas Malthus' theory of population for Engels is

> the crudest, most barbarous theory that ever existed, a system of despair which struck down all those beautiful phrases about philanthropy and world citizenship. The premises begot and reared the factory system and modern slavery, which yields nothing in inhumanity and cruelty to ancient slavery. (MECW 3: 420)[3]

Trade is "legalized fraud," and to those apologists of the system who argue for its civilizing virtues, Engels contemptuously replies:

> You have destroyed the small monopolies so that the one great basic monopoly, property, may function the more freely and unrestrictedly. You

> have civilised the ends of the earth to win new terrain for the deployment of your vile avarice. You have brought about the fraternisation of the peoples—but the fraternity is the fraternity of thieves. You have reduced the number of wars—to earn all the bigger profits in peace, to intensify to the utmost the enmity between individuals, the ignominious war of competition! When have you done anything out of pure humanity, from consciousness of the futility of the opposition between the general and the individual interest? When have you been moral without being interested, without harbouring at the back of your mind immoral, egoistical motives? (MECW 3: 423)

As a Left Hegelian, Engels is concerned to delineate the series of contradictions between competition and monopoly, supply and demand, wealth and poverty, and the general and particular interest that will eventually lead the system to crisis:

> The economist comes along with his lovely theory of demand and supply, proves to you that "one can never produce too much," and practice replies with trade crises, which reappear as regularly as the comets, and of which we have now on the average one every five to seven years. For the last eighty years these trade crises have arrived just as regularly as the great plagues did in the past—and they have brought in their train more misery and more immorality than the latter. (MECW 3: 433)

Yet although Engels sees the emerging industrial society as inherently unstable and crisis-prone, at this point in his development he does not grasp any mechanism or tendencies that will lead to a progressive social transformation, beyond the pronouncement that:

> as long as you continue to produce in the present unconscious, thoughtless manner, at the mercy of chance—for just so long trade crises will remain; and each successive crisis is bound to become more universal and therefore worse than the preceding one; is bound to impoverish a larger body of small capitalists, and to augment in increasing proportion the numbers of the class who live by labour alone, thus considerably enlarging the mass of labour to be employed (the major problem of our economists) and finally causing a social revolution such as has never been dreamt of in the philosophy of the economists. (MECW 3: 434)

During 1843, Engels also composed a review of Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present*, which like Engels' work of the period, developed a contrast between modern and premodern society. It shows Engels at work in researching the contemporary factory system and exploring the development of industrial society. Studies of England—"The Eighteenth Century" and "The English Constitution"—disclose that Engels was also inquiring into the structure and conditions of the modern economy and state as they emerged in England (MECW 3: 444–514).

In addition to studying industrial production and the political constitution of modern society, Engels explored the new working-class life in England, compiling material for a book that he published in 1845, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*. The book was a result of Engels' work in his father's factory in Manchester and reveals a tremendous amount of research, scathing denunciation of the capitalist system and ruling bourgeoisie, and tremendous empathy and sympathy for the working class.[4]

In this ground-breaking work, Engels argued that the history of the proletariat was bound up with the invention of the steam engine and "machinery for working cotton" in the second half of the 18th century (MECW 4: 307), writing that these instruments gave rise to the industrial revolution which produced new instruments of labor, new industries, a new social structure, and new living and working conditions.[5] Engels claimed that:

> The industrial revolution is of the same importance for England as the political revolution for France, and the philosophical revolution for Germany; and the difference between England in 1760 and in 1844 is at least as great as that between France under the ancient regime and during the revolution of July. But the mightiest result of this industrial transformation is the English proletariat. (MECW 4: 320)

Engels' account in *The Condition of the Working Class* begins with a sketch of the living conditions of weavers in pre-industrial England, thus setting up a model for distinguishing between premodern and modern societies in the mode adopted by later classical social theory. He describes the "passably comfortable existence" of weavers who worked in their home, owned their means of production, had stable family structures, and "leisure for healthful work in garden or field" as well as sports and recreations (MECW 4: 308f). Yet he does not overly idealize the previous conditions of the English workers, calling attention to their lack of education, political awareness, intellectual life, and the need for radical transformation of their situation to create the possibility of a better life.[6] In a powerful passage Engels writes:

> Previously, the workers were comfortable in their silent vegetation, but for the industrial revolution they would never have emerged from this existence, which cosily romantic as it was, was nevertheless not worthy of human beings. In truth, they were not human beings; they were merely toiling machines in the service of the few aristocrats who had guided history down to that time. The industrial revolution has simply carried this out to its logical end by making the workers machines pure and simple, taking from them the last trace of independent activity, and so forcing them to think and demand a position worthy of men. As with politics in France, so in England manufacture and the movement of civil society in general drew into the whirl of history the last classes which had remained sunk in apathetic indifference to the universal interests of mankind. (MECW 4: 309)

Note that Engels adopts the same attitude toward the industrial revolution that he and Marx were later to espouse toward the rise of capitalism and the bourgeoisie in "The Communist Manifesto" and their writings on colonialism. The industrial revolution destroyed the "romantic" conditions of traditional society and violently forced the proletariat into the conditions of modern industrial society. By bringing them into "the whirl of history" the industrial revolution brought the working class the possibility of achieving human emancipation, of developing their human potential and faculties to the fullest—yet during the early stages they suffered extreme oppression and degradation. This dialectical vision that affirmed both destructive effects and emancipatory possibilities of social change like the industrial revolution would characterize the work of Marx and Engels throughout their career.

Engels' humanism is also striking, and indeed a sharp focus of both the early Marx and Engels is their critique of capitalist modernity for what it did to human beings, for its demoralizing, dehumanizing, and oppressive aspects.[7] Marx and Engels' study in Berlin of Hegel with Young Hegelians such as Bruno Bauer and their reading of Ludwig Feuerbach gave them a rich conception of the human being containing both the subjective and spiritual features stressed by Hegel, Bauer, and other Young Hegelians, as well as the emphasis on the body and the senses focused on by Feuerbach (2012 [1972] and 1975 [1841]).

The young Engels was thus able to compare the potential of individual human beings acclaimed by the Young Hegelians and Feuerbach with the actual situation of the working class in England. Engels' study of the working class in Manchester disclosed that a key result of the industrial revolution was a class structure, divided into the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Engels writes:

> It has already been suggested that manufacture centralises property in the hands of the few. It requires large capital with which to erect the colossal establishments that ruin the petty trading bourgeoisie and with which to press into its service the forces of Nature, so driving the hand-labour of the independent workman out of the market. The division of labour, the application of water and especially steam, and the application of machinery, are the three great levers with which manufacture, since the middle of the last century, has been busy putting the world out of joint. (MECW 4: 325)

The expression "out of joint" articulates the rupture produced by modern conditions, and Engels also emphasizes the impact of technology, science, and industry on the production of modern societies.[8] He provides an account of how the spinning jenny created a new division of labor and new factories for the spinning of cotton, flax, wool, and silk. Invention of the steam engine produced new sources of power and the beginning of a manufacture and factory system. The factory system mechanized agriculture and created the possibilities of new large-scale farming that displaced small farmers who were forced to seek their livelihood in the newly emergent factory towns.

Throughout the book, Engels describes the novel forms of manufacture, the innovative division of labor, and the new social differentiation produced by the

industrial revolution and capitalism. The production of raw materials and of fuel for manufacture produced new mining industries and generated coal mining and iron smelting. The iron industry created new forms of construction like bridges and new products like nails and screws. New industries like ocean trade boomed and new forms of transportation and communication emerged, such as roads, canals, and railroads. Yet Engels' focus in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* is on the towns, which were a distinctive feature of the new industrial revolution and the new social structure appearing in the urban centers.

After briefly describing London and other "great towns," Engels zeros in on his own Manchester, the second largest city in England and the capital of the industrial world.[9] Engels maps out the structure of the city, the class division that cleaves it, and the deplorable working and living conditions of the working classes. For Engels, class division and conflict are "the completest expression of the battle of all against all which rules in modern bourgeois society." This battle is fought not only between the different classes but "also between the individual members of these classes. Each is in the way of the other, and each seeks to crowd out all who are in his way, and to put himself in their place" (MECW 4: 375).

Engels focuses on the conditions of the working class in Manchester and other industrial cities, presenting documentation of their poor wages and wretched working conditions, their miserable housing and living conditions, their putrid and adulterated food, the epidemic of diseases they suffer, the terrible sanitary conditions, and their low life expectancy (MECW 4: 344ff). He also investigates different types of industrial work, ranging from "Factory Hands" (428–478) to "The Remaining Branches of Industry" (479–500), including "Stocking Weavers and Dress Makers and Sewing Women" (479–500).[10]

In a later passage, Engels describes the class war typical of modern societies, thus delineating the new forms of division and conflict:

> In this country, social war is under full headway, every one stands for himself, and fights for himself against all comers, and whether or not he shall injure all the others who are his declared foes, depends upon a cynical calculation as to what is most advantageous for himself. It no longer occurs to any one to come to a peaceful understanding with his fellow-man; all differences are settled by threats, violence, or in a law-court. In short, every one sees in his neighbour an enemy to be got out of the way, or, at best, a tool to be used for his own advantage … The enemies are dividing gradually into two great camps—the bourgeoisie on one hand, the workers on the other. (MECW 4: 427)

Note the anticipation of the class analysis of "The Communist Manifesto" in this passage in which the bourgeoisie and proletariat are engaged in a class struggle against each other, representing different and opposing interests, as in Marxist class theory. Moving on, Engels describes the associations that the

working class strives to put in the place of competition, and he is optimistic about the revolutionary potential of the proletariat. Throughout the book, he describes the cycles of capitalist crisis which he believes makes the collapse of the system inevitable. Anticipating the classical Marxian vision of revolution, Engels claims that if the present trends continue, commercial crises would intensify and grow more violent and terrible, with the extension of industry and the multiplication of the proletariat.

In Engels' view, the proletariat would increase in geometrical proportion, in consequence of the progressive ruin of the lower middle class and the giant strides with which capital was concentrating itself in the hands of the few. Consequently, the proletariat would soon embrace most of the nation, with the exception of the wealthy industrial class and the *déclassé*. For Engels, in this development there comes a stage at which the proletariat perceives that the existing capitalist society may be overthrown, involving a revolutionary upheaval (MECW 4: 580).

The Proletariat, Capitalist Crisis, and Revolution

Marx and Engels arrived at the conclusion that the proletariat was the revolutionary class at approximately the same time, but Marx had a much more extravagant Hegelian concept of the proletariat as a revolutionary subject at this time than Engels' more modest sociological and political concept.[11] Engels is completely confident that a "revolution will follow with which none hitherto known can be compared … These are all inferences which may be drawn with the greatest certainty … The revolution must come; it is already too late to bring about a peaceful solution" (MECW 4: 581).

Later, Engels would temper this excessive optimism; but in fact a similar vision of the certainty of the coming revolution would permeate Marx and Engels' works at various stages of history and their development of their socio-political theory that traced the conditions and transformations of the movement in capitalist societies toward crisis and revolution.

Engels' first conclusions that the capitalist system necessarily would lead to crisis and the proletariat would emerge as the revolutionary class were reached when he was living, working, and writing in England. And, within a decade, Marx and Engels were both living in and focusing on England as the exemplary capitalist society whose development and crises other capitalist societies would follow.

Engels thus emerges as one of the first social theorists to attempt to grasp the structure of modern societies, to delineate their fundamental conflicts and crises, and to predict their eventual demise. One is struck by the confidence with which he attempts to delineate the entire situation of the working class in England, attempting to map out comprehensively its working and living conditions, and to lay bare the class structure of modern societies through his analysis of the working class in England, its class structure, living and working conditions, and oppression by the capitalist class.

Moreover, Engels' analysis is a dynamic one, showing the classes in conflict, struggling for control of society. Steven Marcus claims that, in Engels' study of

the English working class, one sees a particularly modern mode of thought emerge: the ability of thought to grasp the essential features of a phenomenon, and to distinguish between appearance and reality in producing a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the contemporary social structure of industrial capitalism. As Marcus points out (1974, p. 192), Engels also provides the first full-scale attempt at representing the "culture of poverty."

In order to grasp the macrostructure of the new industrial cities, Engels maps out the various connections of neighborhoods to each other in Manchester, describing and mapping the structure of the city in what can be seen as the first work of urban sociology. Penetrating the heart of darkness of modern industrial society, Engels plunges into the labyrinth of squalid working and living conditions, attempting to make order out of chaos. Using his eyes, nose, ears, and feet, he attempts to map and comprehend the horrific situation of the working class in England, which he takes, as did Marx later in *Capital*, as the model of the modern industrial societies of the present that will expand in the future.

In mapping this immense complexity, Engels makes use of Hegelian dialectical thought, relating the parts to each other and to the whole social system. For Engels, dialectics is making connections and explicating contradictions and conflicts, and he confidently maps out the essential structures of the emerging industrial society as a class society rife with conflict and crisis. His thought is thoroughly systematic, conceptualizing the parts in terms of the whole, and showing how the parts are components of a new modern capitalist and crisis-prone industrial society.

Yet Engels also maintains a critical posture, describing the horrendous living and working conditions of the proletariat in astonishing detail. His critique is generally moralistic and lacks the concepts of alienation and human nature with which Marx carries out his analysis of the alienation of labor in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (see Marx in MECW 4 described in Chapter 2).[12] Engels condemns the greed and callousness of the bourgeoisie, recounting in one telling vignette how he described the wretched lot of the workers to a bourgeois associate, who nodded and then said: "And yet there is money to be made. Good day, sir" (MECW 4: 563). Typically, Engels sees retribution coming in the future revolution, an event to which he and Marx dedicated their lives.

Indeed, Engels concluded his study of the English working class with a dramatic account of increasing capitalist crises and working-class uprisings and revolution. Engels claimed that the English New Poor Law that was being debated in the 1830s was set to replace the previous laws that made it a responsibility of the parish to provide for the poor with a draconian system that abolished all relief for workers. These laws required those who sought work to labor in workhouses, which were described in the German version of the text as "Poor Law Bastilles" (MECW 3: 373). This term highlighted the prison-like conditions that broke up families and provided miserable housing, food, and brutal labor.

Engels devotes several pages to describing the brutal conditions in these "workhouses" with striking examples of degradation and death, and then

begins discussing working-class revolt against this form of humiliating super-exploitation (MECW 3: 373ff). This analysis follows with Engels' description of how English industry is declining and entering into crises, unable to compete with the vigorous emerging US economy (MECW 3: 580ff), concluding:

> a revolution will follow with which none hitherto known can be compared. The proletarians, driven to despair, will seize the torch which Stephens preached to them; the vengeance of the people will come down with a wrath of which the rage of 1793 gives no true idea. The war of the poor against the rich will be the bloodiest ever waged … The revolution must come: it is already too late to bring about a peaceful solution, but it can be made more gently than that prophesied in the foregoing page. This depends, however, more upon the development of the proletariat than upon that of the bourgeoisie. In proportion, as the proletariat absorbs socialistic and communistic elements, will the revolution diminish in bloodshed, revenge, and savagery. (MECW 4: 581)

Engels presents communism as connected with humanism, which, if absorbed by the working class and understood by the bourgeoisie, could lead to peaceful resolution of the class war. Yet he is rightfully skeptical that communist ideals can calm the rage of the super-exploited working class or convince the bourgeoisie that class harmony is possible, and the concluding pages of *The Condition of the Working Class in England* affirm that

> the war of the poor against the rich now carried on in detail and indirectly will become direct and universal. It is too late for a peaceful solution. The classes are divided more and more sharply, the spirit of resistance penetrates the workers, the bitterness intensifies, the guerilla [sic] skirmishes become concentrated in more important battles, and soon a slight impulse will suffice to set the avalanche in motion. Then, indeed, will the war-cry resound through the land: "War to the mansion, peace to the cottage"—but then it will be too late for the rich to beware. (MECW 4: 582–583)

Marx, Engels, and Modernity

In this chapter, I have argued that Engels preceded Marx in developing an ideal-type analysis of the distinction between modern and premodern society, in sketching the outlines of a critique of political economy, and in developing a critique of capitalist society with the intention of overthrowing it for a socialist society. In their collaborative texts of the 1840s, Marx and Engels worked together on this project. When Marx was expelled from Paris in 1845 for publishing in a radical émigré newspaper, he moved to Brussels, where he began his collaboration with Engels. Together they travelled to England to observe the new factories and industrial living and working conditions.

Upon their return to Paris, they began developing their sketch of the genesis of the modern world and historical-materialist perspectives in *The German*

Ideology (MECW 5) written in 1845–46 and never published in their lifetime. The text is important, for it articulates some of their first formulations of historical materialism and the differentiated structure of modern societies, as well as theorizing the new modes of association and cooperation. In 1845 Marx and Engels also published a joint attack, *The Holy Family* (MECW 4), on Bruno Bauer and their former Young Hegelian associates, who they now considered pseudo-radical and idealist. Marx published in addition an attack on the economics of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1846; MECW 6, 105ff), declaring the French writer to be trapped in the idealist verbiage of Hegel, thus mystifying the concrete economic phenomena that Marx and Engels were attempting to analyze.

These texts by Marx and Engels in the mid-1840s inaugurated the critique of ideology and practice of ideology critique that I shall engage in a later chapter, and that continues to be one of their key contributions to modern social theory. The neo-Hegelian cohort who studied Hegel and his predecessors at approximately the same time as Marx and Engels in Berlin produced neo-Hegelian and idealist texts that Marx and Engels critiqued in their mid-1840s' work aimed at the brothers Bruno and Edgar Bauer, Max Stirner, Arnold Ruge, and others with whom they studied and associated in various journal and writing projects. They also critiqued in the 1940s Hegel's idealism and Feuerbach's materialism, although Marx and Engels would famously turn Hegel's dialectical method "on its head." And while at one time they saw Feuerbach's materialism, with its materialist humanism and radical critique of religion, as an emancipation from idealism and the theological debates that absorbed many of their Young Hegelian cohort in the "Theses on Feuerbach" discussed in the previous chapter, Marx distinguished their activist political critique of bourgeois-capitalist society from Feuerbach's philosophical materialism (MECW 5: xxff).

Marx and Engels' vision of history from this period was presented in "The Communist Manifesto" (MECW 6: 477ff), which sketches in dramatic narrative form their view of the origins and trajectory of modernity. It appeared in early 1848, anticipating the sequence of revolutions that broke out throughout Europe shortly after its publication. Marx and Engels sketch out a contrast between precapitalist societies and the new modern society where: "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind" (MECW 6: 487).

The standard English translations (other than Carver's 1996 version for Cambridge University Press) obscure the important point in German that all previous classes and social groups, *Stände*, dissolve as "all that is solid melts in the air" (*Alles Ständische und Stehende verdampft*).[13] The point is especially important because it distinguishes Marx and Engels' analysis from Hegel's. Hegel believed that the *Stände* would play an important part in integrating individuals into modern society; but Marx and Engels are arguing that the class structure and its institutions are disintegrating, and that the bourgeois-capitalist class system is fatally dividing contemporary capitalist societies into working

and possessing classes. While Hegel developed a political theory that would unify modern and premodern institutions and conceptions, Marx and Engels developed a concept of a thoroughly modern society, riven with class conflicts, contractions, and crisis tendencies.

The above passage thus points to the dissolution of the old hierarchical order of society and of previous classes, leaving workers facing the bourgeoisie without intervening classes. The first section of "The Communist Manifesto" is titled "Bourgeois and Proletarians," and one of the first important points is that during the present era class antagonisms have been simplified and "society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeois and proletariat" (MECW 6: 485). This two-class vision was that of Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, and it would periodically appear in key junctures in their thought, though in some texts they would utilize a more differentiated class analysis. Indeed, much of the vision of "The Communist Manifesto" was delineated in Engels' early writings, although Marx is usually given credit for drafting its especially expressive prose and dramatic historical narrative.[14]

In this vision, when solid ties of dependence melt in the air, individuals become free to compete with each other and engage in exchange relations where workers sell their labor power to capitalists who profit from the exchange and thrust the worker into dependence and often poverty and unstable working and living conditions. This "unequal exchange" produces a wholly disharmonious and conflicted social order, precisely as Engels sketched out in his early writings. Indeed, modern capitalist societies for Engels and Marx were torn by inequalities, class conflicts, and crisis tendencies which produced an inherently unstable modern social order subject to crisis and overthrow.

Following the hopes of the Enlightenment for a higher stage of civilization, Marx and Engels held that class conflicts between the ruling bourgeois class and the oppressed proletariat would be resolved through victories of the working class which would create an egalitarian, just, and democratic social order that would realize the ideals of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the emergent socialist traditions, driving modernity to a higher stage of civilization.[15]

Marxism thus very much shared the optimistic Enlightenment belief that modern society was on a trajectory of historical progress, and that humanity was bound to overcome its limitations and solve its problems en route to a higher stage of human history. By addressing capitalism in its most advanced setting of British society, Marx and Engels were ideally situated to describe the inner dynamics of the new modern order and to be prescient about changes that came later in other nations.

They experienced first-hand the most advanced forms of the industrial revolution, with its mechanization, big industry, intensified incorporation of science and technology into the labor process, imperialist competition for markets, and modern state—a revolution which began in England and quickly spread to the continent and the new world of the Americas. Marx and Engels also experienced the rise of the working-class movement which increasingly called for

sweeping political and egalitarian social reconstruction, and they themselves became leaders of the movement.

Marxian theory thus bears distinctly modern hopes for progress, freedom, democracy, and socio-economic and individual development. To some extent, both the strengths and limitations of classical Marxism are connected with its extremely ambitious hopes concerning the progressive features of the era, which Marx and Engels believed would terminate in creation of a democratic and socialist society that would realize the promises of modernity.

The Marxian analysis of the contrast between precapitalist and capitalist societies provides the basis of Engels' and Marx's concept of modernity, and they present the transition from capitalism to socialism as a process taking place within modernity that would fully develop its potential and produce a higher stage of civilization. The mode of historical, systematic analysis of modern societies developed by Marx and Engels provides the model for classical social theory; and the enduring contributions of the Marxian theory consist in its mode of historical and social analysis and its insights into the structures, conflicts, and potentials of modern societies.

Of course, it was in their mature writings that Marx and Engels developed their most articulated perspectives on modern society. Yet this study of the early Engels and the beginning of his collaboration with Marx reveals that Engels should receive more credit for being one of the founders of classical Marxian theory and contributing decisively to the development of Marxian theory in the mode of co-founder and life-long partner in their project of developing historical materialism and what has become known as the Marxist critique of political economy, theory of society, and theories of revolution and socialism, which I shall engage in this book. Yet important differences would emerge between Marx and Engels regarding their respective uses of the Hegelian dialectical method and the methods of modern science; and their epistemological and methodological differences will be explored in following chapters in this volume.

Here I have argued that, before the development of classical Marxism, Engels was a key partner and should receive more credit for his important contributions to developing the theoretical and political perspectives on modern society associated with classical Marxism, a theme that will be taken up in later chapters.

Notes

1 In the 1920s, thinkers associated with "Western Marxism" distinguished a more Hegelian and critical Marxism from the dogmatic "scientific socialism" promoted as Marxism by the theorists and politicos of the Second and Third Internationals, which represented the socialist and communist movement of the time associated Engels with a dogmatic scientific socialism, and in some cases positivism. See the critique of Western Marxism by Perry Anderson (1976). This disassociation of Engels from genuine Marxism continues to the present when Edwards and Leiter (2025) present a book on Marxism where they fail to discuss Engels at all, thus in effect purging Engels from the development of Marxism altogether. In my studies, by

contrast, I shall stress the importance of Engels in the development of Marxism and the similarities in his and Marx's shared project which, despite differences, Engels also referred to as Marxism.

2 Engels was 19 when he published these revealing analyses of the novel conditions of the emerging modern industrial society and focused on its effects on workers, the environment, and the conditions of life, thus becoming one of the first critical social theorists to engage ecological issues, cities and housing, diet and health, crime, and many other themes that were later themes of critical social theory. Self-taught and a voracious reader with evident literary ambitions, Engels spent much of the time during his apprenticeship in Bremen and later during his military service in Berlin engaged in study and writing (see Carver 1989 and Hunt 2009). Engels' writings are published in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York and London: International Publishers and Lawrence & Wishart, 1975–2004). Marx and Engels' texts are cited as "MECW," followed by the volume number and page reference (as in MECW 3: 56), with the original date of publication included where necessary.

3 Thomas Malthus was a British political economist whose theory of population predicted that growing populations and limited food would produce starvation, a depletion of resources, increased pollution, overcrowding, and increased unemployment—all factors that Marx and Engels would ascribe to the dynamics of industrial capitalism and not overpopulation. See Malthus (2015) and on Malthus, see Mayhew (2014).

4 Steven Marcus, in his excellent study *Engels, Manchester and the Working Class,* describes the text as "the best and most original work he ever wrote" (1974, p. viii), and David McLellan (1973, p. 139) describes Engels' study as "probably the bitterest critique of early capitalism ever written."

5 David Riazanov (1973, p. 14) claims that "[t]he term 'Industrial Revolution' belongs to Engels." Yet, in notes on the republication of Riazanov's classic study of Marx and Engels, Dirk J. Struick argues that: "The term 'Industrial Revolution' was used in France at least as early as the 1820s, in analogy to what was known as 'The Revolution,' the one of 1789. Friedrich Engels, using the term in 1844 and 1845, may well have met it in the French literature and have used it for the first time in the German language. Strangely enough, the term has not been noticed in English before 1884, when the economist Arnold Toynbee used it. Toynbee knew Marx's *Capital*, which uses the term in German" (p. 223).

6 Standard criticism of the text claims that Engels "painted a one-sided picture of the conditions of the English working classes at the time, overemphasizing the well-being of the workers before industrialization and the subsequent impact of the machine upon them" (Hunley 1991, p. 16). Yet the passages cited above and my discussion raise questions concerning the extent to which Engels did romanticize previous conditions, and I suggest rather that he utilized the sort of dialectical model of the gains and losses from the industrial revolution that he and Marx were to develop in "The Communist Manifesto" and their other writings even in his early writings.

7 On Engels' humanism, see his dedication "To the Working Classes of Great Britain" at the beginning of his text, where he writes: "I found you to be more than mere *Englishmen,* members of a single, isolated nation. I found you to be MEN, members of the great and universal family of Mankind who know their interest and that of all the human race to be the same. And as such, as members of this Family of 'One and Indivisible' Mankind, as Human Beings in the most emphatical meaning of the word" (MECW 4: 8). While to our modern eyes and ears "men" and "mankind" have a patriarchal ring, this was standard usage of the time; and in fact Engels was one of the first male theorists to describe the condition of women, and is renowned for bringing women and the family into Marxist theorizing in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which is accessible at https://www.ma

rxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/origin-family/index.htm, and which I shall discuss in a later chapter.

8 Throughout his early writings, Engels presents both highly favorable pictures of the progressive effects of science and industry and the harmful effects it has on the working class; see, for example, MECW 3: 427–428, 440, and 478.

9 For an excellent study of the city of Manchester and Engels' book on it, which presents his text as one of the best analyses and critiques of Manchester and the growing industrial cities in England at the time, see Marcus (1974).

10 Although Tristan Hunt's biography of Engels, *Marx's General* (2009), provides excellent contextualization of Engels' study of the working class in England and describes it as a major influence on Marx and a "pioneering text of communist theory" (p. 112), Hunt is wrong in claiming that Engels fails to delineate different types of labor (p. 109) since Engels has chapters on "Single Branches of Industry: Factory Hands" and "The Remaining Branches of Industry" that explore a whole range of types of labor, from "Stocking Weavers" to "Dressmakers and Sewing-Women" (pp. 428–478, 479–500).

11 Compare Marx's "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law" (MECW 3: 175ff) with Engels' *Condition of the Working Class*, with its in-depth sociological and political analysis that I discuss above.

12 Young Marx, as we saw in Chapter 2, was inclined toward deeply philosophical study, immersed in Hegelian philosophy and the contemporary works of the Young Hegelians, Feuerbach, and others. Thus, Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* inevitably had more of a philosophical thrust than Engels, though Marx, like Engels, was also pursuing studies in political economy, and bringing together economic, social, political, and philosophical issues in his work. Young Engels, as we have seen in this chapter, brought together his first-hand economic experience, study of English working-class conditions, and industrial capitalism with a humanistic critique of the industrial capitalist system, along with a scathing attack on the bourgeoisie which he knew from within. Thus, in their pre-collaborative works, and soon in their collaboration, Marx and Engels nicely complemented each other in skills, knowledge, and experience, while working together on a common program with shared interests and social-political commitments.

13 Carver's 1996 version reads: "Everything fixed and feudal goes up in smoke", although one might suggest: "all fixed feudal conditions and social groupings evaporate." See also Marshall Berman's discussion of this phrase, which provides the title and theme of his book on modernity—*All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (1988 [1982]).

14 See Berman (1988 [1982]), who interprets the manifesto as a founding document of social modernity and an example of modernist writing. Carver (1989) argues that much of the historical writing in the manifesto is more like Engel's earlier works than Marx's.

15 On Marx, Engels, and the Enlightenment, see Greene and Fluss (2020).

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4 Human Nature and Capitalism in Adam Smith and Karl Marx

In this chapter, I shall present the ideas of Adam Smith, often taken as the father of modern political economy, in contrast to those of Karl Marx, a major critic of Smith, on the themes of human nature and capitalism. This contrast will assert both the importance of Adam Smith for Karl Marx's works and the understanding of capitalism and human nature that divided them. Marx considered Smith a pioneer of bourgeois political economy and a man who clearly expressed the dominant ideology of the emergent capitalist class. I begin with Marx's appraisal of Smith, highlighting both the features and insights that Marx found of importance, and then follow with Marx's critique of what he considered Smith's ideological presentation of the emergent capitalist society.

Karl Marx's Appraisal of Adam Smith

Karl Marx's appraisal of Adam Smith contains a dialectical approach that assimilates into his own theory the enduring insights of Smith into the nature of capitalism and economics, while criticizing those aspects of Smith's work that are, in Marx's view, bourgeois-capitalist ideology: ideas that reflect the institutional arrangements, behavior, and ideas of the existing bourgeois-capitalist society, or that construct an illusory and fanciful model of the real world that legitimates the interests of the ruling class.[1]

The ideas of the dominant class become the dominant ideas of the age, Marx believed, and in his view Adam Smith expressed and systematized the ideas on economics and capitalism, the market society, and human nature of the rising and eventually triumphant bourgeoisie. Smith was not, however, for Marx, a crass apologist whose ideas were constructed explicitly to defend the interests of the English industrialist class. Rather, he saw Smith as a conscientious theorist who expressed the leading ideas of his age, saw deeply into its fundamental tendencies and new developments, and fell prey to some of its illusions. No one can transcend the limits of their age, and Adam Smith could not foresee the problems that the developing capitalist system would produce that were the subject of his critique of political economy during Marx's life.

Marx's complex critique/appreciation of Smith is cogently summarized in a passage in the second volume of *Theories of Surplus-Value* (1863):

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> Political economy had achieved a certain comprehensiveness with Adam Smith; to a certain extent he had covered the whole of its territory, so that [J.B.] Say was able to summarize it all in one textbook, superficially but quite systematically.[2] The only investigations that were made in the period between Smith and [David] Ricardo were ones of detail, on productive and unproductive labour, finance, theory of population, landed property and taxes. Smith himself moves with great naiveté in a perpetual contradiction. On the one hand he traces the intrinsic connections between economic categories that structure the bourgeois economic system.
>
> On the other hand, he simultaneously sets forth the connection as it appears in the phenomena of competition and thus as it presents itself to the unscientific observer who is actually involved and interested in the process of bourgeois production. One of these conceptions fathoms the inner connection, the physiology, so to speak, of the bourgeois system, whereas the other takes the external phenomena of life, as they seem and appear and merely describes, catalogues, recounts and arranges them under formal definitions. With Smith both these methods of approach not only merrily run alongside one another, but also mingle and constantly contradict one another. With him, this is justifiable (with the exception of a few special investigations, such as that into money) since his task was indeed a twofold one. On the one hand he attempted to penetrate the inner physiology of bourgeois society, but on the other, he partly tried to describe its externally apparent forms of life for the first time; to show its relations as they appear outwardly and partly he had even to find a nomenclature and corresponding mental concepts for these phenomena, i.e. to reproduce them for the first time in the language and in the thought process. The one task interests him as much as the other and since both proceed independently of one another, this results in completely contradictory ways of presentation: the one expresses the intrinsic connections more or less correctly. The other, with the same justification,—and without any connection to the first method of approach—expresses the *apparent* connections without any internal relation.
>
> Adam Smith's successors, in so far as they do not represent the reaction against him of older and obsolete methods of approach, can pursue their particular investigations and observations undisturbedly and can always regard Adam Smith as their base, whether they follow the esoteric or the exoteric part of his work or whether, as is almost always the case, they jumble up the two.[3]

In this passage, Marx appraises Smith as the great explorer who charted the unexplored terrain of political economy for the first time and who formulated much of the language in which later discussions would take place (and ideological battles would be fought!). Smith is lauded for his comprehensiveness, his penetration of the "inner physiology of bourgeois society," and his grasp of important connections between economic categories (and the structures of the

capitalist system). Yet Smith is criticized for a certain naiveté in which he accepts some of the appearances of bourgeois society at face value ("as they seem and appear"), and merely "describes, catalogues, recounts, and arranges … under formal definitions … the external phenomena of life."

Hence, Marx believes that Smith's work contains an "esoteric" and "exoteric" method of approach that at once superficially mirrors some aspects of the bourgeois society while it profoundly and correctly conceptualizes important systemic aspects of the society. Much of the development of Marx's own economic theory would consist of a critique of Smith's work and a correction of its inadequacies through constructing an alternative theory.

Marx must have also appreciated the practical-political thrust of Smith's work, which, like the Marxian project, wanted not only to interpret but also to promote the wealth of nations—a project that was of significance for social economic development and political practice. Indeed, the very well-being of the nation depended on devising an economic policy based on correct solutions to the problem of maximizing wealth and productivity, as both Smith and Marx saw.

Smith believed that industrial labor and industry were the source of "the wealth of nations" and that the free functioning of the market without state intervention would provide maximum opulence and human well-being, becoming a chief ideological defender of the emerging capitalist market system. Although Marx would totally oppose this political position, he could appreciate Smith's attempt to use theory to influence practice, and could thus approve the attempt to unite theory with practice in Smith's work, as he famously attempted to do himself and advocated as a key feature of his theory, as in his famous phrase: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world is various ways. The point, however, is to change it."[4]

Marx continually applauded the comprehensiveness of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776). Both Marx and Smith were engaged in a Faustian attempt to gain an overview of the development and mechanisms of the modern world, to lay bare the structure of the present industrial society, and to chart its future course. Although Smith lacked the Hegelian categories of totality and mediation, he at least attempted to picture the main features of historical development and to uncover the mainsprings of the economic process that was revolutionizing the world.

Both Marx and Smith were iconoclasts who were attacking the received wisdom and dominant theories of the time. Marx, following Engels, labeled Smith the Luther of political economy,[5] for Smith believed exchange was the fundamental human activity and argued that labor as human productive activity was the source of wealth, rejecting the views of his "Catholic" "fetishist" predecessors that the source of wealth lay outside of human activity (in gold, land, bullion, and so on).

Hence, Smith brought the essence of economics (exchange, labor, commodity, and property) into human activity, just as Martin Luther brought the essence of religion into individual religious activity (faith, praying, and so forth). Yet if Smith was the Luther of political economy, Marx was its Kierkegaard,

exploring the manifold alienations that ruptured and fragmented the human being caught in the thralls of the capitalist system.[6]

An examination of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* discloses the crucial importance of Adam Smith's work for his own project. After being convinced by Engels' ground-breaking essay "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy"—that the development of capitalism and industry was the key to the physiognomy of modern society, and that the nature of the rising society was most clearly revealed in the economic theory of Adam Smith,[7]—Marx began his own critique of political economy.[8] The first important formulation of Marx's theory is found in his *Paris Notebooks of 1844*, where he divides his manuscript into three columns—"The Wages of Labor," "The Profit of Capital," and "The Rent of Land"—thus reproducing Smith's tripartite division of political economy. Marx cites Smith's views on these topics and develops his own theory by critiquing the dominant views of Smith and other writers on economics.

Hence, Smith was a decisive influence on the development of Marx's engagement with the capitalist economy; and, from the beginning to the end of his intellectual labors, Marx's vocabulary, problems, and systematic intentions were highly influenced by Smith's work, as I shall argue in this chapter. Yet Marx's *Auseinandersetzung* (dispute) with Smith was always *critical* and took the form of a *critique of political economy*. In the rest of this chapter we shall examine that critique.

Marx's Critique of Smith

Marx continually developed a methodological/meta-theoretical critique of Smith's work, as well as a substantive critique of Smith's views of human nature and capitalism. Smith's meta-theoretical error, in Marx's view, was assuming that a given social system—capitalism—was a natural, rational, and universal system that would eternally endure as it corresponded to the being of human nature and had constructed a market system that was self-regulating, self-correcting, and thus crisis-resistant. In assuming that capitalism could endure indefinitely, Smith fell prey to the illusion that Marx felt was the cardinal sin of bourgeois thought: the tendency to universalize the status quo and thus to suppress history, contradiction, and conflicts.

Smith, Locke, Kant, and the other architects of the dominant philosophy and science of the 18th century failed to see that the present social system and its ideology and culture was a product of a historical matrix and that history consisted of conflict, change, and development. In the Marxist theory of history, every system, institution, and idea is transitory; a product of its age that must eventually give way to a more developed socio-economic system, set of institutions and social relations, and ideas and ideologies as the totality of social and economic conditions mature and develop.

Change takes place, in the Marxist view, through contradiction and conflict; and, as the socio-economic system generates contradiction and conflict

embedded in opposing classes, political parties, and ideologies, this struggle produces historical change, eliminating institutions, ideas, and relations that no longer adequate to the needs and potentialities of the age. From this standpoint, Marx is able to claim that Smith failed to see that capitalism was a transitory system full of contradictions that would result in conflict, crisis, upheaval, and its eventual demise.

Marx's project was to ferret out these contradictions and class struggles in order to chart the course of historical development and the conflicts and crises of capitalism overlooked by Smith. Yet Marx seriously engaged Smith's work that helped him see into the nature of capitalism, and Marx perceived his own work as a corrective that surpassed the defects and limitations of Smith's theories of human nature and capitalism that I address in this chapter.

Underlying the differences between Marx and Smith were conflicting theories of history and methodology—as well as capitalism and human nature. Marxian dialectics produces a theory of history and society as well as a philosophic-scientific methodology. Marxian dialectics sets out the fundamental categories that describe the totality of social relations in a given society and describes the dynamics of historical movement and development. Because the central dialectical categories of contradiction and negation are missing in Smith's theoretical apparatus, he was able to assume that capitalism was a smoothly functioning, contradiction-free system, devoid of explosive structural contradictions or agents of revolution.

Although Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* contains numerous historical interludes tracing out stages of historical development from the society of hunters and shepherds to the industrialist factory system of manufacture and commerce of his day, according to Marx, Smith lacks insight into the logic of historical change (explained by Marx in his theory of contradiction and class struggle), and is instead guided by the Enlightenment philosophy of history, which viewed historical development as a process of evolutionary perfectionism leading to the heavenly city and self-regulating market of 18th-century capitalist-bourgeois society.[9]

History is thus revealed in Smith's telling phrase, "the natural progress of opulence." Smith's "invisible hand" that allegedly guides this process anticipated Hegel's "cunning of reason";[10] but it lacked the turbulent dialectic of negation and contradiction found in Hegel and Marx, and instead posited a magical coincidence "between private vice and public benefit" as the motor of historical change.[11]

In the famous passage in Book III of *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith describes the transition from feudalism to capitalism as follows:

> A revolution of the greatest importance to the public happiness was in this manner brought about by two different orders of people who had not the least intention to serve the public. To gratify the most childish vanity was the sole motive of the great proprietors. The merchants and artificers, much less ridiculous, acted merely from a view to their own interest, and in

> pursuit of their own peddler principle of turning a penny wherever a penny was to be got. Neither of them had either knowledge or foresight of that great revolution which the folly of the one, and the industry of the other, was gradually bringing about.[12]

In Smith's fanciful theory of the transition from feudalism to capitalism, blind self-interest is the (unconscious) agent of capitalist progress. One might compare it to Marx's account of this process, which stresses class conflict and the brutal exploitation of the working class, upon whose suffering the capitalist system was brought into the world.[13] Indeed, in the passage just cited, Smith does not even mention the working class as a participant in the modern age's monumental economic revolution. Critiquing Adam Smith's concept of primitive accumulation, Marx writes in *Capital*:

> Within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labour are brought about at the cost of the individual labourer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of producers; they mutilate the labour into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour-process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour-process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut of capital.
>
> Yet all the methods for the production of surplus-value are at the same time methods of accumulation; and every extension of accumulation becomes again a means for the development of capitalist methods of production. It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse. The law, finally, that always equilibrates the relative surplus-population, or industrial reserve army, to the extent and energy of accumulation, this law rivets the labourer to capital more firmly than the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding to the accumulation of capital … capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt.[14]

Marx stresses class conflict as the key to the transition to capitalism and emphasizes the terrible costs to the working class involved in this historical process. Adam Smith, on the other hand, smooths over class opposition and assumes a harmonious balance and coincidence of interests among all classes.[15] This is not to say that Smith was totally oblivious to the fact of class conflict or conflicting class interests,[16] but he believed that class conflicts could be resolved and class interests harmonized within the confines of the existing capitalist system.

Indeed, "conflicts," or Smith's favored term *competition*, would in the long run for Smith strengthen rather than weaken the system in his view. Hence, we see that Smith lacks the crucial categories of historical change found in Marx's theory of contradiction, negation, and class struggle. Underlying differences in their theories of history and methodology are different views of human nature. The motor of Smith's self-regulating market that harmonizes class interests is the dual propensity of human nature to barter and exchange and the relentless drive to pursue one's self-interest, all of which produce "opulence" and "the wealth of nations" in Smith's ideological fantasy.

I shall now attempt to show the role of Smith's theory of human nature in his pro-market political economy. Very often a thinker's concept of human nature is a key element and constitutive of their political, economic, and social theory, and their view of history, and this is dramatically the case with Adam Smith. Let us recall that before Smith became the founder of modern political economy, he was a philosopher whose theory of human nature in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) provided the foundation for an ethical theory in congruence with the pre-industrial capitalist British society of the mid-18th century.[17]

Smith was continually concerned with human motivation and the "well-springs of human action." While working on his economic theory, Smith was broadly interested in developing a "science of man" and focusing on human nature and commerce, often explaining human behavior in its intercourse with its social-economic environment. After all, as Smith perceived, economics is concerned with some very basic and fundamental human activities—producing, buying, selling, consuming—and it is natural that the theory of a philosopher vitally concerned with the nature of the human species in its everyday life would be informed and shaped by his theory of the economic animal, *Homo faber*, who both Smith and Marx distinguished from other species by the human's productive activity.[18]

It is arguable that Smith's economic studies led him to modify his theory of human nature set forth in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in the direction of postulating a more relentless and consistent theory of egotism, self-interest, and bartering as the primary wellsprings of human action, which involved an increasing de-emphasis on benevolence, sympathy, and the social sentiments that he stressed in his earlier work. Possessive individualism triumphed in political economy, just as it did in political theory.[19]

The point I wish to stress is that Adam Smith's theory of human nature was the basic prop/support for his theory of the self-regulating market ("the invisible hand"), for his theory of capitalist competition and laissez-faire, and indeed crucially influenced the construction of his entire edifice of political economy. Smith's mature theory of human nature is, I shall attempt to show, at odds with his earlier theory of human nature in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, as well as with the theory of human nature in Karl Marx; and perhaps Marx's most powerful critique of Smith lies in the implicit/explicit assault on the concept of human nature and capitalism in Adam Smith that played such a fundamental role in Smith's theory and economic, political, and social theory. I

shall accordingly next offer a reading of *The Wealth of Nations* to support the claim that Smith's theory of human nature plays a major role at key intervals in the development of his political economy, and shall then present Marx's critique.

The Theory of Human Nature in *The Wealth of Nations*

To begin, let us note that Smith makes human nature the driving force of historical and economic development in the emerging capitalist-bourgeois society. The division of labor, which is the source of society's opulence, is for Smith the "gradual consequence of a certain propensity in human nature … the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another."[20] Human beings for Smith are uniquely dependent on other humans for their well-being, and are forced to appeal to the self-interest of other humans to ensure their survival and improve their well-being. The underlying assumption of this position—and of Smith's whole theory—is that the human being is uniquely, deeply, and fundamentally motivated by self-interest/egotism.

This is expressed in unparalleled candor and even charm in a passage in *The Wealth of Nations* that exposes a clear turn to the primacy of self-interest in Smith's theory of human nature, and devaluation of the role of benevolence, fellow-feeling, and sympathy from Smith's earlier theory in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Note the appeal to *self-love* at two crucial junctures in this passage:

> Man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind proposes to do this.
>
> Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages. (*WN*, p. 14)

Smith then argues (p. 15),

> As it is by treaty, by barter, and by purchase that we obtain from one another the greater part of those mutual good offices which we stand in need of, so it is this same trucking disposition which originally gives occasion to the division of labour.

In Smith's nursery rhyme of the tribe of hunters and shepherds, John L makes bows and arrows and exchanges them for cattle or venison with Jean-Jacques

R. John L finds that it is in his own self-interest to solely make bows and arrows because he can get much more meat, clothes, and beer by exchanging his produce with others than if he tended cattle, raised crops, and brewed beer himself. Moreover, the hunters benefit from John L's production of bows and arrows in that it saves them the trouble of having to make their own tools and implements; hence they can devote their energies to their specialty, producing game for a hungry public.

In this scenario, everybody comes out ahead. In Smith's idyllic fable, which has lulled to sleep the critical faculties of countless generations and still provides the self-satisfied punch line for countless economics lectures and chamber of commerce meetings,[21] there is a remarkable coincidence between self-interest and public interest in a capitalist exchange society. By following one's own interest, one contributes to public well-being. Moreover, self-interest and the market induce one to develop one's own talent and abilities:

> [T]he certainty of being able to exchange all that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men's labour as he may have occasion for, encourages every man to apply himself to a particular occupation, and to cultivate and bring to perfection whatever talent or genius he may possess for that particular species of business. (*WN*, p. 15)

The process of exchange and the emerging market system that develops from this "original state of things" (*WN*, p. 64) produces an increasing division of labor and simultaneously an increased variety of "natural talents" and "dissimilar geniuses." These differences are harmonized in the market where

> the most dissimilar geniuses are of use to one another; the different produces of their respective talents, by the general disposition to truck, barter, and exchange, being brought as it were into a common stock, where every man may purchase whatever part of the produce of other men's talents he has occasion for. (*WN*, p. 16)

In the exchange society, "[e]very man, thus lives by exchanging or becomes in some measure a merchant and the society itself grows to be what is properly called a commercial society." The introduction of money facilitates exchange and becomes the measure of value in the commercial society and the social bond that ties the society of egotists together. In Smith's magical and imaginary world, self-interest, money, and the "higgling and bargaining of the market" creates that "sort of rough equality which though not exact is sufficient for carrying on the business of common life" (*WN*, pp. 22, 25ff, 31).

Hence, the exchange society is supposed to maximize the individual's freedom and social equality. Marx brilliantly summarizes Smith's theory in the *Grundrisse* before demolishing it:

> Out of the act of exchange itself, the individual, each one of them, is reflected in himself as its exclusive and dominant (determinant) subject. With that, then, the complete freedom of the individual is posited: voluntary transaction; no force on either side; positing of the self as means, or as serving, only as means, in order to posit the self as end in itself as dominant and primary (*übergreifend*); finally, the self-seeking interest which brings nothing of a higher order to realization; the other is also recognized and Jack acknowledged as one who likewise realizes his self-seeking interest, so that both know that the common interest exists only in the duality, many-sidedness, and autonomous development of the exchanges between self-seeking interests. The general interest is precisely the generality of self-seeking interests. Therefore, when the economic form, exchange, posits the all-sided equality of its subjects, then the content, the individual as well as the objective material which drives towards the exchange, is *freedom*. Equality and freedom are not only respected in exchange based on exchange values but, also, the exchange of exchange values is the productive, real basis of all *equality* and *freedom*.[22]

Further, Smith claims that each individual solely following his own self-interest will not only improve his own condition, but also that of the public and nation as a whole—despite clumsy and harmful state intervention:

> The uniform, constant, and uninterrupted effort of every man to better his condition, the principle from which public and national as well as private opulence is originally derived, is frequently powerful enough to maintain the natural progress of things toward improvement, in spite of both the extravagance of government and of the greatest errors of administration. Like the unknown principle of animal life, it frequently restores health and vigor to the constitution, in spite, not only of the disease, but of the absurd prescriptions of the doctor. (*WN*, p. 326)

That the root of opulence is found in an innate tendency of human nature is starkly expressed in the following passage: "But the principle which prompts to save is the desire of bettering our condition, a desire which, though is generally calm and dispassionate, comes with us from the womb, and never leaves us till we go to the grave" (*WN*, p. 324).

After tracing in broad historical panorama "the natural progress of opulence" and championing the commercial society, Smith then comes to his famous passage where he explains how each individual following his self-interest

> is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. (*WN*, p. 423)

Commentators have noted that Smith's "invisible hand" metaphor was influenced by mechanistic concepts of society, a deistic idea of Divine Providence, and natural law thought.[23] These metaphysical theories might well have influenced Smith, but his arguments for the self-regulating market governed by the "invisible hand" more obviously reveal the visible hand of Bernard Mandeville's private vices/public benefit argument. In all the passages cited there is no metaphysical natural law talk, let alone whispers of Divine Providence, but rather the position that following one's self-interest (that is, obeying the basic law of human nature for Smith) would harmonize public and private interests and make possible a self-regulating market system.

Thus, underlying Smith's theory of the self-regulating market is his theory of human nature. As we have seen, the market arises out of individual drives and inclinations that are deeply engraved upon the human heart from cradle to grave: Smith's Enlightenment belief in "the natural progress of things toward improvement" is rooted in his postulate of a uniform, constant, and uninterrupted effort of every man to better his condition; the wealth of a nation grows from the division of labor that grows out of an innate disposition to barter grounded in the propensity to pursue one's self-interest; "the system of perfect liberty" and free competition requires that each individual relentlessly follow his own self-interest, and presupposes that it is a law of human nature that he will; and Smith's laissez-faire politics rests on the assumption that the society of egotists can best maximize their well-being by pursuing their own interests without state interference.[24] In other words, social stability for Smith derives from the rational pursuit of one's self-interest (and not from the state, the system of laws, or constitution as previous political theorists would have it).

This summary of Smith's theory should show that his elaborate edifice rests on his theory of human nature. Hence, there has been a tremendous exaggeration of the market mechanism in Smith's theory and an underestimation of the importance of human nature in making it all work in the ideological uses of Smith to legitimate market capitalism. In the passages we have examined where Smith discusses the mechanisms of the capitalist market; what plays the key role is his concept of human nature and not the law of supply and demand, competition, free enterprise, or the like, as our capitalist ideologues would have it.

Smith and Marx on Capitalism and Exchange

The reason that for centuries there has been a primary stress on the "free market" concept in Smith is that capitalist apologists want to posit the existence of a self-regulating crisis-free market as the producer of the wealth of nations, and then want to posit a harmony between human nature and capitalism. In our reading of Smith, one can find the second position; however one will find upon closer examination of *The Wealth of Nations* that the success of the market is a product of the working out of human nature (and not of the market's own inner, self-regulating, self-contained mechanisms), but is rooted in a complex historical analysis of capitalism by Smith in his giant tome and other writings.

Moreover, when Smith does construct a model of the genesis of the capitalist market it is based on the idyllic society of hunters and fishermen, giving way to manufacture and commerce, and thus grounding his theory of capitalism in a fanciful myth of simple accumulation—as Marx clearly saw. In fact, I believe that Smith's theory of the market is based on a replay of Mandeville's private vice/public benefit argument, which he strips of its moralistic overtones and from which he traces out the "unintended social consequences" that follow from a sustained pursuit of self-interest that is the source of the wealth of nations.

Mandeville's discussion of industry, free trade, opulence, and "private vice" (self-interest) had, I believe, a major and generally unappreciated impact on Smith. Although Smith viciously denounced Mandeville's views in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as "licentious" and termed him a "pot-house philosopher,"[25] I believe that Mandeville's ideas haunted Smith and finally won him over in *Wealth of Nations*—as they reflected the reality of the emerging bourgeois society whose outlines were becoming increasingly clear to Smith as the capitalist market and commercial society dramatically developed.

There are some unarticulated premises of Smith's theory of human nature and model of how a society of egotists will act, and many subsequent interpretations of Smith consisted of a series of attempts to bring the underlying premises to light and to then draw the appropriate political consequences. The different evaluations of Smith's egotistic man and society of egotists resulted in the conflicting liberal and conservative traditions that accepted many of the premises of Smith's theory of human nature and the market society, but differed as to their evaluation of what the egotist would do in a free market society, unfettered from previous feudal-absolutist shackles, and differed over what role the state should consequently play to protect the market society (that is, private property) and to ensure social harmony.

In this context, I might suggest that the main difference between conservatives and liberals is derived from their theories of human nature and consequent theories of the market and the state. Both assume the existence of an atomized individual with an innate, fixed, unchanging human nature that is primarily egotistic, driven by self-interest and competitive instincts. The conservative, like Hobbes and Mandeville, is frightened and pessimistic about this state of affairs, believing that the aggressive and destructive aspects of human nature must be kept in check by a strong state and authoritarian system of law and order (this is the common thread running through the conservative theories of Plato, Hobbes, de Tocqueville, Freud, Hitler, and U.S. TV police shows like *Dragnet* and *SWAT*, and politicians like Donald Trump and his Make America Great Again followers).

The liberal, on the other hand, has a more beneficent and optimistic view of human nature, and believes a society that gives free reign to human nature will best develop human potentialities and well-being— just like dear old Adam Smith. Hence, the liberal is not afraid, as is the conservative, that human beings will run amok, wreak havoc on one another, and produce chaos and disorder. Rather, the liberal believes—and here Adam Smith is a classic liberal—that all

the egotists will smoothly mesh into a market society that at once enables them to give full play to their self-interest and harmoniously resolve all conflicts.

This analysis suggests that the functional model of society in *The Wealth of Nations*—and subsequent liberalism—presupposes aspects of the theory of human nature in Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which stresses the more social, benevolent, and fellow-feeling sides of human nature, for the smoothly running market presupposes that the egotists will play by the rules, respect the law and the other's rights to pursue their self-interest, and will not utilize crime or violence to pursue their ends.

Occasionally the view of human nature in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* surfaces in *The Wealth of Nations*, as in the passage where Smith discusses justice (p. 670):

> Envy, malice, or resentment are the only passions which can prompt one man to injure another in his person or reputation. But the greater part of men are not very frequently under the influence of those passions; and the very worst men are so only occasionally. As their gratification, too, howsoever agreeable it may be to certain characters, is not attended with any real or permanent advantage, it is in the greater part of men commonly restrained by prudential considerations. Men may live together in society with some tolerable degree of security, though there is no civil magistrate to protect them from the injustice of those passions.

This issue raises the old Adam Smith problem concerning the relationship between Smith's earlier *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations*. [26] It has been hotly debated for two centuries whether the views of human nature in Smith's two major works are completely contradictory or are compatible and even harmonious. In my view there are both continuities and discontinuities in the relations between Smith's works, but the inconsistencies and contradictions are dominant.[27]

It has been argued that there is a disharmony between *TMS* and *WN* in that self-interest is operative in *TMS* and sympathy is operative in *WN*. Hence the principles of self-interest and sympathy are said to be operative in both works and to provide complementary and reciprocal aspects of human nature—or contradictory views of human nature.[28] Let us examine this position in more detail. One argument is that exchange in *WN* requires sympathy: putting oneself in the other's place, identifying with his self-interest, discerning as an impartial spectator what are the other's needs and fancies. It is also suggested that exchange elicits a process of mutual approbation in which both participants attempt to win each other's approval by presenting themselves to each other in a sympathetic manner that takes account of the other's self-interest. Hence it is claimed that exchange in *WN* requires sympathy, mutuality, fellow-feeling, reciprocity—central themes in *TMS*; ergo the continuity in Smith's works—but also the discontinuities between his more benevolent and social theory of human nature in *TMS* compared to the more competitive

individualist and predatory nature of human beings in the class-riven and increasingly savage industrial capitalist system that was developing in Smith's life-time in mid-18th century England where Smith observed the great transformations in English life and articulated them in his two major writings and more incidental writings.

However, is not the "sympathy" operative in exchange-relations in market-driven possessive individualism much different from the moral sympathy and benevolent social-moral relations in *TMS*? Is not the "sympathy" in *WN* completely subordinate to economic self-interest? I put myself in another's place in the exchange-relation precisely so that I can best profit from the deal, get the highest price at the lowest cost, or perhaps even mislead, deceive, or exploit the other person. In Smithian language, is not the approbation I seek to win from sympathetic behavior often a mask for crude self-interest: the hypocritical smile, calculated handshake, and pseudo-friendliness of the salesman? Is not the motor of exchange thus self-interest in its most asocial, egotistic guise?

Smith, in fact, was not so naive as to believe that the sort of sympathy, fellow-feeling, or the like that he portrayed in *TMS* played a major role in capitalist exchange relations. In a passage in *WN* he cynically, and accurately, notes the primacy of a self-interest that has no regard for the public good—and by implication for the other person:

> By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected trade for the public good. It is an affectation, indeed, not very common among merchants, and very few words need be employed in dissuading them from it. (*WN*, p. 423)

Economics triumphed in Smith over morality, reducing it to a pale specter of idealism weakly confronting the triumphant materialism of capitalism. Smith thus profoundly shifts the operation of sympathy in *WN*, making it a means to the end of profit and self-interest, rather than a self-subsistent "end in itself" creating more benevolence, cooperation, and morality, as Smith put it in *TMS*. Capital, Marx tells us, transforms everything it touches, and in Smith's theory we see sympathy metamorphosed from a profoundly social-moral virtue in *TMS* to an aspect of capitalist business practice in *WN*. Morality and moral sympathy were a weak counterforce to the juggernaut of capital and gave way time and again to the primacy of material self-interest.

This fact of capitalist society is perhaps reflected in the change in emphasis from Smith's *Theory of Moral Sympathy* to his later *Wealth of Nations*. Unfortunately Smith, unlike most writers, refused to comment on the relation between *TMS* and *WN*, burned his papers before his death, and left no (known) evidence as to whether he perceived or constructed a change in his theories; nor, as far as I know, have any of his intimate contemporaries thrown any light on the topic. To clarify the issue, I would suggest that there is not only a metamorphosis of sympathy in the shift from *TMS* to *WN*, but that

there is a changed emphasis from the primacy of social-moral sympathy to self-love in human nature as the motor of human behavior in Smith's *WN* and later writings that deal with human nature and capitalism.

It seems reasonable to interpret this shift as a response to the developing capitalist economy that was conceivably changing human behavior before Smith's very eyes as industry grew, wealth accumulated, cutthroat competition intensified, and economics played a dramatically increasing role in all areas of public and private life, becoming, in Marx's words, "the religion of everyday life." A sensitive observer of human behavior with strong empiricist leanings who was writing the first great treatise on capitalism could hardly fail to notice the "great transformation" taking place, and would no doubt take account of this thoroughgoing revolution in his theory.[29]

In any case, capital triumphed in 18th-century social theory and both the classical liberal; and the emerging capitalist class agreed—and this is the basis of their consensus—that a capitalist market economy would maximize opulence, human freedom, and individual well-being. An accompanying part of their argument that Karl Marx also attacked was that capitalism was in harmony with human nature interpreted in terms of the competitive individualism and belief in the primacy of self-interest that was dominant at the time.

Thus, after his earlier ethical writings and championing of benevolence, sympathy, and fellow-feeling in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith perceived the growth of a capitalist market society that required new types of competitive individuals, and he theorized and legitimated it as in tune with human nature. Hence, Smith's analysis of individuals in a market society in his time and place created the first classical work of political economy and legitimation of the emergent capitalism that has made him a great intellectual figure into the present age.

Marx, of course, saw through the ideological veils of the theories of capitalism set out in the largely British political economy of the period which he, Engels, and other radicals denounced as an ideological fraud. Hence, Marx and Engels' critique of political economy and theory of socialism and revolution provided a great ideological antithesis to Smith and bourgeois political economy that continues to this day.

For Marx in his early *Philosophical and Economic Manuscripts*, it was, first, the alienation of labor in the emerging capitalist-industrial system that he and Engels studied and critiqued feverishly the rest of their lives that undermined the foundation of the liberal–conservative consensus. Their critique of the contradictions and disharmonies of capitalism, which was producing periodic economic crises that Marx and Engels were studying at first-hand, crises that continue to this day, led them to expose and attack the failings of the capitalist market from a political economy point of view as crisis-ridden and generative of growing class inequality and antagonisms that would lead to class war and what they envisaged as the overthrow of capitalism in a socialist revolution.

In addition, Karl Marx attempted to show from his early thought to his late writings that capitalism was totally at odds with and hostile to human nature,

and was thus at its core an alienating and inhumane system. Smith and the liberal-individual advocates of political economy and the emerging bourgeois-capitalist society argued that capitalism was a harmonious system that met people's needs and was in harmony with human nature. It is this argument that Marx contested, and it is Marx's critique of it that I shall pursue in the next section.

Marx's Critique of Smith's Theory of Human Nature and Capitalism

Marx points out that the view of human nature in Smith (and other bourgeois political economists and theorists of human nature) is best seen as an ideological reflection of the personality type that was coming to be dominant in the rising capitalist society. Smith's bartering animal in *The Wealth of Nations* reflected the nature of the rising merchant-industrialist class for whom business was the center of life. The calculating man of self-interest reflected, Marx said of Jeremy Bentham, the 18th-century English storekeeper.[30]

The illusion of Smith and his ilk was their belief that the sort of personality gaining ascendency in their society was identical with human nature at large. This incredible egotism and naive projection of the dominant personality traits of the era onto a human essence was for Marx evidence of how ideology covered over the facts of the human condition and provided a mystified consciousness that served the interests of the ruling class. For if the human being is primarily egotistical, motivated by self-interest, enamored by self-love, driven to bartering and higgling in everyday life as one's fundamental propensity, then capitalist-market society is most in tune with human nature and can best satisfy the human demands and fulfill human strivings. Adam Smith's concept of human nature thus provides an ideological defense of the capitalist economy and legitimation of capitalist practice as being in fundamental harmony with human nature.

Marx's attack on this point of view is devastating. Human beings are not by nature like the egotistical creatures freely consenting to capitalist acts in the texts of political economy and the marketplace of bourgeois society. Rather, we became this way through the development of capitalism, which rewarded and reinforced the relentless pursuit of self-interest; which forced the pursuit of profit and wealth on those who would rule, dominate, and prosper; which created new needs for wealth and luxury that required capital accumulation, bartering, and self-motivated higgling.

"Consciousness is from the very beginning a social product," Marx writes, "and remains so as long as human beings exist at all."[31] In Marx's view, one's language, values, ideas, and consciousness develop in an intimate interaction with one's social environment. As Marx and Engels put it in *The German Ideology*:

> The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material

> behaviour. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc. of a people. Humans are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. and active human beings, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of human beings is their actual life-process … Life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life.[32]

Marx denies that there is a human essence inhering in all human beings at all times throughout history; rather, each single individual is the "ensemble of social relations."[33] Marx argues that the social relations of production of a given society produce a certain dominant personality type. In his view human behavior does not spring from an innate human essence, but is shaped and molded by a given society. Smith naively assumed that the bartering, acquisitive, competitive individual of his emerging market society was identical with the human essence as such, whereas Smith was actually and accurately describing an emerging personality type that would become dominant in bourgeois society.

Hence, the harmony between capitalist society and human nature that Smith and other capitalist ideologues maintained was for Marx an ideological fiction. Obviously, Marx was sharply critical of the bourgeoisie's self-image of human nature that he found in Smith, which for Marx reflected the bourgeois class's enslavement to money, commodities, and business, providing but a stunted, fragmented, and alienated version of human nature, opposed by Marx and Engels in their vision of the many-sided human being with a wealth of senses, intellect, critical reason, and imagination that they described in their writings.

Indeed, Marx's crucial criticism is that Adam Smith and the political economists had an incredibly one-sided, reductionist, and impoverished concept of human nature that did violence to the full wealth of human potentialities. The human being, Marx tells us, is a many-sided being with a wealth of needs, potentialities, desires, and possibilities for individual and social development:

> Man, in as much as he may therefore be a particular individual (and it is precisely his particularity which makes him an individual, and a real individual social being) is just as much the totality—the ideal totality—the subjective existence of thought and experienced society present for itself; just as he exists also in the real world as the awareness and the real enjoyment of social existence and as a totality of human life-activity.[34]

Adam Smith's egotistical barterer, primarily motivated by self-interest directed at the market, possession, consumption, and the accumulation of capital, falls prey to a "one-sided gratification—merely in the sense of possessing, of having." Marx contrasts the total, whole, well-rounded human being who cultivates a wealth of human potentialities and relations to the world—"seeing,

hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, being aware, sensing, wanting, acting, loving"—to the one-sided acquisitive activity of capitalist man who is characterized by "an estrangement of all human senses and attributes," a reduction of human wealth to mere financial gain.[35]

In short, Marx believes that "private property" has made Adam Smith's egotistic higgler "stupid and one-sided," a partial, impoverished human being. Marx wants

> [to put] in place of the wealth and poverty of political economy the rich man, being rich in human needs. The rich human being is simultaneously the being in need of a totality of human life-activities—the being in whom his own realization exists as an inner necessity, as need.[36]

"Political economy," Marx ironically writes—and he is referring to Smith and his definition of self-interest in terms of frugality, accumulation, and so on—"this science of *wealth*"

> is therefore simultaneously the science of renunciation, of want, of *saving* … this science of marvelous industry is simultaneously the science of *asceticism*, and its true ideal is the *ascetic* but extortionate miser and the ascetic but *productive slave* … Self-renunciation, the renunciation of life and of all human needs, is its principal thesis. The less you eat, drink, and buy books; the less you go the theater, the dance hall, the public house; the less you think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you *save*—the *greater* becomes your treasure which neither moths nor dust will devour—your *capital*. The less you *are*, the less you express your own life, the greater is your alienated life, the more you *have*, the greater is the store of your estranged being.[37]

Smith's view of human nature was also deficient for Marx in that he failed to perceive the crucial role of *labor* in producing a humanized world, in fulfilling human needs, and in developing human potentialities. Labor for Marx was human productivity, creative activity par excellence, and the human species was distinguished by its capacities for producing out of its imagination, out of its aesthetic sense, out of its freedom and creativity. Smith had in Marx's view an impoverished concept of the human significance of labor, and thus of the very central core of human being. As Marx puts it in the *Grundrisse*:

> In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou labour! was Jehovah's curse on Adam. And this is labour for Smith, a curse. "Tranquillity" appears as the adequate state, as identical with "freedom" and "happiness." It seems quite far from Smith's mind that the individual "in his normal state of health, strength, activity, skill, facility," also needs a normal portion of work, and of the suspension of tranquillity. Certainly, labour obtains its measure from the outside, through the aim to be attained and the obstacles to be overcome in attaining it. But Smith has no inkling whatever that this

> overcoming of obstacles is in itself a liberating activity—and that, further, the external aims become stripped of the semblance of merely external natural urgencies, and become posited as aims which the individual himself posits—hence as self-realization, objectification of the subject, hence real freedom, whose action is precisely labour.[38]

The Division of Labor and Alienation

The radical differences in Marx's and Smith's views of human nature are also dramatically revealed in their different evaluations of the capitalist division of labor. Smith champions the division of labor as producing tremendous benefits in increased productivity and efficiency that will spill over and produce increased opulence and well-being for all classes of society. At one point, Smith concedes that the worker becomes a commodity and that the increased division of labor may fragment the human being,[39] but on the whole he is a resolute champion of the capitalist division of labor. Smith's primary focus in fact is on exchange and circulation, and the act of production receives little attention from him.

Hence, Smith misses the alienation of labor under capitalism that Marx was to make a primary focus of his theory from beginning to end.[40] For Marx, the division of labor constitutes an alienation of the human being in several senses. Marx challenges Smith's uncritical praise of the capitalist division of labor in the very beginning of his critique of political economy in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*:

> The accumulation of capital increases the division of labour, and the division of labour increases the number of the workers. Conversely, the number of workers increases the division of labour, just as the division of labour increases the accumulation of capital. With this division of labour on the one hand and the accumulation of capital on the other, the worker becomes ever more exclusively dependent on labour, and on a particular, very one-sided machine-like labour at that. Just as he is thus depressed spiritually and physically to the condition of a machine and from being a human becomes an abstract activity and a belly, so she/he also becomes ever more dependent on every fluctuation in market price, on the application of capital, and on the whim of the rich. Equally, the increase in the class of people wholly dependent on work intensifies competition among the workers, thus lowering their price. In the factory system this situation of the worker reaches its climax … The division of labour renders him ever more one-sided and dependent, bringing with it the competition not only of men but also of machines. Since the worker has sunk to the level of a machine, he can be confronted by the machine as a competitor … Whilst the division of labour raises the productive power of labour and increases the wealth and refinement of society, it impoverishes the worker and reduces him to a machine.[41]

Marx continues his critique of the alienation of labor under capitalism in the famous passage on alienated labor, which can be read as a direct critique of Smith's views on human nature, labor, and capitalism:

> The estrangement is manifested not only in the result but in the act of production, within the producing activity, itself. How could the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself? The product is after all but the summary of the activity, of production. If then the product of labour is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity the activity of alienation. In the estrangement of the object of labour is merely summarized the estrangement, the alienation, in the activity of labour itself.
>
> What, then, constitutes the alienation of labour?
>
> First, the fact that labour is external to the worker, i.e. it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside her work, and in her work feels outside herself. She is at home when she is not working, and when she is working she is not at home. Their labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs not to himself, but to another. Just as in religion the spontaneous activity of the human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates independently of the individual—that is, operates on him as an alien, divine or diabolical activity—so is the worker's activity not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his or her self.[42]

Adam Smith ignores these alienating conditions of labor under capitalism and derives his much-acclaimed concepts of freedom and equality from an analysis of the exchange relation. All men are in a sense free in a capitalist market society to exchange whatever they can on the market; they are equal before the laws of supply and demand; they are free to pursue gain and their self- interest as they see fit. Moreover, one can theoretically sell his or her labor power to whomever one chooses, and one is free to seek any occupation for which one is qualified. What Smith fails to note, however, is that one class of individuals is much more free and equal than the other class, and that the system of labor and exchange produces gross inequality, lack of freedom, and the destruction of

individuality. Crucially, in a class society where one class owns the means of production and the other class must submit to domination and exploitation by the possessing class, the deck is stacked from the beginning in a rigged game.

Once again, Marx's critique of Smith is devastating. In a section of the *Grundrisse*, Marx first summarizes Smith's position (see the passage I have already cited) and then demolishes it:

> If this way of conceiving the matter is not advanced in its historical context, but is instead raised as a refutation of the more developed economic relations in which individuals relate to one another no longer merely as exchangers or as buyers and sellers, but in specific relations, no longer all of the same character; then it is the same as if it were asserted that there is no difference, to say nothing of antithesis and contradiction, between natural bodies, because all of them, when looked at from e.g. the point of view of their weight, have weight, and are therefore equal; or are equal because all of them occupy three dimensions. Exchange value itself is here similarly seized upon in its simple character, as the antithesis to its more developed, contradictory forms. In the course of science, it is just these abstract attributes which appear as the earliest and sparsest; they appear in part historically in this fashion too; the more developed as the more recent.
>
> In present bourgeois society as a whole, this positing of prices and their circulations etc. appears as the surface process, beneath which, however, in the depths, entirely different processes go on, in which this apparent individual equality and liberty disappear. It is forgotten, on one side, that the presupposition of exchange value, as the objective basis of the whole of the system of production, already in itself implies compulsion over the individual since his immediate product is not a product for him, but only becomes such in the social process, and since it ·must take on this general but nevertheless external form; and that the individual has an existence only as a producer of exchange value, hence that the whole negation of his natural existence is already implied; that he is therefore entirely determined by society; that this further presupposes a division of labour etc., in which the individual is already posited in relations other than that of mere exchanger, etc. That therefore this presupposition by no means arises either out of the individual's win or out of the immediate nature of the individual, but that it is, rather, historical, and posits the individual as already determined by society. It is forgotten, on the other side, that the higher forms, in which exchange, or the relations of production which realize themselves in it, are now posited, do not by any means stand still in this simple form where the highest distinction which occurs is a formal and hence irrelevant one. What is overlooked, finally, is that already the simple forms of exchange value and of money latently contain the opposition between labour and capital, etc. Thus, what all this wisdom comes down to is the attempt to stick fast at the simplest economic relations, which, conceived by themselves, are pure abstractions; but these relations are, in reality,

> mediated by the deepest antithesis, and represent only one-side,—in which the full expression of the antithesis (that is, between capital and labour) is obscured.[43]

This passage encapsulates much of Marx's critique of Smith and returns to my first criticism that Smith often merely describes surface appearances and fails to see the reality of the social relations of production of capitalist society; in this case, the extent to which all individuals are dominated by society and that the bourgeoisie's much-touted equality, individuality, and freedom are surface appearances that hide slavery, conformity, and a manifold of societal and class domination. As we have seen, Smith's view of human nature is a superficial reflection of the predominant personality type of the time that hides the full wealth of human nature. In the same vein, his theory of equality and freedom reflects surface appearances that cover over existing inequality, dependence, exploitation, and wage slavery.

Marx's theory of surplus value is intended to call attention to the reality of capitalist exploitation that previous political economists had failed to grasp. Marx conceives his theory of surplus value as one of his major scientific contributions to understanding the workings of the hidden, inner mechanisms of capitalist society. Marx believed that the major failure of Smith's economic theory is a failure to provide an adequate theory of surplus value, and thus of exploitation of the working class by capital.[44] For Marx, socially necessary labor time to produce a commodity constituted its value, while the capitalist only paid the laborer enough to cover his/her basic needs while appropriating the "surplus value" that surpassed what the capitalist paid the laborer and gained in exchange for the capitalist's profit which constituted the exploitation of the laborer.[45]

Conclusion

This chapter explored how from the beginning of Marx's development of a critique of political economy to the end, Marx continually studied and critiqued the works of Adam Smith, whose work exposed the ideologies of capitalism that Marx was intent to critique. I should stress in conclusion that Marx's critique of Adam Smith is not limited to engaging Smith's theory of human nature and capitalism. In Marx's view, Smith fails to accurately describe many of the realities of capitalist society and its historical origins. For Marx, Smith's model of the origin of the market society in the society of hunters and shepherds is an ahistorical myth, an idyll of simple accumulation that covers over the bloody history of capitalism.[46]

In Marx's view, Smith fails to appraise the fundamental role that monopoly will play in the capitalist economy, and fails to see that the state will actively intervene on the side of the monopolists and capitalist ruling class again and again, making a sham out of laissez-faire. In particular, Marx believed that Smith failed to properly grasp the phenomenon of exploitation and lacked a

cogent theory of surplus value, as I just argued. Finally, Smith's mode of the self-regulating market, harmony of class/individual interests, and the invisible hand are in Marx's view but mere myths—ideology concocted to cover over the reality of class conflict, the anarchy of an unregulated market, and a capitalist system full of explosive inequality and contradictions that would create periodic crises and bring about eventual collapse.

It is tragic and in some ways a mystery that Adam Smith could not detect the deleterious effects of the impact of industrial capitalism that Smith noted in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Smith failed to see and depict that the capitalist society market society he described in *Wealth of Nations* is dreadfully harmful to human beings, especially the working class; that the division of labor, competition, and unbridled self-interest, the ubiquity of the market, lust for money and possessions as the end of life, and so forth are really restrictive of human potentialities and create humanly impoverished, one-sided, alienated human beings.

Thus, in Marx's view, rather than being in harmony with human nature, capitalism is profoundly opposed to it. Smith's view of human nature, upon which his theory of political economy rests, was shown to be a mere myth that legitimates powerful and destructive economic interests and that provides ideological support for an alienating and dehumanizing economy. Marx's critique of Adam Smith's concept of human nature, which continues to express the dominant bourgeois view of human beings to this day, is one of his enduring contributions to modern thought and indicates that radical socio-economic and individual change is necessary to create more human beings and a more humane society.

Notes

1 Marx and Engels' concept of ideology as the ruling ideas of the ruling class will be discussed in Chapter 5, "Marxism, Morality, and Ideology."
2 On J.B. Say, see Evelyn Forget, "J.B. Say and Adam Smith: An Essay in the Transmission of Ideas," *Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue canadienne d'Economique* 26, no. 1 (1993), pp. 121–133.
3 Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value*, pt. II (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), pp. 165–166.
4 Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845), in *The German Ideology*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm (accessed December 31, 2024).
5 The description of Smith as the Luther of political economy who attacked the dominant Catholic religion while producing another fundamentalist Christian doctrine originates in Engels' "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 422. Marx elaborates on the metaphor in "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 290.
6 On Kierkegaard's critique of what he saw as the degraded practice of Christianity in his day, see Douglas Kellner, "Kierkegaard, Mass Media, and *The Corsair Affair*," in *The Corsair Affair: International Kierkegaard Commentary*, Vol. 13, ed. Robert Perkins (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1990), pp. 23–62.
7 Engels' early article reveals less respect for Smith than Marx was to show, and exhibits excessive moralism that was never present in Marx's critique of Smith's

work. For instance, Engels writes: "Modern economics—the system of free trade based on Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*—reveals itself to be that same hypocrisy, inconsistency and immorality which now confront free humanity in every sphere." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 420.

8 Karl Marx, "The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers, 1975), pp. 235–270.

9 On the Enlightenment philosophy of progress and conception of bourgeois society developing as a "heavenly city," see Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (London: Penguin, 2019); and Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

10 It is interesting to note that Hegel—often touted as Marx's chief intellectual influence and source—was himself deeply immersed in Smith's ideas, which he engaged in his early writings and in *The Philosophy of Right*. On Adam Smith's influence on Hegel, see James P. Henderson and John B. Davis, "Adam Smith's Influence on Hegel's Philosophical Writings," *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 13, no. 2 (1991): 184–204. Hence, Smith's ideas had a twofold impact on Marx: through his direct study of Smith and through his work on Hegel, who had earlier appropriated many ideas and insights from Smith. For a further detailed exploration and discussion of the influence of Hegel on Marx, philosophy, and social theory of the era, see Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (New York: Beacon, 1960), and George Lukács, *The Young Hegel* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976).

11 Mazlish suggests in the Library of Liberal Arts edition of *The Wealth of Nations* that "Smith reached, although only gropingly and without using the technical term, the notion of the 'dialectic,' and what is more, the dialectic working itself out in economic terms." Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations: Representative Selections*, edited, with an introduction by Bruce Mazlish (New York: Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961), p. xix. This is absurd because the central dialectical notions of negation and contradiction are missing in Smith's theoretical apparatus.

12 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 1937), pp. 391–92.

13 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm (accessed January 17, 2025); Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 459–515; and Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1947), chaps. 25–32.

14 Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1947), pp. 708–709.

15 See especially Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Bantam, 2003), bk. I, chap. 8 ("On the Wages of Labour"), which displays an optimistic faith in progress in a growing cornucopia of opulence that will spill over its bounties to the entire population—an ideological claim that Marx and Engels contested throughout their writings and lives. As we shall see, opulence is a key ideological concept of Smith that informs *The Wealth of Nations*.

16 Smith, for instance, saw class divisions and the plight of the poor. See Christopher Martin, "Adam Smith on the Rich and the Poor," Adam Smith Works, February 22, 2023 at https://www.adamsmithworks.org/documents/martin-smith-rich-poor-just-sentiments (accessed December 20, 2024).

17 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759; Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1976), hereafter *TMS*. For excellent studies of Smith that compare *TMS* with the later *Wealth of Nations*, see Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010) and Jesse Norman, *Adam Smith: Father of Economics* (New York: Basic Books, 2018). Both present Smith as a

fundamental figure in the Scottish Enlightenment and point to continuities and differences in his earlier and later major works.

18 Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers, 1975), pp. 235, and Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776; New York: Bantam, 2003) (hereafter *WN*).

19 C.M. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), discusses the role of egotism and self-interest in the political theories of Hobbes and Locke. Hartmut Neuendorff discusses the concept of self-interest in Hobbes, Smith, and Marx in *Der Begriff des Interesses* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973).

20 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776; New York: Bantam, 2003), p. 13.

21 See James Buchan, *The Authentic Adam Smith: His Life and Ideas* (New York: Norton, 2006). Buchan opens his witty and entertaining book with an appearance at Smith's native town of Kirkcaldy in Scotland of U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, praising Smith's "demonstration of the inherent stability and growth of what we now term free market capitalism" (p. 2).

22 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 244–245.

23 Jacob Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish in *The Western Intellectual Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960) interpret the "invisible hand" doctrine in terms of "God's providential benevolence" and "man's earthly self-interest" (*WN*, p. 352). Yet I don't see what God has to do with this, and find no appeal to Him as the backbone of the capitalist market in *The Wealth of Nations* or Adam Smith's other writings. Indeed, biographers stress that Smith was very careful to hide his skeptical views on religion, unlike his close friend David Hume, whose attack on religion was notorious and got Smith into much trouble. On Smith and Hume's close personal relation and their views of religion, see Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010) and Dennis C. Rasmussen, *The Infidel and the Professor: David Hume, Adam Smith, and the Friendship that Shaped Modern Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). Phillipson (p. x) also notes that Smith only uses the "invisible hand" metaphor three times in *Wealth of Nations*, and that it is later capitalist ideologues like Milton Friedman and Alan Greenspan who fetishize the term as the label of choice for the capitalist market.

24 As Phillipson points out, this is a myth of *The Wealth of Nations* and capitalism perpetrated by later capitalist ideologues as Smith frequently provides examples of how the state needs to intervene in the economy to provide for human well-being and does not have a theory of a laissez-faire state. Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. xx and passim.

25 Sarah Skwire, "Why Mandeville Makes Smith Mad," Adam Smith Works, June 28, 2020 at https://www.adamsmithworks.org/speakings/why-mandeville-makes-smith-mad (accessed January 1, 2025).

26 The Adam Smith problem in Smith interpretations requires analysis of how the quite different works, *TMS and WN*, can be synthesized in reading Smith; to what extent there are ruptures and incompatibilities between the earlier *TMS* and *WN*; and to what extent they complement each other and can be used to develop a more complex theory of human nature and capitalism than *WN* contains in its radical possessive individualism, which seems to contradict the earlier theory of moral sympathy, benevolence, cooperation, and other social traits as defining human nature in Smith's *TMS*.

27 I might note that, although there is the same continuity/discontinuity evident in the relation between the early and late works of Marx, as noted in earlier chapters,

Marx's work presents more consistency and unity in its totality than does Smith's work, where, in my view, the discontinuities are predominant.

28 Glenn Morrow, in *The Ethical and Economic Theories of Adam Smith* (1923; New York: A.M. Kelley, 1969), attempted to integrate Smith's *TMS* and *WN* on these grounds. Other attempts include Joseph Cropsey, *Polity and Economy: An Interpretation of the Principles of Adam Smith* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1957); and Ralph Lindgren, *The Social Philosophy of Adam Smith* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1973). Countless articles have also dealt with this problem.

29 For an account of the rapid economic development and industrialization and the changes that capitalism wrought on human life from the mid-1700s when *TMS* was conceived to 1776 when *WN* appeared, see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon, 1968); Paul Mantoux, *The Industrial Revolution in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961); and Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

30 In Chapter 24 of *Capital*, Vol. I, note 50, Marx says of Bentham: "Bentham is a purely English phenomenon. Not even excepting our philosopher, Christian Wolff, in no time and in no country has the most homespun commonplace ever strutted about in so self-satisfied a way. The principle of utility was no discovery of Bentham. He simply reproduced in his dull way what Helvétius and other Frenchmen had said with esprit in the 18th century. To know what is useful for a dog, one must study dog-nature. This nature itself is not to be deduced from the principle of utility. Applying this to man, he that would criticise all human acts, movements, relations, etc., by the principle of utility, must first deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch. Bentham makes short work of it. With the driest naiveté he takes the modern shopkeeper, especially the English shopkeeper, as the normal man. Whatever is useful to this queer normal man, and to his world, is absolutely useful. This yard-measure, then, he applies to past, present, and future. The Christian religion, e.g., is 'useful,' 'because it forbids in the name of religion the same faults that the penal code condemns in the name of the law.' Artistic criticism is 'harmful,' because it disturbs worthy people in their enjoyment of Martin Tupper, etc. With such rubbish has the brave fellow, with his motto, 'nulla dies sine linea!,' piled up mountains of books. Had I the courage of my friend, Heinrich Heine, I should call Mr. Jeremy a genius in the way of bourgeois stupidity." This stunning putdown of English utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham is available in the Marxist Internet Archive at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch24.htm (accessed November 27, 2024).

31 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), p. 42.

32 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968), pp. 37–38.

33 Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm (accessed January 1, 2025).

34 Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm (accessed January 1, 2025).

35 Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers, 1975), pp. 299, 304.

36 Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 309.

37 Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 309.

38 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 610.

39 Marx himself cites this passage from Smith in *Capital*, Chap. 14, sec. 5, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ (accessed January 1, 2025).
40 Against the view that the notion of alienated labor was a temporary fancy of the young Marx, one can easily show that this theme is always of central importance to Marx and is a thread running through his work from the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844" to *Grundrisse* and *Capital*. On the theme of how alienation and alienated labor runs through Marx's work, see Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in a Capitalist Society*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
41 Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers, 1975), pp. 237–238.
42 Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 274.
43 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 248–249.
44 Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value* (New York: Progress Publishers, 1968).
45 Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value* (New York: Progress Publishers, 1968), especially pp. 69–182, 216–236, and 342–373. From the 19th century through the present there has been controversy over Marx's theory of surplus-value and capitalism: see Guido Starosta and Gastón Caligaris, *Value, Money and Capital* (New York and London: Routledge, 2023); and for contemporary battles raging over Marx's theory of surplus value and capitalism on-line, see the "CapitalismVSocialism" site on Reddit at https://www.reddit.com/r/CapitalismVSocialism/comments/15tjyzx/capitalist_was_marx_right_about_surplus_value/?rdt=61128 (accessed December 20, 2024).
46 See the introduction to Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Macmillan, 1973), where Marx attacks "Robinson Crusoe" approaches to political economy model-building, and the chapters on "Primitive Accumulation" in Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1947).

5 Marxism, Morality, and Ideology
Toward a Critical Marxian Humanism

The relationship between Marxism, morality, and ideology has been fraught with controversy and heated debates at every stage of the origin and development of Marxism. Advocates of "scientific socialism" tend to dismiss morality as mere ideology, which serves as a camouflage for class interests.[1] In this view, Marxism is a science, separate from and opposed to morality; morality is conceived of as part of the ideological superstructure: false consciousness, containing lies and illusions, which seduces the bourgeoisie into self-satisfaction and complacency while blinding the working class to their own class interests and exploitation by the ruling class and the capitalist mode of production.[2]

Since, however, there are powerful moral and humanist impulses in Marx's own critique of capitalism and call to socialist revolution, and since those engaged in political struggle invariably make use of moral terms and exhortations, the self-reflexive "scientific socialist" comes to devise some sort of moral doctrine: Kautsky, Trotsky, and others talked of a higher socialist morality which would govern the future socialist society and, in some versions, which is to become already the guiding morality for a socialist revolutionary.[3] Bernstein and the Austro-Marxists, on the other hand, appealed to a Kantian prescriptive on morality as the genuine socialist morality that would universalize moral claims and thus transcend class interests.[4]

As a reaction against "scientific socialism," another tradition of "critical Marxism," or "Western Marxism," openly affirms that Marxism contains a moral critique of capitalism, guided by an ideal of human liberation and a moral vision of an emancipated socialist society.[5] This tradition of Marxism roots itself in Marx's philosophical humanism and argues that Marxism contains at once: (1) a theory of human nature and its alienation under capitalism that is used to criticize capitalist society and convince people of its shortcomings, evils, and the need for radical change;[6] and (2) a theory of the liberation and development of many-sided individuals in a "free association of producers" that provides a classless, socialist democracy and community.

In this interpretation, Marxism rests on a humanist conception of individuals, society, and revolution in which socialism is conceived of as a process of overcoming alienation and all the evils of capitalism by providing a human society with new social relations, institutions, and values that make possible the

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free and full development of our social and individual capabilities. The two conflicting conceptions of a critical and humanist Marxism and scientific socialism have been locked in struggle since the late 19th century through the present, each asserting its claims to be the "true Marxism," each struggling for hegemony within Marxism by attacking its opponents and defending its own conceptions.[7]

In this chapter, I shall argue that versions of these conflicting conceptions are both parts of the Marxian theory. From this standpoint, separation of Marxism into "science" and "critique" is artificial and distorting, condemning its advocates to a one-sided and limited position. Instead, I shall argue that Marxism combines "fact" and "value," moral and scientific discourse, and theory and practice. Their separation into separate, say, descriptive and normative disciplines is, I would argue, a function of a later empiricist-positivist tradition that is quite foreign to Marxism's theoretical origins, structure, and theoretic-practical functions—although, admittedly, there is a tradition of Marxian scientism/positivism that began with Social Democratics in the 19th century and Soviet Marxists in the 20th century that continues to be widespread today throughout the world.

The complexity of critical Marxism and its own internal tensions, conflicts, and, yes, contradictions render it a difficult subject for the sort of moral analysis dominant in the English-speaking philosophical world. This interconnection of elements in a totalistic theory—which are separated out and analyzed discretely in analytical and empiricist traditions—is grounded in the Marxian concept of dialectics which is, in my view, the foundation of the Marxian theory and the key to its interpretation.[8]

In the following pages, I shall try to make clear the conceptual relations between Marxism, morality, and ideology by showing their interconnection within "critical Marxism." I shall first, elucidate Marx's moral critique of capitalism and conception of human nature, alienation, and liberation through a close reading of Marx's texts. Next I shall discuss the moral and humanist components in Marx's theory of socialism and revolution. I then discuss Marx's theory of ideology as, in part, a critique of bourgeois morality. In conclusion, I compare Marxian critical humanist theory with traditional moral theory and assess its contributions and challenges.

Marx's Moral and Humanist Critique of Capitalism

In an 1843 letter to Arnold Ruge, Marx calls for a "ruthless criticism of all that exists."[9] From the beginning to the end, Marxism conceptualized itself as a "critical theory" which is to engage in the "critique of political economy," German philosophy, the state and the political-juridical system, religion and the cultural system, and the alienation, fetishism, commodification, and exchange-relationships that permeate capitalist society.

The Marxian concept of "critique" is itself extremely complex and hard to unpack as it contains several different dimensions:

1 "philosophical critique," which, as with Hegel, "measures the individual existence by the essence, the particular reality by the 'idea'";
2 "immanent critique," which compares an idea's realization, or exemplification in practice, to its own self-professed goals and criteria for adequacy;
3 "ideology critique," which compares the theory's claims with the theorists' class-position, analyzing the origins, social functions, and relations to the social totality of ideas or theories in a given historical society;
4 "scientific critique," which measures a theory against the empirical, factual claims of an arguably superior theory (i.e. such as Marxian economics or historical materialism);
5 "political critique," which criticizes a political practice or strategy according to its efficacy in obtaining certain goals, or in terms of the adequacy of the goals themselves to obtain, for instance, revolutionary socialism or human emancipation; and
6 what I shall call "humanist and moral critique" which measures institutions, forms of society, social practices, or values according to whether they stand up to scrutiny by a normative conception of human nature and society, and which critiques forms of human oppression, alienation, and dehumanization.

These forms of critique are present in a complex and varied mixture throughout Marx's writings, although sometimes one or more forms are dominant in a certain text or period. In this section, I shall focus solely on what I call Marx's "critical humanist and moral critique" of capitalism and shall focus on his "critique of ideology" in a later section. I would argue that Marx's critique of capitalism from his 1843 essays and *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (*EPM*) through *Capital* and his later economic writings is permeated with morally loaded and rhetorically charged critical humanist language that together constitute a humanist and moral critique of capitalism and theory of emancipation and moral ideal of the development of many-sided human beings in socialism, as I shall seek to demonstrate.

Marx is one of the great denouncers and passionate polemicists in the Western tradition. His fiery moral rhetoric and dramatic critical strategies characterized his literary style throughout his writings.[10] Marx also practices a version of Feuerbachian "transformative criticism" in his early writings, where critique was focused on oppressive conditions and their transformation.[11] Throughout his life, Marx manifested a hatred of all kinds of oppression and was a devoted revolutionary who expressed his anger, hatred, and revolutionary zeal in language that combined descriptive and moral components. Before he turned his splenetic ire and analytical intelligence to dissect and attack the capitalist mode of production, Marx published essays that contain bitter attacks on oppressive tendencies in the Germany of his day. Speaking of the Prussian government in "Letters from the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*" of 1843, Marx writes:

> The mantle of liberalism has been discarded and the most disgusting despotism in all its nakedness is disclosed to the eyes of the world. That, too, is a revelation, although one of the opposite kind. It is truth which, at least, teaches us to recognize the emptiness of our patriotism and the abnormity of our state system, and makes us hide our faces in shame. You look at me with a smile and ask: What is gained by that? No revolution is made out of shame. I reply: Shame is already revolution of a kind; shame is actually the victory of the French Revolution over German patriotism that defeated it in 1813. Shame is a kind of anger which is turned inward. And if a whole nation really experienced a sense of shame, it would be like a lion, crouching ready to spring.[12]

This passage is revealing because it illustrates Marx's use of explicitly critical moral and humanist vocabulary to denounce the object of critique, and points out that critical and moral language can be utilized to mobilize political opposition and provide motivation for political struggle—a point stressed by Herbert Marcuse in the 1960s.[13] In the same series of letters in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, Marx carries out a moral critique of the German bourgeoisie and the autocratic political system; he sarcastically berates the 'philistines' as protectors of a decaying world and announces that he intends to "carry out a ruthless critique of everything existing."[14]

To the narrow-minded philistines, enslaved in their prejudices, Marx counterposes, "Human beings, that would imply thinking beings, free men, republicans" ("Letters" 134). Next, Marx articulates his political aims and strategy:

> The self-confidence of the human being, freedom, has first of all to be aroused again in the hearts of these people. Only this feeling, which vanished from the world with the Greeks, and under Christianity disappeared into the blue mist of the heavens, can again transform society into a community of human beings united for their highest aims, into a democratic state. On the other hand, people who do not feel that they are human beings become the property of their masters like a breed of slaves or horses. The aim of this whole society are the hereditary masters. This world belongs to them. They accept it as it is and as it feels itself to be. They accept themselves as they are, and place their feet firmly on the necks of these political animals who know of no other function that than to be obedient, devoted, and attentive to their masters. ("Letters" 137)

Using Hegel's contemptuous term, Marx denounces the "philistine world" as a "political world of animals,"[15] the product of "centuries of barbarism" which "now confronts us as a consistent system, the principle of which is the dehumanized world." As for the autocratic despotism in the political sphere, "Despotism's sole idea is contempt for man, the dehumanized man, and this idea has the advantage over many others of being at the same time a fact." Further, "the monarchical principle in general is the despised, the despicable, the

dehumanised man; and Montesquieu was quite wrong to allege that it is honour" ("Letters" 137, 138).

It is clear from these passages that the early Marx's political ideal is freedom and democracy, which will restore human beings to their very humanity by making possible individual self-determination and the creation of a participatory political community. Although these ideals are often dismissed (for example, by Althusser)[16] as Kantian-Rousseauean elements in the young Marx which were overcome by the "mature" Marx, I would argue that these ideals shaped his critique of capitalism and concepts of socialism and revolution throughout his life.

After Marx's early attacks on the state and religion, he turned his attention to capitalism, beginning with some critical remarks in "On the Jewish Question." Here he calls for emancipation "from huckstering and money," aiming at "general human emancipation."[17] Note the strongly moral and rhetorical terminology that Marx uses in attacking the capitalist property and monetary system:

> Money is the jealous god of Israel, beside which no other god may exist. Money abases all the gods of mankind and changes them into commodities. Money is the universal and self-sufficient value of all things. It has therefore robbed the whole world—both the world of men and nature—of its specific value. Money is the estranged essence of man's work and man's existence, and this alien essence dominates him, and he worships it .... The view of nature attained under the dominion of private property and money is a real contempt for and practical debasement of nature .... It is in this sense that Thomas Munzer declares it intolerable "that all creatures have been turned into property, the fishes in the water, the birds in the air, the plants on the earth; the creatures, too, must become free."[18]

Marx worked out his moral critique of capitalism and moral conception of socialism in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Here, for the first time, one finds an outline of Marx's notion of a "new human science" which, I would argue, contains science and critique, empirical analysis and theoretical construction, political economy and morality in a unified project that provides the basis of integral Marxism. In a preface to this unpublished work, Marx writes:

> I shall therefore publish the critique of law, ethics, politics, etc., in a series of distinct, independent pamphlets, and afterwards try in a special work to present them again as a connected whole showing the interrelationship of the separate parts, and lastly attempt a critique of the speculative elaboration of that material. For this reason it will be found that the interconnection between political economy and the state, law, ethics, civil life, etc., is touched upon in the present work only to the extent to which political economy itself expressly touches upon these subjects.[19]

Marx never actually wrote the "independent pamphlets" that were to critique "law, ethics, politics, etc." However, at the time of his Paris manuscripts, Marx developed his criticisms of the capitalist production, property, and exchange system in a brilliant analysis of James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*. [20] Marx's commentary on Mill was written during the same period as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and should be carefully studied along with this work as they supplement and enrich each other. Indeed, most of Marx's subsequent major writings contained analysis of the "interrelationship of separate parts"; and, as I have been arguing, the analysis of these interrelationships constitutes the method of Marxian dialectics that discloses interconnections between various phenomena—as well as contradictions between the various parts—and mystifications and distortions by opposing theories and dominant ideologies.

In the rest of this section, I shall sketch the outlines of Marx's critique of capitalism to illustrate his procedure of critique, highlighting what I call his "moral and humanist critique" of capitalism. First, however, I should define the concept of "moral critique," which I am introducing as an interpretive aid to elucidating the role of what is traditionally considered "morality" in Marx's theory. As our examination of some of Marx's early writings indicate, Marx uses both traditional moral categories and ordinary language that has heavily moral overtones. This procedure perplexes both contemporary analytical philosophers, who insist on a rigid separation of "facts" and "values" in the articulation of a systematic moral theory, as well as Marxian "scientific socialists" who equate morality with mystifying and oppressive ideology.

Although it is true that Marx does not have a systematic moral theory, his language and analyses function similarly to critical humanist moral theories that commend and disapprove of various phenomena and behavior, or that criticize and urge various types of action. Moreover, as I shall attempt to show in this and the next section, Marx's analyses and critiques are guided by conceptions of the good life and good society; thus moral ideals, as well as critical concepts and language, are operative in Marx's theoretical project.

The crux of the matter is simply that Marx did not separate fact and value, ethics and politics, scientific description and moral critique. Both dimensions are contained, I would argue, in all his major works. The interrelationship of disciplines and language that are separated out by later traditions defines Marxian dialectics and distinguishes the Marxian approach. Contemporary Marxists—basing themselves firmly within Marx's own procedure—argue that the separation of disciplines marks the fragmentation of the sciences and life under capitalism.[21]

Moreover, as Bertell Ollman points out, not only has "Marx integrated his remarks of approval and disapproval more closely into his system than have most other thinkers," but Marx also believes that "for those who share his outlook these 'facts' contain their own condemnation and a call to do something about them."[22] Since, therefore, Marx's descriptions are permeated with critical evaluative elements and contain in addition a summons to transform or

overthrow the conditions described, and since his critique is guided by normative ideals, there are at least aspects of his critique of capitalism—both his earlier and later critiques—that contain what I am calling a "critical humanist moral critique," and thus should be seen as an important part of Marx's critical dialectic. For instance, Marx begins developing his early critique of capitalism in the Paris *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* by stating, "We proceed from an actual economic fact."[23] The fact:

> The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. The devaluation of the world of men is in direct proportion to the increasing value of the world of things. Labour produces not only commodities: it produces itself and the worker as a commodity (*EPM*, pp. 271–272)

Marx's description of labor under capitalism contains analyses both of its analytical features and its crippling, dehumanizing effects. His analysis thus contains descriptive and evaluative/critical components. I do not want to exaggerate the role of the "humanist moral critique" in Marx's early works within his project as a whole. Note that there are at least six varieties of "critique" operative in Marx's writings that I explicate above. There is no question that what I call "ideology critique" and "scientific critique" played an ever larger role in Marx's later writings. Yet I do not accept the Althusserian view that there are radical breaks within the corpus of Marx's works.[24]

Instead, I see a unity and continuity in which, for example, the humanist moral critique that stands at the center of Marx's early writings is still operative in Marx's "scientific critique" that stands at the center of his later writings.[25] Marx's writings from the *Paris Manuscripts* through *Capital* contain theories of alienated labor, of the dehumanizing effects of the commodification of labor and its reduction to wage-slavery, and an analysis of the mechanics and structures of the exploitation of labor that constitutes the reality of wage-labor under capitalism beneath the appearance of the free "wage-contract."

Both Marx's theories of the alienation and exploitation of labor presuppose an ideal of non-alienated and non-exploitative labor which in turn are rooted in a theory of human nature and ideal of liberation in a classless society. These normative ideals, grounded in Marx's "new human science," provide a standpoint and criteria from which Marx can criticize labor, institutions, social practices, and values under capitalism while calling for their overthrow through "revolutionary practice."

Let us now examine in more detail Marx's moral critique of capitalism and the theory, values, and ideals that guide this project. Alienation under capitalism is grounded in, Marx argues, alienated labor.[26] Marx offers a historically specific analysis of "alienation" that Hegel and other German philosophers used as an ontological concept to signify divisions and separations within human nature and between human beings and their world. For Marx, it was the capitalist system of

production that produced alienation, and it could be eliminated in his view through revolutionary practice and the construction of a non-alienated socialist society. Beneath Marx's critique lay a philosophical humanism that maintained the primary importance of human beings, and which praised or condemned various modes of production, social practices, institutions, or values according to whether they enhanced or crippled and mutilated human life.

Such terms as "alienation" and "dehumanization," or "inhuman," are the basic categories of Marx's critical moral humanism which denounces anything that oppresses, debases, or exploits human beings. Underlying this moral critique of political absolutism and capitalism is a conception of human nature based on an analysis of basic human needs, potentialities, and forms and types of activity as fundamental to the human species. In Marx's materialist-naturalist concept of human nature, labor is the fundamental activity through which humans satisfy their needs and develop their potentialities.

Thus, if labor is alienated in that:

1 human beings cannot appropriate the products of their labor but must submit to wage-slavery and exploitation;
2 they do not control and direct their labor-activity, but instead experience it as forced, coerced, controlled activity;
3 their labor does not develop their human powers of creativity and capacity to engage in free, productive activity, but instead stunts and debases (i.e., dehumanizes) individuals; and
4 the social mode of labor is not mediated by relations of cooperation and solidarity, but is instead rooted in egotism, competition, and exploitation—if these conditions of alienated labor pertain (as Marx claims they do under capitalism)—then the system of labor is morally condemned as inhuman and harmful to human beings.[27]

In assessing the whole range of institutions, social practices, and values under capitalism, Marx develops a normative concept of human nature and judges the capitalist system according to whether it is in accord with or hostile to human nature. As already argued, human beings are primarily productive beings and develop, or fail to develop, their human potentialities and satisfy, or fail to satisfy, their needs through their labor activity.

For Marx, human beings are many-sided beings who possess a wealth of senses, needs, and abilities, which requires a wide range of activities to develop the full wealth of human potentialities. If the labor system forces one-sided, repetitive, and fragmented activity on individuals as one's primary life activity, then it is brutally restrictive of our fuller humanity. Human beings are also at once individual and social beings. Contrary to popular (mis)conceptions, Marx highly valued individuality and his early writings are full of critiques of the capitalist property and money system, as well as the capitalist division of labor, which inhibits and suppresses individual self-determination and development as well as social interaction and cooperation.

In fact, Marx argues that the value-system under capitalism is fundamentally at odds with our human nature and creates a distorted and mutilated individual. If capitalism requires long hours of hard work and sacrifice of free time to earn the money needed to buy commodities, then one is impoverished as a human being as one gets wealthier as an economic being. This inversion of values, in which the accumulation of wealth and possessions becomes primary and engaging in humanly fulfilling social and individual activities is devalued, is interconnected with Marx's powerful critiques of money, exchange, and commodity fetishism.

In the *Paris Manuscripts* Marx argues that "the positive transcendence of private property—i.e., the perceptible appropriation for and by man of the human essence and of human life … should not be conceived merely in the sense of immediate, one-sided enjoyment, merely in the sense of possessing, of having". To the "one-sided enjoyment" of "having" or "possessing," Marx counterposes a many-sided range of activities that will fulfill a wide range of human potentialities and will satisfy basic human and individual needs. Thus, his ideal is "the rich man profoundly endowed with all the senses."[28]

To the "sheer estrangement of all the senses" in someone possessed by the "sense of having," Marx calls for "the complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities." This means development of "each of our human relations to the world—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, observing, experiencing, wanting, acting, loving"—so that "all the organs of individual being" become human. Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man's essential being is the richness of the subjective human sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form—in short, senses capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of man) either cultivated or brought into being. Marx concludes in *EPM*:

> The personality-structure under capitalism, by contrast, is impoverished and one-sided: The sense caught up in crude practical need has only a restricted sense. For the starving man, it is not the human form of food that exists, but only its abstract existence as food. It could just as well be there in its crudest form, and it would be impossible to say wherein this feeding activity differs from that of animals. The care-burdened, poverty-stricken man has no sense for the finest play; the dealer in minerals sees only the commercial value but not the beauty and specific character of the mineral: he has no mineralogical sense.

Thus, the values of money, property, and possession central to capitalism are opposed by Marx to human and social values which will help liberate the senses and enhance human life. It is not accidental that Marx centered his critique of capitalism on the concept of value, which signified not only "exchange-value" and "use-value" in a narrow economic sense, but encompassed a set of meanings associated with moral and social values. From his early writings on the capitalist monetary, property, and labor system to his theory of commodity

fetishism in *Capital*, Marx uses religious and moral metaphors and terminology to describe how the accumulation of money and property and capitalist exchange-values become the "religion of everyday life" whose adherents are described as "fetishists" for whom commodities, money, and private property become the ultimate values.[29]

Underlying Marx's theory of human nature and liberation, and his moral critique of capitalism, is a belief that freedom characterizes the abilities of humans to control nature and their own lives and society so as to act in ways that are fulfilling and distinctively human (i.e., creativity, love, sociality, etc.).[30] Human freedom on this analysis refers to a capacity to act in creative and self-fulling ways that are in harmony with other human beings. Human freedom is thus realized, or blocked, in a specific society and historically constitutive social relations. The highest form of human freedom—and here we hear echoes of Rousseau—is to be found in mutually fulfilling and free association and interaction in a human community.[31] Marx writes:

> Whereas exchange under capitalism is primarily an economic activity geared toward maximization of profit and self-interest, in a human community, it would be equivalent to species-activity and species-spirit, the real, conscious, and true mode of existence of which is social activity and social enjoyment. Since human nature is the true community of men, by manifesting their social and human nature individuals create and produce the human community, the social entity, which is no abstract universal power opposed to the single individual, but is the essential nature of each individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth.[32]

Although Marx moves from a fervent affirmation of human freedom in his earlier writings to detailed analysis of restrictions on human freedom under capitalism in his later writings, he continued to assume that the main restrictions on human freedom derived from the capitalist mode of production, the elimination of which would enable socialism to produce a "realm of freedom" for the first time in history.[33]

Thus a human community would itself be an expression of human needs and powers, and would in turn fulfill and develop them. If society under capitalism fails to fulfill individual and social being, then it is condemned as inhuman, in opposition to our shared humanity. This emphasis on freedom and community helps illuminate the concept of contradiction which plays such a major role in Marxian dialectics. For Marx, contradictions between capital and labor, the forces and relations of production, social wealth and its private appropriation, etc. created a disharmonious, hostile, and irrational society.

By contrast, Marx, as I shall argue in the next section, envisaged instead a harmonious society based on respect for human freedom and dignity which embodies cooperative human relations and interaction that will make possible both individual and social freedom. "Contradictions" were thus those divisive, hostile, irrational forces which rend asunder the social order into competing,

antagonistic classes, social forces, and values which provided impediments to community and social harmony—as well as those forces producing conflict that could help motivate people to struggle for the overcoming of capitalism and creation of a fairer, more equable, and just socialist society.

"Class struggle" was thus another primary Marxian category that signified a state of social discord and warfare which generated social struggle and which a classless socialist society would set out to ameliorate. In the *Paris Manuscripts*, Marx describes contradictions between the morality of political economy and traditional ethics, and illuminates what has later been called "the cultural contradictions of capitalism."[34]

Whereas the capitalist "work ethic" analyzed by Max Weber and economist David Ricardo's capitalist ethic call for hard work, thrift, savings, and what Weber named "inner-worldly asceticism," the capitalist consumer ethic calls for luxury, indulgence, and gratification of desires through buying, consuming, and possessing thus article a major cultural contradiction within capitalism.[35] Whereas religion and traditional ethics preaches virtue, love, the Golden Rule, and a good conscience, political economy in Marx's view emphasizes manipulation for profit, exploitation, and single-mindedly pursuing one's own self-interest.

Thus, "each sphere applies to me a different and opposite yardstick—ethics one and political economy another."[36] This "cultural contradiction," I might note, was resolved by the class system in the early stages of capitalism with the capitalist class following the morality of political economy and the working class being urged to follow traditional values and the work ethic; but today, as Daniel Bell has argued, there are contradictory value-systems operative in contemporary capitalism between consumerism and work which set many people's consumerist and hedonist values in conflict with capitalist values of hard work, discipline, savings, and accumulation.

There are also, in Marx's view, contradictions between the values and ideologies of the liberal bourgeoisie and the actual nature and practice in bourgeois society. For Marx, a class society based on private ownership of the means of production was a system of bondage, frequently described by him as a system of wage-slavery and class-domination. In a class society, there are structural forms of inequality that contradict ideologies of equality and perpetuate centuries of divisions between the "haves" and the "have-nots." For Marx, genuine equality was therefore to become a reality in a future classless socialist society which would at last eliminate obstacles to each individual's possibilities of fulfilling their needs and developing their potentialities. The evils, in fact, of capitalism are most evident in the situation and life of the oppressed class, the proletariat.

As Marx and Engels put it in *The Holy Family*:

> To use Hegel's expression, this class is, within depravity, an indignation against this depravity, an indignation necessarily aroused in this class by the contradiction between its human nature and its life-situation, which is blatant, outright and all-embracing denial of that very nature.[37]

Although Marx criticizes the contradiction between capitalism and human nature and condemns capitalism as inherently dehumanizing, alienating, and exploitative, he is not judging capitalism from the vantage point of a universalistic, invariant concept of the human essence. Instead, Marx's concept of human nature is materialist, social, and historical. Human needs and potentialities are rooted in the human's natural constitution, its material embodiment in nature. Thus, certain human needs and potentialities are relatively invariant (i.e. food, shelter, sex, etc.), but the forms of gratification they take in different societies are quite variable. Marx constantly stresses the social nature of our human nature, arguing that individuals and social values are quite different in varying societies and historical periods.

In my reading, Marx therefore undercuts previous philosophical dualisms between essentialism and historicism. He does not affirm an unchanging human essence characterized in idealist terms as pure, unchanging, universal, and so on. Rather, he talks of human agency, of human abilities, needs, and potentialities. In some societies, certain human abilities are far more developed than in others, and some societies have created needs not present in others. Some societies restrict human agency, while in others certain human capabilities are less restricted and more developed.

Thus, Marx can consistently, I believe, call human beings "species beings" with defining characteristics, and can also reject concepts of the human essence in "Theses on Feuerbach," where he writes: "The human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality, it is the ensemble of social relations."[38] In Marx's view, it is the social relationships and mode of production that produces certain needs, develops potentialities, and makes possible or impossible activity which is in accord with, or enhances, human nature in each historical period.

Marx's concept of human nature thus can be taken as a normative concept describing at once the human situation in general and its constituents in a given society. If a society or individual fails to meet its potentialities, or fails to fulfil needs that could otherwise be satisfied, and instead oppresses, debases, or harms individuals, then Marx describes the society as "inhuman," "reactionary," and dehumanizing. In this historical optic, capitalism, the Enlightenment, the European political revolutions—indeed, the entirety of previous human history—created human and social potentialities which were either being realized or were being restricted in the contemporary period.

If the current capitalist (or state socialist) society became a fetter on human progress and development, as Marx believed capitalism had become, then it must be eliminated, precisely to realize potentialities which it had once helped generate but now blocked.[39] Parallel to Marx's undercutting dichotomies between essentialist and historicist theories of human nature is his undercutting absolutist and relativist moral theories. Marx is not a relativist since he is formulating standards of criticism which he uses to condemn certain institutions, social values, and practices, and commends other institutions, practices, and values. He is not an absolutist, however, for he knows that societies historically

evolve and that his analyses, criticisms, ideals, and projected alternatives may too change and develop.

Hence, the Marxian concept of human nature and its alienation is not measuring and condemning capitalism from the standpoint of a fixed, ahistorical, identical human essence which is then shown to be in contradiction with activity in capitalist society. Rather, Marx argues that human nature should be interpreted in terms of creative agency and social interaction embodied in social labor and productive activity. The critical thrust of the Marxian theory of human nature and alienation is that capitalism restricts free, many-sided, creative activity. Moreover, alienation cannot thoroughly be specified and evaluated until we examine Marx's theory of the overcoming of alienation in socialist society.

Marx's Conception of Socialism and Revolutionary Morality

In this section, I wish to show how Marx's conception of socialism was formulated in terms of his notion of the overcoming of alienation and exploitation in the construction of a society which would make possible the realization of human nature. First, the elimination of alienated labor would make possible the creation of a "free association of producers," where individuals would at once control their labor activity and be able to engage in a wealth of human activities—an ideal articulated in Marx's famous and sometimes ridiculed notion in *The German Ideology* that:

> in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity, but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.[40]

This passage expresses Marx's view that human beings are many-sided beings and should be able to engage in a wide range of activities according to their own individual abilities, needs, and preferences. This is also the background to the famous passage in the 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Programme* that:

> In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banner: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs![41]

Since private property is the foundation of alienated labor, the socialist society would eliminate private ownership of the means of production. This would in

turn eliminate class domination and class conflict, and would make possible the construction of a classless society with common ownership of the means of production, creating the preconditions for a socialist democracy and community. It is significant, however, that Marx polemicizes against what he calls "crude and thoughtless communism" and suggests a rejection of "state communism" as well. Marx rejects "crude" or ultra-egalitarian communism which would completely share all property, women, etc. because:

> it negates the personality of man in every sphere, [it] is but the logical expression of private property, which is this negation. General envy constituting itself as a power is the disguise in which greed re-establishes itself and satisfies itself, only in another way .... Crude communism is only the culmination of this envy and of this levelling-down. Such a form of communism would only perpetuate bourgeois egotism, greed, and the destruction of personality. Moreover, state communism, where the state owns property and controls production, likewise has not yet grasped the positive essence of private property and just as little the human nature of need, it remains captive to it and infected by it.[42]

This enigmatic passage is clarified by later passages in the *Paris Manuscripts* which state: "The meaning of private property—liberated from its estrangement—is the existence of essential objects for man, both as objects of enjoyment and as objects of activity" (p. 322). Marx thus argues that possession of "human and social property" is essential to develop human potentialities, and that socialism, far from eliminating all private ownership and the cultivation of individuality, must, on Marx's account, make available "essential objects of use and enjoyment" in order to fulfill individual and social needs. Marx's concept of non-alienated labor, as an expression of both individual and social needs, is articulated in a striking (and neglected) passage in his notebooks on James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*:

> Let us suppose that we had carried out production as human beings. Each of us would have in two ways affirmed himself and the other person. 1) In my production I would have objectified my individuality, its specific character, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual manifestation of my life during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be objective, visible to the senses and hence a power beyond all doubt. 2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the direct enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a human need by my work, that is, of having objectified man's essential nature, and of having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another man's essential nature. 3) I would have been for you the mediator between you and the species, and therefore would become recognized and felt by you yourself as a completion of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in

> your thought and your love. 4) In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly confirmed and realised my true nature, my human nature, my communal nature.[43]

A society that eliminated alienated labor and the capitalist system of production, property-system, and market-exchange system would eliminate the constituents of alienation and of class conflict, domination, and exploitation. Such a society would produce a socialist community that would be marked by harmony and the elimination of discord and alienation. As Marx puts it in the *Paris Manuscripts*, communism would be the fulfillment of human nature and the solution of all previous conflicts and alienation:

> Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being—a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development. 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.[44]

If Marx never fully works out in detail the political forms of socialism, it may be that part of the problem is that his concept of socialism is primarily a philosophical-moral conception of human emancipation; and Marx progressively came to believe that the workers would liberate themselves, as when he argued "the emancipation of the working class can only be the task of the workers themselves."[45] Throughout Marx's life, the emancipation of the working class required the construction of a socialist society which would be the product of the workers' own self-activity and cooperative social interaction.

Marx continued throughout his life developing a concept of socialism that articulates the socialist ideal of the good life and the good society, the articulation of which provides yardsticks to criticize the current capitalist society. Socialism is a human society in accord with the needs of potentialities of human nature. Marx's ideal of socialism is thus tied to an ideal of human nature and its liberation. Moral components permeate this conception and cannot be abstracted out and dismissed as the philosophical idealism (or ideology) of the early Marx.

Some of Marx's later descriptions of socialism characterize it as a society which will provide "a life worthy of a human being," and throughout his most "scientific" work, *Capital*, there are moral condemnations of capitalism that attack it in light of its dehumanizing effects on human beings, as I have shown

above. Thus, I would argue that a detailed textual analysis of Marx's writings, which could expand on the one I have provided here, would show that Marx's moral critique of capitalism and moral-humanistic conception of socialism permeates his works, although it is "de-centered" by the more explicitly "scientific" analysis of the capitalist mode of production in his later writings.

Further, I would argue that there is a moral-philosophical dimension to Marx's concept of the proletariat and revolutionary class—in addition to its empirical dimension—as the exploited industrial working class and its political role as the revolutionary class in the Marxian revolutionary scenario indicates. In the first essay in which he discusses the proletariat, Marx describes it as a class which is the "general representative" of society whose

> demands and rights are truly the rights and demands of society itself; a moment in which it is truly the social head and the social heart. Only in the name of the general rights of society can a particular class lay claim to general domination.[46]

The proletariat, in this conception, has "radical chains" which can only be broken and the working class liberated with the elimination of capitalism, which Marx repeatedly emphasized is the product of the working class itself.

In *Capital*, Chapter XIV on "Division of Labour and Manufacture," Marx fleshes out the critique of alienated labor with a wealth of historical and empirical detail. Throughout *Capital* there are condemnations of the dehumanizing effects of capitalism on human beings that presuppose—and in turn concretize—the theory of human nature, alienated labor, and moral critique of capitalism found in Marx's early writings. See, for example, the passage in *Capital*, Chapter XXV, where Marx writes:

> We saw in Part IV, when analyzing the production of relative surplus-value: within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productiveness of labor are brought about at the cost of the individual laborer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of, the producers; they mutilate the laborer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil; they estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labor-process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they distort the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labor-process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the juggernaut of capital.[47]

In addition to this sharp moral critique in the later Marx, see the passage from Marx's early, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law" (1843), where he describes the proletariat

> as a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no particular right because no particular wrong but wrong generally is perpetrated against it; which can no longer invoke a historical but only a human title; which does not stand in any one-sided antithesis to the consequences but in an all-round antithesis to the premises of the German state; a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society which, in a word, is the complete loss of man and hence can win itself only through the complete rewinning of man. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the proletariat.[48]

Throughout his writings, Marx saw communism and proletarian revolution as products of the very movement of history and rooted his revolutionary theory in the trajectory of history that he and Engels spent their lives attempting to delineate. Thus, Marx never provides a prescriptive moral theory that could articulate, or justify, absolute moral imperatives which would be binding on action. The closest expression of what might be called a "revolutionary morality" is found in the same essay on "Hegel's Philosophy of Right," where Marx articulates his concept of the proletariat:

> The criticism of religion ends with the teaching that man is the highest being for man, hence with the categoric imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being, relations which cannot be better described than by the exclamation of a Frenchman when it was planned to introduce a tax on dogs: Poor dogs! They want to treat you like human beings![49]

This passage, despite the Kantian term "categoric imperative," rather than articulating a Kantian prescriptive morality, is better read, I would suggest, as an expression of the critical socialist-humanist morality that takes the human being as the supreme being and human well-being in a non-alienated society as the measure of human value. Kantian prescriptive morality, as well as other dominant forms of bourgeois morality, Marx came to dismiss as "ideology." What, then, is the relationship between Marx's moral critique of capitalism and the Marxian critique of bourgeois morality?

The Marxian Concept of Ideology and Ideology Critique

It is not until Marx's and Engel's joint work, *The German Ideology*, that they actually use the term "ideology." Although their early critiques of religion, politics, and capitalism engage in what might be called "ideology critique," they do not introduce the term until their detailed explications and critiques of German idealism, utopian socialism, and various other contemporary

philosophical theories under the rubric "the German ideology." In this text, in a famous passage, Marx and Engels work their analysis of the social origins and functions of ideas into a theory of "ideology":

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently, also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relations grasped as ideas; hence of the relations which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.[50]

The theory of ideology in *The German Ideology* is contested inside and outside of Marxian theory and has been the subject of much discussion and criticism.[51] In this chapter, I have argued that Marx's theory of ideology provides a basis for attacking bourgeois morality and capitalist society as well as the ruling ideas, the dominant ideology. I shall suggest in conclusion how one might envisage and formulate a socialist morality that transcends the limitations of bourgeois ideology.

First, a moral theory and values are "ideology" if historically specific values and practices are claimed to be, or are perceived as, eternal, unchanging, and universal.[52] Instead, Marx would claim that all values are bound to certain forms of social existence and express certain social needs or "class interests." Bourgeois morality and ideology, Marx claims, serve the class interests of the bourgeoisie and the social needs of the preservation of capitalism. Since Marx has a whole series of critiques of capitalism, any morality that serves to stabilize, or preserve, the capitalist mode of production is rejected by him as part and parcel of the dominant ideology of a society which he wants to transform and eliminate.

Values, however, that express human needs (i.e. for adequate subsistence or non-alienated labor) and that contain a rejection of bourgeois needs (i.e. those called "radical needs" or "transcending needs" in contemporary literature) would be grounded both in the Marxian theory of human nature and in the socialist revolutionary project.[53] These values would help activate individuals to engage in political struggle, and thus would be part of the revolutionary project.

Likewise, in a socialist society, if the values express genuine human needs and the social needs of a democratic, humane, egalitarian social order, they would not be ideology in the sense just cited. If, however, one could argue that an allegedly socialist morality served the interests of party dictatorship and bureaucratic state domination, one could, on this model, similarly attack a dominant socialist morality.

Secondly, moral values are ideology if private interests masquerade as expression of public interests. If bourgeois values can be shown to be grounded in private interests and contradictory to public, or more general, interests, then

the bourgeois values can be denounced as "ideology." For instance, if the values of capital accumulation, competition, hierarchy in the labor process, oppressive authority, and private ownership of the means of production can be shown to serve the class interests of the capitalist class in dominating and oppressing the working class, then they can be described as part of an ideological superstructure, serving capitalist interests, which it is a task of revolutionary practice to criticize and replace.

If, on the other hand, values or moral theories can be demonstrated to serve generalizable and public interests in a given society, they are not simply to be denounced as ideology, but are to be seen as part of a genuinely socialist morality. For example, if values of cooperation, developing one's individual and social capabilities, and producing for human needs rather than profit can be shown to serve the interests of promoting the general welfare and of helping produce a socialist society that overcomes alienation and the other evils of capitalism, then such values can be said to transcend a class ideology and be humane moral and social values.

Thirdly, morality can be said to be ideology if the values oppress and inhibit, rather than fulfill and enhance, human needs and potentialities. This could arguably be the case with repressive sexual morality, with extreme egotism and narcissism, with patriarchy, with the capitalist work ethic, and other values, institutions, and ideologies that inhibit the development of human potentialities and block the satisfaction of human needs. A non-ideological human morality would then be one that furthered the development of human potentialities and the satisfaction of human needs.

Towards a Socialist Morality

Marx never systematically worked out this sort of critique of bourgeois morality, or articulated a humanistic socialist morality, and such a project remains on the theoretico-practical agenda today for contemporary Marxism. I should, however, note that "bourgeois-morality-as-ideology" and a "non-ideological" socialist morality cannot be as sharply separated as my analysis suggests. For "bourgeois morality" to have any efficacy it must serve, even in a distorted fashion, enough people's needs and interests so that it is accepted by large numbers of people. Thus, it must have some resonance with people's experience and produce effects that people perceive as beneficial. When moralities directly and overtly run counter to people's needs and interests and are contradicted by their own experience, then the morality must collapse.

Therefore, a hegemonic morality must serve some human needs and people's interests in order to maintain its existence. Consequently, if a bourgeois morality is obsolete and no longer serves social needs, it may be subverted and widely rejected. In this way, a social order produces competing value systems and "cultural contradictions." Likewise, a socialist morality may take on legitimating functions or serve special interests of domination in a repressive state socialist or communist society, and thus oppress people so that a socialist—or

any—morality that really served people's needs and promoted the general welfare would take the form of a normative ideal which must be exemplified in reality and shown to serve human needs and interests, and not to oppress individuals in the service of class domination or other forms of oppression.

Consequently, one could construct ideal types of "ideological capitalist morality" that exist in current forms of bourgeois-capitalist society against a "human and social morality" in the light of which existing moralities could be measured, criticized, and perhaps condemned. The truth of a socialist morality must ultimately be tested in practice and cannot, as Kantian or a priori approaches would have it, rest on a deductive argument or an inconvertible a priori foundation. Therefore, only a combination of socialist theory and practice can ultimately produce a social and human morality that would be demonstrably superior to bourgeois morality.

In any case, we see here how, on Marx's theory, it would be possible to carry out both a rigorous critique of dominant values and moral theories and how a moral theory might be developed and grounded, or specific values defended, along Marxian lines. If this procedure has merits, then the sharp distinction between Marxian "science" and "morality" collapses and both moral critiques and theories can be developed that are rooted in a cogent theoretical-practical Marxian project. I have suggested that the moral critique of capitalism and its value system is implicit, if not always explicitly thematized, in Marx's work; and, although he never fully spells out, or thematizes, his alternative moral theory, or system or socialist values, there are some indications in his writings of what might be taken as a model for developing a socialist morality.

How, then, can we characterize the relation between Marxism and morality in regard to traditional moral theories and contemporary discussions, and what are the contributions and possible shortcomings of a Marxian moral theory?

Concluding Remarks

It is difficult to characterize the Marxian morality and moral critique of capitalism in terms of traditional moral theory. There are elements of a "naturalistic" ethics in Marx, which derives values from human nature; but Marx in a sense transcends a strictly naturalistic approach by rooting his theory of human liberation and socialism in a historicist analysis of the higher potentialities of existing society and human nature that serve as goals summoning people to realize the highest possibilities in their society which have evolved differently in different historical eras.

Thus, in my view, Marx's theory of morality contains a mixture of materialist and idealist and naturalist and utopian conceptions. In this reading, Marx's ideal of human liberation and socialism is rooted in a theory of human nature, society, and history; and, I would argue, this approach undercuts previous philosophical dichotomies between essentialism and historicism and relativism and absolutism. As Eugene Kamenka's studies show, it is impossible to characterize Marx's theory in terms of contemporary moral theory, which

demands separation of fact and value and the "is" and the "ought," while demanding a comprehensive and rigorous moral theory.[54]

Thus, Marx does not "solve" the problems of traditional or contemporary moral theory; rather, he develops his moral critique and theory on an anthropological and practico-political and historical plane. That is, contrary to Social Democrats like Bernstein and Austro-Marxists who claim that Marx has a Kantian ethic, I would argue that Marx's theory is not prescriptive in the Kantian sense of prescribing moral behavior, or categorical imperatives ("oughts") that must be followed.

In other words, I would suggest that one cannot derive an "ought" from an "is" in Marx's theory so as to prescribe necessary courses of moral action and absolute moral values. In fact, I would argue that the "moral point of view," which underlies prescriptive conceptions of morality, is precisely a conception that Marx would reject as a proto-typical example of "bourgeois morality." The Marxian "moral point of view," by contrast, involves critique of capitalist relations and forms of alienation, oppression, and dehumanization contrasted to socialist relations and ideals or human self-realization, community, cooperation, and the construction of a democratic socialist society.

Thus, there are some things that a Marxian morality, as I have constructed it, cannot do. It provides no model of conflict resolution within existing society or way of allowing individuals to choose between specific courses of action (as do Kantian or utilitarian moralities) within bourgeois society. It provides no absolute moral imperatives grounded in a strictly moral theory. It ascribes no autonomy to the "moral point of view" and simply rejects the project of developing a separate and independent moral theory, divorced from theories of human nature, society, history, and politics.

Thus, as Kai Nielsen points out, there is an element of "decisionism" in Marx's theory.[55] Marx does, however, indicate what groups of oppressed people should do in certain situations in order to further their own interests, by showing sources of oppression and by recommending action to overcome it (i.e. class struggle and revolution). Marx does wish to articulate a revolutionary class-consciousness and to promote it in those to whom the theory is addressed. He wishes to merge his theory with a revolutionary political practice and to encourage people to engage in this practice by showing them that it is in their own interests to do so; thus, there is a strong enlightenment rationalistic and democratic-emancipatory strain in Marx's theory.

Marx incites people to action by the variety of "critiques" of existing capitalist societies that I listed at the beginning of this chapter, including the "moral critique" and "ideology critique" which I focused on. In his later writings, "scientific critique" and "political critique" became dominant elements of Marx's theory and he often argues that the course of history is proceeding toward the demise of capitalism and the triumph of socialism; and thus his scientific and moral critique attempts to help provide a historical foundation to his critique of capitalism and advocacy of socialism.

Orthodox Marxists thus often talk of "historical tasks" and "duties" which are rooted in the Marxian theory of history; but, as I have argued, these "tasks"

or "duties" do not have a prescriptive grounding in a strictly Kantian sense. Consequently, a commitment to socialism, or various courses of revolutionary action, could derive from agreement with Marx's various critiques of capitalism, his theory of socialism and liberation, or his theory of history and society. Any of these elements might lead one to commit oneself to socialism and revolutionary action; but even the entirety of Marx's theoretical-practical project—combined with the entirety of later Marxist writings and arguments—would not provide a categorical moral imperative to overthrow capitalism, or the moral justification, which some moral theories claim to provide, that one's course of action was without question morally justified.

The advantage of Marx's procedure is that he avoids the ideological traps and mystifications of bourgeois morality as well as the morally trivial theoretical concepts in some contemporary meta-ethics. Although I believe that it is an illusion to claim that Marxism provides a "scientific morality" in some elevated concept of science as providing the highest form of truth, Marx's moral critique and conception of socialism and liberation are grounded in a theoretical analysis which has many merits and which can foster useful debate on a variety of issues, social, moral, and political and progressive transformative political activity in the interests of producing a more progressive and humanistic society and higher and more fully realized human beings.

Although there are many other merits in Marx's approach that I do not have the space to develop here, I wish to conclude with a discussion of some of the shortcomings and limitations of his approach to moral thematics and moral critique. It may be that Marx suffered from excessive Enlightenment optimism, believing that if people could be shown their own interests they would act on them and that, for instance, the working class would militate for socialism if they were familiar with Marx's concept of capitalism, exploitation, and alienated labor, or simply became fed up with oppressive conditions and consequently rebelled against them. Further, Marx believed that, if he could show that history was progressing in a certain direction (i.e. toward socialism), then people would assume certain historical tasks to "shorten the birth-pangs" of the new society, to use one of Marx's favorite metaphors.

However, basing moral or political action on the "laws" or "course" of history is more problematic and dangerous than many Marxists have admitted. How does one know when to flow with or oppose the course of history? In an age of evolutionary optimism when it was assumed that history must progress from lower to higher stages—and the socialist movement was growing stronger and more numerous everyday—this issue might not have imposed acute difficulties on the Marxist movement which might well have believed it was indeed on the winning side of history. Yet after the emergence of fascism, the failure of many socialist revolutions, and frequent counterrevolutions, such historical optimism is extremely dubious.

The notion of "laws of history" as the foundation for moral and political action—characteristic of "scientific socialism"—provides an especially dangerous foundation for a revolutionary morality. It tends toward elitism and

support for party-dictatorship in which the working class is ordered to submit to the directives of those who allegedly know the laws of history (i.e. the party leadership). Such "scientism" provides ideological support for party-dictatorship and bureaucratic communism, and thus should be opposed by those who cherish Marx's more democratic ideals of liberation and socialism.

In conclusion, I would suggest that it may be desirable to more fully develop a Marxian ethics to overcome the problems alluded to in this chapter. Such a project could follow the lines of the moral critique of capitalism and conceptions of socialism and revolution suggested throughout this book, and should also sharply distinguish its procedure and theory from capitalist-bourgeois morality, along the lines suggested in the last section. This project could include a more careful examination and criticism of "bourgeois morality," or dominant capitalist moralities of the contemporary era promoted by autocrats, than is usually found in Marxian writings. A critical humanistic Marxist morality would also involve careful articulation and defense of the values and morality in the light of which capitalism is being condemned and which socialist values are being advocated. Such a project would not be irrelevant to socialist revolutionary politics or the construction of socialism; and it could be argued that the past failure in Marxian revolutionary movements and "existing socialist societies" indicate that constructive work in the areas of Marxian theories of morality, justice, and socialism may well be useful for future political struggles.

The forms that such work would take would be, in part, shaped by the requirements of revolutionary struggle in the present age and in whatever socio-historical situation one is developing such a critical moral humanistic and democratic critique and theory of revolutionary practice. Yet within Marxism, morality and political practice is driven in large part by the vision of democratic socialism developed by Marx's own conception and its relevance to one's contemporary social situation. Hence, a Marxian moral theory relevant to contemporary concerns and challenges remains to be fully developed and is a worthy project for our era.

Notes

1 The term "scientific socialism" is itself an ideological construction used by both Second and Third International Marxism and orthodox Marxists to this day to describe Marxism as a science beyond ideology. A critical Marxism developed in the 1920s by thinkers such as Korsch, Lukács, Gramsci, and the Frankfurt School is more Hegelian, dialectical, and historical compared to the more dogmatic and rigid "scientific socialism." Hence, in this chapter, I am attempting to sketch out a "critical Marxian humanism," as the chapter's subtitle indicates.

2 On the distinctions between Marxism as "science" and as "critique," see Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies within the Development of Theory* (New York: Seabury, 1980), and my review thereof in Douglas Kellner, "Remarks on Alvin Gouldner's *The Two Marxisms*," *Theory and Society* 10, no. 2 (1981), pp. 265–277.

3 See Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (New York: International Publishers, 1939); Karl Kautsky, *Ethics and the Materialist Theory of History* (Chicago: Kerr, 1918); and Leon Trotsky, *Their Morals and Ours* (New York: Pathfinder, 1969).

4 See Edward Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism* (New York: Schocken, 1961) and the selection of material in *Austro-Marxism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), translated and edited by Tom Bottomore and Patrick Goode, especially, Otto Bauer, "Marxism and Ethics" (pp. 78–84).
5 On Western Marxism, see Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (New York and London: Verso, 1976); New Left Review, ed., *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader* (London: Verso, 1983); and Kevin B. Anderson, *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: A Critical Study* (London: Haymarket, 2023). On "critical Marxism" vs. "scientific socialism," see Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies within the Development of Theory* (New York: Seabury, 1980).
6 Marx's theory of human nature, alienation, and liberation in a socialist revolution was discussed in Chapter 4.
7 Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies within the Development of Theory* (New York: Seabury, 1980), and Douglas Kellner and Robert C. Solomon, "Recent Literature on Hegel and Marx," in *Modern Trends in Philosophy*, ed. Asa Kasher and Shalom Lappin (Tel-Aviv: Yachdav, 1983, and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1984).
8 On Marxian dialectics and the interrelation between fact and value in the Marxian theory, see Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).
9 See Karl Marx, "Letters from the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_05.htm (accessed January 2, 2025).
10 A detailed study of the moral components in Marx's early writings is found in Eugene Kamenka, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism* (New York: Praeger, 1962). Although Kamenka's textual studies are useful, I basically disagree with his method of analysis, interpretation of the role of the moral dimension of Marxism, and his conception of the tasks of moral theory, as the following pages should make clear.
11 See, for example, Marx's criticism of Hegel's theory of the state in his commentary "Contributions to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm (accessed January 2, 2025), and the discussion of this method of critique in Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1968). On Feuerbach's transformative critique, see Marx Wartofsky, *Feuerbach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) and Andrew Kliman, "Transforming Reality, Not Only Thought: Marx's Critique of Hegel's Dialectic *and* of Feuerbach's Materialism," Marxist-Humanist Initiative (MHI), June 28, 2023 at https://marxisthumanistinitiative.org/philosophy-organization/transforming-reality-not-only-thought-marxs-critique-of-hegels-dialectic-and-of-feuerbachs-materialism.html (accessed December 22, 2024).
12 See Karl Marx, "Letters from the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher of 1843*," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09.htm (accessed January 2, 2025).
13 See Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), where he writes: "Morality is not necessarily and not primarily ideological. In the fact of an amoral society, it becomes a political weapon, an effective force which drives people to burn their draft cards, to ridicule national leaders, to demonstrate in the streets, and to unfold signs saying, 'Thou shall not kill,' in the nation's churches" (p. 8). Marcuse's interpretation of Marxism, which has influenced formulations in this chapter, is discussed in Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press and Macmillan, 1984).
14 Karl Marx, "Letters from the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher of 1843*," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09.htm (accessed January 2, 2025). Subsequent quotations with page numbers in parentheses are from this source.

15 In Friedrich Hegel's, *Phenomenology of Mind* (New York: Harper and Row 1967), there is a section titled "Self-Contained Individuals Associated as a Community of Animals," which mercilessly dissects the socio-political world of bourgeois society (pp. 413ff), and in this chapter I will cite Hegel in this edition.
16 See Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (New York: Vintage, 1970), pp. 35f and 223f.
17 Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/ (accessed January 2, 2025).
18 Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/ (accessed January 2, 2025).
19 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm (accessed January 2, 2025), p. 1.
20 See Karl Marx, "James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*," at https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/mill-james/index.htm (accessed January 2, 2025).
21 This is the position of the Frankfurt School critical theory of society; see my discussion in Douglas Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity* (Cambridge and Baltimore, MD: Polity and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
22 Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 49.
23 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm (accessed January 2, 2025). Subsequent quotations from *EPM* are from this source.
24 See Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (New York: Vintage 1970).
25 For an examination of *Capital* and Marx's later economic writings which shows how the problematic of alienation and theories of human nature, dialectics, etc. are still operative, see Raya Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom: From 1776 Until Today* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000 [1958]) and Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971). On Marx's concept of labor and alienation, see Istvan Meszaros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (London: Merlin, 1970), and Herbert Marcuse, "On the Philosophical Concept of Labor in Economics," *Telos* 16 (Summer 1973), pp. 9–37, and my discussion of the article and issues in Douglas Kellner, "Introduction to Marcuse's 'On the Philosophical Foundation of the Concept of Labor,'" *Telos* 16 (Summer 1973), pp. 2–8.
26 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm (accessed January 2, 2025), pp. 272ff.
27 See Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm (accessed January 2, 2025).
28 See Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm (accessed January 2, 2025).
29 See the sources in note 24 above, as well as Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (London: Macmillan, 1973) and Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968).
30 Marx's early writings are full of praises of freedom, which is one of the central values shared by Marx and the liberal tradition. See his essays on freedom of the press, divorce laws, and other topics in his journalistic articles in Karl Marx, "On Freedom of the Press Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly Debates on Freedom of the Press and Publication of the Proceedings of the Assembly of the Estates" written and published May 1842, in *Rheinische Zeitung*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_On_freedom_of_the_Press.pdf (accessed January 2, 2025). This is discussed in Eugene Kamenka, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism* (New York: Praeger, 1962). Marx, unlike many previous

thinkers, grounds restrictions on human freedom and well-being in the capitalist mode of production and calls for the elimination of those restrictions on human freedom in a freer, in principle, socialist society.

31 On free association and community in Marx, see Group of International Communists, "Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution" (1930) at https://www.marxists.org/subject/left-wing/gik/1930/01.htm (accessed December 2, 2024).

32 See Karl Marx, "James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*," at https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/mill-james/index.htm (accessed January 2, 2025). For another discussion of the connection between human nature and community, see Karl Marx, "Critical Notes on the Article: 'The King of Prussia and Social Reform. By a Prussian,'" *Vorwarts!* 63 (August 7, 1844) at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/08/07.htm (accessed January 2, 2025).

33 Karl Marx, "The Trinity Formula," in *Capital*, Vol. 3, Chap. 48, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/hist-mat/capital/vol3-ch48.htm (accessed January 2, 2025).

34 See Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm (accessed January 2, 2025) and Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

35 Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books 1976).

36 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm (accessed January 2, 2025).

37 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Criticism. Against Bruno Bauer and Company,* at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/holy-family/index.htm (accessed January 2, 2025).

38 Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm (accessed January 2, 2025). See also Alfred Schmidt, *Marx's Concept of Nature* (London: New Left Books, 1971).

39 See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, for a dramatic presentation of this point at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf (accessed January 2, 2025).

40 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets*. at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ (accessed January 2, 2025).

41 Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ (accessed December 2, 2024).

42 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm (accessed January 2, 2025), p. 296.

43 Karl Marx, "James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*," at https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/economics/mill-james/index.htm (accessed January 2, 2025).

44 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/08/07.htm (accessed January 2, 2025).

45 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Strategy and Tactics of the Class Struggle" (1879), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1879/09/17.htm (accessed December 2, 2024).

46 Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Critique_of_Hegels_Philosophy_of_Right.pdf (accessed January 2, 2025).

47 Cited from Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 430.

48 Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Critique_of_Hegels_Philosophy_of_Right.pdf (accessed January 2, 2025).
49 Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Critique_of_Hegels_Philosophy_of_Right.pdf (accessed January 2, 2025).
50 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ (accessed January 2, 2025). On the historical background to the Marxian concept of ideology, its formulation by Marx and Engels, and its development in later Marxian theorists, see Douglas Kellner, "Ideology, Marxism, and Advanced Capitalism," *Socialist Review* 42 (1978), pp. 37–66. For an excellent representation of the life and activity of Marx and Engels at the time of writing the unpublished *German Ideology*, which also features the characters that they were criticizing as they developed their own critiques of capitalism and concept of socialism, see the film by Raoul Peck, *The Young Karl Marx* (2017), details of which can be found online.
51 See, for example, the commentary by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).
52 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to Its Various Prophets*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ (accessed January 2, 2025).
53 On "radical needs," see Agnes Heller, *The Theory of Needs in Marx* (London: Allison and Busby, 1976), and on "transcending needs," see Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon, 1971), p. 115.
54 Eugene Kamenka, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism* (New York: Praeger, 1962) and Eugene Kamenka, *Marxism and Ethics* (London: Macmillan, 1969).
55 See Kai Nielsen, "Marxism, Ideology, and Moral Philosophy," *Social Theory and Practice* 6, no. 1 (1980), pp. 53–68, p. 62. Remarks throughout this section are addressed to issues that Nielsen raises in this paper.

6 Marxism, Colonialism, and Modernity
Toward an Intersectional Marxism

Although thinkers like Machiavelli, Vico, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Condorcet, Adam Smith, Comte, Saint-Simon, and Hegel all distinguished between modern and premodern times, it was Karl Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels who produced the first systematic social theory of modernity, thus initiating the mode of thought associated with classical social theory. Although previous theorists developed distinctions between modern and ancient societies, sketched historical stages that described the transition to a new modern society, and delineated some of its key distinguishing features, it was Marx and Engels who provided the first rigorous and comprehensive historical analysis of the rupture that produced modernity and the first systematic analysis of the distinctive structures, processes, conflicts, and potentials for the progressive transformation of modern societies.[1]

Combining detailed historical and empirical analysis of capitalist social formations, systematic theoretical conceptualization, radical social critique, and a call for fundamental social transformation, Marx and Engels formulated with particular analytical rigor and historical grounding the new forms of social differentiation, conflict, and fragmentation, as well as the modes of social cooperation and association produced by capitalist modernity.

Moreover, it was Marx and Engels who initiated a distinctive emancipatory tradition in the critique of political economy and social theory that critically addressed the structures of modern society from a standpoint of its higher historical possibilities and developmental tendencies.[2] In the Marxian vision, the destructive and oppressive features of modernity would be overcome in a superior stage of societal development that would fully realize the potentials of modernity. Thus, Enlightenment thinkers and positivist-technocratic social theorists like Comte and Saint-Simon embraced modernity and postulated a utopian future ruled by a technocratic elite who would solve all social problems and promote social progress. The Marxian theory addressed the forms of societal crisis and oppression that modernity produced, but saw the solution to its problems and its potentials for more progressive societal development to be imminent features of modern societies, rather than simply a normative ideal to be imposed from without.

In the Marxian theory, the motor of modernity was the capitalist mode of production, with economic development shaping the forms of social, political,

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and cultural life, and consequently generating a new modern social formation. For classical Marxism, the capitalist mode of production thus produced an entirely new modern world which decisively broke with the feudal world. For the Marxian theory, the concept of modernity is thus constituted by the theory of capitalism as the fate of the new modern world, as its motor and creator.

Modern capitalist societies for Marx and Engels were torn by inequalities, class conflicts, and crisis tendencies that produced an inherently unstable modern social order riven with conflict and subject to crisis and overthrow. Following the hopes of the Enlightenment for a higher stage of civilization, the Marxian theory held that class conflicts between the ruling bourgeois class and the oppressed proletariat would be resolved through victories of the working class which would create an egalitarian, just, and democratic social order that would realize the ideals of the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the emergent socialist traditions, driving modernity to a higher stage of civilization.

Marxism thus very much shared the optimistic Enlightenment belief that modern society was on a trajectory of historical progress and that humanity was bound to overcome its limitations and solve its problems en route to a higher stage of human history. By addressing capitalism in its most advanced setting of British society, Marx and Engels were ideally situated to describe the inner dynamics of the new modern order and to be prescient about changes that came later in other nations. They experienced first-hand the second industrial revolution (with its mechanization, big industry, intensified incorporation of science and technology into the labor process, intensified imperialist competition, and modern state)—a revolution which began in England and quickly spread to the continent and the new world of the Americas. Marx and Engels also experienced the rise of the working-class movement that increasingly called for sweeping political and egalitarian social reconstruction, and themselves became leaders of the movement.

Marxian theory thus bears distinctly modern hopes for progress, freedom, democracy, and socio-economic and individual development. In this chapter, I argue that both the strengths and limitations of classical Marxism are connected with its extremely ambitious hopes concerning the progressive features of the modern era, which Marx and Engels believed would terminate in creation of a democratic and socialist society that would realize the promises of modernity for democracy, economic and technological progress, and a higher form of socialist society. My argument is that the Marxian analysis of the contrast between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies provides the basis of the Marxian concept of modernity, and that the Marxian theory presents the transition from capitalism to socialism as a process taking place within a trajectory of modernity that would fully develop its potential and produce a higher stage of civilization.

In this view, the mode of historical, systematic analysis of modern capitalist societies developed by Marx and Engels provides the model for critical social theory and radical politics, grounding society in political economy, economic progress, and radical democracy. Further, from this perspective, the enduring contributions of the Marxian theory consist in its mode of historical and social

analysis and its insights into the structures, conflicts, and functions of capitalist societies, culture, and state and the revolutionary transformation into socialist societies during the modern era.

My focus will be on those ideas that articulate the historical rupture that produced modernity, the specific analysis of modern societies as differentiated from premodern social formations, and the appraisals of the developmental features of modernity and prognosis of its future prospects. This perspective on the Marxian theory of modernity sheds new light on the contributions and limitations of classical Marxism and provides a critical reading of its insights and blindspots.

From the Young Hegelians to Marxism

For the Young Hegelians, the key to individual and social emancipation was liberation from dogmatic forms of religion; thus Marx and the progressive students of his generation saw modern thought and the modern age as quintessentially secular.[3] They were deeply influenced by the biblical criticism of David Strauss (2010 [1835]) and the anthropological critique of religion developed by Ludwig Feuerbach (1957 [1841]). Strauss put in question the divinity of the Gospels by detailed textual analysis of the contradictions in the life of Jesus in the various Gospels. Marx's close friend Bruno Bauer challenged the authenticity of the Gospels, claiming that the biblical stories were sheer myth. Feuerbach disclosed the anthropological origins of religion in the need to project idealized features of human beings onto a godhead who was worshipped and submitted to. His trenchant critique reduced theology to philosophical anthropology and claimed that humans worshipped their alienated human powers in religious devotion, fetishizing human powers as divine.

The early Marx followed the Young Hegelians in producing a critique of religion and the state. The American and French revolutions spurred new theories of radical democracy, which inspired Marx and his cohorts to criticize the old autocratic order that still dominated most of Europe. These "bourgeois" revolutions produced discourses that labeled "forms of inequality as illegitimate and anti-natural," and thus called attention to historically produced "forms of oppression."[4] Relations of subordination such as serf/lord or capital/labor were presented as relations of oppression, and Marx developed theories attacking class domination, describing the conditions under which it emerged, and outlining programs for its elimination.

Association with the Young Hegelian philosophical radicals in Berlin meant that Marx could not attain a teaching position in Germany; and so with philosophy Ph.D. in hand, he travelled to Cologne in 1842 and got a job with a newspaper, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, soon after becoming its editor at the age of 24. Young Marx discovered the importance of economic conditions and the impact of capitalism in his work with the newspaper, writing articles on freedom of trade debates, bourgeois agitation for extended railways, reduction of taxes, and common toll and custom duties (MECW 1: 224ff). He also discovered the plight of the poor, covering the trial of Mosel Valley peasants

accused of stealing wood from what used to be common land, but which was now declared to be private property.[5] In addition, Marx championed Enlightenment ideas by attacking new Prussian censorship regulations and restrictions on divorce law, publishing some of the most striking articles ever penned on behalf of freedom of the press (MECW 1: 109ff and 132ff).

Yet until his move to Paris in 1843, Marx lived in a relatively provincial and premodern Germany and was not really exposed first-hand to the emerging industrial-capitalist society or to the working-class movement. In Paris, Marx began studying the French Revolution and then the classics of bourgeois political economy. He intended to support himself as co-editor of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (*German-French Yearbook*), which was terminated after one issue, seized by police on the German border. Marx's article declaring "war on Germany" and support of proletarian revolution (MECW 3: 175ff) caused him to lose his German citizenship rights, making him an exile—first in France and later in Belgium and England, where he would spend most of the rest of his life until his death in 1883.[6]

The *Jahrbücher* included some important early essays of Marx and a "Critique of Political Economy" by Friedrich Engels, who was to become Marx's collaborator and life-long friend.[7] As described in Chapter 3, Engels was born in the northern German industrial city of Barmen in 1820. His father was a factory owner and Engels went to work in the family firm at 17. After several years of clerical labor in Barmen and Bremen, Engels spent a year in military service in Berlin in 1841–1842, where he became involved with the Young Hegelians. Engels was then sent to England in 1842 to learn the production business in his father's factory, which was situated in Manchester, the industrial heart of the most advanced capitalist society of the day. As we saw in Chapter 3, in addition to studying industrial production, Engels explored the new working-class life in England, compiling material for his book *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, published the following year (MECW 4: 295ff). During his early years in Manchester, Engels wrote:

> it was forcibly brought to my notice that economic factors, hitherto ignored or at least underestimated by historians, play a decisive role in the development of the modern world. I learnt that economic factors were the basic cause of the clash between different classes in society. And I realised that in a highly industrialized country like England the clash of social classes lay at the very root of the rivalry between parties and was of fundamental significance in tracing the course of modern political history. (cited in McLellan 1973, p. 22)

To some extent Engels preceded Marx in his analysis of the development of modern societies and their rupture from traditional societies. Some of Engels' first publications (collected in MECW 2) concern the new industrial society emerging in Germany and what he saw as modern forms of industry, urbanization, architecture, culture, and thought. In a series of "Letters From

Wuppertal," published in a German newspaper in 1839, Engels described the novel industrial conditions in the Wuppertal Valley, deploring the horrific working and living conditions of the working class, which he depicts as a tragic effect of modern industrial development (MECW 2: 10ff).[8] In the latter part of his "Letters," and in many other newspaper articles written over the next few years, Engels describes in great detail "modern" literature, culture, and thought, equating "modern" tendencies with Enlightenment criticism and the contemporary literature of the "Young Germany" movement, which he champions against reactionary Pietistic thought and backward German literature. In the voluminous newspapers articles and sketches of the early Engels he reveals himself to be, like Marx, a great partisan of modernity, an avatar of modern ideas, as well as a sharp critic of the impact of modern conditions on the working class.

Marx began seriously studying economics in Paris in 1843–1844, and after an encounter with Engels in Paris in 1844 he intensified his economic studies. Convinced that the rise of capitalism was the key to modern society and history, Marx sketched out his analysis of capitalism in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which presented his initial perspectives on modern societies in terms of a sketch of the alienation of labor under capitalism and its projected emancipation under socialism (MECW 3: 231ff).[9] Marx's Paris manuscripts revealed that he had intensely studied classical political economy, French theories of revolution and socialism, and German philosophy—the three key components of what would emerge as the distinctive Marxian synthesis of modern theory that provided the basis for the Marxian perspectives on modernity.

Marx's early theoretical optic viewed modern society as a product of industrial capitalism; criticized alienation, oppression, and exploitation from the standpoint of the ideals of the Enlightenment and German philosophy; and called for revolution to realize the positive potential of modernity while eliminating its negative features. Marx acknowledged Engels' "Contributions to a Critique of Political Economy" in the Preface to his *Manuscripts of 1844*, and proceeded to develop his own analysis of the class structure of capitalist society, providing an early vision of modernity as a catastrophe for the working class (MECW 3: 231ff). For Marx, capitalism transformed the worker into a commodity who was forced to sell his or her labor power. The worker's labor power thus belonged to the capitalist and its productive activity was forced, coercive, and unfree. Since the product of the labor belonged to the capitalist, the worker could not get any satisfaction that its labor activity produced something of itself for others, and thus felt alienated from his or her product, labor activity, other workers, and one's own human needs and potentialities.

The early Marx represents a synthesis of Hegel and Enlightenment critical rationalism, influenced by the radical democratic wing of the French Revolution. Thus, the early Marx basically interprets modernity, the rise of a modern social order, in terms of the categories of the Enlightenment and Hegel, critically appropriated to serve the interests of radical democratic transformation. Within a few years, however, Marx and Engels would jointly develop a much more detailed conception of a differentiated modern society rooted in the

capitalist mode of production. The overwhelming bulk of Marx's work, indeed, would soon focus on analyzing the structure of capitalist societies and their class conflicts, as well as their potential for democratization and improvement.

While working on his economic studies, Marx was expelled from Paris in 1845 for publishing in a radical émigré newspaper, and moved to Brussels, where he began his collaboration with Engels. Together they travelled to England to observe the new factories and industrial living and working conditions. Upon their return, they began developing their sketch of the genesis of the modern world and historical-materialist perspectives in *The German Ideology* (MECW 5), written in 1845–1846 but never published in their lifetime. The text is important for it articulates some of their first formulations of their historical materialism and analysis of the differentiated structure of modern societies, as well as theorizing the new modes of association and cooperation. In 1845 Marx and Engels also published *The Holy Family* (MECW 4), a joint attack on Bruno Bauer and their former Young Hegelian associates, who they now considered pseudo-radical and idealist. The following year Marx published an attack on the economics of Proudhon in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, declaring the French writer to be trapped in the idealist verbiage of Hegel, thus mystifying the concrete economic phenomena that Marx and Engels were attempting to analyze (MECW 6: 105ff).

Marx and Engels presented their vision of history from this period in "The Communist Manifesto," sketching in dramatic narrative form their view of the origins and trajectory of modernity, and anticipating the sequence of revolutions that broke out throughout Europe shortly after its publication in early 1848 (MECW 6: 477ff). As mentioned earlier, Marx and Engels travelled from Brussels to Paris and then to Germany, where the turbulent situation had gained Marx an amnesty. Marx returned to Cologne, where he gathered support for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*.

Marx and Engels sided with the bourgeois democrats who were fighting the old German feudal powers for a modern parliamentary system in the 1848 revolutions. They envisaged at the time a two-stage theory of revolution in which the workers would initially ally themselves with the bourgeoisie to fight for constitutional government and then for a socialist republic. The counter-revolution prevailed, however, Marx's newspaper was shut down, and he was once again forced into exile, where he published his key works on economics, politics, and history that I discussed in Chapter 2 and will engage in more detail in the following chapters.

Historical Stages, Rupture, and the Genesis of the Modern

In the remainder of this chapter, I shall present Marx and Engel's analyses of modernity, of the transition from feudal to capitalist society, and their envisaged transformation from capitalism to socialism and communism. There are several differing analyses of the transition from the premodern and feudal society to modern capitalist societies in the many Marxian texts dedicated to tracing out the origins, genesis, and trajectory of the modern world. Marx and

Engels continually traced this trajectory and developed a wide range of analytic concepts and analyses to describe the rupture between modern and premodern societies, the structure of modern capitalist societies, and the transition to socialism. These different, sometimes conflicting, models do not, in my view, constitute a deficiency of the Marxian theory, but rather a richness that enables one to employ and reconstruct different Marxian concepts, analyses, and theories depending on one's projects and goals. It also calls attention to the deeply historical nature of the Marxian theory that responds to important historical changes with revision and reconstruction of Marxian theory and politics.

One could therefore interpret Marxism in terms of the model of classical social theory in which increasing social differentiation and complexity are the defining features of modern societies, and thus define Marxism in terms of social relations—grounded in political economy and the mode of production. Or one could produce an economistic reading that privileges economic forces and relations, in which Marx traces the rupture between capitalist and precapitalist societies and defines modern societies in terms of the features of class division and struggle in capitalism and resolution of the class conflicts and struggles in socialism. This economic theory of society would claim that the economic base provides the infrastructure for societal superstructures, and thus provides the skeleton and foundation for modern societies.

Yet there are widely different accounts of the Marxian economic theory of society as well, with some arguing that productive forces are the key analytical concept in Marx (Cohen 2000 [1978]; Edwards and Leiter 2025),[10] while others argue for the primacy of economic relations of production (Ollman 1971; Colletti 1973 and 1985) or a dialectic of forces and relations of production (Sayers 1985). I would argue that capitalism is indeed the motor of modernity in the Marxian theory, that capitalist social relations structure modern society, and that Marx does advocate a primacy of the economic, but that one needs to conceptualize the dialectical interaction and interpenetration of the social, the economic, and the political in the Marxian theory, as well as the reciprocal interaction of the forces and relations of production. Thus, on this reading, Marx can be considered the founder of a critical social theory of modernity, grounded in a theory of capitalism, class struggles, and stages of history from precapitalist to capitalist societies to a transition to socialism. Accordingly, I will defend Marxism against charges of economic determinism or reductionism, but argue that the Marxian analysis of modern society is grounded in political economy and the vicissitudes of history.

Throughout their writings, Marx and Engels presented their analysis of modernity in terms of a theory of historical stages leading from primitive to modern societies and what Max Weber would later call "ideal types" distinguishing between precapitalist and capitalist societies. They therefore inaugurated a mode of social theory grounded in a historical account of the rupture between modern and premodern societies. The Marxian theory thus contextualizes its theory of modernity in an analysis of stages of history, including a sketch of the transition from feudalism to manufacture to the industrial

system that would characterize mature capitalism and would make possible a modern society that constituted a definite rupture with precapitalist and premodern societies—a transition we shall engage in the next section.

From Precapitalist to Capitalist Societies

In his famous explication of precapitalist societies in the *Grundrisse*, [11] Marx claimed that there was an "original unity between a particular form of community (clan) and the corresponding property in nature" within earlier modes of production.[12] In precapitalist societies there was a unity between human beings, nature, property, community, and their mode of production. Humans themselves appeared "originally as a *species-being* [*Gattungswesen*], *clan being, herd animal*." They "become individuals only through the process of history .... Exchange itself is a chief means of this individuation [*Vereinzelung*]. It makes the herd-like existence superfluous and dissolves it."[13]

The transition from precapitalist to capitalist societies is thus marked by a process of individuation and the separation of individuals from natural, tribal, and communal bonds. Marx sketches the process of the *dissolution* of relations to the earth, to the original form of communal property, and to the instruments and products of labor, as well as the dissolution of communal social relations, in the transition to capitalist societies.

Under feudalism, peasant producers typically work for a landlord, and are thus indentured servants.[14] Capitalism, by contrast, produces the "free laborer" who must sell himself on the labor market, where he or she becomes a wage-slave and suffers the alienation of labor. In a sense, this historical model replicates the analysis of the alienation of labor in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* since, in a capitalist society, the individual faces the "objective conditions of production as his *not-property*, as *alien property* ... as capital."[15]

The transition from precapitalist to capitalist societies first involved "the divorce of elements which up until then were bound together." The separated elements (land, materials, the instruments of labor, the worker, etc.) are then, however, brought together by capital: "Capital proper does nothing but bring together the mass of hands and instruments which it finds on hand. It agglomerates them under its command. This is its real stockpiling."[16]

Capitalism thus produced a form of associated labor that evolved through several distinct stages. The rise of merchants provided the "first advance beyond naturally derived estate capital," a capital that "was from the beginning movable capital, capital in the modern sense." The second advance "came with manufacture", which mobilized capital and "became a refuge of the peasants from the guilds which excluded them or paid them badly" (MECW 5: 68). There emerged as well a period of vagabondage and the beginning of commercial struggles between the emerging modern nations. The "discovery of America and the sea-route to the East Indies" elicited "a new phase of historical development," which intensified commercial rivalries and fueled expanded manufacture.[17]

The expansion of commerce and manufacture created a large bourgeoisie that gained ascendancy over the petty bourgeoisie, which was organized into guilds that were quickly becoming outmoded with the emergence of capitalist production.[18] The next period "began in the middle of the seventeenth century and lasted almost to the end of the eighteenth." Commerce, navigation, and colonialization had expanded, and manufacture was sheltered by protective duties and monopolies. Yet trade increased, big towns emerged, and "large-scale industry—the application of elemental forces to industrial ends, machinery and the most extensive division of labor"—called into existence a stage of a more extensive division of labor and mature capitalism (MECW 5: 70, 72).

New industrial cities sprang up "overnight" and "completed the victory of the town over the country." Its basis was the "automatic system. It produced a mass of productive forces," for which the existing system of private property was "a fetter," thus producing the system of modern capitalism that emerged in the 19th century. Therefore it was large-scale industry that was the motor of modern capitalism and which "created everywhere the same relations between the classes of society, and thus destroyed the peculiar features of the various nationalities." These developments created a new class, the bourgeoisie, "which in all nations has the same interest"—a "class which is really rid of all the old world and at the same time stands pitted against it. For the worker it makes not only his relation to the capitalist, but labour itself, unbearable" (MECW 5: 73, 74).[19]

Part of the development of modernity in the Marxian theory was the rise of a global market system characterized by a world market and the imposition of similar relations of production, commodities, and ideas on areas throughout the world, thus creating a new modern world system as the capitalist market penetrates the four corners of the earth: "Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way." In turn, the "need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere" (MECW 6: 486, 487).

Marx and Engels thus developed one of the first theories of globalization in their analysis of the emergence of capitalism. As Marx once wrote in a letter, the railway, steamer, and telegraph "finally represented means of communication adequate to modern means of production" (cited in Hobsbawn 1996, p. 32), making possible a world market: "The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian nations into civilization .... In a word, it creates a world after its own image" (MECW 6: 488).

In the Marxian vision, the bourgeoisie constantly revolutionized the instruments of production and the world market generated immense forces of commerce, navigation and discovery, communications, and industry, creating a potentially new modern world of abundance, diversity, and prosperity:

> In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant

> lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as immaterial, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature. (MECW 6: 488)

This passage points to the resources and positive creations of the world market that provide the basis for a higher stage of social organization. The world market, however, also produced a new class of "*world-historical*, empirically universal individuals in place of local ones." This class of individuals—the industrial working class, the Proletariat—was reduced to abstract labor power, rendered propertyless, and standing in contradiction to the "existing world of wealth and culture" (MECW 5: 48–49). Having nothing but its chains to lose and a world to win, Marx and Engels believed that the industrial proletariat would organize as a revolutionary class to overthrow capitalism and produce a new socialist society that would abolish poverty, inequality, exploitation, and alienated labor, making possible the full development of the individuals and social wealth (MECW 5: 48f and MECW 6: 490f).

The Marxian theory was one of the first to posit a global market system that would penetrate the world. Marx and Engels were located in England, the center of the world's major colonial empire, and through their work in journalism documenting the vicissitudes of colonialism and British excursions into India, China, Africa, and other areas of the world. Their explorations of colonialism and world history of the epoch as it was occurring through their journalism led to explorations of race, nationalism, gender, and cultural differences that requires the development of an intersectional Marxism, as I will argue in this and subsequent chapters throughout this book.

Although Marxism is generally interpreted and attacked as primarily a class system, this is a mistake since, from the 1850s through the rest of their lives, Marx and Engels wrote on race and colonialism, gender and the family, and nationalism and ethnicity, and anticipated contemporary analyses of the intersectionality of class, race, gender, nationality, and cultural differences that are now recognized as key elements of contemporary critical theory.

The term "intersectionality" was introduced by feminist, civil rights activist, and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 in a paper written for the student-edited journal *University of Chicago Legal Forum*. [20] Crenshaw argued that traditional feminist theory and antiracist politics tend to exclude black women because they face forms of overlapping discrimination unique to them. She writes: "Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take *intersectionality* into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated."[21]

A Marxian critical intersectional theory will thus engage the ways that class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual, and other forms of oppression and domination

overlap and intersect, and stress that emancipation and social justice are multidimensional. Since the 1960s there have been syntheses of Marxist and feminist theory; Marxism and what is now called critical race theory; and a number of articles, studies, and books within Marxism depicting the intersectionality of class, race, gender, sexuality, and other forms of oppression and domination.

Marx and Engels anticipated these theories of intersectionality in their analyses of colonialism, slavery, and the U.S. Civil War, and Engels' analysis of the family and gender oppression. In his article "Revisiting Marx on Race, Capitalism, and Revolution," Kevin B. Anderson (2022) argues:

> Marx tied slavery not only to early, mercantile capitalism, but also to its later industrial forms, which slavery helped spawn and continued to underpin even in his own time. As he wrote as early as 1847 in *Poverty of Philosophy*, "direct slavery is as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as are machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery you would have no cotton; without cotton you have no modern industry. It is slavery that gave the colonies their value, it is the colonies that created world trade, and world trade is the precondition for large-scale industry. Slavery is therefore an economic category of paramount importance."

In *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies*, Anderson (2020) argues that Marx and Engels' analyses of colonialism, nationalism, and race and ethnicity provide a rich and variegated analysis that breaks with interpretations that Marx was Eurocentric and reduced non-Western societies to the same historical trajectories and models of development which they assigned to Western societies. A standard but problematic interpretation alleges that Marx and Engels claim societies must go through a determined sequence of development between precapitalist, capitalist, and then socialist development. Complexifying this unilineal stage analysis which would argue that societies develop according to given laws and trajectories, much like Enlightenment theories of history as progress, Anderson argues that instead Marx and Engels' analyses of non-Western societies and nationalism follow a multilinear model with complex historical analyses of colonialism involving progress and regression, and a multiplicity of modes of development according to various countries' own histories and places in the contemporary global economy.

Thus Anderson refutes the postmodern claim that Marxism has one totalizing Grand Narrative of history by providing complex narratives of Marx and Engels' analyses of India, China, and Indonesia; Poland and Russia; and race, class, and slavery in an analysis of the U.S. Civil War. Marx and Engels' articles on non-Western societies and race, slavery, and the U.S. Civil War were initially published in the *New York Tribune* from 1849 to 1862, when they were regularly employed by the paper to cover European affairs, although they often veered off to cover global affairs, which the paper's editor, Charles Dana, appreciated (Anderson 2020, p. 12).

Marx and Engels' articles on the colonization of Indonesia, India, and China were fierce denunciations of British and Dutch colonialism, and they wrote sharp critiques of the Dutch and English imperialist governments as well as Dutch and English trading companies, with Marx fixating especially critical commentary on the English parliamentarian Lord Palmerston on whom he wrote a large number of attacks,[22] and on the Chinese opium war.[23]

In their writings on Russia and Poland, Marx and Engels carry out their typical and fierce critiques on Russia, which they saw for decades as the bulwark of European reaction and a deadly enemy of European democracies. Marx and Engels also had a special affinity for Poland and Polish emancipation, championing the country in a large number of articles and speaking for Poland's emancipation in the Workers' International and other meetings (see Anderson 2020, pp. 67ff).

Marx and Engels were also keenly interested in the U.S. Civil War and Irish emancipation, again putting in question that Marxism ignores nationalism.[24] Yet there are also arguments that they underestimated the power of nationalism and its obstacles to socialism.[25] Marx and Engels were fervent internationalists who advocated world revolution. During the 1860s, they envisaged the possibility of a capitalist crisis and world revolution which would envelop the world in a global struggle between capital and its opponents. Their working-class revolutionaries would be resolutely internationalist and cosmopolitan, seeing themselves as citizens of the world rather than members of specific nations. The Marxian theory thus shared some illusions of many market liberals that the development of a world system of free trade would generate prosperity, with both downplaying the importance of nation states, nationalism, national rivalries, and wars that had characterized previous centuries and would indeed continue to be important forces up until today.[26]

Social Relations and the Materialist Theory of History

The Marxian method of analysis is intrinsically historical, assuming that phenomena could only be properly understood and conceptualized by grasping their historical origin and genesis. Hence, Marx and Engels provided a series of historical analyses of modernity and developed a historical method to chart its trajectory and vicissitudes. In several major works, they sketch out an analysis of the historical succession of modes of production based on forms of ownership and division of labor, ranging from tribal society, to ancient and medieval societies, to modern society.[27] In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, for instance, Marx engaged three phases of exchange, distinguishing between: (1) the time in the Middle Ages when only excess of production, what was superfluous, was exchanged; (2) a period in which all industrial products were subject to exchange; and (3) the present, "when everything that men had considered as inalienable became object[s] of exchange, of traffic and could be alienated" (i.e. sold).

> This is the time when … virtue, love, conviction, knowledge, conscience, etc.—when everything finally passed into commerce. It is the time of

> general corruption, of universal venality, or to speak in terms of political economy, the time when everything, moral or physical, having become a marketable value, is brought to the market to be assessed at its truest value. (MECW 6: 113–114)

The Marxian theory thus provides a historical optic that illuminates the specificity of contemporary modern capitalist societies and contrasts the current mode of bourgeois social organization with previous forms. What is important, then, are not the specific details of the Marxian genealogies, but the insights they yield for understanding contemporary societies and for research into the origin, genesis, and structures of the modern world.[28] What is arguably important, therefore, in the Marxian project is the mode of historical vision and research, and the insights into the nature and social relations of contemporary capitalist societies, and not the details of the specific stages and periodizing in the Marxian genealogies. I will accordingly focus in the following account on the Marxian analysis of the structure of modern capitalist societies and its critical theory of modernity and account of the transition from capitalism to socialism.

In investigating the origins and genesis of modern societies, Marx and Engels developed a new historical materialist theory of history and society, introducing the concepts of the mode of production, forces and relations of production, division of labor, ideology, and of history as a succession of modes of production, leading to the emergence of modern bourgeois society and its future transition to a communist society. For Marx and Engels, the highly differentiated mode of production associated with modern bourgeois society makes its appearance "with the *increase of population*" and presupposes the "*intercourse* [*Verkehr*] of individuals with one another" (MECW 5: 32).[29] According to the Marxian theory, every society is constituted by:

> definite social relations [which] are just as much produced by men as linen, flax, etc. Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill give you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill with the industrial capitalist. (MECW 6: 165–166)

While this passage is often taken as an example of an alleged technological determinism in Marx, one can also read it as stressing the importance of social relations and differentiation in the constitution of modern societies. Social differentiation is in turn connected to the division of labor which begins in the family, leading to a division between mental and material labor, and serving as the motor for further social differentiation (MECW 5: 46f). Differentiation, however, takes the form of relations of subordination and domination; thus Marx and Engels develop one of the first critical theories of modern bourgeois society, attacking the alienation, social domination, and exploitation in the capitalist relations of production and of social reproduction in the family.

Although Marxian theory is often accused of limiting domination and oppression to class and neglecting such forms of oppression as gender and race (Balbus 1982), Marx and Engels argue that inequalities begin "in the family, where wife and children, are the slaves of the husband" (MECW 5: 46). They also refer to the "latent slavery in the family" and constantly criticize "patriarchal" forces, thus providing the conceptual space for critique of the oppression of women. Indeed, Marx and Engels frequently describe the production *and reproduction* of social life as the basis of society and history (MECW 5: 42, 43, 46), and thus attribute conceptual importance to the family and social reproduction.[30]

Of course, their later focus would be almost exclusively on production and the oppression of the working class, although Engels would eventually write *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (2010 [1884]), which is subtitled "In the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan" and is partially based on notes by Karl Marx to American anthropologist Morgan's book *Ancient Society* (2022 [1877]).

Engels' study is the first Marxian text to focus on gender and the family, and it is a thoroughly historical materialist work in analyzing the economic role of the family in different societies, including Engels' contemporary English society, and is regarded as one of the first major works on family economics and social relations. Engels follows Morgan in *The Origin of the Family* by arguing that in ancient societies the family had a matriarchal lineage. For Engels, the rise of patriarchal society is connected with the emergence of private property, the state, and capitalism; and in his view a key function of the contemporary family is ensuring its succession in patriarchal lineage whereby the eldest son inherits the family's property, which ensures the reproduction of capitalist, patriarchal families.

Both Morgan and Engels argued that originally in primitive communism, women lived in communities with their sisters in a matrilineal clan where females in these communal households lived and worked together and felt strong bonds of solidarity with one another. This enabled them when necessary to take action against uncooperative men or other external threats.

Engels anticipates the Marxist-feminist position that capitalism and patriarchy are constitutive features of modernity. Engels argued that the movement toward patriarchy reversed the position of the wife and mother in the household. His historical grounding of the development of human society and the family added political impact to Morgan's (2022) studies of women in prehistory, describing the "overthrow of mother right" as "the world-historic defeat of the female sex." Engels attributed this defeat to the onset of farming and pastoralism, and then the rise of the state which ensures patriarchy through enforcing patrilineal inheritance.

Engels' study is important for conceiving of women as important and equal members of society who, although often oppressed under bourgeois-patriarchal societies, would be freed in a future socialist democracy where relations between men and women would be equal. Of course, this utopian vision has rarely came to pass, though it is admirable that Engels and other Marxists like August Bebel, Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, and a later tradition of socialist-

feminists took up the cause of the liberation of women and insisted this was a fundamental aspect of a genuine progressive socialist society.[31]

It is important to note, however, that the Marxian theory of social relations is grounded in political economy, which "produces the foundation" of modern societies; and Marx's dialectical theory accordingly articulates the relationships between the economy, polity, society, and culture in modern social formations. In his 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx writes:

> In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or—this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms—with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.[32]

Marx's theory of modern society accordingly unfolds in an interdisciplinary space connecting economy, social structure, state, and culture. "Political economy" for Marx referred to a structure that combined politics and economics, describing a mode of social organization where political economy constitutes the "base" (*Unterbau*) for the set of modern legal, political, social, and cultural institutions and practices that he described as "superstructures" (*Überbau*).

Social differentiation proceeded in modern industrial societies via the division of labor and separation of town and country (MECW 5: 32). Commercial labor is differentiated from industrial labor; and with mechanization and modern factories, labor is differentiated according to skill and function. Yet the capitalist labor process also produces homogenization and the destruction of particularity: "Generally speaking, large-scale industry created everywhere the same relations between the classes of society, and thus destroyed the peculiar features of the various nationalities" (MECW 5: 73; also 85). In addition, mechanized industry standardized work, creating homogeneous labor that anyone could do, erasing differences between individuals as well as classes. Machinery replaced "skilled workers by unskilled, men by women, adults by children" by reducing labor activity to standardized operations that anyone could perform (MECW 9:

226f). Mechanized production thus homogenized people, eroding individuality and creative labor.

Modern societies thus exhibited in the Marxian vision of modernity a highly differentiated social structure, riven into competing isolated individuals and conflictual social classes. As noted, the Marxian theory of modernity is a theory of capitalism, and the Marxian theory of modern societies combines analysis of social relations with political economy.

From a methodological standpoint, Marx and Engels began a reconstruction of science and development of a scientific social theory fusing a new critical epistemology (i.e. radical historicism and praxis) with broad historical perspectives and detailed empirical research. By decisively breaking with Adam Smith and bourgeois political economy, Marxian theory broke with early conceptions of social science and inaugurated the critical tradition of social theory by explicitly conceptualizing a split between science and ideology, social structure and ideas and culture, and by calling explicitly for a new critical social science with the pragmatic end of dealing with this split.

Further, Marxian theory privileged practice as the criterion of truth and rejected all ideas that could not be confirmed in practice, that could not be experimentally validated. Hence, in the next section, I shall depict the Marxian analysis of modern capitalist societies and then discuss Marx's theory of revolution and socialism, which provides his analysis of what he and Engels saw as a higher stage of social development that overcomes the limitations of capitalism.

The Structure of Modern Societies

Modern capitalist society for Marx is a commodity-producing society that is characterized by large-scale industry, an ever-proliferating division of labor, and contradictions rooted in capitalist relations of production—in particular the relation between capital and labor, the bourgeoisie and workers. Bourgeois society is a form of social order in which individuals lack conscious control and mastery of their social relations, and in which individuals stand alienated over and against an oppressive social system over which they have no control.

The capitalist division of labor effects a "life-long annexation of the laborer to a partial operation, and his complete subjection to Capital" at the same time that it increases the productiveness of labor. Marx cites Adam Smith to illustrate what he sees as the "crippling of body and mind" in the capitalist division of labor:

> The uniformity of his stationary life naturally corrupts the courage of his mind .... It corrupts even the activity of his body and renders him incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance in any other employments than that to which he has been bred. His dexterity at his own particular trade seems in this manner to be acquired at the expense of his intellectual, social and martial virtues. But in every improved and civilised society, this is that state into which the labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people, must necessarily fall.[33]

For Smith, the capitalist division of labor was thus a sad fate for the working class that was, however, redeemed in the wealth of nations and tremendous increase in the productivity of labor it generated. For Marx, by contrast, the capitalist division of labor was a temporary condition, an immense tragedy which would need to be overcome to liberate the tremendous powers of production generated by the new organization of the economy. While previous political economy described capitalism as a natural mode of social organization, as a highly progressive mode that it legitimated as the best possible organization of the economy, Marx described it as a highly flawed transitory mode that would be overcome. As Marcuse pointed out (1960 [1941]), all of Marx's key concepts such as commodity, alienated labor, the division of labor, capital, and so on point to structures "which are there, but could be abolished." Although Marx describes the "law that regulates the division of labor" as acting with "the irresistible authority of a law of nature" (in Tucker 1978, p. 396), laws for Marx describe social relations and processes that pertain under certain historical conditions but which could be radically modified under different conditions. Marxian laws refer to tendencies that not only allow for countertendencies, but which themselves are subject to modification and even elimination.

For Marx, laws hold under certain conditions, but humans produce these conditions and can change them. Society is not nature; nor is capitalism eternal. Marxian theory thus depicts certain fundamental features and processes of capitalist society which are presented as conditions to be eliminated, as negations (of the working class) that are to be negated. Utilizing rigorously Hegelian modes of thought, Marx also sees the higher potentials trapped in their capitalist form—in this case, the power of freely associated labor which, under capitalism, is harnessed specifically to provide surplus-value for the capitalist while stunting and destroying the life of workers.

In this analysis, both Smith and Marx see industrial capitalism as producing bondage of the working class under capitalist relations of production; while Smith sees capitalism as continuing to advance and lift up the working class, Marx and Engels see continued exploitation. Yet both Marx and Smith envisage a modernity that will create progress that will eventually form a higher society and modes of social production and cooperation, although Marx and Engels believe that socialist revolution is necessary to create this higher form of modernity.

Capitalism, Crisis, and the Transition to Socialism

By the time of the publication of his magnum opus *Capital* (1867), Marx has come to conceptualize modernity as a system of domination whereby the commodity form comes to dominate society in its totality, in which the worker is reduced to commodity status, and in which production is geared toward commodity production in order to produce profit and surplus value. Thus, modern societies are those ruled by capital, by abstract social forces that impose a system of domination on modern individuals. For Marx, capitalism is fundamentally a commodity-producing society and modernity is an era in history

organized around the production of commodities. Whereas in premodern societies fetishes were made out of trees or other animate or inanimate objects, under capitalism commodity fetishism metamorphized value into exchange value, whereby use value, or the development of human beings, was minimized and value resided primarily not in the possession and use of commodities but in their value and the surplus value or profit that the capitalist gained through the production and circulation of commodities.

Within the history of civilization, capitalism thus constitutes a unique mode of social organization based around the production, exchange, distribution, and consumption of commodities. Modernity for Marx thus is bound up with the triumph of capitalism. Yet Marx's vision of modernity was dynamic and developmental, and he saw the crisis tendencies of capitalism driving inexorably toward socialism.

In Marx's vision, both the negative and positive features of modern capitalist societies were driving modernity toward an inevitable break or rupture with capitalism. On the one hand, Marx believed that the inherent crisis tendencies of capitalism were leading to upheaval, intensified crisis, and eventual collapse. On the other hand, he believed that positive features of modernity—such as increased cooperation among workers in the process of production, big firms that brought associated producers together in the workplace (where they could be organized and increase their social power), and, especially, the tendencies toward automation that would eliminate socially necessary labor—would increase the realm of freedom, and thus provide the basis for a freer, more egalitarian, and more democratic social order. For Marx, capitalism and socialism are thus two forms of modernity, two developmental models within modernity.

On their vision, socialism represented a higher stage of modernity, the preconditions for its fulfillment; thus Marxism is firmly rooted in the main currents of modern theory that map social evolution and development. Yet their critique of capitalism contained anti-modern motifs and their concept of socialism contains premodern ones. To some extent, the concept of the modern itself contains anti-modern elements, in that modernity involves constant critique and negation as well as premodern nostalgia, which looks back at what some individuals believe should be preserved from the maelstrom of modern development. Thus, it is not surprising that the Marxian concept of socialism contains a combination of modern and premodern ideas.

In "The Communist Manifesto," for instance, after alluding to a democratic republic as the goal of revolution and listing ten, arguably modern, proposals that will be more or less applicable in different countries, Marx and Engels utilize rather premodern language to depict the new socialist society:

> When, in the course of development, class distinctions have disappeared, and all production has been concentrated in the hands of a vast association of the whole nation, the public power will lose its political character. Political power properly so called, is merely the organized power of one class for oppressing another. If the proletariat during its contest with the

> bourgeoisie is compelled, by the force of circumstances, to organize itself as a class, if, by means of a revolution, it makes itself the ruling class, and, as such, sweeps away by force the old conditions of production, then it will, along with these conditions, have swept away the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms, and of classes generally, and will thereby have abolished its own supremacy as a class.
>
> In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.[34]

This vision of a classless society, of a free association, of the withering away of political power, replicates the old communal dreams of a society without state, classes, and oppressors and contradicts the developmental trends of modernity which would be in the direction of increasingly complex bureaucratic state forms and more stratified and differentiated modern societies. Marx's hopes for revolutionary unification of the proletariat and for a post-capitalist society of "associated producers" pointed toward a community and consensus reminiscent of premodern solidarities. Yet Marx and Engels also evoke the modern idea that a free association could help develop individuality to the fullest, so that people would realize their social and individual capacities to the utmost—as John Dewey (1944 [1916]) and those who advocated participatory democracy have argued. In view of Marx and Engels' claim concerning the disappearance of the state in fully developed communism, it is ironic that the communist societies built in their name would evolve complex modern bureaucracies and state power that would be very political indeed.[35]

The Marxian theory of socialism is also resolutely modern in its championing of democracy as the highest form of political organization. In an early commentary on Hegel, Marx championed democracy as the highest form of state:

> democracy stands to the other constitutions as the genus stands to its species; except that here the genus itself appears as an existent, and therefore as one *particular* species over against the others whose existence does not correspond to their essence. To democracy all other forms of state stand as its Old Testament. Man does not exist for the law but the law for man—it is a *human manifestation*; whereas in the other forms of state man is a *legal manifestation*. That is the fundamental distinction of democracy.[36]

Moreover, Marx championed a form of radical democracy. For Marx, unlike Hegel, sovereignty lies with the people and not the state or monarch. In his critique of Hegel, Marx asserted that the constitution under democracy "is a free product of men" and represents "the self-determination of the people." Popular sovereignty thus involves—as illustrated below—the self-government of the people in all realms of social life.

In "The Communist Manifesto," Marx and Engels champion the modern form of state, urging the workers "to win the battle of democracy" and to fight

for the establishment of a democratic republic.[37] In his most radical vision of an emancipated society, however, Marx envisaged a realm of freedom made possible by the developments of modern technology and industry. In the *Grundrisse*, he sketched a theory of a possible rupture between capitalist and post-capitalist societies that would be as radical as those between precapitalist and capitalist ones. On his account, capital generates factories, machine production, and eventually an automatic system of machinery. In his famous analysis of automation, Marx sketches out an audacious vision of the development of a fully automated system of production under capitalism that brings capitalism to an end and produces the basis for an entirely different social system.

In Marx's vision, the "accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain," is absorbed into capital and produce machinery which "develops with the accumulation of society's science, of the productive force generally." As machinery and automation develop, the worker becomes more and more superfluous, standing ever-more powerless alongside the growing power of machines and big industry. On the other hand, machines free the worker from arduous and back-breaking labor. In this situation:

> Labour no longer appears so much to be included within the production process; rather, the human being comes to relate more as watchman and regulator to the production process itself .... He steps to the side of the production process instead of being its chief actor.[38]

The capitalist system thus makes possible "*a large quantity of disposable time*" that furnishes the space for the development of the individual's full productive forces.[39] Free time allows for more education and development of the social individual, who can then enter "in the direct production process as this different subject."

> This process is then both discipline, as regards the human being in the process of becoming; and, at the same time, practice [*Ausubung*], experimental science, materially creative and objectifying science, as regards the human being who has become, in whose head exists the accumulated knowledge of society.[40]

Thus capitalism produces the basis for a new society of non-alienated labor in which individuals will possess the free time to fully develop their human capacities; and labor itself will be a process of experimentation, creativity, and progress in which the system of automation produces most of society's goods, and individuals can thus enjoy leisure and the fruits of creative work. Such a society would be a completely different social order from that of capitalist society which is organized around work and the production of commodities. Marx acknowledges that the new society would have a totally "changed foundation of production, a new foundation first created by the process of history."[41]

In the third volume of *Capital*, Marx described this radically new social order in terms of a "realm of freedom," writing:

> Freedom in this field can only consists in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature.[42]

Marx's most radical vision of socialism thus envisages socialism as constituting a break in history as dramatic as the rupture between precapitalist and capitalist societies that produced modernity. While capitalism is a commodity-producing society organized around work and production, socialism would be a social order organized around the full development of individual human beings. Marx formulated this radical vision of a new society in his late text *Critique of the Gotha Programme* as the product of a transition to a higher phase of communism. In the first phase, the "prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society" would limit the level of social and individual development, but:

> In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the spring of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banner: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs![43]

Crucially, Marx and Engels saw the potential for socialism rooted in the very historical trajectory of modernity. Eschewing moralistic and utopian concepts, they theorized that, just as historical forces had produced capitalist modernity, so too would history provide the possibilities of constructing a socialist society. Yet such a transition would involve political choice and struggle. Therefore, much of Marx and Engels' attention was devoted to analyzing the class forces and material conditions that could produce socialism and the political strategies that could produce a socialist revolution and a new stage of history that broke as radically with the previous stage as capitalist modernity broke with previous precapitalist social formations.

Of course, the big question for Marx and Engels was how a socialist revolution could occur. At times, they envisaged that only a radical crisis and collapse of the capitalist system would generate the possibility of a transition to socialism. In the *Grundrisse*, for instance, Marx posited the rupture in terms of a cataclysmic collapse of capitalism, leading to a violent upheaval:

> [T]he highest development of productive power together with the greatest expansion of existing wealth will coincide with [the] depreciation of

> capital, degradation of the labourer, and a most straitened exhaustion of his vital powers. These contradictions lead to explosions, cataclysms, crises, in which by momentaneous suspension of labour and annihilation of a great portion of capital the latter is violently reduced to the point where it can[not?] go on. These contradictions, of course, lead to explosions, crises, in which momentary suspension of all labour and annihilation of a great part of the capital violently lead it back to the point where it is enabled [to go on] fully employing its productive powers without committing suicide. Yet, these regularly recurring catastrophes lead to their repetition on a higher scale, and finally to its violent overthrow.[44]

Yet, in an 1872 address to a Congress of the First International, Marx suggested that a democratic road to socialism "where the workers can attain their goal by peaceful means" was also viable, in countries such as America, England, and Holland.[45] To some extent Marx's politics were always ad hoc and oriented toward existing political forces and possibilities, and, contrary to many attacks on Marx, were never fixed and dogmatic. In an 1843 contribution to *The German-French Yearbook*, which established the political principles for that venture, Marx wrote:

> We shall confront the world not as doctrinaires with a new principle: "Here is the truth, bow down before it!" We develop new principles to the world out of its own principles. We do not say to the world: "Stop fighting; your struggle is of no account. We want to shout the true slogan of the struggle at you." We only show the world what it is fighting for, and consciousness is something that the world must acquire, like it or not.[46]

To a large extent, Marx followed this principle throughout his life. His and Engels sketch of socialism in *The German Ideology*—where one would "hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic"—reflects the ideals of the utopian socialism that predated the form of communism to which Marx would eventually adhere.[47]

Indeed, the principles and ideals of "The Communist Manifesto" summed up the program of the emerging communist movement; and in the 1848 revolution, as noted, Marx joined the struggles of liberals and workers for a democratic republic, projecting communism as an ideal for the future. During the 1860s, Marx articulated the principles of the First International Working Men's Association, again occasionally putting his socialist ideals aside, while in his writing on the Paris Commune, he championed the commune form of government where workers took over after France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1871, where the workers appropriated all industry and capital and ran Paris as a socialist, democratic commune until the combined French and Prussian army overtook the city.[48]

Thus, Marx tried to connect his political theory with the most advanced and radical political forces of the day, and articulated his principles in accord with

the most radical struggles and movements. This form of "revolutionary historicism" derives political ideals from existing forces and struggles, rather than projecting an a priori blueprint which is then imposed on diverse movements and contexts. Rather, Marx saw that in disparate political circumstances different forms of struggle and different alternatives were necessary, and thus never advocated one single strategy of revolution or concept of socialism, instead developing his concepts in concordance with existing struggles and potentials.

Marxian political theory was thus oriented toward actually existing struggles as the bearers of hopes for revolution; and Marx and Engels generally adopted a multi-class model and analysis of class blocs, rather than the "melting vision" that pitted the proletariat against the bourgeoisie as in "The Communist Manifesto." Despite different emphases in his political theory, it was class struggle and a coalition of classes that was a necessary condition of any revolution or transition to socialism. Much of Marx's focus in his post-1848 works was thus on class analysis. Indeed, his materialist theory of history suggested that the role of classes was crucial in history, and his theory of revolution indicated that class struggle was the vehicle for achieving socialism.

In Marx and Engel's analyses of the 1848 revolutionary movements and the defeats by the counterrevolution, for example, they called attention to the complex social differentiation characteristic of modern societies. In *The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850*, Marx described how an alliance between the working class and the industrial bourgeoisie defeated the regnant aristocratic classes allied with finance capital in the 1848 revolution. Yet the bourgeoisie betrayed the working class, siding with the defeated reactionary powers in a new coalition with the former ruling powers. The peasants entered the French ruling alliance with the emergence to power of Louis Napoleon in 1848.[49]

Thus, Marx developed a model in this text of ruling-class hegemony as an alliance of dominant class sectors against the oppressed classes. Despite his powerful critiques of the capitalist organization of labor, Marx considered new forms of freedom and equality to be immanent in capitalism's new "mode of cooperation" and to constitute the heart of class-conscious proletarians' revolutionary hopes. Marx and Engels argued forcefully that cooperative interdependence strongly favors the ideals of freedom and equality. The affinity was so strong that they thought the ideals would remain central to the most important societal aspirations, contradictions, and struggles for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, they did not take a neutral stance toward the ideals, but instead passionately embraced them in their own theoretical practices. They sided with what they believed to be the progressive possibilities of social modernity and with the majority of the populace whose needs and hopes were being shaped by the new conditions. On the basis of their implicit and sometimes explicit ethics of social interdependence, they executed an immanent critique of social modernity.

Although Marx and Engels framed their criticism somewhat differently, they both argued that heightened societal interdependence demands increased realization of freedom and equality to foster voluntary cooperation and to limit the

relentless pursuit of individual and institutional self-interest. Marx and Engels held that the rupture with traditional society transformed freedom and equality into more universal ideals and made possible, for the first time, their realization in an inclusive and just social order. They believed that their new science served these immanent values and that modernity was leading toward socialism and then communism.

Marx and Engels viewed modernity as a liberating negation of the traditional world, implying that the fate of humanity depended on overcoming the material, cultural, intellectual, and, in particular, social impoverishment of traditional undifferentiated society. Marx's famous depiction of the French peasantry in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* typifies the disdain for the parochial features of rural life. He claimed that their very simple and unspecialized modes of production leave peasants "isolated" from each other. Because they lack the creative power of organized collective action, peasant societies are wanting in social and cultural diversity as well as material abundance. By contrast, capitalism links people into huge, enriching social networks that destroy "the former natural exclusiveness."[50]

Marx's rage against the repressive side of modernity was thus tempered by his often repeated point that capitalism multiplies needs, relationships, and possibilities, creating conditions for an emancipatory break that will extend voluntary cooperation far beyond current bounds. In addition, Marx saw capitalism producing, first, the individual as a social unit, and then a "rich individuality" that would make possible the all-around development of fully realized individuals. In Marx's analysis, social relations and exchange individuate people and make

> the herd-like existence superfluous and dissolve it. Soon the matter [has] turned in such a way that as an individual he relates himself only to himself, while the means with which he posits himself as individuals have become the making of his generality and commonness.[51]

For Marx, capital eventually

> creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself, in which natural necessity in its direct form has disappeared; because a historically created need has taken the place of the natural one.[52]

The development of the "all-around individual" whose potentials were bound up with further development of the forces of production and social relations that would develop to the full both individuals and productive forces reveals Marx as a champion of modernity. While he believed that capitalism had developed the forces of production in a more revolutionary fashion than any

previous social formation, he believed that there comes a time, as he put it in *Capital*, when

> the monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with, and under it. Centralization of the means of production and socialization of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.[53]

Such a vision is distinctly modern, and articulates Marx's belief that modern societies would continually revolutionize themselves as they developed their potentials further.

Marxism and Modernity

In this chapter, I have argued that Marxism is par excellence a critical theory of modernity, and that Marx and Engels developed the first analysis and critique of social differentiation, the new modes of cooperation and association, and the crises and potentialities for social progress inherent in the new forms of capitalist modernity. Marx and Engels inaugurated the discourse of modernity in critical social theory by articulating the break with the previous social formation in social-theoretical terms, as a rupture with feudal society and the creation of a new modern capitalist social order.

For classical Marxism, industrial capitalism was the motor of social modernity and produced wide-scale social differentiation and fragmentation combined with new forms of social interdependence, cooperation, and solidarities. Modernity generated new possibilities for richer individuality, new needs, and increased links between individuals all over the world. These interdependencies and solidarities made possible a new realm of freedom, democracy, and equality that Marx and Engels called socialism, a society in which the free development of each was a precondition for the free development of all.

Marx and Engels thus emerge in this analysis as the first great theorists and critics of modernity, and they see socialism and revolution as emerging from the trajectory of modernity. They initiated critical discourses on modernity and provided powerful historical perspectives on the origins, trajectories, and potential transformation of modern societies. In the next two chapters, I will indicate some of the ways in which Marxism can contribute to a critical theory of contemporary capitalism with an analysis of how technological revolution in the 20th and 21st centuries created new forms of techno-capitalism. I will then conclude with Chapter 9 on the contemporary relevance of Marxism and an Epilogue that indicates some major contributions and limitations of Marxism as a critical theory of the contemporary era, as well as some problems concerning the continued relevance of his theories of socialism and revolution.

Notes

1 This chapter is indebted to work with Robert J. Antonio and was published in an earlier version as Robert J. Antonio and Douglas Kellner, "Metatheorizing Historical Rupture: Classical Theory and Modernity," in *Metatheorizing*, ed. George Ritzer (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992), pp. 88–106. Antonio later published a book arising from our joint research in the 1990s and his decades of scholarly work: Robert J. Antonio, ed. *Marx and Modernity: Key Readings and Commentary* (London: Blackwell, 2002). I am also indebted to discussions of the chapter with Kevin Anderson, as well as to his publications on Marxism that I engage and cite in this chapter.

2 In the opening paragraphs I am citing the dual contributions of Marx and Engels because Engels played a significant role in sketching out the early perspectives on modern societies within which he and Marx would work, as I argued in Chapter 3; and Engels also contributed to the critiques of colonialism and global politics and developments of capitalism that I discuss in this chapter. Yet it was Marx who most significantly developed their shared theory, and so I use the name "Marx" and the adjective "Marxian" to describe their shared perspectives on capitalism and modernity. Many interpretations of the relationships between Marx and Engels stress the differences between them by emphasizing the scientistic writings of the later Engels, which are contrasted with the more philosophical works of Marx. I stress instead their shared perspectives on modernity, putting aside their later differences in emphasis in theory and method. Indeed, from 1838 to 1848, Engels played a leading role in theorizing the distinctive features of modern societies and led Marx to see the importance of capitalism in producing a distinctively new modern social formation, as argued in Chapter 3. It is one of the merits of Gouldner (1980, p. 250ff) to stress the importance of Engels in developing the Marxian theory and to defend Engels against attacks that he was but a crude simplifier of Marx's ideas. Mazlish (1989) and Hamilton (1991) also appreciate the importance of the contribution of Engels, while Levine (1975 and 1984) and Carver (1989) sharply distinguish between Marx and Engels, attacking Engels as a vulgar debaser of Marx's ideas; and Edwards and Leiter (2025), simply ignore Engels altogether. While there are important epistemological differences between Marx and Engels, especially in Engels' later writings, I do not want to downplay the important contributions of Engels and his significance in shaping Marx's vision of modernity, or their decades of collaboration and friendship as Marx-Engels.

3 In this chapter, "MECW" refers to volumes in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York and London: International Publishers and Lawrence & Wishart, 1975–2004). In 1843, for instance, Marx wrote that the "criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism" (MECW 3: 175–176). After this analysis, Marx simply concluded that the criticism of religion was finished and occupied himself henceforth with social and political critique. On the Young Hegelians, see Chapter 2, "Karl Marx in Historical Context."

4 Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 155) see the French Revolution as the founding event of modernity and appraise its significance in the production of discourses that named oppression and mobilized action to fight it, thus linking modernity with democratic transformation. Marx produced democratic and revolutionary discourses; but he and Engels perceived the rise of the bourgeoisie and capitalism as the key events that created modern societies, of which democratic and then socialist revolutions were an important part.

5 In the Preface to his 1859 *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx wrote that: "In the year 1842–44, as editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, I experienced for the first time the embarrassment of having to take part in discussions on so-called material interests. The proceedings of the Rhenish Landtag on thefts of wood and

parcelling of landed property, the official polemic which Herr von Schaper, then Oberpräsident of the Rhine Province, opened against the *Rheinische Zeitung* on the conditions of the Moselle peasantry, and finally debates on free trade and protective tariffs provided the first occasions for occupying myself with economic questions." Karl Marx, "Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly, Third Article: Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood" (1842), at https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/marx/works/1842/10/25.htm (accessed December 15, 2024).

6 As we saw in Chapter 2, he returned to Germany in 1848–1849 to participate in the 1848 revolutions, but once again was banished, this time for life.

7 For Marx and Engels' contributions to the *Jahrbücher*, see MECW 3: 131ff and 418–443, respectively. On Engels' life and times, see Marcus (1974), Carver (1989), and the earlier discussion in Chapter 3.

8 Engels' "Letters from Wuppertal" are described in more detail in Chapter 3.

9 These notebooks were never published during Marx's life and their printing in 1932 caused a sensation, presenting a vigorous philosophical and humanist Marx quite different from the economic theorist and "scientific socialist" championed by the official Marxian working-class movements. On the importance of the Paris *Manuscripts* for the interpretation of Marxism, see Herbert Marcuse, "The Foundations of Historical Materialism," in *Studies in Critical Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon, 1972 [1932]), pp. 3–48.

10 Edwards and Leiter (2025) ignore capitalist relations of production as key constituents of Marxism, and claim that for Marx the forces of production are the motor of history, especially technology, which leads them to ascribe a technological determinism to Marx, a position he never held, while ignoring Engels altogether, and thus not engaging the Marxian analyses of modernity and Engels' crucial role in the Marxian project.

11 Marx's *Grundrisse* ("Fundamental Outlines") was written in 1857–1858 in heated excitement that the coming economic crisis was going to inaugurate a new period of revolutionary struggles, parallel to those of 1848 (see MECW 28). Accordingly, Marx attempted to work out his comprehensive analysis of the transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist societies, the analysis of capitalism, and the transition to socialism in order to provide a theoretical basis for the coming revolution and construction of the new socialist society. Neither the crisis nor revolution materialized, but Marx produced an 800-page manuscript that contains some of his most important formulations and the most comprehensive overview of his vision of the transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist societies. Unpublished in Marx's life-time, the *Grundrisse* also contains the fullest formulation of his vision of the qualitative rupture with capitalism that he ever worked out, and a sketch of how he imagined an entirely new social order emerging from the ruins of capitalism. Thus, the *Grundrisse* can be interpreted as one of the most important texts in the Marxian corpus. On the significance of the *Grundrisse* and explication of its key themes and arguments, see Musto (2008).

12 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*: Introduction. Late August–Mid-September 1857. 1. Production, Consumption, Distribution, Exchange (Circulation)(1), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch01.htm (accessed January 3, 2025).

13 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*: Notebook IV / V – The Chapter on Capital, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch09.htm (accessed January 3, 2025).

14 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*: Part I: Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production, Chapter III: The Feudal Mode of Production, at https://www.marxists.org/subject/economy/authors/pe/pe-ch03.htm (accessed January 3, 2025).

15 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*: Notebook IV / V – The Chapter on Capital, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch09.htm (accessed January 3, 2025).

16 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*: Notebook IV / V – The Chapter on Capital, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch09.htm (accessed January 3, 2025).
17 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, Chapter Thirty-One: Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch31.htm (accessed January 4, 2025).
18 Interestingly, in the margins of *The German Ideology*, Marx noted "Petty bourgeoisie—Middle Class—Big bourgeoisie" (MECW 5: 70), thus suggesting a complex class structure for the bourgeoisie, in opposition to the more simplistic opposition between bourgeoisie and proletariat that is central to "The Communist Manifesto." Moreover, the famous passage in the "Manifesto," indicating that with modernity "All that is solid melts into air," obscures in the standard English translations the important point in German that all previous classes and social groups (*Stände*) dissolve as well as "all that is solid"—*Alles Ständische und Stehende verdampft*" (MECW 5: 487). On this point, see Mazlish (1989, pp. 267–268), and Berman's (1988) study of Marx and modernity that takes "all that is solid" as his epigram for modernity. This point is especially important because it distinguishes Marx and Engel's analysis from Hegel's. Hegel believed that the *Stände* would play an important part in integrating individuals into modern society, but Marx and Engels are arguing that these institutions (*Stände*) are disintegrating. Hegel thus ultimately developed a political theory that would unify modern and premodern institutions and conceptions, while Marx and Engels developed a thoroughly modern social and political theory.
19 These passages provide a basis for the two-class analysis of the "Manifesto." Yet, as we shall see, in later works, Marx and Engels carried out more complex multi-sectored class analyses, and did not utilize the two-class model in their mature works or, as Kevin Anderson (2020) demonstrates, in their analyses of non-Western societies. Moreover, as Marx and Engels' differentiation of the bourgeoisie into class sectors suggests, a more complex and differentiated class analysis exists as early as *The German Ideology*. In a sense, then, the "melting vision" and two-class analysis of the "Manifesto" is really an anomaly within the Marxian corpus, which usually operated with more complex class differentiations. I take this point up below and critique the two-class model of some versions of traditional Marxism.
20 Merrill Perlman, "The Origin of the Term 'Intersectionality,'" *Columbia Journalism Review*, October 23, 2018 at https://www.cjr.org/language_corner/intersectionality.php (accessed January 4, 2025). See also Patricia Hill Collins (2019) and Davis (1983) for a brilliant anticipation of the concept of intersectionality.
21 Merrill Perlman, "The Origin of the Term 'Intersectionality,'" *Columbia Journalism Review*, October 23, 2018 at https://www.cjr.org/language_corner/intersectionality.php (accessed January 4, 2025). Kimberlé Crenshaw's key works were collected in *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings* (2017; New York: New Press, 2022).
22 Marx and Engels' writings on colonialism and non-Western societies that Kevin Anderson engages are found in MECW 12–17, and the attacks on Palmerston are collected in MECW 13: 341–406. Lord Palmerston (Henry John Temple) was British Prime Minister from 1855 to 1858 and 1859 to 1865, dominating British foreign policy from 1830 to 1865, when Britain stood at the height of its imperial power. See Karl Marx, *The Story of the Life of Lord Palmerston* (1853, first published 1899), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/palmerston/index.htm (accessed January 12, 2025).
23 See Eugenio Lo Sardo, "Karl Marx and the Opium War," in *Probings and Re-Probings: Essays in Marxian Reawakening*, ed. Sankar Ray and Shaibal Gupta (New York and London: Routledge, 2021).
24 See Anderson (2020), who has chapters on Marx and Engels' close scrutiny of both the Civil War in the U.S. and Irish emancipation struggles.

25 See Ephraim Nimni, "Great Historical Failure: Marxist Theories of Nationalism," *Capital and Class* 9, no 1 (1985), pp. 58–83 at https://doi.org/10.1177/030981688502500103 (accessed January 6, 2025). Mike Davis also has a good chapter on Marx and nationalism, "Marx's Lost Theory: The Politics of Nationalism in 1848," where, after laying out critiques of the neglect of nationalism in Marxism, he claims that Marx and Engels do have excellent analyses of nationalism in the 1848 revolutions that they closely followed and supported. See Mike Davis, *Old Gods, New Enigmas: Marx's Lost Theory* (London: Verso, 2020), esp. pp. 135–178.

26 See Polyani (2001 [1944], p. 189) on how market liberals failed to see the importance of the nation state and nationalism, an oversight also attributed to Marx but which needs reconsideration in light of contemporary research on Marxism political writings on contemporary events and his analyses of colonialism.

27 See Marx in MECW 5: 32–35 and 64–81, as well as entries in Notebooks from 1857–1867. Marx never lost interest in charting out stages of history and the role of capitalism in constituting modernity. For discussion of the notes and manuscripts describing precapitalist formations and the transition to capitalism never published by Marx, and that he worked on in his later years up to his death, see Sayer (1991).

28 Historians like Richard Hamilton (1991) criticize the specific historical details in the Marxian genealogies of modern societies, especially their accounts of the history of England and, in Hamilton's case, French and Germany societies as well. One can acknowledge that there are historical inaccuracies in some of Marx and Engels' accounts; but I believe that the Marxian theory is nonetheless fruitful for the light it sheds on the structure of modern capitalist societies and for the methods and material it provides to aid in historical research.

29 The term "intercourse" (*Verkehr*) was used by Marx and Engels to describe the mode of interaction of individuals in a social environment. The term was soon replaced by "relations of production," which became the primary focus of their analyses of modes of social interaction. Yet the concept of *Verkehr* is perhaps broader and is close to what Habermas later described as social "interaction." In any case, it is false to claim that Marx and Engels reduced everything to production, for at least in their early writings they utilized a concept of social interaction. See, for example, *The German Ideology*, where they write that communism would overturn "the basis of all earlier relations of production *and intercourse*" (MECW 5: 81, emphasis added). See also the analysis where Z.A. Jordan (1962) describes Marx as interpreting "society as the product of men's reciprocal action," with this analysis at https://www.marxists.org/subject/marxmyths/jordan/article2.htm (accessed January 7, 2025). Later, Marx and Engels made cooperation and communication key forces of production, so they never excluded the dimension of social interaction from their optic, as critics ranging from Habermas (1971 and 1984) to Baudrillard (1973) have claimed.

30 During the past decades, there have been spirited debates between Marxists and feminists concerning the possibility of a synthesis of Marxism and feminism. See Kuhn and Wolpe 1978; Eisenstein 1978 and 2019; Davis 1981; Nicholson 1986; Collins 1990; Bartky 2006 [1990]; and Afary 2022. I agree that such a synthesis is viable as the conceptual space for a rapprochement between Marxism and that feminism is found in the Marxian theory and texts. I would also note that in "The Communist Manifesto" Marx and Engels made the abolition of the (bourgeois) family second to the abolition of private property (MECW 6: 501); thus they did not totally ignore the issue of the family and the oppression of women, though their primary focus was on production and the liberation of the working class.

31 See August Bebel, *Women and Socialism* (Paris: Foreign Languages Press, 2022), at https://foreignlanguages.press/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/C37-Women-and-Socialism-1st-Printing.pdf (accessed January 6, 2025); Karl Kautsky, "The Commonwealth of the Future: The Abolition of the Family," in *The Class Struggle*, at https://www.

marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1892/erfurt/ch04a.htm (accessed January 5, 2025); and Rosa Luxemburg, "Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle" at https://www.marxists.org/archive/draper/1976/women/4-luxemburg.html (accessed January 5, 2025).

32 Karl Marx, "Preface," in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm (accessed December 16, 2024).

33 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, Chapter Thirty-One: Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist. Karl Marx. *Capital*, Volume One, Chapter Fourteen: Division of Labour and Manufacture, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch14.htm (accessed January 5, 2025).

34 See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (1848), in *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, Vol. One (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), pp. 98–137, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ (accessed January 7, 2025).

35 The notion that political power would disappear in a free association of a future communist society is evident in Marx's polemic against Proudhon, *The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to the Philosophy of Poverty* by M. Proudhon, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/ (accessed January 5, 2025). Friedrich Pollock would later speak of the primacy of the political under fascism and state communism; see "State Capitalism" in Bronner and Kellner (1989, pp. 95–118). Marx characterized modern capitalist societies as marked by a primacy of the economic, while Pollock and other members of the Frankfurt School claimed that the state and the domain of the political were the central ruling force in the configuration of state monopoly capitalism that emerged by the 1930s. Marx, by contrast, envisaged socialism eventually as manifesting a primacy of the social and political, of the producers themselves running and controlling their society, a vision of radical democracy.

36 Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/ch02.htm (accessed January 5, 2025).

37 As Hal Draper (1987) has demonstrated, Marx and Engels consistently championed a democratic republic during the 1848 democratic struggles and celebrated the workers' democracy of the Paris Commune as a model of socialism. Draper makes clear that the word *Diktatur* was always used negatively by Marx and Engels, and that by "dictatorship of the proletariat" they meant "rule by the proletariat." He cites Engels as stating late in life: "Of late, the Social-Democratic philistine has once more been filled with wholesome terror at the phrase: dictatorship of the proletariat. Well and good, gentlemen, do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was the dictatorship of the proletariat." The Paris Commune for Marx and Engels was always their model of radical democracy. See Karl Marx, "The Civil War in France," in Tucker (1978, pp. 618ff).

38 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*: Notebook VII – The Chapter on Capital, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/ch02.htm (accessed January 5, 2025).

39 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*: Notebook IV / V – The Chapter on Capital, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch09.htm (accessed January 5, 2025).

40 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*: Notebook VII – The Chapter on Capital, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch14.htm (accessed January 5, 2025).

41 Karl Marx. *Capital*, Volume One. Chapter Fourteen: Division of Labour and Manufacture, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch14.htm (accessed January 5, 2025).

42 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, Part VII. Revenues and their Sources: The Trinity Formula, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch48.htm (accessed December 27, 2024).

43 Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm (accessed December 26, 2024).

44 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*: Notebook VII – The Chapter on Capital, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch15.htm (accessed December 27, 2024).
45 Karl Marx, "1872 Address to a Congress of the First International, The Hague, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1872/hague-conference/introduction.htm (accessed December 27, 2024).
46 Karl Marx to Arnold Ruge, "Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher," Kreuznach, September 1843, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09.htm (accessed December 27, 2024).
47 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*. Part I: Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm#a4 (accessed December 27, 2024).
48 See Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (1871), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ (accessed December 27, 2024). On the Paris Commune, see also Lissagaray (2012) and Horne (2007).
49 Karl Marx, *The Class Struggles in France, 1848–1850,* at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/ (accessed December 26, 2024).
50 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ (accessed December 26, 2024).
51 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse:* Notebook IV / V – The Chapter on Capital, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch09.htm (accessed December 26, 2024).
52 Karl Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations* (1857–1858), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/precapitalist/ch01.htm (accessed December 26, 2024).
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7 Marx's Critique of *Capital* and the Consumer Society

This chapter will engage both theoretical issues involved in contemporary debates over Marx's critique of capitalism and debates within contemporary Marxian theory about the current form of capitalist society and the emergence of the consumer society. Marx's magnum opus, *Capital* (1867), attempted to provide a scientific analysis of capitalist society in the 19th century grounded in the critique of political economy. In so doing, in his Prefaces to various editions of *Capital* Marx set out important methodological analyses concerning his method of political economy and made clear key points concerning his theory and analysis of *Capital* that I shall engage in the opening sections of this chapter.

Marx also provides empirically grounded analyses of capitalist production, state, society, culture, and ideology to provide a critical theory of capitalist society grounded in political economy and aiming at socialism and revolution to create a socialist/communist society. I have discussed some of these themes in previous chapters, and in this chapter engage the rise of the consumer society after Marx and Engels' death that emerged in the 20th century. I will also provide Marxian analyses of the transition from entrepreneurial and free market capitalism to state capitalism in the 21st century, followed by consumer capitalism and the consumer society after World War II. In the next chapter, I engage what I call "techno-capitalism," which constitutes a synthesis of capital and technology, while creating a capitalist-technological society that has emerged full-blown in the 21st century and is now a dominant form of contemporary capitalist societies.

Hence, in subsequent chapters I will continue to present the key Marxian concepts and methods that help us develop a critical theory of contemporary society and radical transformational politics to move beyond capitalism, and will now begin discussions of important updating of the Marxian theory after Marx and Engels' deaths concerning key developments in the Marxian theory in the 20th and 21st centuries. These latter chapters will thus attempt to provide a Marxian critical theory of contemporary capitalist society and a Marxian concept of socialism and radical social change to develop post-capitalist societies in the present. The project will also involve discussing the relevance of Marxism today for radical critical theory and transformative emancipatory politics in the contemporary era.

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Scientific vs. Critical Marxism

Since the death of Marx in 1883, the tradition of "scientific Marxism" has been dominant in almost all socialist movements and sects, and has been institutionalized in most countries that call themselves "socialist" or "communist." Another tradition of Marxism—called "critical Marxism," "Hegelian Marxism," or, more vaguely, "Western Marxism"—opposed both the fetishism of science and the interpretation of Marxian science in terms of positivism or other bourgeois models of science.[1] Yet critiques of the concept of science operative in "scientific Marxism" have been generally ignored or inadequate, so in this chapter I shall argue for the limitations of the project of "scientific Marxism" and for "critical Marxism" as an appropriate method of social critique and socialist transformation in the contemporary era.

This failure to engage "scientific Marxism" in meta-theoretical debate over the concept of science and scientific method in Marx has had important and harmful political consequences. For instance, from the time of the German Social Democrats in the 19th century and the Bolsheviks and their successors in the 20th, one hears party, or sect, leaders talk of the "laws of history," "historical necessity," or "scientific Marxist theory" that legitimates their specific political positions and actions. I argue in the following pages that this appeal to "Marxian science" has a mystificatory role within political practice and serves to legitimate the power of various political groups, or the "party," by virtue of their superior "science" that supposedly allows them to take the "correct" political line.

I contend in this chapter that the tradition of "scientific Marxism" found in Bernstein, Kautsky, and classical Social Democracy and "Marxist-Leninist" Soviet Communism is grounded in a bourgeois concept of science which is at odds with the theory and method of science implicit in Marx's work, and that this problem puts in question those who wish to present Marxism as a science today. Since "scientific Marxists" usually appeal to Marx as a paradigm of their particular form of science, I shall argue that the interpretation of science in "scientific Marxism" is based on a misreading of Marx's texts and Marx's notion of science and critique.

Through a close reading of the Prefaces to Marx's *Capital* and reflections on the method, theory, and critique of capitalism present in what is usually taken as his "most scientific" work, I argue that "science" for Marx is a quite different enterprise than that of "scientific Marxists," who, I argue, present a truncated and distorted picture of science and scientific method in Marx which I argue is significantly different from positivistic mainstream science that has become dominant in the 20th and 21st centuries. This exercise will put in question the concepts of science, critique, and method in some standard versions of Marxism, and will show the need for more sustained analysis of Marx's method and the need to develop a concept of Marxian science and critique adequate to Marx's work and the theoretical and political tasks of contemporary Marxism. It will also help us define the specificity of Marxian science and how it differs from bourgeois/positivistic science.

Our problems begin when we discover that Marx never explicitly developed a theory of science and critique. Both traditions of "scientific" and "critical" Marxism can find support for their positions within Marx's writings, as both Social Democratic reformists and insurrectionary Leninists can find support for their theoretical and political positions in Marx's writings. Marx was too busy doing economic, political, and historical research, as well as involving himself in the vicissitudes of contemporary radical politics, to develop a meta-theory of science—an epistemology or a detailed presentation of his methodology and critique of opposing methodologies. In fact, the philosophy of science had not substantively developed during Marx's day.[2] Further, I shall try to show that Marx utilized a quite different concept of science from that dominant in mid-19th-century Europe and from 20th-century positivist-empiricist versions of science that sharply distinguish between appearance and reality, fact and value, subject and object, and that exclude a normative and political dimension from "scientific" analysis.

A close reading of the Preface to the first German edition of *Capital*—which contains one of Marx's most detailed published explications of his concepts of "science" and "method"—in the following pages will illustrate the difficulty of pinning Marx down to conventional concepts of science, and will show what distinguishes Marx's method and work from previous and contemporary models of "science."

Reading the Prefaces to *Capital*

In the Preface to the French edition of *Capital*, Marx tells his readers "who zealously seek the truth" that "There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits."[3] "Science" for Marx was perceived as a weapon of truth against superstition, ignorance, and ideologies promoted by "the most violent, sordid and malignant passions of the human breast, the Furies of private interest."[4] Science was also for Marx a vehicle of progress. He was a modernizer par excellence and saw science, industry, and technology as promoting human well-being. "Science" is thus an honorific term for Marx that signifies both a method that would help dispel ignorance and ideology and a progressive force in the modern world. Yet note that Marx states that "there is no royal road to science." What does this mean? That science is difficult? Or that there is no one scientific method or model? Or that there is no direct, immediate access to reality, no unmediated grasp of truth?

As we shall see, examination of the Preface to the first German editions will reveal a series of ambiguities concerning Marx's understanding of "science" in *Capital* and concerning the relationship between science and dialectics in Marx's method. These ambiguities, I submit, disclose real problems in explicating Marx's method which have not been satisfactorily raised or clarified in the many discussions of Marx and science, and which have been ignored or glossed over by most "scientific Marxists" who assume that they know what Marx's method and science are.

Marx's Prefaces should be taken seriously and read carefully. He constantly prepared new Prefaces to new editions and translations of his major works, and they often contain important material. Marx was usually candid and aggressive in his Prefaces, and they often contain in a compressed form important ideas and insights into his method. In the case of *Capital*, the Prefaces contain some of the most important methodological insights that Marx ever published in a major work, and contain the most explicit and revealing references to "science" and method. "Prefaces" alone, however, are of methodological importance only if they in fact illuminate what one actually does, so reflections on Marx's Prefaces will then be connected with and illustrated by a reading of their texts.

Consequently, I now argue that generations of "scientific Marxists," and a generation of Althusserians,[5] have taught us to misread *Capital* and misinterpret Marx—as I shall try to demonstrate in this study—and suggest that we return anew to *Capital* and Marx's other works. Let us begin by reading carefully and thoroughly the Prefaces to *Capital*, and then let us engage the critique of capitalism in Marx's great mature work, which he labored over for decades.[6]

Preface to the First German Edition of *Capital*

After two paragraphs that introduce his work and relate it to his previously published *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx writes in the Preface to the first German edition of *Capital*:

> Beginnings are always difficult in all sciences. The understanding of the first chapter, especially the section that contains the analysis of commodities, will therefore present the greatest difficulty. I have popularized the passages concerning the substance of values and the magnitude of value as much as possible. The value-form, whose fully developed shape is the money-form, is very simple and slight in content. Nevertheless, the human mind has sought in vain for more than 2,000 years to get to the bottom of it, while on the other hand there has been at least an approximation to a successful analysis of forms which are much richer in content and more complex. Why? Because the complete body is easier to study than its cells. Moreover, in the analysis of economic forms neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of assistance. The power of abstraction must replace both. But for bourgeois society, the commodity-form of the product of labour, or the value-form of the commodity, is the economic cell-form. To the superficial observer, the analysis of these forms seems to turn upon minutiae. It does in fact deal with minutiae, but so similarly does microscopic anatomy. (Preface, #3)[7]

Note, to begin, that Marx presents his work as science. He uses organic metaphors (body, cell, etc.) but then suggests that scientific instruments (microscopes, chemical reagents) are not useful in explaining the commodity form, and that "The power of abstraction must replace both." In this way Marx distinguishes his procedure both from that of the "superficial observer" and from

empiricist science that uses the tools of natural science to investigate phenomena. In fact, Chapter I of *Capital* is notoriously Hegelian in its structure, organization, and use of such distinctions as appearance and essence, mediation and contradiction, part and whole, and fetishism and objectification.[8] Marx stresses that his analysis of the commodity analyzes both quantitative and qualitative elements of the commodity, employing a process of "social abstraction" that grasps elements of the commodity that do not appear to everyday consciousness.

Thus, Marxian science is quite different from the empiricist science dominant in 19th-century Europe which grounded truth and verifiability in perception and eschewed theoretical abstractions. Marx informs his readers that:

> With the exception of the section on the form of value, therefore, this volume cannot stand accused on the score of difficulty. I assume, of course, a reader who is willing to learn something new and therefore to think for himself. (Preface #4)[9]

The section on the "value form" is especially difficult because the analysis depends on a process of social abstraction that penetrates beneath social appearances and differs from the habits of empiricist science and common sense observation.

"Social abstraction" is different for Marx from both "empirical abstraction" and "formal-mathematical abstraction." Marx's concept of social abstraction abstracts from the variety and diversity of social processes and phenomena those essential features that make up the concepts of his theoretical model of capitalism (i.e. commodity, value, labor power, etc.). In turn, they are instantiated in social processes but describe certain essential features of the capitalist mode of production, and thus have a theoretical generality different from inductive-empiricist concepts that abstract concepts from a given, observable phenomenon alone (i.e. as in nomological-inductive science).

Marx describes this procedure in paragraph 5, but let us reflect first on a passage from *Capital* III (Part VII, Chapter 48), where he writes: "All science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided."[10] Marx wants to penetrate to the essence of capitalism, to the underlying social processes and relations beneath the surface appearance. This requires not only economic analysis of the capitalist mode of production, but also description of exploitation, class struggle, and the possibility of socialist revolution and the end of capitalism. "Essence" for Marx signifies the fundamental social relations of an object within the capitalist mode of production (such as capital, commodity, or wage labor, etc.). "Essence" is always the essence of something within a historically specific context, and is constituted by the fundamental relations of an object or phenomenon. Under capitalism, these relations are antagonistic, conflictual, and subject to change and modification.

"Economic" relations for Marx are intrinsically social and political, and Marx's object of study in *Capital* falls into the field of "political economy,"

which contains reciprocally interacting socio-political relations that constitute the economy. The "reality" described is that of class struggle, of an antagonistic world torn by division and contradiction. Thus, Marx's categories are fundamentally different from those of a natural scientist or "pure economist," who is describing a world of things, or stable natural objects that possess an independent, atomistic existence which could be grasped and measured by quantitative, purely technical terms. Moreover, "socially necessary illusion," ideology, distorts ordinary everyday perception of social processes and relations.[11] Marxian science must penetrate beneath appearances to grasp the underlying social relations and processes. In this way, Marx reconstructs Hegelian-idealist theories of "essence" to describe fundamental social processes of capitalism.

Marxian science also rejects the bourgeois distinction between "nature" and "history" and the positivist tendency to use methods of the natural sciences to describe historical reality as if there were one "royal road to truth" and that road was the method of the natural sciences. Instead, history enters the object of capital, constitutes social relations and processes, and opens the social field to conflict, change, and human intervention.

History is class struggle for Marx, human activity and production within the constraints of social relations, and economic interests and forces. In this complex, multidimensional, and socio-historical reality, the methods of the natural sciences can only offer poor abstractions: weak attempts to freeze and quantify an antagonistic and constantly changing force-field of relations. In view of this situation, Marx wants to teach his readers "something new"; and not just new "facts" but a new way of looking at things, a new method, a new revolutionary intellectual enterprise which produces a "new science": the revolutionary critique of capitalism and political economy. This theoretical enterprise, I am arguing, cannot be assimilated to bourgeois models of science, and therefore scientific Marxists who assimilate Marxism to conventional science cover over what is novel and revolutionary about Marxian science and misrepresent his enterprise.

Marx next describes his process of social abstraction:

> The physicist either observes natural processes where they occur in their most significant form, and are least affected by disturbing influences, or, wherever possible, he makes experiments under conditions which ensure that the process will occur in its pure state. What I have to examine in this work is the capitalist mode of production, and the relations of production and forms of intercourse (*Verkehrsverhaltnisse*) that correspond to it. Until now, their locus classicus has been England. This is the reason why England is used as the main illustration of the theoretical developments I make. If, however, the German reader pharisaically shrugs his shoulders at the condition of the English industrial and agricultural workers, or optimistically comforts himself with the thought that in Germany things are not nearly so bad, I must plainly tell him: "*De te fabula narratur!*" [It is of you that the story is told.]. (Preface, #5)[12]

When Marx compares his method with that of a physicist, he makes clear that he is engaging in a procedure of social abstraction and is producing a model of capitalist society generalizing from conditions in England. He tells his German reader that the model derived from his English laboratory pertains—or will pertain—to the situation in Germany and, by implication, to other developed capitalist societies. Consequently, Marx was hardly a "relativist" or "historicist" who denied that knowledge of social relations could be obtained, or that comparative historical analysis could take place. Capitalist societies shared certain social processes and relations that contained certain common features. Marx set out to describe what constituted capitalist societies, and took England as his field of study. The question, however, is how he conceptualized his object of inquiry and what methods he used.

Marx clearly sought to discover the basic "natural laws of capitalist production" and seemed to believe that the laws themselves pointed to the eventual demise of capitalism. It is not clear, however, what he meant by "law" or "necessity," and an examination of the actual "laws" of capitalist production which he studied indicate that it would be a mistake to interpret Marx's "laws" in terms of "natural necessity," predicated on the model of natural science, as so many "scientific Marxists" tend to do.

Harry Cleaver (1979) has argued that "laws" in *Capital* refer to observed regularities that Capital is able to impose upon production. "Laws" are therefore those regularities, or rules of the game, which Capital attempts to impose. These laws, however, Cleaver insists, are the results of class struggle. For instance, in Chapter 10, section 6, after describing in detail Capital's attempt to expand the length of the working day to the utmost and working-class attempts to shorten it, Marx writes:

> It has been seen that these highly detailed specifications, which regulate, with military uniformity, the times, the limits and the pauses of work by the stroke of the clock, were by no means a product of the fantasy of Members of Parliament. They developed gradually out of circumstances as natural laws of the modern mode of production. Their formulation, official recognition and proclamation by the state were the result of a long class struggle.[13]

Earlier in Chapter 10, section 5, Marx says that the drive to increase the length of the working day and maximize profit does not "depend on the will, either good or bad, of the individual capitalist. Under free competition, the immanent laws of capitalist production confront the individual capitalist as a coercive force external to him."[14] Here we see "laws" function as coercive forces on the capitalists, driving them to maximize profits. Yet the capitalist drive to expand the working day is countered by the physical limitations of the human body and the struggle of the working class to shorten the working day. Chapter 10 of *Capital*, especially sections 5 and 6, are full of graphic and vivid examples that present the "laws" of surplus value as the results of class struggle.

In short, "laws" for Marx are not eternal conditions or mechanistic forces of nature, but are regularities and constraints that emerge from the capitalist mode

of production. For example, "surplus value" is not used by Marx to calculate and quantify percentages or magnitudes of surplus value in a given firm, sector of industry, or society as a whole. Rather, "surplus value" functions as part of a theory of exploitation that shows how the working class is systematically exploited by the capitalist class.[15] It is a political-economic concept that functions as part of the arsenal of weapons used by socialists and the working class against capitalism. Examination of the theory of surplus value in *Capital* therefore shows that it is a theoretical concept derived from social abstraction which is then used as part of a critical theory of capitalism and as a weapon of socialist politics in the class struggle. Thus Marxian science is hardly empiricist, value-free, or politically neutral.

Although in the German Preface Marx described these "laws" as "tendencies winning their way through and working themselves out with iron necessity," he analyzes countertendencies to these laws, and clearly saw the possibilities of class struggle and human intervention as forces that could break through and overthrow these laws. When he talked of "iron necessity," or the tendency of capitalist production to beget "with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation," he was probably indulging in political rhetoric rather than advocating concepts of economic-historical necessity or hard scientific determinism. Rather, this discourse signals Marx's faith that antagonisms between the working class and capitalists would sharpen and lead to the overthrow of capitalism.

Marx never formulated any "natural law" that guaranteed capital's demise. As noted, he analyzed countertendencies to the tendency of capitalist production to beget "with the inexorability of a law of nature" its own negation; moreover, Marx felt that he had never developed his theory of the falling rate of profit in an adequate scientific form with which he could predict the collapse of capitalism (see Hodgson 1974).

In any case, scientific law does not refer to invariant regularities that could be falsified by a contrary example. Marx's "laws" are part of a theoretical model of capitalism which describes social relations and processes that pertain under certain historical conditions, but which can be radically modified under a different social organization. Marxian laws thus refer to tendencies which in individual cases allow deviation and which themselves are subject to modification and even elimination.

Whereas forms of positivistic empiricism predicated on Newtonian science, dominant when Marx published *Capital*, reify and eternalize scientific laws, Marx historicizes science. All "laws" of history and society for Marx are tendencies which can be changed. As Mihailo Marković (1974) writes:

> Marx's key concepts invariably refer either to structures "which are there, but could be abolished," or to those which "are not yet there, but could be created." To the former belong the concepts of commodity, abstract (alienated) labor, value, surplus-value, profit, capital, class, state, law, politics, ideology, etc. To the latter belong the concepts of "species being" (or social man), praxis, human production, community, freedom, history, communism, etc.

For Marx, laws hold under certain conditions, but humans produce these conditions and can change them. Society is not nature and capitalism is not eternal. Empiricism and bourgeois political economy cannot really conceptualize capitalism or revolution. They can see statistical regularities and perhaps can describe gradual, evolutionary change, while revolutionary Marxian science analyzes regularities and their overthrow, static and dynamic phenomena, historical continuity and discontinuity, evolutionary development, and revolutionary leaps and upheavals. It is no accident that positivistic empiricists of the Second International, like Bernstein and Kautsky, tended to be reformists; and, as Karl Korsch noted, tended to use methods of empiricist science limited to describing gradual, evolutionary change, or historical stasis.[16]

I shall return to this issue in the concluding section. First, let us consider how the "absolute general law of capitalist accumulation" functions in Marx's theory. It is noteworthy that Marx describes this law in terms that recapitulate his theory of alienated labor, and then in mythic-moral terms that metaphorically describe the human suffering of the working class:

> It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the laborer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse. The law, finally, that always equilibrates the relative surplus-population, or industrial reserve army, to the extent and energy of accumulation, this law rivets the labourer to capital more firmly than the wedge of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e. on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.[17]

Consider that this is the passage in which Marx formulates a major law of capitalism and that this "law" describes an accumulation of misery for the working class in proportion to the accumulation of capital. It is clear here that Marx's science is not value-free, politically neutral, theoretically anti-humanist, and so on. It is so unlike classical political economy, or bourgeois social science, that to describe it in terms that ape bourgeois ideologies of science is to distort its uniqueness and specificity.

Consider the mixture of social observation with moral critique and political analysis in the first Preface to *Capital* (#7):

> where capitalist production has made itself fully at home amongst us, for instance in the factories properly so called, the situation is much worse than in England, because the counterpoise of the Factory Acts is absent. In all other spheres, and just like the rest of Continental Western Europe, we suffer not only from the development of capitalist production, but also from the incompleteness of that development. Alongside the modern evils, we are oppressed by a whole series of inherited evils, arising from the

> passive survival of archaic and outmoded modes of production with their accompanying train of anachronistic social and political relations. We suffer not only from the living, but from the dead. *Le mort saisit le vif!* [The dead holds the living in his grasp.][18]

Marx's use of moral language and rhetorical metaphors here is consistent with his use of language and critique throughout *Capital* and his other major works. It is significant that *Capital* is subtitled "Critique of Political Economy" (the title of his 1859 economic treatise that provides a preview of *Capital*), and it has often been pointed out that Marx uses the term "critique" in the title of many of his published works. What, then, is a "critique" for Marx?

While there are various types of "critique" operative in Marx's works, there are two levels of critique that Marx uses in different contexts.[19] First, he criticizes opposing theories in his critique of "political economy," or in political polemics against political theories and programs that he opposes.[20] Marx's "critique of political economy" refers to an intellectual practice through which he criticizes opposing theories and develops his own theory of capitalism. "Critique" in this sense refers to Marx's way of working through his material as he develops his own theory and critique of capitalism.

In a text like *Critique of the Gotha Programme* Marx presents a political critique and indicates what he sees as deficiencies in a German Social Democratic Party that he and Engels were directly involved with and makes proposals for improvement. Further, Marx criticizes capitalist society directly in both his critique of political economy and in various political and historical writings. In fact, the two levels of critique are interrelated in Marx, and I am only proposing an analytical distinction here to clarify what "critique" signifies in Marx's theory and practice. In criticizing alienated labor or exploitation under capitalism, for instance, Marx presupposes a state of affairs (under socialism) of non-alienated, cooperative labor from which standpoint capitalist relations of production can be measured and found deficient. Or, when Marx criticizes the political economy of Adam Smith or David Ricardo, he presupposes a theory (Marxian political economy) from which standpoint opposing theories can be shown to be deficient.

"Critique," in the most general sense, presupposes that something is being criticized for a deficiency, or negative quality, by means of some criteria or standards by virtue of which a state of affairs or theory is deemed inadequate or blameworthy. "Critique" therefore presupposes normative criteria: I can "critique" something when it does not measure up to some standards or theory. Marx's critique of capitalism thus presupposes the possibility and desirability of socialism. Exploitative and alienating labor under capitalism is denounced in the name of non-exploitative and non-alienating labor. Marx tries to discover those tendencies and possibilities in existing capitalist societies that might lead to the construction of a socialist society—and the obstacles to socialist construction and class oppression that can be overcome through class struggle.

The question then arises: from where does Marx derive his standards and theories from which standpoint he can criticize opposing theories or capitalism

itself? Previous idealist or utopian theories derived their standards and norms from a vision of the good society or absolute moral and political values, or essentialist concepts of human nature, from which standpoint they criticized society or other theories. These pre-Marxian thinkers tended to bring to bear external standards to condemn capitalism and opposing theories. These utopian-idealist thinkers usually presupposed an essentialist, absolutist, and transcendental metaphysics, or vision of a good society, which they used as standards or criteria. This metaphysical practice is, of course, foreign to Marx's historical-materialist practice. One of the difficulties, in fact, in reading Marx derives from his materialist reconstruction of previous idealist philosophies so that, for instance, "essence," or "human being," or "critique," or "science" (the list could go on) mean something quite different in Marx's theory than in previous philosophers'.

"Scientific Marxists" fail to appreciate Marx's conceptual reconstruction and fail to see how his concepts differ radically from previous formulations. Instead they are eager to get rid of Marxist "philosophy" and to construct a model of "Marxist science." In fact, such an opposition between "philosophy" (when reconstructed) and "science" is foreign to Marx.

Another problem is linguistic. Marx habitually used the German term for science, *Wissenschaft*, the roots of which pertain to knowledge; and not by accident Hegel and other German philosophers used *Wissenschaft* to refer to their endeavor.[21] The dialectician Karl Marx, however, condemned Hegel and other idealist philosophers who used *Wissenschaft* as having a distorted idealist notion of science and knowledge. Thus Marx's concept of science/knowledge contained both philosophical and scientific connotations of language use in his time that remain pertinent today, and explain why I insist that Marx's concept of science, method, critique, and knowledge combine what is sometimes separated out as "science" and "philosophy"—both of which can be construed as part of "Marxist theory."

Marx—to return to the issue posed earlier—derived his concepts of human nature, socialism, unalienated labor, community, and so on from historical analysis of emerging trends, historical possibilities, and tendencies of historical development, as well as analysis of contemporary conditions. As Gouldner (1980, p. 71) shrewdly puts it, Marx's critique examines

> emerging trends and their relative strength as one element in establishing what may be. It is open to the truly new and emergent. Critique especially throws light on the hidden, repressed, unspoken possibilities, the possibilities that may be hostile to "what is," indicating what they are, why they have been hidden and by whom.

Gouldner continues (p. 71):

> It is thus not "what is" or even what is becoming on which critique is grounded. For it cannot opt for all that is possible, but must select among possibilities on the basis of some set of values to which it has committed itself.

In fact, I would argue that it is precisely from "what is" and "what is becoming" that Marx derives his theories or values (or criteria), which are always subject to change and revision as history develops. Moreover, Marx derived his theoretical and moral standards from antagonisms and struggles within existing society and tendencies toward socialism, for instance, which are already present in the existing society. His theory of the "new society" was derived from the beginnings of socialism already observable, from which standpoint he could criticize the deficiencies of capitalism. Let us, then, turn to a summary discussion of Marx's critique of capitalism.

Marx's Critique of Capitalism

Marx's concept of critique thus contains both a normative and a political dimension. Marx's science is not neutral or "value-free." This is the ideology of bourgeois, or positivist, science. Marx's model of science is critical, humanistic, moral, and revolutionary. Fitting Marx's model of science into positivistic models fundamentally distorts it. Marx was concerned with human suffering and in discovering and eliminating the causes of human misery. As Norman Geras puts it: "Marx could have produced a work that was value-free. In fact, he did not."[22]

Thus, Marx not only analyzed the modalities of exploitation; he also protested against it in the name of those who suffered it and projected a way to end exploitation and alienated labor. A reading of *Capital* that fails to see this is a guilty reading indeed—guilty of an oversight of inexplicable proportions. No doubt one could, by a fairly intricate analytical operation, purge Marx's concept of exploitation of its ethical and critical content (in the first place, one would have to change its name), leaving it only its cognitive function. However, it would then no longer be Marx's concept of exploitation. The use Marx himself makes of it is a critical as well as a cognitive one because he expresses in his work the interests of the exploited.

Indeed, *Capital* is the great treatise that reveals how capitalism produces human misery and exploits and dehumanizes the working class. It contains a moral condemnation of capitalism, and combines empirical and historical description, theoretical analysis, moral rhetoric, and revolutionary politics. This interpretation is supported by the next two paragraphs of the first Preface to *Capital* that I shall examine, as well as by a literary strategy that Marx pursues throughout *Capital*. Note in the following paragraph the literary metaphors, use of moral rhetoric, and the political reference to the importance of government commissions and factory inspectors:

> The social statistics of Germany and the rest of Continental Western Europe are, in comparison with those of England, quite wretched. Yet they raise the veil just enough to let us catch a glimpse of the Medusa's head behind it. We should be appalled at our own circumstances if, as in England, our governments and parliaments periodically appointed commissions of inquiry into economic conditions; if these commissions were armed with

> the same plenary powers to get at the truth; if it were possible to find for this purpose men as competent, as free from partisanship and respect of persons as are England's factory inspectors, her medical reporters on public health, her commissioners of inquiry into the exploitation of women and children, into conditions of housing and nourishment, and so on. Perseus wore a magic cap so that the monsters he hunted down might not see him. We draw the magic cap down over our own eyes and ears so as to deny that there are any monsters. (Preface, #8)[23]

To understand the prevalence and force of Marx's "moral critique" of capitalism, one can perform an experiment, and circle the moral and rhetorical/critical metaphors and language in this paragraph and note throughout *Capital* the use of moral-literary metaphors, the evaluative language, and the highly charged rhetoric. The language and rhetorical strategy used in the passage just quoted is in fact epistemologically ambiguous. On one hand, the social statistics compiled by good bourgeois factory inspectors reveal enough of the facts about capitalism—if only the bourgeoisie would not "draw the magic cap down over our own eyes and ears" and make believe that there are no monsters. Empirical observation, then, can help us get at the facts—but what do they reveal? Marx's answer: "monsters … with a Medusa's head."

Marx continues to use this kind of literary metaphor and moral rhetoric to condemn capitalism throughout his magnum opus: the tendency of the capitalist to extend the working day to increase surplus value is compared to

> the were-wolf's hunger for surplus-labour in a department where the monstrous exactions, not surpassed, says an English bourgeois economist, by the cruelties of the Spaniards to the American redskins, caused capital at last to be bound by the chains of legal regulations.[24]

The section in *Capital* on "Day and Night Work: The Relay System" causes Marx to comment: "The prolongation of the working-day beyond the limits of the natural day, into the night, only acts as a palliative. It quenches only in a slight degree the vampire thirst for the living blood of labor."[25] Commenting on Marx's "metaphoric myths" and "metaphoric rites" in *Capital*, S.E. Hyman (1962, p. 98) writes:

> if the laborer is Sisyphus and Prometheus, capital is not only Gorgon and Furies but a whole menagerie of supernatural horrors. It is a monster "that vampire-like only lives by sucking living labor" … It has a "werewolf's hunger for surplus labor." *Capital*'s machines are giants and ogres: "a mechanical monster whose body fills whole factories, and whose demon power, at first veiled under the slow and measured motions of his giant limbs, at length breaks out into the fast and furious whirl of his countless working organs" … The capitalists are ghouls.

In addition to moral metaphor and a literary-rhetorical polemical strategy, *Capital* is full of historical and social investigation, political diagnosis and prognosis, and revolutionary political intentions. Consider the next passage:

> Just as in the eighteenth century the American War of Independence sounded the tocsin for the European middle class, so in the nineteenth century the American Civil War did the same for the European working class. In England the process of transformation is palpably evident. When it has reached a certain point, it must react on the Continent. There it will take a form more brutal or more humane, according to the degree of development of the working class itself. Apart from any higher motives, then, the most basic interests of the present ruling classes dictate to them that they clear out of the way all the legally removable obstacles to the development of the working class. For this reason, among others, I have devoted a great deal of space in this volume to the history, the details, and the results of the English factory legislation. One nation can and should learn from others. Even when a society has begun to track down the natural laws of its movement—and it is the ultimate aim of this work to reveal the economic law of motion of modern society—it can neither leap over the natural phases of its development nor remove them by decree. But it can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs. (Preface, #9)[26]

Marxism, Commodities, and the Consumer Society

As we have seen, the original theory of Karl Marx focused on capitalist production, exploitation of the working class, class struggle, and socialist revolution. His topic of inquiry in *Capital* was the production process of the workers, their exploitation by the capitalist, and class struggle that would overthrow capitalism and create socialism. Marx wrote in the 19th century, during a time of market capitalism when great corporations owned by families competed, and the state was supposed to leave the market alone in the era of laissez-faire capitalism celebrated by Adam Smith which Karl Marx strongly critiqued (see Chapter 4).

With the rise of the modern state in the 19th and 20th centuries, Marxist theorists working with the Institute for Social Research, known as the Frankfurt School, experienced in Germany in the 1930s the rise of National Socialism and the Nazi regime, as well as the emergence of an autocratic dictatorship under Stalin in the Soviet Union, and began analyzing the changes in capitalist society from Marx's day of market capitalism to state capitalism.[27] Indeed, in the 1930s, after the capitalist depression of the late 1920s and 1930s, the state came to manage the economy in German and Italian fascism, in Soviet Communism, and in the U.S. during the time of Roosevelt and the New Deal.

In Frankfurt School debates about the primacy of capital vs. the state, Friedrich Pollock (1941) argued against the standard Marxian position of the primacy of the economic by affirming a primacy of the political with the rise of state capitalism and fascism in the 1930s, while Franz Neumann (2009 [1942])

argued for the primacy of monopoly state capitalism in *Behemoth*. [28] Hence, the Frankfurt School argued that a mode of state capitalism emerged where the state played a more important role in all realms of society, with the attendant growth of state bureaucracy, administration, social control, and power.

The 20th century also saw the rise of mass communication and culture, and the Frankfurt School developed a critique of the "culture industries" whereby the mass media performed roles of production of ideology and social control, and after World War II, especially in the capitalist countries, promoted consumption and mass culture.[29] In their analyses of the culture industries, the Frankfurt School and a variety of theorists—including Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci, Henri Lefebvre, and other neo-Marxists—deployed Marx's concepts of hegemony, ideology, commodity, reification, fetishism, and alienation to analyze a wide range of phenomena in contemporary society. The Frankfurt School also carried out analyses of the consumer society as a new stage of capitalism, following, and in accord with, state capitalism.

With the stabilization of state monopoly capitalism after World War II, various European and American Marxists saw the emergence of the consumer society as the distinct form of contemporary capitalism. In this social formation, culture, as Fredric Jameson (1979, p. 139) has argued, "far from being an occasional matter of the reading of a monthly good book or a trip to the drive-in," consumption has become "the very element of consumer society itself; no society has ever been saturated with signs and messages like this one."

This phenomenon of the increased role of image and spectacle in reproducing and legitimating advanced capitalism derives from the fact that they are part of the social processes of production and distribution (Debord 1970), as well as creating consumer demand that will reproduce the consumer society (Fromm 1955; Marcuse 1964). More and more contemporary experience is mediated by cultural representation, advertising, and the continual development of the consumer society. Not only does advertising use image and spectacle to sell commodities (Goldman and Wilson 1977), but contemporary capitalism also channels desire through a variety of forms of mass culture (Ewen and Ewen 1982), the media, fashion, toys and games, packaged leisure activities; and the architecture, shopping malls, department stores, billboards, and so on constitute the very facade of advanced capitalism.

Thus, not only do the forms of the consumer society shape our vision of the contemporary world, determining what most people can or cannot see and hear, but our very images of our own body, our own selves, our own personal self-worth (or lack thereof) are also mediated by the omnipresent images of mass culture (Featherstone 1982). In this section, I shall outline the origins of the neo-Marxist theory and critique of the consumer society in the Frankfurt School, examine developments of their positions in contemporary Marxist theories of the consumer society, and then sketch out my own perspectives.

Many 20th-century Marxists have paid close attention to the way in which consumer culture has helped construct the forms, values, and social relations of advanced capitalism. Marx's concepts of the commodity, reification, and

fetishism have been used to analyze a wide range of cultural forms, such as Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of the culture industry, whereby mass culture produces needs, desires, and models of the commodities and life-styles needed for happiness and success in advanced capitalist societies. They argued that the center of new forms and strategies of capitalist integration were the colonizing of leisure by the entertainment industries, which substituted the "manipulated pleasures" of film, radio, sports, bestsellers, and shopping for both social and communal activities and individual cultivation of autonomy and personality (Horkheimer 1941a, 1941b; Horkheimer and Adorno 1972).

During World War II, Horkheimer and Adorno wrote *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where they argued that instrumental reason and reification were becoming extensive in modern industrial societies (capitalist and socialist), and that under the pressures of the administered society, the "individual" was rapidly disappearing (Fromm 1941; Horkheimer and Adorno 1972 [1947]; Horkheimer 1941a, 1941b, and 1974). At the centre of this process stood the productions of the cultural industries that used image and spectacle to manipulate people into social conformity and into behaving in ways functional for the reproduction of capitalism (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972 [1947]; Kellner 1989a, 1989b).

Other critical theorists like Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse also attributed a fundamental role to mass culture and communications. Fromm's first book in the U.S., *Escape from Freedom* (1941), applied the culture industry model to a critique of advertising, mass culture, and political manipulation. He called attention to how mass communications dull capacity for critical thinking and contribute to the decline of the individual. These themes were further developed in *The Sane Society* (Fromm 1955), which criticized passive, manipulated leisure activity from the perspective of the theory of the culture industry.

In *Man for Himself*, Fromm (1947) focuses on character orientation and makes a distinction between "productive" and non-productive character structures, which he labels Receptive, Exploitative, Hoarding, and Marketing, and one positive character orientation, which he called Productive. These character orientations are derived from the capitalist work ethic (production) and current forms of consumer capitalism (consumption), and they provide critiques of how capitalism shapes and controls individual behavior in ways that reproduce the capitalist system and ideology. The receptive character provides a target for the exploitative character who can manipulate the receptive consumer to purchase basic and luxury goods as tokens of success and well-being (see Veblen 1953). The hoarding orientation is obsessed with purchasing and acquiring goods in a way compatible with Max Weber's capitalist ethic and "inner-worldly asceticism," whereby individuals work hard to buy and possess consumer goods, while the marketing orientation produces desires and needs for these goods to ever expand the consumer society (Fromm 1947).

Herbert Marcuse was also very influential in propagating the critical theory model of mass culture and communications. In *Eros and Civilization*, he described the processes through which sexual and aggressive instincts are tamed and channeled into socially necessary, but unpleasant, labor. Like other critical

theorists, Marcuse stressed the manipulation of both consciousness and instincts in inducing the individual to conform. Following the Institute model of socialization, he noted the decline of the family as the dominant agent of socialization and the rise of the mass media (see Marcuse 1955).

Marcuse continued to stress the manipulative character of mass communication and culture in *One-Dimensional Man* as "new forms of social control," which engender "false needs" and "one-dimensional" thought and behavior necessary for the smooth reproduction of advanced capitalism. Marcuse claimed that in advanced industrial society "mass production and mass distribution claim the entire individual" (Marcuse 1964, p. 10). Marcuse was one of the first neo-Marxists to develop a theory of the consumer society and to analyze in detail the role of commodities and consumption in reproducing advanced capitalism and in integrating individuals into it. In a key passage he writes:

> The productive apparatus and the goods and services which it produces "sell" or impose the social system as a whole. The means of mass transportation and communication, the commodities of lodging, food, and clothing, the irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole. The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood. And as these beneficial products become available to more individuals in more social classes, the indoctrination they carry ceases to be publicity; it becomes a way of life … and as a good way of life, it militates against qualitative change. (Marcuse 1964, pp. 11–12)

Marcuse claims that in advanced capitalism, commodities and consumption have transformed the very personality—structure—the values, needs and behavior of individuals—in a way that binds "one-dimensional man" to the social order which produces these needs:

> The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties an Individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced. (Marcuse 1964, p. 9)

In Marcuse's view, the most striking feature of advanced industrial society is its ability to contain all social change and to integrate all potential agents of change into one smoothly running, comfortable, and satisfying system of domination. This "one-dimensional society" is made possible by "new forms of social control" which plant needs and help create a consciousness that accepts and conforms to the system, thus systematically suffocating the need for liberation and radical social change. He believes that: "the most effective and

enduring form of warfare against liberation is the implanting of material and intellectual needs that perpetuate obsolete forms of the struggles for existence" (Marcuse 1964, p. 4).

Although Marx argued that capitalism created a world in its own image and analyzed the commodity-form and commodity-fetishism, he did not see the extent to which the commodity and consumption would integrate the individuals—especially the working class—into the capitalist social order. In Marcuse's analyses of false needs, advertising, ideology, and culture as modes of cultural control, he foresaw the possibility of the identification of the working class with capitalist society and values its structural integration into what he called "one-dimensional society" theorized as a theory without alternatives.

Marx, by contrast, began his analysis at the point of production and did not believe that consumption would compensate for alienated labor, exploitation, and working-class oppression. Marcuse claims that certain consumer and conformist needs provide the basis for the integration of the working class in advanced capitalism. Although human needs have always been preconditioned by the prevailing institutions and interests, Marcuse argues that it is crucial to distinguish between true needs that are essential to human survival and well-being and false needs that are "superimposed upon the individual by particular societal interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice" (Marcuse 1964, p. 5). False needs are for Marcuse artificial and heteronomous: imposed upon the individual from outside by manipulative vested interests. For example, consumer needs for money, possessions, property, and security are repressive to the extent that they perpetuate conformity and alienated labor; although these needs and their satisfaction provide momentary pleasure, they perpetuate a system whose continuation impedes the fulfillment of individual and social needs and potentials.

Marcuse concludes that in advanced industrial society the needs that support and expand the consumer society have become individual needs to buy, possess, and consume. These consumer needs are powerful factors of stabilization, or counter-revolution built into the instinctual structure, as he puts it in *An Essay on Liberation* (Marcuse 1969, p. 1). Moreover, he argues that these false needs are shared by all groups and classes of society, indicating an assimilation and integration of potential oppositional forces within the prevailing establishment of needs and satisfactions:

> If the worker and his boss enjoy the same television programme and visit the same resort places, if the typist is as attractively made up as the daughter of her employer, if the Negro owns a Cadillac, if they all read the same newspaper, then this assimilation indicates not the disappearance of classes, but the extent to which the needs and satisfactions that serve the preservation of the Establishment are shared by the underlying population. (Marcuse 1964, p. 8)

Marcuse's critique of the consumer society and false needs is global and his indictment is damning. He claims that the system's widely championed

individualism is a pseudo-individualism: prefabricated, synthesized, and administered by advertising agencies, corporations and media manipulators. Further, the individual's freedom is a pseudo-freedom that fails to see that bondage to the system is the price of being able to "choose" to buy a new car and live a consumer life-style. Although one-dimensional man conceives of himself as free, Marcuse believes this "freedom" and "choice" is illusory because the people have been preconditioned to make their choices within a predetermined universe that circumscribes their range of choices to the choice between Ford or General Motors, Wheaties or Cheerios, Tweedledum or Tweedledumber.

Thus, for Marcuse, economic freedom would mean freedom from the economy—from being controlled by economic forces and relationships; freedom from the daily struggle for existence, from earning a living. Political freedom would mean the liberation of individuals from politics over which they have no effective control. Similarly, intellectual freedom would mean the restoration of individual thought now absorbed by mass communication and indoctrination, abolition of "public opinion" together with its makers (Marcuse 1964, p. 4).

Marcuse urges liberation from the alienated freedoms that serve as an ideological veil for bondage and domination. He claims that the system's much-lauded economic, political, and social freedom, formerly sources of social progress, lose their progressive function and become subtle instruments of domination that serve to keep individuals in bondage to the system that they strengthen and perpetuate. For example, "economic freedom" to sell one's labor power in order to compete on the labor market submits the individual to the slavery of an irrational economic system; "political freedom" to vote for generally indistinguishable representatives of the same system is but a delusive ratification of a non-democratic political system; and "intellectual freedom" is ineffectual when the media either co-opt and defuse or distort and suppress ideas, and when the image-makers construct the public opinion that is hostile and immune against oppositional thought and action. Marcuse concludes that genuine freedom and well-being depend on liberation from the entire system of one-dimensional needs and satisfactions (see Kellner 1984). This critique of the consumer society had a strong impact on the thinking and politics of the New Left and continues to be debated today.

It might be noted that Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Fromm, and other critical theorists are not the only neo-Marxists who regularly critique the culture industries and the consumer society. Henri Lefebvre's three-volume *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1947–1962) touches on, in a Marxian framework, some of the Marcusean themes of a consumer society; but it is not until his *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1971) that Lefebvre calls contemporary capitalism "the bureaucratic society of controlled consumption." Further, in *Monopoly Capital*, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy (1966) propose Marxist theories of advertising, consumption, and mass culture as crucial components of the capitalist system.[30]

Citing economist Albert Hirschman's (1982) study and his own work, William Leiss (1983) notes that a variety of thinkers of various political persuasions

regularly attack consumption as debased activity. The most extreme contemporary critic of consumption and the commodity is Jean Baudrillard (1968, 1970, 1981). His critique is so outrageous that it would require a separate study to explicate fully his admittedly complex and frequently provocative position and to point out the fallacies and theoretical and political blinders in his position.[31] Baudrillard's critique goes far beyond Marcuse and Fromm in rage and denunciation of commodity and consumption; but it offers no discernible way out of the "society of consumption," and thus hopelessly collapses into one-dimensional hostility in the face of contemporary commodities and media.

Environmentalists have been pointing out that certain synthetic industrial substances are non-biodegradable and are dangerous pollutants (Commoner 1971). In the 1970s, an environmentalist movement developed that sharply criticized capitalist production and consumption as providing a surplus of goods that were having a destructive environmental impact (Speth 2008; Klein 2014).[32] The near epidemic of cancer and other industrial- and environment-related diseases has made it mandatory to become aware of the impact of certain commodities on health and the environment (one out of four people in America today get cancer; one out of five die of it). Governments (sometimes) try to regulate the worst excesses of capitalist production, and frequently document a variety of abuses of different types of commodity production and products.

Indeed, contemporary Marxism should pay more attention to these issues, take environmental and consumer politics more seriously, and more sharply politicize these issues by showing how the capitalist mode of production as such is responsible for a variety of these threats to human well-being and the environment. That is, Marxists today should not, as they have often tended to do in the past, see these health and environmental issues as superfluous to the struggle for socialism, or irrelevant to the task of party-building. Health and environmental struggles threaten capital at its life-line, and should be aimed at its most vulnerable parts and intensified and radicalized.

Indeed, in the 1970s, a powerful environmental movement emerged contesting unregulated pollution and multiple forms of destruction of the environment that are still active today.[33] There have also been revolts against consumerism, and the search for healthier food and less destructive modes of food production and consumption. Many parts of the United States have food cooperatives where members of the community take turns helping gather the produce, and working in the store, as took place in the Wheatsville co-op in Austin, Texas that I belonged to from the 1970s to the 1990s before moving to Los Angeles. Other cites, including LA, have farmers' markets where one can buy fresh produce straight from the fields and healthier food.

On the other hand, initiatives of consumer, environmental, or health movements may be absorbed and used by the capitalist state or the consumer industries themselves. These movements can be utilized to rationalize and strengthen the capitalist system by forcing correction of its worst abuses. They also further technocracy and instrumental domination by making people dependent on "experts" who define their consumer or health needs.

Building on Foucault's work, Bauman (1983), for example, argues that consumer movements, jogging, health foods, on so on lead to more disciplined workers and consumers. Moreover, excessive emphasis on consumption and health may increase narcissism and individualism, driving individuals to be more absorbed in their own bodies and consumer practices. Nonetheless, with these problems in sight, risks must be taken; so contemporary Marxists should try to take more seriously consumer, health, environmental, and other social movements that address the needs of everyday life.

Alternative cultural production also thrives in the fields of music, film, video, theater; and other participatory arts, music, and cultural festivals provide possibilities for collective enjoyment and celebration of the arts. In the U.S., Pacifica radio and pirate radio stations provide alternative news and entertainment, and since the 1960s there have been alternative newspapers, magazines, and other progressive forms of news and information.[34]

Marxists have been long active in producing political entertainment and cultural festivals. For example, the Social Democratic movement had alternative cultural activities, publications, and celebrations by the 1880s;[35] and at the height of the Russian Revolution, the country's film industry produced the revolutionary documentaries of Dziga Vertov[36] and the films of innovative cineastes such as Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Dovzhenko, and others, as well as a revolution in theater, music, and other arts.[37] In Germany, Brecht, Weil, Eisler, and their collaborators produced Marxist-oriented theater, musical productions; and Brecht's film *Kuhle Wampe* shows multiple forms of socialist festivals, concerts, and celebrations, as well as political demonstrations and activities.[38]

Hence, as I have argued in this chapter, neo-Marxism can contribute critical perspectives on commodity and consumption, as well as insights into how the production of needs and consumer practices provides crucial mechanisms through which the consumer society reproduces itself. Marxist consumer practices and alternative cultural forms and practices can also provide the beginnings of an alternative socialist culture within the scope of the consumer society, which often will market and promote anything that can be sold and commodified. Such possibilities have led progressives to produce alternative institutions and cultural movements against capitalism, and this process continues today.

Contemporary Marxism can also provide critical perspectives on how technology and the production of a technological society are providing new forms of domination and social control, as well as emancipatory possibilities—an analysis I will provide in the next chapter.

Notes

1 On the differences between "scientific" and "critical" Marxism, see Gouldner (1980).
2 Yet there are claims that the philosophy of science originated with the Greeks, and there is a long genealogy of the philosophy of science suggesting that science was discussed in philosophical debates of Marx's day. See Shuttleworth (2009).

3 For the French edition, see Marx (2015). On Marx's French translation of *Capital*, see Musto (2022).
4 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, "Preface to the First German Edition" (1867), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p1.htm (accessed December 26, 2024).
5 In the contemporary era, Louis Althusser and his school were the most prominent advocates of Marxism as a science, and argued for a split between the early philosophical works and the later scientific work of *Capital*, which Althusser praised over Marx's early works, providing a truncated version of Marxism. See Althusser (2006 [1978]; Althusser et al. 2016 [1978]); for a critique of Althusser, see Thompson (1978).
6 On the genesis, development, and major themes of *Capital*, see Cleaver (1979) and Heinrich (2012).
7 Since readers are likely to have many different versions of *Capital* on hand to consult, I felt it easiest to use paragraph numbers to pinpoint quotes as the Prefaces are brief enough to easily find the quote in any edition. See here https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p1.htm (accessed December 26, 2024).
8 On the Hegelian structure of *Capital*, see Mosley and Smith (2014) and Smith (2022).
9 https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p1.htm.
10 See https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch48.htm (accessed December 26, 2024).
11 On Marx's concept of ideology, see Chapter 5.
12 https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p1.htm.
13 https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch10.htm (accessed December 26, 2024).
14 https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch10.htm (accessed December 26, 2024).
15 On the debates over surplus value in Marx, see Bellofiore (2018).
16 See Karl Korsch and the discussion in *Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory*, ed. Douglas Kellner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977).
17 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, Chapter Twenty-Five, "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch25.htm (accessed December 26, 2024).
18 https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p1.htm (accessed December 26, 2024).
19 See the discussion of the many senses of critique used by Marx in Chapter 5.
20 In *Capital* Marx presents a "critique of political economy," and in *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875) he is presenting a critique of a specific program put forth by the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany (SDAP) in 1875. For the text of the latter, see https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ (accessed December 23, 2024). See also *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, translated by Kevin B. Anderson and Karel Ludenhoff, Introduction by Peter Hudis, Foreword by Peter Linebaugh (Oakland, CA: PM Press/Spectre, 2023).
21 See, for example, G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, Band 1, at Project Gutenberg, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6729 (accessed December 26, 2024).
22 Norman Geras, "What Does It Mean to Be a Marxist?" *Global Discourse*, at https://globaldiscourse.wordpress.com/contents/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-marxist-by-norman-geras/ (accessed January 3, 2025).
23 https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf (accessed December 26, 2024).
24 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, Chapter Ten, "The Working-Day," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch10.htm (accessed December 26, 2024).
25 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, Chapter Ten, "The Working-Day," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch10.htm (accessed December 26, 2024).

26 https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p1.htm (accessed December 26, 2024).
27 On the Frankfurt School, see Jay (1973); Arato and Gebhardt (1982); Bronner and Kellner (1989); Kellner (1989a) and Wiggershaus (2007).
28 On the Pollock–Neumann debate over fascism, see Brick and Postone (1976) and Lenhard (2024).
29 On the theory of the culture industries, see Horkheimer and Adorno (1972 [1947]).
30 See the critique of their formulations on these topics by Dallas Smythe (1977) and the analysis of the similarities between the theories of capitalist integration in Marcuse's critical theory and Baran and Sweezy by Harry Cleaver (1979). These analyses of the consumer society are updated in Miles (1998) and Cross (2000).
31 For my systematic appreciation and critique of Baudrillard from a neo-Marxist perspective, see Kellner (1989b).
32 Timothy Luke (1977 and 1999) criticizes literature on the environmental crisis from a neo-Marxist point of view that also puts some Marxian analyses of the crisis in question.
33 See Byron Taylor, "The Third Decade and Beyond: Radical Environmentalism in the Twenty-First Century," Environment and Society Portal, at https://www.environmentandsociety.org/exhibitions/radical-environmentalisms-print-history/third-decade-and-beyond-radical-environmentalism (accessed January 6, 2025).
34 On alternative media, see the "Alternative Media" website, which features sections by John Downing on radical media, at https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/alternative-media (accessed January 3, 2025).
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38 See Douglas Kellner, "Brecht's Marxist Aesthetic," in *A Bertolt Brecht Reference Companion*, ed. Siegfried Mews (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), pp. 281–295.

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8 Marxism, Technocapitalism, and the Information Revolution

Media and computer technologies are creating dramatic changes that are producing an explosion of rhetoric and hype touting the benefits of the new information revolution and artificial intelligence (AI), where individuals will supposedly get data and entertainment on demand, hook up to new virtual communities, and even create new identities. Such ideological hyperbole has accompanied the introduction of all new technologies. However this time the structures of contemporary capitalist economies, politics, society, culture, and everyday life are dramatically changing, and creating new ideologies to hype AI, new social media, and emergent information and virtual technologies, requiring radical social theory to rethink its assumptions, models of society, and politics.[1]

In this chapter, I wish to argue that if Marxism is to have a future it must theorize the new media and digital technologies, and revise and update its analyses of contemporary capitalist societies and socialist politics accordingly. I will also show that Marxian theory provides powerful perspectives to make sense of the technological and information revolution and the momentous changes currently transforming every dimension of social reality, but that it needs to be reconstructed and updated as well to adequately theorize the information/communications technology revolution of the 21st century and to develop appropriate political practices in light of the momentous changes and challenges of the contemporary era.

Forces of Production

Media and digital technologies are among the most advanced forces of production which are creating a new global technocapitalist society that may well strengthen capitalist relations of production and hegemony, but also contain the potential for democratizing, humanizing, and transforming existing inequities in the domains of class, race, and gender.[2] Like most technologies, they can be used as instruments of domination or liberation, and can empower citizens and working people, or they can be used by capital as powerful instruments of domination. It is therefore a mistake to either celebrate new media and digital technologies in the mode of technophilia or simply denounce them in the mode of technophobia.

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A critical theory of technology, by contrast, characterizes technologies both as potential instruments of liberation that could be used to democratize and humanize society and empower individuals and as powerful instruments of capitalist domination and hegemony. The construction and effects of technologies depend in part on how corporations market and use the technologies, in part on government regulation, and in part on the will and intelligence of individuals and social movements struggling to determine the structure, uses, and effects of the new social media and digital technologies. Which side prevails in specific cases will determine the shape of the future.

So far, neo-liberals, libertarians, and technophiles of various stripes have been strongly celebratory of the potential of new technologies for new jobs, new modes of information and communication, and democratization, while radicals and traditional humanists have been frequently denunciatory, exposing the illusions of media and digital technologies and attacking their actual implementation and use. The task for the Left in the face of new media and technologies, I would argue, is to theorize how they are currently being implemented, to discern their more positive potentials, and to develop strategies and struggles to work for their democratization and humanization.

I have in previous publications outlined some of the consequences of media culture in transforming contemporary society and politics,[3] and in this chapter I will delineate some of the features of the emerging digital culture, its syntheses with media culture, and its impact on every dimension of social life. After delineating the terrain of the always evolving media and technoculture, I shall articulate some strategies concerning how progressives can use media and digital technologies to promote democratization and positive social change in order to counter the technophobia still widespread on the Left.

Classical Marxian perspectives provide a starting point to theorize the impact and use of new media and digital technologies. For Marxian theory, the new technologies are forces of production used by capital to produce a new media and information society in which information, entertainment, education, and everyday life will be mediated by these technologies. The project of corporate capital is to commodify the new technologies and the data they extract from their use as rapidly as possible to maximize capital accumulation[4] and create a new technocapitalism in which capital and technology are combined to create new social relations, commodities, and new forms of information and communication. With this "great transformation" into a new era of capital, the project of the Left should be to struggle for the decommodification of these new media and technologies and to use them against the interests of capital and in favor of empowering human beings and creating a more democratic society and life worthy of human beings.

Since the 1990s, the Internet/World Wide Web and now social media have been free to many who have government, business, or academic affiliations, and broadcast television is free to the entire public, although cable and streaming channels are becoming increasingly expensive. There have been moves by the entertainment and information industries, however, to privatize the Internet/World Wide Web and to charge for all stream media programming, perhaps on

a pay-per-view basis, and even to charge for information and communication. The struggle against the commodification of information and entertainment will thus help determine the future of our information and communications system and infotainment ecosphere.

Further, a dominant ideology has been that media and digital technologies inherently empower people; and, while there is some truth to this claim, it is also the case that these technologies are used to empower some people while exploiting, manipulating, and disempowering others. Moreover, some people become slaves to these media and technologies, and are captive users of the technosphere to the detriment of their everyday lives, social relations, and development of a many-sided personality. Meanwhile still others cannot afford the basics of broadcast television or Internet and digital culture, and thus are excluded from the emergent technoculture altogether.

Moreover, and to change the focus, whether individuals do or do not have ready access to information and social media in the future, and the skills necessary to function in an information society, will determine whether society is more or less egalitarian and democratic in the future. From the beginning of the introduction of new technologies like cable television or the Internet and digital media, there were signs that red-lining of neighborhoods was taking place in the construction of information and entertainment systems,[5] and there are still areas of the earth left out of the information revolution, without access to information or participation in the emerging public spheres that I describe below.

There are countervailing signs, however, that efforts are being made in some U.S. school districts and communities to ensure that every individual has access to new digital technologies to gain the skills, education, and training necessary to participate in a high-tech environment.[6] It is indeed crucial that women, members of oppressed minorities, and the entire strata of the general public gain access to the education, skills, and technology required for jobs and participation in the public spheres of the future. Of course, the new technologies are for the most part only deployed at present in some areas of the overdeveloped countries and in some parts and sectors of the developing world, although they are quickly going global.[7]

While only one in five people in the world had a telephone in the 1990s, today more than half the world has mobile phones,[8] although many fewer have access to computer technology. Yet the proliferation of new communications technologies may help erode existing inequalities and divisions—although they may well intensify class domination and gender, race, and class inequality and subordination. For this reason, it is important for developing countries to devise strategies to enable their citizens to use new technologies to better themselves and to overcome existing inequalities and oppression, and for individuals and communities to get access to these technologies.

Indeed, the new information and communications digital technologies are part of the creation of a new capitalist global order in which media, computer, and digital technologies are the very vanguard and instrument of globalization, intending to bring information and entertainment to the entire planet.[9] Indeed,

McLuhan's global village may well be a scenario for the future, although it is taking the form of corporate and state technoculture and not of a utopia of free information and entertainment, or of a global village where everyone can communicate freely with everyone else.[10]

It is clear by now that the massive media mergers of the past decades are harbingers of corporate concentration and strategies that aim to globally penetrate new markets and compete for dominance in existing ones. Major mergers of the last decades include the following:

- WarnerMedia and Discovery: This created Warner Bros. Discovery, combining iconic content like HBO, CNN, and the Discovery Channel under one company.
- Disney and Fox: Disney acquired a large portion of Fox's entertainment assets, including major movie studios and television networks.
- Disney and Hulu: Disney acquired the remaining stake in streaming service Hulu, solidifying its control over the streaming platform.

Other notable broadcast mergers included:

- AT&T and Time Warner: This merger was highly scrutinized due to its potential impact on media ownership.
- CBS and Viacom: These two entities combined to form ViacomCBS, now known as Paramount Global.
- Fox bought streaming TV service Tubi for $440 million.
- Netflix bought Animal Logic, an animation studio.[11]

The mergers between entertainment, broadcasting, and social media and Internet giants are signs of new synergies between entertainment and information and production and distribution systems within an oligarchic technocapitalism that tightens corporate control of sources of information and entertainment at the same time as corporate products are globally disseminated, helping to produce a new global technocapitalist culture. Therefore, when talking of the media and information society we are talking of corporate globalization, with the media and digital technologies unevenly distributed in the overdeveloped and underdeveloped worlds.[12]

My discussion of strategies of democratization of digital and information technology will accordingly focus on conditions in advanced capitalist societies, although it is imperative that discussions also take place concerning how digital technologies can aid people in the developing countries in their struggles for control over their futures.

Pessimism of the Intellect

With the defeat of the movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the collapse of large sectors of the existing socialist world in the 1980s, there are extremely

good reasons for pessimism, as new media and digital technologies give global capital new sources of profitability and new instruments of social control undreamed of in the corporate imaginaries of the past. On the other hand, Antonio Gramsci's motto, "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will," still seems the appropriate response for radicals in the current situation, as I will argue in succeeding sections of the chapter.[13] In this section, I will accordingly delineate some reasons for skepticism concerning the positive benefits of digital technologies as instruments of democratization and social justice, as well as grounds for pessimism that they will serve primarily as instruments for capitalist hegemony. In subsequent sections, however, I will concentrate on activist strategies and ways that digital technologies might help the democratic and socialist project.

All the utopian talk of "information superhighways" and the great media societies of the future helps mask the fact that contemporary capitalist societies are in a situation of seemingly permanent crisis, with increased human suffering due to deteriorating social conditions and inequalities between the haves and have-nots. Internet technologies were introduced and hyped in the mid-1990s when the 1995 Republican Party "Contract with America" increased poverty, homelessness, and class, gender, and race inequalities while providing more wealth and power to the privileged.[14]

Meanwhile, the conditions of everyday life, even in the metropoles of the United States, were disintegrating dramatically. At the time when the Internet/World Wide Web and its information superhighway were dramatically expanding and transforming information and communication access, numbers of homeless and unemployed continued to grow; epidemics of cancer, HIV/AIDS, and other deadly diseases proliferated with no cure in sight; crime and violence were on the rise; tobacco, drugs, and alcohol took millions of lives yearly; drinking water continued to be contaminated by toxic chemicals; and basic foods were adulterated with chemicals, additives, and pesticides, many of which also contributed to deadly diseases. Accidents and deaths in the workplace grew, while people were subject to increased surveillance, insecurity, and cutbacks in social benefits.[15]

As compensation for decaying social conditions, those who can afford it are offered an ever increasing dose of media culture, consumption, and new digital technologies. The numbers of channels on cable television continued to multiply, and in the 21st century one can access multitudes of such channels, also accessible as online streaming channels, with high costs in both cases, and with media and information inequality continuing.[16] The hours spent watching television have continued to grow from the 1990s to the present, the amount of advertising continues to increase, and even more time is spent on social media.[17]

Further, digital technologies and social media are producing a new techno-imaginary, often shaped by capitalist values, in a situation in which the colonization of leisure and society by media culture and technology first described by the Frankfurt School continues apace.[18] The new techno-imaginary is shown emerging in the film *The Social Network* (2010), where entrepreneurs in college

create new Internet sites/technologies that produce a new technoculture where the young techies imagine untoward wealth and power coming to them through the new technologies and an imaginary that technoculture is where it's at.

In turn, the technoculture gravitates to California's Silicon Valley, where a cadre of high-tech moguls have created new corporations such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and a wealth of other social media sites. The new techno-imaginary, which lives and dreams in the virtual and digital space of technoculture, imagines they are in a sphere in which everyone can become rich and powerful. This techno-imaginary is also visible through a culture of "influencers" who promote themselves and various products through a mushrooming of social media sites. In this culture, one gains popularity, "friends," and the ability to monetize sectors of the expanding technoculture, and becomes both a denizen and promoter of this space and life-style.

The media and digital society of the present, also marked by what French neo-Marxist Guy Debord called "the society of the spectacle," continues to invert the relationship between the imaginary and the real, with positivity and value invested in media, digital, and commodity spectacles, while everyday life becomes ever more uniform, banal, and degraded.[19] Debord's concept helps describe the current fascination with digital culture that provides exciting new worlds of information, entertainment, spectacle, interaction, and wealth and power, compensating for declining social conditions and standards of living in many areas and sectors of the world.

Part of the downside of the digital and media society, therefore, is that it masks deteriorating social conditions and crises, growing inequality, and eco-crisis, challenging neo-Marxist social theory to theorize and deploy these emerging technologies to point to current problems, to propose solutions, and to mobilize for progressive social transformation. Unfortunately, those who are most exploited and oppressed by the social order can afford little more than the "free" entertainment provided by media culture, especially television.

As an escape from social misery, or distraction from the cares and woes of everyday existence, people thus increasingly turn to media and digital culture to produce some meaning and value in their lives. Sports offer identification with glamour, power, and success, "empowering" those who identify with winning teams and stars. Soap operas and situation comedies provide "education" for coping in the contemporary social order, while action-adventure entertainment demonstrates who has power and who doesn't, who can and cannot exercise violence, and who does and does not get awarded with the benefits of the "good life" in the media and consumer society. Advertising demonstrates how to solve problems and how to be happy, successful, and popular—through proper commodity purchasing and enjoyment. Films glamorize the "American way of life" and provide unreal models of identification, while images of violence constantly increase on the screen and in everyday life.[20]

Those who celebrate the media and information society tend not to focus on what kind of society produces a digital technoculture and multimedia cornucopia for its privileged denizens while denying others the basic necessities of life.

Without critical perspectives on contemporary media and digital society, with its emerging information and entertainment infrastructure, all celebrations of an information superhighway and media-techno utopia are purely ideological, serving to veil the current misery of millions and increasing poverty of U.S. culture and society. Indeed, surrender of criticism and oppositional resistance to the injustices and oppression in the contemporary technocapitalist societies are nothing more than capitulation to a way of life that produces incredible suffering for people throughout the world.

Moreover, the media and information society forecast in the mid-1990s is now here; but what wonders has it wrought? Has the entertainment and information of the present age brought about increased happiness, freedom, and well-being, even for those privileged to access it? Rather social, cultural, and political barbarism are among the most striking features of the present age, with Israel waging in the 2020s a genocidal war against the Palestinians and then expanding the war into Lebanon and Syria, while Vladimir Putin and his Russian imperialists wage war on Ukraine. Meanwhile in 2025 the U.S. and the world tremble at the second presidency of the autocratic Donald Trump, who caused havoc and chaos in the United States during his first term. Trump 2.0 is destroying the U.S. Justice and Education Department, and closing or downsizing many crucial agencies (including those that regulate food, products, and the environment) while making the U.S. military and government agencies such as Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) instruments of his retribution in a mass deportation of desperate refugees, and using the U.S. government to empower and enrich himself and his followers while attacking the institutions and values of democracy and social justice.

Perhaps a future age will look back at this era of political and media culture with disbelief. It could be that denizens of an age of interactive technologies will look back at the passive couch potatoes of the television era and social media "influencer" culture in wonder.[21] Perhaps those able to access information and entertainment free from a wealth of sources from techno-databases will be astonished that in this era the vast majority of people depended on television and politically biased Internet and social media sources for their prime access to information. Perhaps later generations who have access to a vast array of significantly different and better information sources and cultural texts at their fingertips will be amazed that people actually wasted their time on the programs of commercial television, radio, film, and social media during the present era.

Perhaps individuals in a future age will be astonished that people watched so much television, sat through so many poor films, listened to so much mediocre music, and read such trashy magazines and books, hour after hour, day after day, year after year. People in the future may indeed look back at our age of media and political culture as an astonishing age of cultural barbarism in which commercially driven culture industries pandered to the lowest common denominator, pouring out films, TV shows, social media, pop novels, and other material that depicted violence as the way to solve problems, that debased women and people

of color, and that repeated the same old tired genre formulas over and over. The endless sequels of popular films and the eternal recurrence of the same in the fields of television, popular music, and other forms of media culture might strike a future age as highly primitive and barbaric.

A future age might look at an era that idolized Sylvester Stallone, Michael Jackson, Beavis and Butt-Head, Tom Cruise, Paris Hilton, Donald Trump, Elon Musk, fashion models, social influencers, and other celebrities as highly peculiar, as weird. Future generations may look at our advertising-saturated culture as the crudest and crassest commercialism, as one of the most amazing wastes of time and resources in the history of civilization. Perhaps future historians will be astonished that, during the 1980s and 1990s, figures like Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Bill Clinton were elected as presidents of the United States; that reactionary politicians like Margaret Thatcher and John Major ruled England; that Helmut Kohl and his arch-conservative party governed Germany; that Italy was ruled by corrupt and crude media baron Silvio Berlusconi, with lackluster conservatives Brian Mulroney, Kim Campbell, and Mike Harris governing federally and provincially in Canada; while alcoholic demagogue Boris Yeltsin reigned in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by the vicious autocrat Vladimir Putin; and that similar mediocre, greedy, corrupt, and vicious individuals controlled much of the world, with the era of corruption and autocracy topped by the 21st-century election of Donald Trump, who used disgust with the current social political system to mask his reactionary political ideas and envisaged destruction of democracy in his second term.

Future ages might look back on the incredible concentration of wealth and striking class differences, the phenomenal amount of world hunger and poverty, the deadly diseases, the violence and social disorder, and the lack of humane and egalitarian social institutions and perceive this condition as truly astonishing. Our time might thus be looked upon one day as a dark age of incredible ignorance, backwardness, and brutality, where life is nastier, more brutish, and much shorter than it needs to be. Perhaps our time will be looked on as an especially backward period, when individuals had not yet adjusted to new technologies, when they were overwhelmed by new media and digital technoculture and were not yet well enough educated to govern themselves and control their technologies, media, and social and political life.

Perhaps a future generation will come to terms with the new media and technologies and use them to enhance their individual lives. Perhaps the growing choice of information and entertainment will empower individuals to increase their realm of choice and control over their culture, and thus increase their autonomy and sovereignty. Perhaps in the future there will be media study groups, like the book study groups of our era, in which individuals gather together personally and virtually to critically dissect literary and media artifacts and digital technologies, their proliferation, and impact. Perhaps media and digital technology education will be a standard part of schooling from grade school on up to universities and beyond.[22] Perhaps individuals will learn to use

the new technologies to communicate with each other, to produce their own media artifacts, which are circulated and distributed throughout society so that previously marginalized voices are able to speak; so that the full range and diversity of cultures find expression; so that individuals and groups can speak to others, be creative, and participate in the production of society and culture.

Perhaps future governments will discern the importance of culture and will regulate the media platforms and technologies to limit the harms and increase the positive potential by subsidizing a wide range of cultural artifacts, freeing cultural expression from the tyranny of the market and the iron yoke of advertising. Perhaps the works of the corporate mega-media conglomerates of ABC/Disney, Time Warner/Turner, Sony/Columbia, Paramount/Viacom/Blockbuster, CBS/Westinghouse, and their descendants will be shunned and abhorred by audiences who find their products intrinsically debased, insulting, and boring, and these conglomerates will wither away, to be replaced by a vibrant spectrum of media cultural expression and a wide range of visions and voices.

Perhaps, but perhaps not. Perhaps people of the future will spend more time watching increased amounts of ever stupider products and the lowest common denominator will sink ever lower, to an era of cultural barbarism impossible to envisage in the present. Perhaps the present will appear as a Golden Age of individualism, freedom, and democracy to future inhabitants of dystopic societies, much as the post-Holocaust, apocalyptic science fiction films depict our 21st-century present as utopian compared to the dismal future depicted in some films.

Media Culture, Digital Technologies, and Contemporary U.S. Politics

In any case, the coming media and technoculture and the explosion of new digital and social media are probably, in one form or another, our shared fate; and so we should begin thinking about what sort of a future we do and do not want, and should act accordingly. If Marxian theory wishes to have a future, it must therefore both map the social conditions of the present moment and sketch out alternative socialist futures that will use the new technologies to benefit everyone, and not just the privileged few and giant corporations. A revitalized Marxism could reinvigorate the utopian imagination that has always been part of its tradition, and articulate imagined and possible futures to help guide our present and future choices and actions.[23]

Reflection on possible media and technofutures calls attention to the urgency of impending tasks for cultural activism that have been neglected or suppressed in the tumult and confusion of the present. Indeed, political cultural wars over race, gender, sexuality, and identity politics have been the distinguishing feature of most technocapitalist societies since the 1960s and 1970s. In the United States, society and politics have been a contested terrain between liberals and conservatives, with radicals increasingly marginalized after being of key importance in the 1960s and early 1970s—although the Make America Great (MAGA) movement is far more radical and destructive than any currents of the

far Left from the 1960s to the present, and currently control the presidency while threatening autocratic rule and assaults on democracy never before witnessed in the United States.

Media and technoculture have been at the center of the struggles of the present age for decades and will continue to be in the future.[24] In fact, one could argue that the victory of Reagan and the Right in the United States in 1980 was related to the Right's effective use of television, radio, fax and computer communication, direct mailings, telephone, and other sophisticated political uses of new media and technologies. Further, one could argue that Clinton's victory over Bush in 1992 and the surprising success of the Ross Perot campaign were related to effective uses of media and communication technologies. And the succeeding Republican and rightwing success in the 1994 elections can be related to their use of talk radio, computer bulletin boards, and other technologies. In the 21st century, Barack Obama's two presidential victories can be ascribed to his use of broadcast and social media, as can Donald Trump's 2016 and 2024 victories.[25]

Media and Digital Technology and the Rise of Donald Trump

Donald Trump's run for the presidency and his victories in 2016 and 2024 are indeed unimaginable without consideration of his use of media culture to make him a celebrity in the 1980s and his use of social media and digital technology, especially Twitter/X, in his presidential campaigns.

Since Trump's national celebrity derived in part from his role in the reality-TV series *The Apprentice*, [26] we need to interrogate this popular TV phenomenon to help explain the Trump phenomenon. The opening theme music, "For the Love of Money," a 1973 R&B song by The O'Jays, established the hyper-capitalist ethos of the competition for the winning contestant to get a job with the Trump organization, and obviously money is the key to Trump's business and celebrity success. However there is much controversy over his wealth, and he has been forced to release his tax returns, which show he is not as rich as he claims, that he does not contribute as much to charity as he had claimed, and that for many years during his business career, and even in his first presidency, he paid little or no taxes.[27]

In the original format to *The Apprentice*, several contestants formed teams to carry out a task dictated by Trump, and each "contest" resulted with a winner and Trump barking "You're fired" to the loser. Curiously, some commentators believe that in the 2012 presidential election Barack Obama beat Mitt Romney handily because he early on characterized Romney as a billionaire who liked to fire people, which is ironic since this is Trump's signature personality trait in his business, reality-TV, and now political career, which saw him fire multiple campaign managers and advisors by August 2016, and multiple high members of his 2016 administration. These included high-powered generals and his Secretary of State Rex Tillerson (former president of Mobile-Exxon), who was caught on camera calling Trump a "fucking moron" after walking out on a meeting with him, and who was fired by tweet a day or so later.[28]

When NBC started negotiating with Trump about *The Apprentice* in 2002, according to then NBC chairman Jeff Gaspin, the network was not sure that the New York-centric real estate mogul would have a national resonance, and the initial concept envisaged different billionaires each season hiring an apprentice. The show immediately got good ratings, and Trump became a popular TV figure as he brought the contestants into his board room in Trump Tower, appraised their performances, insulted those who did not do well, and fired the "loser."[29]

The Apprentice's producer, Mark Burnett, broke into national consciousness with his reality-TV show *The Survivor* (2000–present), a neo-Darwinian epic of alliances, backstabbing, and nastiness, which provides an allegory of how one succeeds in the dog-eat-dog hypercapitalist business world in which Donald Trump has thrived, and spectacularly failed, as many of the books about him document. Both Burnett and Trump share the neo-Darwinian (a)social ethos of 19th-century ultracompetitive capitalism, with some of Donald Trump's famous witticisms proclaiming:

> When somebody challenges you unfairly, fight back—be brutal, be tough—don't take it. It is always important to WIN!
> I think everyone's a threat to me.
> Everyone that's hit me so far has gone down. They've gone down big league.
> I want my generals kicking ass.
> I would bomb the shit out of them.
> You bomb the hell out of the oil. Don't worry about the cities. The cities are terrible.[30]

It is astonishing that a man with these views would succeed in media and politics; but evidently Trump found a responsive audience, and *The Apprentice* made him a national celebrity who became well known enough to plausibly run for president. Throughout his first presidential campaign in 2016, Trump used his celebrity to gain media time. In addition to his campaign's ability to manipulate broadcast media, Trump is also a heavy user of Twitter/X and posts messages throughout the day and night.[31] Indeed, he may be the first major Twitter/X presidential candidate, and certainly the one using it most aggressively and frequently. Twitter was launched in 2006, but I don't recall it being used in a major way in the 2008 election, although Obama used Facebook as part of his daily campaign apparatus (with claims that he had over a million "Friends").

Donald Trump, however, has used Twitter/X more and more aggressively than any previous presidential candidate, blasting out grievances and daily attacks on his enemies, and calling constant attention to his greatness. When asked at an August 26, 2015, Iowa campaign event as to why he used Twitter so much, Trump replied that it was easy, it only took a couple of seconds, and that he could attack his media critics when he "wasn't treated fairly." He has

also used Instagram, the social networking service that enables users to share pictures and videos on a variety of platforms. Twitter/X is the perfect vehicle for Trump to propagate his opinions and order followers what to think and do. It enables him to define his brand and mobilize those who wish to consume or support it. It gratifies his need to be noticed and recognized as a master communicator who can muster warriors in an online community; and it enables the Pundit-in-Chief to opine, rant, attack, and proclaim on all and sundry.

Hence, in 2016 in his first run for president candidate Trump was at work mastering new media as well as dominating television and old media through his orchestration of media events as spectacles, along with his daily Twitter feed. In his presidential campaign kickoff speech on June 16, 2015, Trump and his wife Melania dramatically descended the stairway at Trump Tower in New York City, and the Donald strode up to a gaggle of microphones and dominated media attention for days. The opening speech of his campaign contained a typically inflammatory remark that held in thrall news cycles for days when he stated:

> The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems. [Applause] Thank you. It's true, and these are the best and the finest. When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.[32]

This comment ignited a firestorm of controversy and a preview of things to come concerning racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, and the other hallmarks of Trump's cacophony of hate. Debate over his assault on undocumented immigrants would come to dominate daily news cycles of the Republican primaries, would continue to play out in the general election in Fall 2016, and would return as a major theme in Trump's successful comeback run in 2024 after losing to Joe Biden in 2020.

One of the keys to Trump's success as a politician is that he gets more airtime in the corporate capitalist mainstream media because he gets good ratings as his MAGA audience tunes in religiously and opponents enjoy his daily blunders and inanities.[33] In the lead-up to the first Republican primary debate in Fall 2015 during his first run for the presidency, Donald Trump got the most publicity, and his daily campaign appearances and debates became media spectacle dominated by him. Cable news networks would hype his campaign events with crawlers at the bottom of the TV screen proclaiming "Waiting for Trump," with airtime dominated by speculation on what he would talk about. Trump's speeches were usually broadcast live, often in their entirety, a boon of free TV time that no other candidate of either party was awarded. Pundits would dissect what he had said and assess his standing vis-à-vis the other Republican candidates. If Trump had no campaign event planned, he would fire

off a round of tweets against his opponents, which would then be featured on network cable news discussions as well as social media.

Hence, Trump's orchestration of media spectacle and a compliant mainstream media were crucial factors in thrusting him ever further into the frontrunner status in the 2016 Republican primaries and winning for him overwhelming amounts of media attention, and eventually the Republican nomination and presidency. The first major quantitative study of candidate media coverage after the Republican primary revealed that, from mid-June 2015 (after he announced he was running) through mid-July, Trump was in 46 percent of the news media coverage of the Republican field, based on Google news hits. He also got 60 percent of Google news searches,[34] and later academic studies will likely show how he dominated all media channels during the Republican primaries and the 2024 general election.

After Trump's win in 2024, Joe Biden announced the dangers of a technooligarchy and autocracy; and with Trump bringing in Elon Musk (owner of Tesla, SpaceX, and X/Twitter) to head the newly created DOGE, Biden's warning was more than prescient in the first 100 days of the second Trump administration. During this time there have been attacks on the institutions of U.S. democracy; important sectors of government have been gutted and even closed; a trade tariff war crashed the stock market but was "postponed" after public outrage; and U.S. allies in NATO and other international organizations have come under attack as Trump tries to realize his autocratic vision of "America First" embodied in a movement that, looking at the past, advances the reactionary and rhetorical slogan: Make America Great Again.

Consequently, I would argue that effective use of digital technology is essential in contemporary politics, and that activists who wish to engage in the new public spheres need to deploy new communications and digital media to participate in democratic debate and to shape the future of contemporary societies and culture. My argument is that, first, broadcast media like radio and television, and now digital and social media, have produced new public spheres and spaces for information, debate, and participation that contain both the potential to invigorate democracy and to increase the dissemination of critical and progressive ideas—as well as new possibilities for manipulation and social control and the promotion of rightwing social movements like MAGA. Yet participation in these new public spheres—from the earliest computer bulletin boards and discussion groups, talk radio and public access television, and later the sphere of cyberspace and new digital and social media—requires intellectuals to gain new technical skills and to master new technologies.

The Left and Media and Digital Technologies: Optimism of the Will

The emergent media and digital technologies can be and are being used by both sides in the cultural wars of the present, and are further marginalizing those without access to digital technologies and the new public spheres they are producing. As I indicated, the Republican Right has been extremely effective in its

use of new technologies, as have extreme Right militia groups that use computer bulletin boards, fax, talk radio, public access television, and video to disseminate their messages of hate and paranoia—a well-documented phenomenon even in the early 1990s after the tragedy of the Oklahoma bombing perpetuated by such groups.[35]

Yet a variety of insurgent intellectuals and activists have also been making use of these digital technologies and public spheres in their political struggles. The peasants and guerrilla armies struggling in Chiapas, Mexico from the beginning in the 1990s used computer databases, guerrilla radio, and other forms of media to circulate their struggles and ideas.[36] Every manifesto, text, and bulletin written in Chiapas was immediately circulated around the world via computer networks. In January 1995, the Mexican government moved against the insurgent movement, but computer networks were used to inform and mobilize individuals and groups throughout the world to support their struggles against repressive government action. Indeed, a similar international struggle using computer networks and other technologies was waged during the summer of 1995 to save from execution a black activist, Mumia Abu-Jamal, accused of murdering a Philadelphia police officer, whom his defenders claimed was innocent and deprived of a fair trial.

Earlier, audiotapes were used to promote the revolution in Iran in 1979 and to promote alternative information by political movements throughout the world. The Tiananmen Square democracy movement in China in 1989 and various groups fighting against the remnants of Stalinism in the former communist bloc and Soviet Union used clandestine practices to circulate samizdat texts, which were often hand-written material critical of the government as typewriters and duplicating machines were banned. In this way, dissident groups and individuals circulated banned or censored materials critical of the government, and dissident authors produced writings previously banned after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953.[37]

Thus, using new technologies and social media to link theory and practice is neither extraneous to political action nor merely utopian. In fact, a series of conflicts around gender and race are also mediated by new communications technologies. After the 1991 Clarence Thomas hearings in the United States on his fitness to be Supreme Court Justice, Thomas's assault on claims of sexual harassment by lawyer Anita Hill and others, and the failure of the almost all-male Senate to disqualify the obviously unqualified Thomas, prompted women to use computer and other technologies to attack male privilege in the political system in the United States and to rally women to support women candidates.[38]

The 1992 election resulted in the election of more women candidates than in any previous election and a general rejection of conservative rule. (I have already suggested that the turn to the right in the 1994 election was largely due to more effective conservative use of media and computer technologies.) Likewise, African American insurgent intellectuals have made use of broadcast and computer technologies to circulate their struggles. For example, John Fiske described some African American radio projects in the "techostruggles" of the

present age and the central role of the media in recent struggles around race and gender.[39] African American "knowledge warriors" are using radio, computer bulletin boards, and other media to circulate their ideas and counterknowledge on a variety of issues, contesting the mainstream and offering alternative views and politics. Likewise, activists in communities of color—such as Oakland, Harlem, and Los Angeles—have set up community computer and media centers to teach the skills necessary to survive the onslaught of the mediazation of culture and computerization of society to people in their communities.[40]

Consequently, a variety of insurgent intellectuals have been using media and digital technologies to circulate their struggles and information. The technologies of communication are becoming more and more accessible to young people and average citizens, and are being used to promote democratic self-expression and social progress. Thus, by transforming politics into media spectacles and the battle of images, technologies that have traditionally blocked the expansion of participatory democracy could also be used to help invigorate democratic debate and participation. In the remaining two sections, I shall discuss some recent forms of cultural and technopolitics and their increasing importance under the reign of technocapitalism.

Media and Cultural Politics

There has largely been a failure on the Left to discern the importance of the linking of new media and digital technologies with cultural politics. This is unfortunate for the questions of who will control the media of the future and debates over the public's access to media, media accountability and responsibility, media funding and regulation; and what kinds of culture are best for cultivating individual freedom, democracy, and human happiness and well-being will become increasingly important in the future.

Indeed, throughout the 1990s and into the present, there have been powerful struggles going on within and between government, business, and the public concerning who will control the new technologies of the so-called information superhighway and now proliferating digital technologies and social media. There have been and are intense debates concerning who will profit from them, and what role the public will play in determining the future of our new technologies and media culture. Individuals need to get involved in these debates and become informed about the importance of their issues. There are recent attempts to censor communication on the Internet, to commodify it, charging for what is now relatively free, to allow commercial uses of it, and to open it to corporate domination.[41]

Other groups are struggling to preserve uncensored and free communication, to guarantee democratic access and participation, and to make the resources of the new technologies open and accessible to everyone, thus promoting, rather than restricting, democracy. These struggles will determine the future of our culture and society, and are therefore of prime importance to those concerned with the future of democracy and movements for equality and social justice.

The proliferation of media culture and digital technologies thus focuses attention on the importance of media politics and the need for public intervention in debates over the future of media culture and communications in the information highways and entertainment byways of the future. As suggested, one of the key issues of the future will concern whether communications and culture are increasingly commodified or are decommodified.

Defenders of commercial media in the United States are always praising "free television," a dubious product though, only made possible at the expense of allowing advertising to clutter the airwaves and giving advertisers and commercial interests significant power over programming. In the future, however, every single TV program might be commodified, owned by corporations who will charge for everything.

Likewise, today computers and other digital routes of communication are free to those who have university, business, or government accounts, whereas all digital communication may be commodified in the future, as is telephone communication. The struggle here is therefore to decommodify digital communication and information; to make digital technologies and social media and other information highways of the future open and accessible to everyone, free of charge; to expand public access television and community radio; and to develop alternative cultural institutions and practices that are funded by the community or state and made available to the people, open to community control and empowerment.

In France, the government carried out an experiment in the 1990s when I was first researching new technologies, providing free Minitel telephone/computers to all telephone customers—although it was shut down in 2012, overwhelmed by the Internet.[42] The Minitel devices were initially to be used for getting information such as about the time, the weather, train and airplane schedules, and the like. However, they were soon used for public computer communications, with discussion groups, bulletin boards, alternative information, hooking up, and other uses quickly developing.

It could well be that digital devices will be linked to digital telephones of the future, part of the standard package, at least in the overdeveloped hyperconsumer countries, much like television today. Consequently, efforts must be made so that everyone who does not currently own key digital technologies can access them and become linked to the technoculture of the future, and thus become part of the ever-evolving culture and society that emergent technologies and social media will make possible. Otherwise, use and access to digital information and communications technologies will be restricted to those privileged groups able to pay for them, and thus will strengthen currents forms of inequality and subordination. Indeed, the very concept of "information superhighways" contains a democratic core that could provide a terrain and discourse of struggle. While the notion that information superhighways will automatically guarantee a free flow of useful and abundant information to all is obviously ideological, a flimflam promotional discourse to sell the agenda of powerful corporations, the superhighway metaphor has some significance for democratic struggles.

Our national highway space is that of a public domain, part of a public space open and accessible to all, free of charge (with growing exceptions). There are, of course, also public tollways; and the danger of the corporate information and entertainment scenarios of the future is that mega-corporations will own and control these resources, charging tolls for entry and use, transforming freeways into tollways. Thus, while the Internet and other digital networks are currently free, at least for some users, there are plans to privatize them and to take them over, charging for use and access. Against such plans, one should utilize the discourse of the public sphere and public domain and struggle to keep these highways open to and accessible to all, free of charge and corporate control.

Likewise, a democratic media politics will struggle for community television and radio, providing public access to all citizens so that the entire community can take part in democratic discussion and debate.[43] As I have noted, there are already a vast number of activist projects involving digital and media technologies. As I write, more and more progressives are establishing platforms, participating in discussion groups, and creating websites that contain valuable information. For instance, the Marx and Engels Internet Archive contains entire texts, free and accessible to all,[44] just as there are highly active Marxism discussion groups that anyone can join.[45]

These sites constitute new public spheres for the future and new sites of information and debate, and progressives should become familiar with these sites and actively engage—as do conservatives, libertarians, and others on their Internet sites in the contested terrain that is U.S. democracy. The free flow of information and communication is essential to a democratic society, and thus democracy requires that powerful instruments of information and communication be accessible to all. Keeping the information superhighways open, protecting current highways like the Internet, and fighting to open them to more people are thus key elements of a contemporary democratic media politics. Without a free flow of information (in the sense both of uncensored and decommodified), citizens cannot be adequately informed; and without access to forums of public discussion and debate, citizens are excluded from the dialogue that constitutes the very soul of participatory democracy.

These issues require a social theory grounded in political economy to adequately contextualize the situation within which a media and communications politics could develop. Lack of an adequate theory of political economy within current technology and cultural and media studies is a main source of the avoidance of public policy concerns that sociologist Tony Bennett has been long been criticizing.[46] Without a sense of how the larger social forces (i.e. the nature of the broadcasting industry, state policy towards communications, etc.) impinge on everyday life, it is impossible to grasp the relevance of public policy and media politics for the nature of the system of communications and culture in a given society.

Yet in a context in which new digital technologies are creating dramatic changes in culture, leisure activity, and everyday life, it is important to perceive the importance of media and technopolitics and the ways that the system and

framework of communications in a given society help determine what sort of programming and effects are produced.[47] But without situating discussions of public policy within the context of social theory and political economy that analyzes existing configurations of power and domination, discussions of public policy and media politics are hopelessly abstract and beside the point.

In the United States, during the reign of Reagan and Bush (1980–1992), there were no real openings for progressive public policy interventions on the national level. Instead, the political urgency at the time, on the level of national politics, was defending liberal gains of the past against conservative onslaughts (I would imagine that something like this was also the case in the U.K. during the regimes of Thatcher and Major, and in other countries ruled by conservative governments.) On the other hand, the Reagan-Bush era of conservative rule saw many exciting local interventions, with lively alternative cultures proliferating and intense political struggles, often cultural in focus, taking place on the local level.

This experience perhaps influenced the postmodern politics, which emphasized local rather than national struggles; but it is important to see that both local and national struggles and issues are vital. On the local level, one can often more visibly make a difference, though even rearguard defensive operations on the national level are also significant, as are public policy interventions that advocate genuine reform on any level.

In the 21st century, cultural politics by the Left in the United States developed in part as a reaction to the conservative hegemony of the Bush-Cheney years (2000–2008) and took more positive activist directions in the Obama years. The rise of Donald Trump created a highly contested cultural/media politics from 2015 into the present, with Trump's success attributed to a large degree to his use of social media and with the resources the Republican Party puts into media warfare, exemplified by the Trump-Musk assault on democracy.[48]

In general, a critical media politics and pedagogy can cultivate citizenship by helping form individuals free from media manipulation, capable of criticizing media culture and of obtaining information from diverse sources, allowing an informed citizenry to make intelligent political judgements.[49] Critical media pedagogy and activism can thus serve as part of a process of social and cultural enlightenment, producing new roles for critical and public intellectuals. Media and technoculture themselves are producing new public spheres and the need for intervention in new arenas of public debate—community radio, public access television, computer forums, websites, social media, and so on. Further, media and technoculture are producing new texts and artifacts, generating the need to cultivate new critical media and technoliteracies able to read and decode their images, scenes, narratives, and spectacles and to distinguish factual information from misinformation.[50] Media and technoculture present today challenges to cultivate new spaces for political discussion and interaction; to produce alternative forms of media and culture; to use the media to promote social enlightenment; and to think how media and technoculture can be used for democratization.

The challenge of media and technoculture thus produces new vocations for the intellectual: their ubiquity and complexity requires critical intellectuals to subvert disciplinary boundaries and to draw on a range of disciplines to understand media and computer culture. It challenges public intellectuals to use media and technoculture to promote democratization and to produce new spaces and alternatives to the conservative mainstream. It is therefore a mistake to either turn one's back on and ignore media and technoculture or to totally embrace them. The new technologies and their impact on social life must be thoroughly analyzed, and possibilities should be explored to provide alternative modes of culture and discourse outside of conventional forms and genres.

Media and Cultural Activism in the Contemporary Moment

My discussion above of the impact of new media and information technologies from the mid-1990s to the present suggests that, ironically, the technologies that could help produce the end of participatory democracy could also be used to help democratize society and revitalize the waning fortunes of democracy and the Left, as I shall argue in the following discussion. Yet the Left has been on the whole negligent in failing to develop strategies and practices for media intervention and the production of alternative media. There has been little discussion within Marxist social theory of how radio, television, film, computers, and other media technology could be transformed and used as instruments of social enlightenment and progress.[51]

Earlier, the Frankfurt School was inherently skeptical of media technologies and viewed them as totally controlled by capitalist corporations, and broad segments of the Left have followed this position.[52] Indeed, when the classical theories of the cultural industries were being formed, this was more or less the case. The failure of radicals today to engage the issue of alternative media is more puzzling and less excusable since there are currently a variety of venues for alternative film and video production, community radio, computer bulletin boards and discussion forums, and other forms of communication within which progressives can readily intervene—especially academic radicals and activists who have access to computer and media technologies, as I shall argue below.[53]

Hence, a Marxian-oriented critical theory of technology should discuss the ways that new technologies can be used both as instruments of liberation and of domination, analyzing how media and culture serve the interests of social control and hegemony, and how the media and technologies can be transformed (at least in part) into instruments of social enlightenment and progress. This requires focus on the political economy of the media and discussion of corporate control of mainstream media and digital information technology, as I did in the opening of this chapter, as well as presenting alternative media strategies and reflections on how media technology can be reconfigured and used to empower individuals. It requires developing practical activist strategies to intervene in public access television, community radio, social media, and other domains currently emerging. To genuinely empower individuals requires giving

them knowledge of media production and allowing them to produce media that are then disseminated to the public.

Increasing media activism could significantly enhance democracy, making possible the proliferation of voices and allowing those voices that have been silenced or marginalized to speak. Critical media pedagogy and activism require new roles and functions for intellectuals.[54] Media and computer culture is producing new cyberspaces to explore and map, and new terrains of political struggle and intervention.

The new cyberintellectuals of the present may not be the organic intellectuals of a class; but we can become techno-intellectuals of new technologies, cultural experiences, and spaces, charting and navigating through the brave new worlds of media culture and technoculture. These technologies can thus be used not only as instruments of domination, but also of liberation.

Dialectics of technology: new media and computers can be used as instruments of manipulation and social control, or of social enlightenment and transformation; and it is up to the activist cultural producers and intellectuals of the present and future to determine how the digital technologies and social media will be used and developed and whose interests they serve. A democratic media politics will accordingly be concerned that the new media and digital technologies will be used to serve the interests of the people and not the corporate elites.

A democratic media politics will strive to see that media are used to inform and enlighten individuals rather than manipulate them. A democratic media politics will teach individuals how to use the new technologies and social media, to articulate their own experiences and interests, and to promote democratic debate and diversity, allowing a full range of voices and ideas to become part of the cyberdemocracy of the future.

Media and technoculture are perhaps our fate and cultural ambience as we rush toward the future. We must therefore chart this new terrain and see how we can make it work for the goals of increasing freedom, happiness, democracy, and other values that we wish to preserve and enhance as we race into the 21st century and confront new forms of society and culture and new political challenges, as I note in the next chapter.

Notes

1 For useful comments and editing, thanks to Kevin Anderson and especially to Rhonda Hammer, with whom I discussed the issues involved in this study in both earlier and this most recent version. Thanks also to Jeff Share for correcting some mistakes and making good suggestions for revising this chapter.

2 I introduced the term "technocapitalism" in Douglas Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity* (Cambridge and Baltimore, MD: Polity and Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), and expanded it in *Technology and Democracy: Toward a Critical Theory of Digital Technologies, Technopolitics, and Technocapitalism* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2021). The term is meant to signal the new syntheses of capitalism and technology and the ways that technology is transforming capitalism,

giving it new powers of domination and capital accumulation but also providing resources to publics to fight to strengthen democracy and protect our rights and freedoms.

3 Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern* (1995; 2nd revised edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

4 On how technocapitalism commodifies "the attention economy," see Tim Wu, "Blind Spot: The Attention Economy and the Law," *Antitrust Law Journal* 82, no. 3 (2019), pp. 771–806, at https://www.jstor.org/stable/27006774.

5 "Redlining" occurs when companies draw lines across communities and only provide the necessary technological infrastructure to wealthier neighborhoods. See Community Tech Network, "What Is Digital Redlining and How Does It Perpetuate Poverty?", January 26, 2023 at https://communitytechnetwork.org/blog/digital-redlining-and-how-it-perputates-poverty/ (accessed November 24, 2024) and a YouTube from the Harvard Kennedy School, September 19, 2023 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cUl3l4w5CYw (accessed November 24, 2024).

6 Federal Communications Commission Broadband Deployment Advisory Council, "Increasing Broadband Investment in Low-Income Communities Working Group," December 2020 at https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/bdac-low-income-communities-approved-rec-12172020.pdf (accessed November 24, 2024).

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9 Yaroslav Izmaylov, Irina Yegorova, Irina Maksymova, and Daina Znotina, "Digital Economy as an Instrument of Globalization," *Polonia University Scientific Journal* 27, no. 2 (2018), pp. 52–60, at http://dx.doi.org/10.23856/2706 (accessed November 24, 2024).

10 See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

11 See "Major Mergers in Broadcast," at https://www.google.com/search?q=major+mergers+in+broadcast+industry&oq=Major+mergers+in+broadca&gs_ (accessed November 24, 2024).

12 See Douglas Kellner and Ann Cvetkovich, eds., *Articulating the Global and the Local. Globalization and Cultural Studies* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997); Douglas Kellner, "Dialectics of Globalization: From Theory to Practice," in *Postmodernism in a Global Perspective*, ed. Samir Dasgupta and Peter Kivisto (London: Sage, 2014), pp. 3–29; Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, "Resisting Globalization," in *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*, ed. George Ritzer (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 662–674; Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, "Globalization, Technopolitics, and Radical Democracy," in *Radical Democracy and the Internet: Interrogating Theory and Practice*, ed. Lincoln Dahlberg and Eugenia Siapera (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 17–36.

13 On Antonio Gramsci, see *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare (New York and London: International Publishers, 1971).

14 The Republican "Contract with America" was a popular exercise meant to divert attention from their real agenda: deep cuts in many programs that Americans rely

on—from poultry inspections to health research. For a critique, see Major Garrett, "Beyond the Contract," *Mother Jones* (March/April 1995) at https://www.motherjones.com/politics/1995/03/beyond-contract/ (accessed November 24, 2024). Interestingly, the Trump document "Project 25" was an extension of the earlier Republican attack on major social programs, but is more radical; see Mike Wendling, "Project 2025: The Right-Wing Wish List for Trump's Second Term," BBC News, February 13, 2025 at https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c977njnvq2do (accessed April 18, 2025).

15 On surveillance capitalism, see Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019).

16 In the mid-1990s I described a situation that has materialized for those able to afford it in the 21st century: "The numbers of channels on cable television continue to multiply, with estimates of more than 500 channels on the horizon. There are also predictions of the imminent arrival of supplementary programs available on demand via computer in the immediate future which will make possible interactive video." See Douglas Kellner, "Marxism and the Information Superhighway," at https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/marxisminformationsuperhighway.pdf (accessed December 9, 2024). Of course, in the 1990s, few could imagine the explosion of social media and its impact on culture, society, and individual life.

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18 On the growing impact and power of media culture, see Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern* (1995; 2nd revised edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

19 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1970).

20 See American Academy of Family Physicians, "Violence in the Media and Entertainment (Position Paper)," at https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/violence-media-entertainment.html (accessed November 24, 2024).

21 For early critiques of the television era, see Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

22 See the arguments for the transformation of education in Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share, *The Critical Media Literacy Guide: Engaging Media and Transforming Education* (Rotterdam: Brill-Sense, 2019); Douglas Kellner, *Critical Theory and Pedagogy: Towards The Reconstruction of Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2023); and Douglas Kellner, *Re-Visioning Education: Cultural Studies, Critical Media and Digital Literacies, and Democracy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2024).

23 For an excellent book on the utopian imagination, see the study of the great utopian philosopher Ernst Bloch, with whom I studied at Tübingen University in the late 1960s, by Wayne Hudson, *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch* (New York: St. Martin's, 1982).

24 On the contested media culture and technosociety in the United States since the 1960s, see Douglas Kellner and Michael Ryan, *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), and Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics*

between the Modern and the Postmodern (1995; revised 2nd edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

25 On Trump's first successful campaign for president, see Douglas Kellner, *American Nightmare: Donald Trump, Media Spectacle, and Authoritarian Populism* (Rotterdam: Sense, 2016), and Douglas Kellner, *The American Horror Show: Election 2016 and the Ascent of Donald J. Trump* (Rotterdam: Sense, 2017). On Trump's 2024 victory over Kamala Harris, see Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle in the 21st Century: From the Stolen Election of 2000 to the Trump MAGA Horror Show* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2025).

26 Trump's book *The Art of the Deal*, co-written with Tony Schwartz (New York: Ballantine, 2005 [1987]), helped introduce him to a national audience and is a key source of the Trump mythology.

27 David A. Fahrenthold and Yeganeh Torbati,"Trump Avoided Paying Taxes for Years, Largely Because His Business Empire Reported Losing More Money Than It Made, Report Says," *Washington Post*, September 27, 2020 at https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-taxes/2020/09/27/8a58c618-010f-11eb-a2db-417cddf4816a_story.html (accessed April 22, 2025). It was also reported that Donald's father, Fred Trump, created dummy corporations under his children's names that served as tax dodges for the Trump Organization. See John Cassidy, "The Trump Family's Tax Dodging Is Symptomatic of a Larger Problem," *The New Yorker*, October 3, 2018 at https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/the-trump-familys-tax-dodging-is-symptomatic-of-a-larger-problem (accessed on July 13, 2024).

28 Jonathan Chait, "Tillerson, Who Privately Called Trump 'Moron,' Pretty Much Confirms It in Public," *New York*, December 7, 2018 at https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/12/trump-moron-tillerson-publicly-confirms.html (accessed July 13, 2024).

29 Gaspin was quoted in the CNN TV show *All Business: The Essential Donald Trump*, September 5, 2016.

30 See Carol Pogash, ed., *Quotations from Chairman Trump* (New York: Rosetta-Books, 2016), pp. 30, 152, 153.

31 As is well known, Elon Musk took over Twitter in 2022 and reinstated Trump, who had been thrown off the platform by the previous management for his outrageous tweets. However, since Trump had formed his own alternative to Twitter, which he called "Truth Social," he declined Musk's offer. Musk then began raising money for Trump's 2024 campaign, and changed Twitter to X. For an excellent overview of Musk's life and business career before he took up with Trump, see Walter Isaacson, *Elon Musk* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2023).

32 It transpired that the supposed Trump fans who turned out to hear his announcement for president at Trump Tower were actors answering a casting call who Trump paid to cheer him on and act in his "media spectacle," warning those in the know of Trump's long history as a fraud. See Aaron Couch and Emmet McDermott, "Donald Trump Campaign Offered Actors $50 to Cheer for Him at Presidential Announcement," *Hollywood Reporter*, June 17, 2015 at https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/politics-news/donald-trump-campaign-offered-actors-803161/ (accessed July 13, 2024).

33 When facing complaints that CBS was devoting too much airtime to Trump, its president, Leslie Moonves, retorted: "It May Not Be Good for America, but It's Damn Good for CBS," *Hollywood Reporter,* February 29, 2016 at https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/leslie-moonves-donald-trump-may-871464/ (accessed December 29, 2024).

34 See Ravi Somaiya, "Donald Trump's Wealth and Poll Numbers Complicate News Media's Coverage," *New York Times*, July 24, 2015 at https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/25/business/media/donald-trumps-wealth-and-poll-numbers-complicate-news-medias-coverage.html (accessed December 9, 2024).

35 See Douglas Kellner, *Guys and Guns Amok: Domestic Terrorism and School Shootings from the Oklahoma City Bombings to the Virginia Tech Massacre* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2008).
36 See Harry Cleaver, "The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle," at https://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/zaps.html (accessed December 9, 2024).
37 See Howard Frederick, "Computer Networks and the Emergence of Global Civil Society," in *Global Networks: Computers and International Communication*, ed. Linda M. Harasim (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993) and John E. Young, *Global Network: Computers in a Sustainable Society* (Washington, DC: World Watch Institute, 1993) and references therein.
38 Terry Gross, "Anita Hill Started a Conversation about Sexual Harassment. She's Not Done Yet," National Public Radio, September 28, 2021 at https://www.npr.org/2021/09/28/1040911313/anita-hill-belonging-sexual-harassment-conversation (accessed December 9, 2024). That Clarence Thomas continues to serve on the Supreme Court as I write in 2024 is an utter disgrace to the U.S. system of justice that finds its weakest link on the Supreme Court, currently ruled by reactionaries.
39 John Fiske, *Media Matters: Everyday Culture and Political Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
40 Michael Roberts, "Empowering Communities of Color Through Computer Technology," United Neighborhood Houses Information Technology Initiative Project at https://scholarworks.umb.edu/trotter_review/vol9/iss2/8/ (accessed November 25, 2024).
41 Commercialization of social media has been dramatized by the take-over of Twitter/X by Elon Musk, who has since promoted hate speech and dangerous misinformation, and has been a primary supporter of Donald Trump. In 2025, as head of DOGE, Musk was in a position to use his superpowers for Trump's agenda of retribution and the destruction of U.S. democracy, a goal that the South African mogul seems to relish. See Dan Balz, "Trump Is Coming for the Executive Branch. Does He Know What He's Doing?", *Washington Post*, November 24, 2024 at https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/11/24/doge-trump-musk-ramaswamy-budget/?utm_campaign=wp_post_most&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&carta (accessed November 24, 2024). Indeed, in this role, Musk has controversially closed down or drastically cut major U.S. agencies and government personnel who have long served as honored public servants. See Ivan Pereira and Emily Chang, "Here Are All the Agencies that Elon Musk and DOGE Have Been Trying to Dismantle So Far," ABC News, February 28, 2025 at https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/elon-musks-government-dismantling-fight-stop/story?id=118576033 (accessed April 18, 2025).
42 See Hugh Schofield, "Minitel: The Rise and Fall of the France-Wide Web," BBC News, June 28, 2012 at https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-18610692 (accessed November 24, 2024). Schofield writes: "France is switching off its groundbreaking Minitel service which brought online banking, travel reservations, and porn to millions of users in the 1980s. But then came the worldwide web. Minitel has been slowly dying and the plug will be pulled on Saturday."
43 See Douglas Kellner, "Public Access Television: *Alternative Views*," *Humanity and Society* 9, no. 1 (1985), pp. 100–107 for further discussion of this issue.
44 See https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/. This archive was invaluable in the production of this book, with sources for citations accessible to all with Internet connectivity, as the multiplicity of editions of Marx and Engels's works makes it difficult to produce references accessible to multiple groups of individuals.
45 An online search will reveal many such discussion groups.
46 See Tony Bennett, "Putting Policy into Cultural Studies", with multiple discussions of his articles on Wikipedia at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Bennett_(sociologist) (accessed November 24, 2024).
47 For an earlier example of radical media politics, see Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), who developed leftist media strategies in the 1930s working

with Bertolt Brecht and others. For important analyses of radical media politics, see John Downing, *Radical Media: The Political Experience of Alternative Communication* (Boston: South End Press, 1983); John Downing, Genève Gil, and Laura Stein, *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001); Leah A. Lievrouw, *Alternative and Activist New Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); and Chris Atton, *Alternative Media* (London: Sage, 2002). Of contemporary theorists, Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1983) is especially contemptuous of alternative media and politics; see my critique of Baudrillard on this issue in Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond* (Cambridge and Palo Alto, CA: Polity and Stanford University Press, 1989).

48 See my books on Trump, note 24.

49 See Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share, *The Critical Media Literacy Guide: Engaging Media and Transforming Education* (Rotterdam: Brill-Sense, 2019).

50 Richard Baldwin, *The Great Convergence: Information Technology and the New Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016); Marinko Skare and Domingo Riberio Soriano, "How Globalization Is Changing Digital Technology Adoption: An International Perspective," *Journal of Innovation and Knowledge* 6, no. 4 (2021), pp. 222–233 at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2021.04.001 (accessed December 28, 2024); Natasha Able, *Digital Literacy in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Navigating the Future with Essential Skills* (author published, 2024), see https://www.amazon.com/Digital-Literacy-Fourth-Industrial-Revolution/dp/B0D889YSLN/ref (accessed December 28, 2024).

51 See the exceptions in Notes 47 and 53.

52 See Max Horkheimer and T.W. Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Seabury, 1972).

53 My activism in alternative media involved co-hosting and producing a public access TV show in Austin, Texas from 1978 to 1994. See Douglas Kellner, "Public Access Television: *Alternative Views*," *Humanity and Society* 9, no. 1 (1985), pp. 100–107 (among other versions). I also did a "BlogLeft" at UCLA in the 2000s. Unfortunately, BlogLeft has disappeared from the Internet due to a the server upon which it was archived burning down at a time before Cloud back-up, but I found an interview about BlogLeft and my view of blogging in Shih Hsiu-chuan, "Media Forum Begins in Taipei. The Keynote Speaker at an International Media Forum Critiqued Mainstream Outlets for Pandering to Corporate Interests, and Praised the Rise of Blogs," *Taipei Times*, July 27, 2005 at https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2005/07/27/2003265208 (accessed December 9, 2024).

54 For early examples of critical media pedagogy written in the mid-1990s when I was first engaging these issues, see Henry Giroux, *Disturbing Pleasures: Learning Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Peter McLaren, Rhonda Hammer, Susan Reilly, and David Sholle, *Rethinking Media Literacy: A Critical Pedagogy of Representation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995); and Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern* (1995; revised 2nd edition, London and New York: Routledge, 2020). For my more recent intervention into critical media literacy, see Douglas Kellner and Jeff Share, *The Critical Media Literacy Guide: Engaging Media and Transforming Education* (Rotterdam: Brill-Sense, 2019).

9 The Continued Relevance of Marxist Theory and Socialist Practice in the 21st Century

In this book, I have presented a version of Marxism addressing theoretical and political challenges in the 21st century. Early chapters presented an overview of Marx and Engels in their historical context, laying out the key events of their lives, their major texts, their collaboration, and the emergence of the 1848 revolutions in which they played a minor role. They became increasingly well known, however, in revolutionary circles with their "Communist Manifesto," published in the 1848 era of revolutionary upheaval that shook the monarchies and old order of Europe in the middle of the 19th century after having absorbed the revolutionary upheavals of the 18th-century American and French revolutions.

Marx and Engels became committed revolutionaries from their participation in the revolutionary movements and upheavals in the 1840s, and continued in their writing, political activity, connections with revolutionary organizations throughout Europe during their exiles after the 1848 upheaval and its aftermath, and their organization of the International Workingmen's Association and other groups in which they became leaders. With their multiple writings and political commitments and actions, they became famous throughout Europe, influencing multiple revolutions of both the 19th and 20th centuries.

In this concluding chapter, I shall sum up their contributions and continued relevance for Marxian critical socio-political theory and radical politics in the contemporary era. I will also contend with claims concerning Marxism's obsolescence in the face of the emergence of a hegemonic global monopoly capitalism at the end of World II that has expanded into the 21st century, along with claims concerning the obsolescence of Marxism after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the turn to capitalism in much of the former Soviet bloc and many other areas throughout the world that were considered in the Cold War part of the communist bloc.

I will argue in response that the Marxian theory was conceived as a historical theory that would revise itself in the light of major developments in capitalism, of political developments and upheavals, and in the face of war, economic depression, and other major historical events that would require a revision and development of Marxism. Accordingly, in the next section, I will discuss: various crises of Marxism in the 20th century; the response of Marxist theorists and movements to these crises; the consequential revisions of Marxian theory

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and politics; and reconstructions of Marxism that are taking place in the 21st century to ensure its relevance in the contemporary moment. As a historical, dialectical, and political theory, I argue that Marxism's historical trajectory necessarily follows the vicissitudes of history and has been developed accordingly in different historical epochs. Consequently, in this concluding chapter, I will discuss crises of Marxism, its supposed obsolescence, and the development of a reconstructed Marxian theory and politics, still ongoing as I write.

The Obsolescence of Marxism?[1]

Crises of Marxism have erupted regularly throughout the past century ever since Marxism became a major European power in the late 19th and 20th centuries with Social Democratic and Communist parties, radical trade associations and movements, and a proliferation of Marxist theorists, political groups, and struggles, resulting in 20th-century revolutions in the Soviet Union, China, and other countries throughout the world, accompanied by Marxist parties, groups, and individuals in diverse locations.

The concept of "crisis" within Marxian theory has its origins in theories of the "crisis of capitalism," which were linked to notions of the collapse of capitalism and the triumph of socialism. The term "crisis" itself is a medical metaphor that suggests the possibility of breakdown, collapse, or a terminal illness that could bring death to its patient—in this case, Marxism.[2] The term "crisis" was applied to Marxism by Karl Korsch and others after World War I (see Kellner 1977 and Gouldner 1980).

In the post-1989 era, there have been many claims that, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the era of Marxism was over and its theory and politics were now obsolete. Consequently, it has been claimed that the crisis of Marxism has terminated in collapse, that the patient has died, that Marxism is no longer a viable theory or politics for the present age.[3]

The discourse of the crisis of Marxism has had a long history. During World War I, the failure of the Second International and Marxian parties and individuals to stop the war put in question the political efficacy of Marxism as an organized movement. The failure to carry through European revolutions after the war produced new crises of Marxism, and the triumph of fascism threatened to eliminate Marxist governments, parties, and militants. After World War II, the integration of the working class and stabilization of capitalism in the so-called democratic capitalist countries seemed to portend the obsolescence of Marxism.[4] Thus Marxism, like capitalism, its object and other, has been in crisis throughout the 20th century and into the 21st.

However, just as capitalism has survived many crises, so too has Marxism; and, just as Marxist critics too quickly proclaimed the demise of capitalism, so too have critics of Marxism too glibly forecast its death. Moreover, just as various crises of capitalism have elicited new survival strategies that in certain ways have strengthened the capitalist system (i.e. imperialism, organized capitalism, state capitalism, the welfare state, the consumer society, military

capitalism, transnational global capitalism, technocapitalism, and so on), so too have crises of Marxism periodically led to the development and improvement of Marxian theory and practice.

Indeed, Marx's historical materialism is intrinsically a historical theory, and its categories demand revision and development as new historical conditions and situations emerge. Revision is the very life of the Marxian dialectic and the theory demands development, reconstruction, and even abandonment of obsolete or inadequate features as conditions emerge that put tenets of the original theory in question.

Marxism has, of course, been regularly denounced and declared over, especially by one-time adherents. During the Cold War era, a whole generation of former Marxists denounced the "God that failed," and Sidney Hook and others declared it dead by the 1940s. As Derrida (1993) reminds us, during the 1950s in France intellectuals proclaimed the end of history and obsolescence of Marxism and similar "end of ideology" discourses. Further, "post-industrial society" theories emerged in the United States in that decade to proclaim the end of Marxism (Bell 1960, 1976).

In post-1960s' renunciations of earlier utopian hopes, many previous adherents turned on Marxism. In *The Postmodern Condition* (1984 [1979]), one-time Marxian radical Jean-François Lyotard argued that the era of totalizing theories of history and grand narratives of emancipation was over. Earlier, former Marxist theorist Jean Baudrillard declared in *The Mirror of Production* (1974) that Marxism merely mirrored capitalist development and ideology, and was inadequate as a radical theory of emancipation.

In his next book *L'echange symbolique et la mort/Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976 [1996]), Baudrillard declared the end of political economy and the end of Marxism in the emergence of a postmodern society of media, simulations and hyperreality.[5] Indeed, the success of postmodern theory is at least partly parasitical on claims concerning the obsolescence of Marxism which positions the postmodernists as the most advanced radical social theorists.

Further, following the postmodern critiques, many books and articles argued that the collapse of Soviet Communism definitively signified the end of Marxism. Francis Fukuyama's celebrated book *The End of History* (1992), in fact, proclaims the end of Marxism with the triumph of global capitalism. Further, there has been a wealth of articles in the mainstream press and opinion journals in the 21st century (too numerous to mention) that have declared the obsolescence of Marxism. However, the continuation of this prophecy, combined with ongoing attacks on Marxism in the present era, provides evidence that it still exists as an intellectual and political force, and that Marx and other thinkers and activists of the tradition have obtained classical status.[6]

Against these positions, my argument will be that the collapse of Soviet Communism does not constitute a refutation of Marxism or signify its demise. I will argue that there are important discontinuities between Marx/Lenin/Stalin and the later Soviet leadership, showing that one cannot blame the collapse of communism on Marx himself or the doctrine associated with his name.

Secondly, I argue that Marx, Engels, and others in the Marxian tradition should not be seen as the spiritual ancestors of Russian and Chinese 21st-century totalitarianism and the modern totalitarian state tout court. Rather, a vast array of fascist, autocratic, and totalitarian thinkers have influenced today's autocratic states that require careful analysis of the traditions and historical conditions that led to contemporary autocratic political systems and totalitarian societies.

Furthermore, I argue that Marx's concept of socialism and democracy is dramatically at odds with Soviet Communism, Leninism, Stalinism, or whatever one wants to call the system of bureaucratic collectivism that collapsed in the Soviet Union and its satellites, and that produced Vladimir Putin's Russian Federation or Viktor Orbán's Hungary—forms of autocratic government that have nothing at all to do with classical Marxian conceptions of socialism.[7]

I'll also suggest that the overthrow of Stalinism was consistent with, or justified by, Marx's principles, and that Marxist theory offers an illuminating analysis and critique of Soviet Communism and its empire, providing important theoretical resources to explain the collapse of Soviet Communism and to make sense of contemporary historical reality. Finally, I argue that Marxism continues to possess resources to theorize and criticize the present age, and that Marxian politics remains at least a part of a progressive or radical politics in the contemporary era.

Discontinuities Within the Marxian Tradition

For decades, Marxism has been blamed for the historical catastrophes of the era. In *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945, with several revised editions), philosopher of science Karl Popper argued that the totalitarian state has its origins in the political philosophies of Plato, Hegel, and Marx. This refrain was repeated in the 1970s by former Maoist André Glucksmann, one of the darlings of the French "new philosophers," who claimed that "master thinkers" such as Marx were responsible for the evils of communism and other totalitarian societies.[8] And, of course, throughout the Cold War, anti-communists have tried to pin all the problems of the era on the philosophy of Karl Marx and his followers.

Such polemics are, of course, hopelessly idealist and greatly exaggerate the roles of ideas in history. Blaming the evils of the modern world, and especially the trajectory of Soviet Communism, on Marx covers over the significant differences between Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and the later Soviet leadership, as well as the material and social conditions that inhibited the development of the sort of socialism envisaged by Marx—and even Lenin—in the Soviet Union. Accordingly, I shall first provide some reasons why it is a mistake to blame the catastrophe of Soviet Communism on Marx, and then will provide a Marxian analysis of why Soviet Communism failed.

To begin, there has never been a unitary Marxian theory that has been the basis for socialist development. Marxism has always had a divided legacy between those following socialist as opposed to communist parties,

institutionalized in the divisions between the Second International and the Third International. Outside of these two power blocs, both democratic-reformist and insurrectionist-revolutionary strategies for constructing socialism could appeal to Marx's texts and practice for legitimation of their own theory and politics; but, as it turned out, the Social Democrats of the Second International, beginning already with Bernstein in the 1890s, distanced themselves from Marxism, while the Leninists of the Third International proclaimed themselves loyal Marxists and the authentic heirs of classical Marxism.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks actually carried through a revolution in 1917 in the name of Marxism and made Marxism the official state ideology. Yet this historically accidental bonding between Marxism and Leninism should not, however, obscure the profound differences between Marx and Lenin. Lenin advocated the formation of a conspiratorial party of professional revolutionaries, and privileged violent insurrection and a vanguard party as the instruments of revolution.[9] Marx, by contrast, was committed to people's democracy and the tenet that the liberation of the working class could only be the activity of the working class itself. Marx and Engels published "The Communist Manifesto" to openly proclaim the ideas and goals of the communist movement; and both Marx and Engels pointed to the Paris Commune, marked by popular sovereignty of the people, as the model of what they meant by socialism.

Against the Marxist vision of participatory democracy, once Lenin and the Bolshevik Party achieved power, the Central Committee of the Communist Party became the self-proclaimed vanguard of the revolution, and power and sovereignty were in effect concentrated in the party's hands. Indeed, on many occasions, Marx proclaimed a democratic road to socialism and always equated socialism and democracy. His early 1843 commentary on Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* championed democracy as the highest form of government, and contained a powerful critique of the absolutist state and bureaucratic government. During the 1848 revolution, Marx and Engels allied themselves with the bourgeois-democratic movement and alliance with progressive elements of the bourgeoisie in a two-stage road to socialism.

In his address to the First International Workingmen's Association, Marx proclaimed the winning of legislation to shorten the working day and the workers co-op movement as the two great victories for the political economy of the working class.[10] In his 1871 address on the Paris Commune, Marx championed the popular sovereignty exercised by the citizens of the Commune as "the finally discovered form for the liberation of the working class."[11] And in his 1872 Hague address to the International, Marx also proclaimed that a democratic and non-violent road to socialism was viable in many developed countries, including the United States, telling the audience:

> But we have never said that the means to arrive at these ends [i.e. socialism] were identical. We know the allowance that must be made for the institutions, manners and traditions of different countries. We do not deny that there exist countries like America, England, and, if I knew your

> institutions better, I would add Holland, where the workers may be able to attain their ends by peaceful means. If that is true we must also recognize that in most of the countries of the Continent force must be the lever to which it will be necessary to resort for a time in order to attain the dominion of labour.[12]

Of course, Marx always had a contextual political theory, and thus in certain contexts supported revolutionary class war and insurrection, while in other contexts he defended a more democratic and reformist route to socialism. Hence, one can find support for various theories of the construction of socialism in Marx's own writings. Yet, in his key texts, Marx was a consistent democrat, supporting workers' self-activity as the locus of popular sovereignty. Marx never advocated a party state, never defended a communist bureaucracy, and would no doubt have been appalled by the deformation of his ideas in the Soviet Union. Thus, to pin the failures of Soviet Communism on Marx is absurd.

Indeed, there are important differences between Lenin and Stalin as well, with Stalin eliminating the democratic centralism of the party for one-man rule and literally exterminating all political "enemies" and opposition.[13] While Lenin championed a vanguard party to make the revolution and then to run the state, he allowed factions, practiced democracy within the party, was sometimes outvoted, and practiced what he and the Bolsheviks called "democratic centralism." An earlier Leninist text, *The State and Revolution*, was even quite populist, following Marx's text on the Paris Commune as the model of socialism and celebrating the soviets (workers' councils) of 1905 and 1917 as the authentic organs of socialist construction.[14]

To be sure, Lenin established a revolutionary bureaucracy that could be manipulated by a Stalin, but Stalinism had nothing to do with any sort of democratic socialism, centralist or not. Such a regime was a throwback to a feudalistic Czarism and had little to do with Marx's, or even Lenin's, vision of socialism—although Lenin's later collective bureaucratic Soviet leadership was also at odds with Marxism, which was always strongly anti-bureaucratic.

Although this is somewhat tangential to my argument, I believe that the later Soviet leadership primarily continued Stalinism, despite the critiques of Stalin at the 20th Party Congress in 1956. Perhaps one of the few moments for genuine reform appeared during the Khrushchev era, when another sort of socialism, one closer to Marx's vision, was possible. Such a socialism was grounded in the workers' revolts in East Germany in 1953, in Hungary and Poland in 1956, in the denunciations of Stalin in the Soviet Union in 1956 and 1958, in the reform movement throughout the communist world, and in the movement for "socialism with a human face" during the "Prague Spring" of 1967–1968. The post-Khrushchev leadership, however, until the emergence of Mikhail Gorbachev, crushed dreams for reform and the creation of a genuinely democratic socialism, and reinforced the repressive Stalinist bureaucratic form of state socialism, which caused deep alienation from the system, corruption, economic inefficiency and stagnation, and the eventual collapse of Soviet Communism. By the

time Gorbachev arrived, it was too late to reform this system, and his removal led to the demise of the attempt to democratize Soviet Communism, which soon fell prey to Putin's autocratic dictatorship.[15]

In any case, it is hard to see why the Marxian theory should be blamed for the debacle of bureaucratic communism in the Soviet Union. The polemic that blames the evils of Soviet Communism on Marx also fails to notice that there are many traditions and political tendencies within Marxism. Rosa Luxemburg, for instance, associated socialism intimately with democracy, arguing that one could not exist without the other. She was an early critic of what she saw as the deformations of socialism in the Soviet Union.

Likewise, the council communists of the post-World War I revolutionary movement consistently supported a view of socialism as a workers' democracy and advocated a libertarian concept of socialism, as did Herbert Marcuse and his comrades in the Frankfurt School, Karl Korsch (for much of his life), and many other so-called Western Marxists. These theorists were often critical of the deformation of socialism in the Soviet Union and usually supported a democratic version of socialism. Thus, to equate Marxism with the bureaucratic collectivism in the Soviet Union is simply historically false and intellectually dishonest.

Spiritual Ancestors of the Modern Totalitarian State

In this section, I wish to suggest that it is Rousseau and the Right Hegelians who provide legitimating ideologies for the modern totalitarian state, and not Karl Marx. While many readings of Rousseau are possible,[16] including those who claim him for radical democratic theory, there are passages in his writings that clearly qualify him for the title of father of the modern totalitarian state. There are passages in Rousseau that are absolutely shocking and that legitimate the most oppressive practices of the totalitarian state, providing a legitimation in advance of the worst excesses of Soviet Communism. In *The Social Contract*, for instance, there are a large number of provocative statements, such as individuals "must be forced to be free,"[17] or statements that project the paradox that the overcoming of alienation requires total submission to the community, whereby individuals gain their liberty—propositions taken up later by Hegel and Stalin.

Rousseau also champions the indivisibility of sovereign power, against Montesquieu's doctrine of the division of powers. Although Rousseau's anchoring of the indivisibility of sovereign power in the people appears highly democratic, it is in fact dangerous, especially when he defends and legitimates censorship and a unitary civil religion to which all must subscribe. There is no concept of freedom of the press and nothing on a bill of rights in Rousseau's theory. Indeed, there are really no individual rights and liberties at all in Rousseau's collectivist conception.

Marx, by contrast, was a newspaper editor and journalist who wrote some of the most brilliant defenses of the freedom of the press that we possess. In a series of newspaper articles written in 1842, Marx attacked the Prussian state's "censorship instruction" and spiritedly defended the freedom of the press. Freedom of

the press, Marx wrote, "is itself an embodiment of the idea … of freedom, a positive good, whereas censorship is an embodiment of unfreedom." Further, the "essence of the free press is the characterful, rational moral essence of freedom. The character of a censored press is the characterless monster of unfreedom; it is a civilised monster, a perfumed abortion" (Marx and Engels 1975, pp. 154, 158). Finally—and I know of no more eloquent defense of freedom of the press:

> The free press is the ubiquitous vigilant eye of a people's soul, the embodiment of a people's faith in itself, the eloquent link that connects the individual with the state and the world, the embodied culture that transforms material struggles into intellectual struggles and idealises their crude material form. It is a people's frank confession to itself, and the redeeming power of confession is well known. It is the spiritual mirror in which a people can see itself, and self-examination is the first condition of wisdom. It is the spirit of the state, which can be delivered into every cottage, cheaper than coal gas. It is all-sided, ubiquitous, omniscient. It is the ideal world which always wells up out of the real world and flows back into it with ever greater spiritual riches and renews its soul.[18]

It is thus a historical anomaly and perversion of Marx's philosophy that Soviet Communism did not allow the freedom of the press. Yet there is nothing in Marx to legitimate censorship, while Rousseau provides arguments for a censor! Worst of all is Rousseau's defense of the imposition of civil religion on the people, as when he writes in *The Social Contract* (p. 102):

> While not having the ability to obligate anyone who does not believe, the sovereign can banish from the state anyone who does not believe them. It can banish him not for being impious but for being unsociable, for being incapable of sincerely loving the laws and justice, and of sacrificing his life, if necessary, for his duty. If, after having publicly acknowledged these same dogmas, a person acts as if he does not believe them, he should be put to death; he has committed the greatest of crimes: he has lied before the laws.

This passage from Rousseau sounds like a 2025 declaration from administrations such as Donald Trump's or Vladimir Putin's. There is, of course, nothing like this in Marx; so it is really Rousseau's views that go much further in legitimating later forms of societal repression and autocracy than Marx's more genuinely democratic theory. Moreover, throughout his work, Marx championed the development of free individuality and argued for the superiority of socialism over capitalism on the grounds, beside other arguments, that it would more fully develop and realize individuality. Furthermore, Rousseau's attack on luxury and celebration of simplicity and frugality provide a good legitimation for communism's repressive egalitarianism and remind one of the "crude communism" that Marx himself attacked in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and elsewhere.

Thus, it is Rousseau, more than Marx, who provides in his writings a legitimating ideology for totalitarian societies. Furthermore, it is Hegel and the Right Hegelians who follow Rousseau in providing legitimation for modern totalitarian states—although readings of Rousseau that claim him for democratic theory are also possible.[19] For Hegel, the state was the incarnation of reason and freedom, and it was the citizens' duty to recognize this and to submit to the dictates of the state. The Right Hegelians followed the master in arguing for the necessity of submission to state authority, while Marx and the other Left Hegelians polemicized against this position, calling for democracy and attacking the authoritarian states of their day that Hegel and his followers defended. The Hegelian Right claimed that democracy would produce chaos and that only a strong state, sanctioned by religion, could preserve order and stability.

Thus, from the perspective of political theory, it is also dishonest and misleading to blame Marx for the horrors of Soviet Communism, and other authoritarian communist regimes, when it is other thinkers whose ideas are more closely connected with modern totalitarian theory and practice.[20] And yet, as I suggested earlier, it is unfair to blame historical disasters on any specific theory because political philosophies at most provide legitimation for political actions and regimes, and do not usually "cause" events to happen. Major political events are overdetermined and are rarely, if ever, the product of ideas alone.

Certainly, the Bolshevik Revolution was made in the name of Marxism; but this could simply be a historical anomaly resting in the important role of Lenin and the fact that Lenin and other key Bolsheviks were highly committed Marxists, albeit with their own version of Marxism. Later communist revolutions were influenced by Marx, Lenin, and other Marxists and took up Marxism as a legitimating ideology—though different versions of Marxism were developed in most of the countries that adopted it. Yet Marxism itself did not really provide a legitimation for the forms of oppression that developed in bureaucratic state communist societies, for Marx never advocated the development of a party state, and in fact urged construction of the precise opposite: a free society in which individuals exercised popular sovereignty.

A Short Excursion on Democratic Theory

One could argue that Western democratic theory in the modern era has two major components: a participatory democracy tradition rooted in Marx, John Dewey, and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), who root popular sovereignty in the will of the people and, in Abraham Lincoln's memorable phrase, advocate "government of, by, and for the people." This tradition of participatory, or radical, democracy is contrasted to a republican constitutional tradition associated with Montesquieu, and the founding fathers of the American Revolution, who advocated a division or separation of powers, dividing sovereignty between the executive, legislature, and judiciary (with the monarchy included in Montesquieu's conception). This notion of constitutional democracy, also developed in the U.S. Bill of Rights, guarantees such freedoms as

freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Each of these traditions has its limitations in which constitutional republics can be dominated by particular factions, as was evident in the U.S. in the 21st century with the Bush-Cheney and Trump administrations which systematically attacked the power of other branches of the government. Populist democracy can mean rule of the mob, as in certain phases of the French Revolution, or can be manipulated by dictators, as has been evident throughout the modern era, when societies willfully put aside the rule of law and separation of powers to follow dictatorial leaders as in 1930s' fascism in Spain, Germany, and Italy.

Thus, I would argue that a robust concept of democracy contains aspects of both the participatory and constitutional democracy tradition—attempting to defend people's rights, to engage their participation, to govern by rule of law, and to maintain a separation of powers and checks and balances. This is, of course, a normative concept, and my argument is that such an ideal of socialist democracy draws on both the participatory/radical and the liberal democracy traditions.

Toward a Critique of Soviet Communism

Far from being implicated in legitimating Soviet Communism, I believe that the Marxian theory and tradition provides some of the most powerful critiques of the deformation of socialism in the Soviet Union. Historically, it was Marxian theorists who produced the first and most powerful critiques of the Soviet system and its divergences from classical Marxism. These critics include Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Korsch, Leon Trotsky, and the Frankfurt School, including later Trotskyist and Maoist-inspired critiques and other critiques, ranging from the French *Arguments* group to Italian "autonomous" Marxists to one-time East German theorist Rudolf Bahro (1978). Moreover, I believe that the Marxian theory continues to provide the resources for analysis of the collapse of Soviet Communism and for providing an account of why bureaucratic communism doesn't work.[21]

Marxian theory has traditionally been a class theory, which analyzes the role of social classes in history. From this perspective, one can argue that one of the reasons that communism collapsed in the Soviet Union concerns the corruption of its ruling class. The privileges of the Soviet bureaucracy inspired critiques of the "new class" that ruled Soviet society. After the excesses of the Brezhnev era, which saw rampant corruption, nepotism on a grand scale, and the alienation of the ruling elite from the masses of the people, it was clear that the system of Soviet Communism was one of bureaucratic collectivism, ruled by a corrupt party elite.[22]

The Soviet system was also highly inefficient, ruled by rigid centralized plans, arbitrary deals cut between central planners and managers, and resistance to work by the oppressed working class. The form of oppression in the Soviet Union and its satellites produced growing bitterness and alienation among the underlying population that terminated in intensifying unrest and struggle.

In the classical Marxian conception, socialism was supposed to overcome alienated labor; but in the Soviet system it provided new forms of the alienation of workers, leading eventually to mass resistance and struggle, and to the collapse of communism. As Herbert Marcuse argued in *Soviet Marxism* (1958), the means of production were nationalized but not socialized, not put into the control of the "immediate producers."[23] The continued reality of workers' oppression and struggle provided a refutation of the communist ideology that the Soviet system was a workers' state; and yet the struggle of the workers against this system and to overthrow it in the late 1980s dramatically confirmed the salient power of the Marxian theory of class struggle.

Boris Kagarlitsky, a Russian democratic socialist critic of the Soviet system, argued that "the cultural level of the masses became on average somewhat higher during the 1970s than the cultural level of the ruling elite" (1990, p. 292). On this account, rising levels of education and consumption produced rising expectations that the Soviet Communist system could not fulfill. Marcuse (1985 [1958]) had earlier argued that the need to incorporate technological rationality in the system would help produce critical consciousness; and Rudolf Bahro (1978) contributed the concept of "surplus consciousness" to describe the growing subjective need in "actually existing socialist societies" for a better life that could fuel social dissent and transformation.

Although both Left and Right critics of communism pessimistically argued that decades of Stalinism in the former Soviet Union and its Eastern European empire had blunted the potential for social change, this diagnosis turned out to be incorrect and to signal the continuing validity of the classical Marxian concept of mass politics and the importance of the activity of the masses in promoting social change with the post-Soviet struggles for democratization, however uneven and marked by successes and failures.

There were other reasons why Soviet communism collapsed that can also be described by the Marxian theory. Marcuse (1985 [1958]) distinguished between a ruling class that owned the means of production and one that controlled them; and, following this distinction, one could argue that the fact the Soviet elite did not own the means of production made them more susceptible to abandoning the Soviet system, with the hopes that they could actually come to own the means of production in a new system, or profit from them. The ideology that the goal of socialism was to develop productive forces also might have contributed to the rapidity of the transition from a bureaucratic collectivist to a market system in former Soviet societies. This is because if the Soviet system proved inefficient, then the ideology of the primacy of the importance of developing the forces of production in Marxian theory might have led some one-time Soviet communists to conclude that perhaps capitalism—or better, a mixed economy as found in social democratic societies—was a better system to develop the forces of production after all, as it was producing more freedom, human rights, and a better life for all.

There were, of course, many economic, political, and ideological reasons why the Soviet system failed. Military competition with the West during the Cold

War overburdened the Soviet system, and the rise of a transnational capitalism cut the Soviet bloc out of world trade and weakened its members in relation to the system of global capitalism. Furthermore, the Soviet economy was too highly centralized and not responsive to consumer demand or local conditions; the system failed to incorporate important new technologies (blocking, for instance, such things as photocopiers and computers); the Soviet educational system and health system were inefficient; apathy and corruption undermined productivity and efficiency; and masses of the people were deeply alienated from a system that they were supposed to control but did not.

Furthermore, Soviet Communism failed to incorporate the gains of the bourgeois revolutionary tradition, which Marx and the classical Marxists believed were an indispensable part of the socialist heritage. As noted, many classical Marxists saw the need for genuine democracy in order to have real socialism. Further, the very experience of the Soviet Union suggests to me that, in addition to popular sovereignty being valorized as a key component of strong democracy, the bourgeois concept of a division of power (Montesquieu) and system of checks and balances should be seen as key components of genuine socialist democracy. This is because Soviet Communism was thoroughly totalitarian, with the state controlling all major institutions and centers of power, from the state to the military, the media, and education. With power centralized in the state apparatus, society grew stagnant and atrophied. There was no socialist public sphere, no civil society, no economic freedom, no cultural freedom, and so stagnation set in and the people and society suffered accordingly.

Division of power and the creation of a socialist public sphere thus seems an integral part of a genuinely democratic and socialist society. It was the tragedy of Gorbachev to respond to the failures of the Soviet system and the struggles for change with measures that were too little and too late. Gorbachev lacked the historical vision and imagination to revivify the Soviet system, although *glasnost* (i.e. cultural freedom and openness, experimentation in arts, criticism, and intellectual freedoms) was obviously needed for the system to survive, to regenerate itself. Likewise, *perestroika* (i.e. a systematic process of economic, political, and social restructuring) was obviously necessary for the Soviet Union to prosper; but Gorbachev and his followers were unable to carry through the necessary restructuring, and some critics claim that Gorbachev himself ultimately opted for an authoritarian model of change from above, replicating the "Bonapartism" that Marx had criticized as early as the 1850s (see Callinicos 1991, pp. 48f).

The collapse of Soviet Communism suggests not that socialism is dead and cannot succeed, but that only democratic socialism can work, and that only with genuine democracy can socialism provide a real alternative to the democratic-capitalist societies of the West and East. Socialism requires workers' self-management and democratic participation in all affairs of society and the polity, or else it is but another economic system, merely a means of rationalizing and modernizing the economy. The lesson of the collapse of communism is that only democratic socialism can succeed to win the allegiance of its citizens.

Consequently, it is the democratic socialist and revolutionary Marxian tradition that has the resources to construct positive alternatives to both capitalism and state communism for the present age. I would also argue—against postmodern critiques that proscribe global and totalizing theories—that making sense of the momentous collapse of Soviet Communism proves the need for Marxian theories to describe the epochal restructuring of the post-Cold War world now occurring, with its attendant problems and crises.

The role of the masses in overthrowing communism suggests the continued viability of mass politics and confirms certain Marxian theories about the circulation of struggles and the importance of mass insurrections. In 1848, Marx and his generation experienced a series of mass upheavals, leading Marx to theorize a process of world revolution.[24] In certain respects, 1989 was the most significant year since 1848 and in similar fashion exhibited a succession of revolutions, originating from below and circulating from one country to another in the Soviet bloc and eventually to the Soviet Union itself. The events of 1989 fit in with the heritage of revolutionary struggles of 1789, 1848, 1870, 1905, and 1917–1918, and show the continued viability of Marxian theories of mass politics, insurrection, and revolution.

Thus, from a Marxian class and revolutionary perspective, revolts emerged against Soviet-style communism because it had failed to incorporate the progressive heritage of both the bourgeois-liberal traditions and the Marxian revolutionary socialist heritage into its system. The Marxian theory, however, can both explain these events and find key elements of its political theory vindicated in its failure.

Consequently, I believe that the Marxian theory continues to be useful today, even if there are problems with certain aspects of its theory of history and political analysis, aspects of which now appear problematical in the light of contemporary developments. Yet I shall argue that Marxism continues to provide indispensable resources for the radical project, though I also argue that we need new thinking in our radical theory and politics. However, this is completely consistent with the critical and historical impulses of the Marxian theory itself, and portends its development and reconstruction and not its obsolescence and abandonment.

The End of Orthodox Marxism?

I have argued so far in this chapter that the most recent crises of Marxism have not been terminal, and that Marxism still has the theoretical and political resources to provide an account of contemporary history and strategies for radical social transformation. In a sense, Marxism is always in crisis as new events emerge that require revision and development of the theory. Marx himself and subsequent Marxists were always revising and reconstructing the theory to take account of historical developments and to fill in deficiencies in the original theory. In this sense, "crises of Marxism" are not so much signs of the obsolescence of the Marxian theory as a typical situation for a social theory that faces anomalies or events which challenge its theories.

It is therefore not unusual for Marxism to be in crisis and for Marxists to reconstruct the theory in response to crisis. This was the life work of Herbert Marcuse, and many other Marxists have also responded to crises of Marxism with important, sometimes spectacular, developments of the theory.[25] In general, crises for the Marxian theory are therefore an opportunity for its development. Crises bring about a challenge to a social system or theory that may lead to its weakening and collapse, or to its improvement and strengthening. Crises of Marxism are like the periodic events that global socio-historical theories continually undergo when events belie forecasts, or historical changes appear that force development or revision of them. When theories like Marxism are put in question during a "crisis," debates ensue that frequently improve the theory. Consequently, crises of Marxism do not necessarily refer to failures of Marxism that portend its collapse and irrelevance, but rather point toward opportunities to expand, develop, and strengthen the theory.

And yet the collapse of Soviet Communism is such an epochal event that perhaps one can say that a certain version of Marxism is now at its end. I am speaking of that version of "orthodox", or "scientific," Marxism that claimed it was theorizing the very movement of history, that history guaranteed the triumph of socialism, and that the collapse of capitalism and the transition to socialism and communism were inevitable. Such a Marxism claimed to be grounded in a "scientific" analysis of history and exhibited features of certainty, dogmatism, and orthodoxy.

Orthodox Marxism was systematized in the Soviet Union and transmitted in different versions all over the world. It was rooted in doctrines concerning the revolutionary vocation of the proletariat and the certainty that capitalism would be overthrown by a revolutionary proletariat. Orthodox Marxism claimed that such socialism was being produced in the Soviet Union, and that the triumph of socialism on a world scale was guaranteed by the success of Soviet Communism.

This version of orthodox Marxism had dire consequences for the construction of a democratic socialism consistent with Marx and Engels' vision of socialism as "a free association" with citizens controlling their working and leisure life. However, this was a "Marxism without guarantees," as Stuart Hall put it, that required commitment to democracy, rights, and free association.[26] Belief that history itself was leading to socialism, that one was part of the flow of history, led to submission to historical trends and the dictates of party leaders who could claim to read the direction and flow of history. It created arrogance and dogmatism, and produced a version of Marxism that could be used to legitimate oppressive societies. This version of orthodox Marxism is now totally obsolete, and in turn discredits the Marxism-Leninism and "scientific Marxism" that were associated with it.

Yet I would argue that a critical Marxism that remains open, non-dogmatic, more modest, and tentative continues to provide theoretical and political resources to develop a critical theory and radical politics for the present age.[27] In sorting out "what is living and dead" in Marxism, one should distinguish

between the Marxian method and theory, and recognize that the theory contains both an overarching system and specific theoretical and political positions. As I have suggested, the Marxian method of inquiry is a highly historical method, and so development and revision of the Marxian concepts and theories is itself proscribed by the method. It would go well beyond the limits of this chapter to lay out in detail the Marxian method and to specify its continuing relevance;[28] but I will simply state here that it is not clear how any historical events could render obsolete a method of inquiry, so it is not necessary for the purpose of this chapter to further demonstrate the continuing relevance of the Marxian method. Yet I would assert that at least some versions of the Marxian method continue to be of use, while aspects of the Marxian theory and a certain version of classical Marxism are now obsolete.

In the work of Marx and Engels, there is an impressive unity between theory and practice and all of the specific elements of the theory in classical Marxism. The critique of capitalism, theory of society and history, method of analysis, concepts of socialism and revolution, and relation between theory and practice all fit together in classical Marxism. It is precisely this classical synthesis that dictates the need to constantly revise the Marxian theory as historical changes and crises emerge, although certain aspects of the Marxian theory such as the theory of proletarian revolution, which was the linchpin of the classical Marxian theory, may be outdated since the class structures of modern societies have significantly altered since the time of Marx and Engels in the 19th century, and by the 21st century there is no unitary proletarian class to carry out a socialist revolution, hence class alliances between progressive sectors are necessary as agents of revolutionary transformation.[29]

Since the Frankfurt School work in the 1930s (see Kellner 1989a), Marxists have put in question the primacy of proletarian revolution and attempted to reconstruct the Marxian theory in the light of existing historical realities and struggles and the failure of movements, like Soviet Communism, that adopted, perhaps illicitly, the name of Marx and socialism. It is precisely the reconstruction and rethinking of Marxian theory of revolution and socialism in the light of contemporary realities that is necessary today.

The particular challenge and opportunity today for critical Marxism is to provide an account of the restructuring of capitalism and new system of technocapitalism that is now emerging, which we have delineated in the previous three chapters, where I argued that the Marxian theory provides the best perspectives and resources for this monumental task. One needs as well to argue how the Marxian theory continues to provide both powerful resources to develop a social theory and radical politics for the present age—for the Marxian theory is at bottom both a theory of capitalism, rooted in the political economy of the existing social system, and a theory of the transition to socialism. As I have argued in preceding chapters, if the economy is undergoing changes, and if economic factors continue to play a key role in all aspects of social life, then a theory of capitalism is a necessary component of radical social theory. Since no competing economic theory or critique of capitalism has emerged to replace Marxism, it still is an indispensable part of radical social theory.

It is still necessary, however, for the Marxian theory to develop new categories and analyses in order to theorize the current restructuring and crises of

capitalism and viable transitions to socialism. Although this process has appeared to signify a disorganized capitalism for some theorists (i.e. Offe 1985 and Lash and Urry 1987), it also involves a reorganization of capitalism, sometimes described as "post-Fordism" and by the 1990s "globalization," which requires new theorizing (Harvey 1989) and what I describe as "technocapitalism" in this book. Many Marxists have provided powerful critiques of contemporary capitalist society, thus updating Marxian political economy and social theory.

In addition, it has been well documented in the past decades that there have been major advances in Marxian social theory, cultural theory, and philosophy, and within every conceivable academic discipline, providing new Marxian analyses of all domains of social life. These efforts provide indispensable components of a reconstructed Marxism for the present age.[30]

Indeed, from this perspective we can see the limitations of the once-fashionable postmodern theories that accumulated a certain degree of cultural capital and influence by critiquing Marxism and other modern theories.[31] Such theories proclaimed "the end of history" at the very moment that communism was collapsing, the capitalist system was restructuring itself, and new possibilities and problems were appearing on the historical scene with increased acceleration and urgency. To say that "history" has ended in such a situation is totally absurd; and the events of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and subsequent War on Terror have discredited "end of history" discourses and led Fukuyama and others to recant (see the critique in Kellner 2003 and 2005).

Baudrillard's concept of "the end of political economy" (1996 [1976]) is equally absurd at a time when capitalism has been restructuring itself on a global level over the past decades. Indeed, the postmodern attack on macro and systemic theories is equally disabling at the very moment in which we need new theories and politics to conceptualize the emergent socio-economic, political, and cultural configurations of the moment and to seek solutions to the political problems of the present age, which are increasingly global in nature (i.e. global debt crises since the 1970s, global ecological crises, and the globalization of local political conflicts as in the Gulf War and the post-1990s' crises in the former Yugoslavia, the former Soviet Union, and other parts of the world).[32]

Thus I would argue that Marxism contains the resources to develop a critical theory of the present age, and that renouncing it because of the political collapse of Soviet Communism, which arguably was a distortion of the theory in the first place, is simplistic and unproductive.

Rethinking Socialism

Only the most ideological enemy of Marxism, or uninformed pseudo-intellectual, could seriously maintain that the Marxian theory is obsolete. But what of Marxian politics? As a critical theory of society, while Marxism is arguably alive and well, Marxist politics seems nonetheless to be floundering. It is a curiosity of the fate of Marxism today that in the past decades, while there has been a significant development of theory, there has been a steady decline in Marxist politics, as well as a declining role for Marxist discourse and practice

in contemporary political movements. Some Marxist radicals have urged that the discourse of socialism be abandoned in the present context, and socialist parties in the Western capitalist countries seem to be rapidly declining in power and influence. Labor struggles and the sort of class politics classically associated with Marxist theory also seem to be in decline; so the question arises as to whether the very discourse of socialism and revolution should be abandoned.

In the following discussion, I will concede that Marxian theories of socialism and social change need to be reconsidered and reconstructed and updated, but that Marxian social and political theory is not obsolete. In part, its continuing political relevance is due to its intense and resolute focus on class. The class theory of politics, I believe, constitutes both an enduring contribution of the Marxian theory and an obdurate limitation. During the past decades in the United States and more or less elsewhere throughout the world, there have been growing class divisions between rich and poor, haves and have-nots. To proclaim the obsolescence of social classes and class struggle is absolutely wrong in the face of the palatable reality of class.

Yet the class privileged by the classical Marxian theory of revolution—the proletariat, the industrial working class—is a declining class sector in the Western industrial countries, though not in the developing/underdeveloped countries where industrial labor is increasingly exported. Beginning with the Frankfurt School in the 1930s, Marxian theorists questioned whether the proletariat could serve as a revolutionary subject, as in the original revolutionary theory of Marx (Marcuse 1964); Kellner 1984 and 1989a). It is also widely accepted that classical Marxism exaggerates the primacy of class and downplays the salience of gender and race. Clearly, oppression takes place in many more spheres than just the economic and the workplace, so a radical neo-Marxian politics of the future should take account of gender, sexuality, and race as well as class, as I argued in Chapter 6 on intersectional Marxism.[33]

Nonetheless, it would be wrong to ignore the centrality of class and the importance of class politics. Indeed, a radical politics today should be more multicultural, race- and gender-focused, and broad-based than the original Marxian theory. Thus, a form of Marxism seems to have come to an end: the Marxism of the industrial working class, of proletarian revolution. Marxism was identified since its beginnings with working-class revolution and Marxian-inspired revolutions legitimated themselves as working-class revolutions. No doubt a future Marxism will have to distance itself from its concept of the proletariat and privileging of the industrial working class as the subject of revolution and the construction of socialism, for, as new technologies expand and the industrial proletariat shrinks, new agents of social change must be sought.

Further, we need to theorize the failure of Marxian politics over the past several decades since 1989—after a series of spectacular triumphs for Marxian revolutionary politics from the late 1950s through the late 1970s in Third World countries—and draw appropriate lessons from recent history. Yet it is premature to describe a series of setbacks as evidence for the collapse of Marxist politics per se. In the long term, we still don't know if the collapse of the Soviet

Union was positive or negative for the Marxian project, as Putin and his Russian Federation are as dangerous a threat to the West as Soviet Communism ever was (see Kellner 2025). The collapse of Soviet Communism in 1989 was certainly a negative event in that it provided for an ideological celebration of capitalism and a market economy as the best economic system, as well as the actual dismantling of state communist societies and the implementation of market economies in the previous Soviet empire, along with autocratic bureaucratic dictatorships, as in Russia and Hungary.

Thus the socialist economic and political counterweight to capitalism, and alternative world system, disappeared, leaving the capitalist economy triumphant. Yet one could argue that the collapse of Soviet Communism was positive in that Marxist analysis was able to describe its collapse in terms of its departure from classical Marxism that never advocated a party dictatorship, let alone a murderous autocratic dictatorship like that of Stalin—followed today by former KGB official Vladimir Putin's dictatorship.

Soviet Communism identified Marxism with a repressive totalitarian dictatorship, and thus was able to provide a powerful ideological bulwark against Marxism which collapsed as the bogeyman of Soviet Communism, the archenemy of the U.S. and Western democracies during the Cold War, was no longer there to justify massive military spending and identification of Marxism with communist dictatorship and the enemy of the Free World.

Of course, new conflicts and crises confronted capitalist countries, such as the Islamic terrorist attacks of the 2000s and U.S.-led militarist attacks on Iraq that justified new military spending to keep the military-industrial complex and military capitalism functioning (see Kellner 2003 and 2005); and new ideological enemies were created to continue military expenditure and Cold and Hot wars.

The capitalist economy on a world scale had been fueled by tremendous military spending that was legitimated by the Cold War. With the end of the Cold War and the communist enemy, such a level of state-administered spending appeared to be no longer justified; and, with the increased pressure of gigantic national deficits and capital shortages, new global crises of capitalism emerged in 2008, disclosing once again the crisis tendencies of capitalism (Gopinath 2020).

Furthermore, the passing of a bureaucratic communist social system that fundamentally distorted Marxian theory opened the way for a new type of socialism that could enhance freedom, democracy, and human happiness. In this context, it is premature to jettison the concept of socialism when existing capitalist societies and bureaucratic autocracies are in need of such profound transformation. I would therefore argue that one can still use the concept of socialism as a practical guide to inform policies in democratic capitalist societies and to make specific policy demands: full employment; free education and health care; a shorter work week; protection of the environment; and democratization of the workplace, the media, and other domains of society. One can also use socialist ideas to call for more radical democratization; yet one should perhaps argue that with a genuinely democratic socialism, all classes of society will participate in self-management, and hence there should be no privileging of the working class or any other class as in some versions of classical Marxism.

Moreover, Marxian concepts can be used to demonstrate the problems with unrestrained capitalism, and can be used to justify regulation and social control of capitalism. During an era in which "free markets" are being touted as the source of economic prosperity and human freedom alike, the Marxian critique of market capitalism shows its limitations. Capitalism has produced incredible suffering all over the world, and Marxian critiques can be used to point to the limitations and enduring problems with free market capitalism, the need for regulation, and ultimately for a better organization of society. Putting the imperative to maximize the accumulation of capital over the needs of people is one of the structural limitations of capitalism that critical Marxian discourse could attack in legitimating social change that could win the favor of large numbers of people.

Perhaps most important, the Marxian vision of emancipation could continue to animate struggles for a freer and more democratic society. The Marxian demand for shortening the workday and increasing the realm of leisure and freedom is especially relevant during an era when technology makes possible less work, yet capitalism continues to impose more work.[34] Marx's vision of emancipation and full development of the individual human being is appropriate to the present level of technological development and can provide a critical standpoint to denounce continued societal oppression. Its emphasis on the democratization of social life is appropriate when the democratic revolution seems to have triumphed, or to be at least possible, on a worldwide scale, despite the emergence of autocracy that makes the struggle between autocracy and democracy the key struggle of the era, displacing the primacy of Cold War antagonisms between capitalism and socialism.

The Marxian vision of democracy and freedom, I would argue, is preferable to the liberal version in that it has a more comprehensive vision of democracy, which is to encompass all realms of social life. The popular sovereignty exercised in the Paris Commune, and celebrated by Marx and Engels as a model for the self-management of society,[35] would involve genuine popular sovereignty on the social and political level, as well as economic democracy. While the actually existing socialist societies never developed full social democracy, there was a modicum at least of workplace democracy. In today's liberal capitalist countries, by contrast, democracy is effectively limited to periodic voting, and there is little real popular sovereignty in the social realm or democracy in the workplace, public sphere, or other major domains of society.

Thus, classical liberalism's notion of representative democracy, its equation of democracy with voting, severely restricts the conception of democracy, yielding but a weak democracy, easily manipulated by conservative forces that use their wealth and power to control electoral processes. The classical liberal concept of freedom is also truncated, often limiting freedom to individual freedom of choice in the market and political popularity contests. The question also arises as to whether the vast majority of the population are really free in capitalist societies that do not provide the economic basis to live a free life. How can one be said to be "free" when one is suffering constant anxiety about employment, homelessness, health care, environmental crisis, and the possibility of economic

collapse? Adorno's (2020) demand for a life without anxiety is relevant as a critical marker against actual existing capitalist insecurity and anxiety.

Crucially, the former communist societies never incorporated the bourgeois tradition of rights, individual liberties, and democracy to the extent stressed by Marx and Engels. Failure to adequately appropriate the progressive heritage of liberalism into the Marxian political theory rendered it vulnerable to liberal critiques and the belief that only liberalism provided genuine freedom and democracy. Marxism should have established itself as the champion of these political values; but an underdeveloped Marxian political philosophy and actually existing political oppression of the communist regimes created an identification of Marxism with oppression and liberalism capitalism with freedom and democracy, a link that a genuinely democratic socialism could break.

Finally, against liberalism's individualism—as well as some so-called postmodern politics that stress micropolitics—one could argue that Marxian concepts of mass politics, which call for mass struggle, radical systemic change, and fundamental restructuring of the system, were instantiated by the very struggles in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that were previously claimed to have invalidated the Marxian theory. This is because the dramatic mass struggles and upheavals in these regions caused fundamental social change (which may, however, turn out to be regressive in many ways in some places, as in Putin's Russia).

Thus, whereas micropolitics may contribute to such a process, it is premature to claim that the era of mass politics, associated in part with Marxism, is over. Indeed, Marxian political theory articulates and grounds those values that can help produce coalitions between disparate political movements. Championing "new social movements" per se as the contemporary agents of change covers over the fact that some of these movements are reactionary, some are at best liberal, while some are genuinely progressive. We need broad political perspectives to judge between contending political movements and to provide values and ideals that might unite specific movements for specific goals. As civil rights activist Jesse Jackson reminds us, coalition politics requires discovering that common ground which might unite progressive movements, which then together can move to the higher ground of democratic and socialist political transformation.

Indeed, in April 2025, socialist Senator Bernie Sanders and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez toured the United States from metropolises like Los Angeles to many small regional towns, drawing record crowds as they fiercely attacked the Trump administration while advocating progressive and Democratic-Socialist policies. Their popularity confirms that radical political ideas inspired by Marxism are alive today, and that many groups representing a broad array of working people (including trade unions, socialist activists, and Marxist-inspired individuals) are demonstrating in record numbers against policies in the U.S. and throughout the world as assaults on government, the fabric of democracy, and the environment inspire growing opposition to increasingly autocratic and oppressive regimes.

Nonetheless, questions emerge as to whether the Marxian theory of social change should presuppose the collapse of capitalism as a necessary condition for the triumph of socialism. Capitalism has been in severe crisis for decades, but it has often emerged stronger than before and now appears far from collapse in its problematical triumph after the collapse of communism. And yet it may also be premature to sound the death-knell of the Marxian theory of revolution. Why should one believe that capitalism itself, capitalism in the most "advanced" capitalist countries like the United States and Japan, might not collapse?

Japanese capitalism has been in severe crisis, and it is not clear that U.S. capitalism has any solutions to its deficit and debt problems, its banking and financial crises, and the crisis of life in decaying cities marked by growing crime and violence, illness and lack of health care, and a pervasive sense of hopelessness. And, finally, the very environment in which we live, nature itself, may revolt against its capitalist misuse and require another mode of social organization to guarantee the very survival of the human species on planet earth.[36]

Capitalism could thus collapse, or at least not work in many parts of the world, which may well turn to socialism as an alternative—but this time a democratic and multicultural socialism, or new forms of socialism that have not yet been theorized, perhaps will emerge through a process of historical struggle and experimentation. The failure of market capitalist experiments in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union—and even in the U.S. and other Western democracies—may yet reinvigorate new socialist experiments that may yet contain many solutions to acute problems of the present age.

In regard to these problems and crises of capitalist society, we can still use Marxian theory to confront the capitalist organization of society and accumulation process. We need to rethink markets and how to tame their destructive effects, as well as developing resolute critique of state communism and its problems with bureaucracy and autocracy. We also need a resurgence of socialist internationalism, with new emphasis on the need for internationalist thinking in the face of global capitalism, its cut-throat competition, the constant threat of war, and the dangers of global ecological collapse.

In the past decades, the Trilateral Commission, Maastricht, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) have served as organs of the international capitalist class to promote its interests. Similarly, socialists and other progressives must organize on an international level and think globally to deal with the problems of the economy, the environment, and everyday life and to come up with attractive global alternatives to capitalism.

Hence, in conclusion, I would argue for the need for new Marxian analysis and politics for the contemporary era. Events in the communist world of the last decades refute both Cold War anti-communist myths and communist dogma and require new political thinking. Most conservative, liberal, and leftist thinking all failed to anticipate the dramatic upheaval in the communist world. Furthermore, it is not clear that any one political ideology has the answers to the mind-boggling problems of the present era. In view of the dramatic changes of the past years and the enduring and even intensified problems, we need new

political thinking; we need to dispense with a lot of old thinking, and to theorize the new and still changing political realities of our time.

Thus, we need to rethink and reconstruct the concept of socialism. Certainly, the concept of socialism maintained in what I am calling a now obsolete orthodox Marxism must be abandoned—socialism as working-class revolution, socialism as guaranteed by history, socialism as inevitable, socialism as the telos of history. Perhaps socialism should be seen more as a normative ideal than as a historical force, more as a model or regulative ideal to provide critical alternatives to the existing capitalist societies, rather than a tendency in history. This model of socialism, as my previous analysis suggests, could be used to criticize existing capitalist societies, to provide policy guidance and justification of certain policies and social transformation, and to provide a radical alternative to the existing organization of society. Socialism must be rethought in the light of historical developments and crises of capitalism and socialism in order to retain its potential to generate progressive social change and address the environmental crisis that threatens life on earth.

Reconstructing Marxism

I have argued that we need new post-Cold War critical socio-political theory and practice to deal with the problems of the present age, and that Marxism can only be a part of such new theories and politics. Yet we need to build on viable political and theoretical perspectives and resources of the past, and I would argue that Marxism continues to provide vital resources for radical theory and politics today. I have also argued, against postmodernists, that the liberal and critical Enlightenment tradition provides important resources for the present, though developing this position would constitute the basis of another study.

In sum, I believe that we need new theoretical and political syntheses, drawing on the best of classical Enlightenment theory, Marxian theory, feminism, critical race theory, multiculturalism, and other progressive theoretical and political currents of the present. Key aspects for such new syntheses, however, are found in the Marxian tradition; and those who prematurely abandon it are turning away from a tradition that has been valuable since Marx's day and will continue to be so into the foreseeable future. Consequently, Marxism is not yet obsolescent. Rather, the Marxian theory continues to provide resources and stimulus for critical theory and radical politics in the present age.

Whither, then, Marxism? Certainly not as a master theory and narrative, as it appeared in its classical forms, but certainly as an important method of social research and set of theoretical perspectives, concepts, and values that can still be used for critical social theory and radical politics today. We continue to live in a capitalist society and, as long as we do, Marxism will continue to be relevant. A reconstructed Marxism—a Marxism without guarantees, teleology, and foundations—will be more open, tolerant, skeptical, and modest than previous versions. A Marxism for the 21st century could help promote democracy, freedom, justice, and equality, and counteract conservative and liberal ideologies

that merely promote the interests of the rich and powerful. As long as tremendous class inequality, human suffering, and oppression under capitalism exists there is the need for critical theories like Marxism and visions of radical social change that the tradition has inspired.

Marxism will disappear either when the nightmare of capitalism is finally over or when a democratic and free society emerges that will produce its own philosophy and way of life. If Marxism has inspired such a project, then the doctrine can pass on to a happy obsolescence, and the sufferings and struggles of those in the Marxian tradition will be redeemed.

This points to a final reason to hold onto and reconstruct Marxism once again in the present era: loyalty to those who have given their lives for the genuinely progressive hopes and dreams of the Marxian heritage. Loyalty to the radical tradition suggests building on its insights, learning from its errors and failures, and reconstructing one's radical theories and politics accordingly. The once fashionable postmodern nihilism that cuts itself off from the theoretical and political resources of the past not only disables contemporary theory and politics, but it arrogantly, in quasi-Stalinist fashion, also relegates to the "dustbin of history" those ideas, political struggles, sacrifices, and heroism of the past. Instead of such absolute negation and negativism, the dialectical negation and sublation practiced by Hegel and Marx (*Aufhebung*) continues to be the more productive way of relating to tradition and reconstructing our radical theories and politics in the contemporary era.

Notes

1 This text was first published as Douglas Kellner, "The Obsolescence of Marxism?" in *Whither Marxism? Global Crises in International Perspective*, ed. Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 3–30. It was revised and updated in 2007 and 2024.

2 Habermas notes that the term "crisis" in the medical sense "refers to the phase of an illness in which it is decided whether or not the organism's self-healing powers are sufficient for recovery" (1975, p. 1). A crisis in this sense thus threatens the survival of a phenomenon and suggests that, if it does not survive the crisis, it will cease to exist.

3 U.S. State Department neo-Hegelian Francis Fukuyama has proclaimed the "end of history" after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet empire in the late 1980s. He declared "the ultimate triumph of Western liberal democracy" and "the unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism" (1992, p. 3). As Derrida reminds us (1993), such claims have been made regularly from the 1950s throughout the Cold War.

4 For descriptions of these crises of Marxism and the ways that Western Marxist theorists responded to them, see my book on Herbert Marcuse (Kellner 1984), who attempted to reconstruct the Marxian theory in response to a series of crises of Marxism from the 1920s and through the Cold War, up until his death in 1979.

5 On Baudrillard, see Kellner (1989b).

6 During the 2024 U.S. presidential election between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, the Trump camp denounced Harris's father as a "Marxist economic professor," and Trump and his Make America Great Again (MAGA) followers constantly attacked Harris and other opponents and critics as "Marxists." See Jennifer Medina, "Trump Ties Harris Critically to Her Father, a Professor Who Studied

Marxism," *New York Times*, September 10, 2024 at https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/10/us/politics/harris-father-marxist-trump.html (accessed December 6, 2024)

7 I discuss the particularly Russian nationalist influences on Putin's Russian Federation regime and the differences with it and classical Marxism in Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle in the 21st Century: From the Stolen Election of 2000 to the Trump MAGA Horror Show* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2025). Jairus Banaji notes: "The economic regime that has emerged in Russia since the Soviet dissolution and the resurgence of private capital in the 1990s has received a wide variety of characterizations and labels; from 'state capitalism' (which includes various versions, such as Catherine Belton's 'hybrid KGB form of state capitalism'), to Karen Dawisha's 'authoritarian kleptocracy', Richard Sakwa's 'managed capitalism', and, of course, 'crony capitalism', which is now widely used. My own preference would be 'Kremlin-controlled capitalism.'" Jairus Banaji, "Russian Capitalism Today: A Case of 'Primacy of Politics'?" *Salvage*, March 7, 2024 at https://salvage.zone/russian-capitalism-today-a-case-of-primacy-of-politics/ (accessed December 7, 2024).

8 On Glucksmann and the French "New Philosophers," see William Grimes, "André Glucksmann, French Philosopher Who Renounced Marxism, Dies at 78," *New York Times*, November 11, 2015 at https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/12/world/europe/andre-glucksmann-french-philosopher-who-renounced-marxism-dies-at-78.html (accessed December 6, 2024).

9 Adam B. Ulam, *Lenin and the Bolsheviks* (London: Fontana, 1969).

10 Karl Marx, "Inaugural Address of the International Working Men's Association" (1864), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1864/10/27.htm (accessed December 28, 2024).

11 Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (1871), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ (accessed December 28, 2024).

12 Karl Marx, "Address to the International Workingmen's Association" 1872, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1872/hague-conference/introduction.htm (accessed December 6, 2024).

13 See Alex Callinicos for a sketch of the historical differences between Bolshevism and Stalinism (p. 21ff), concluding with a quote from scholar Moshe Lewin, who notes: "The party became an organization of an unprecedented type: a bureaucratic-political administration, highly centralized and geared to mobilization, regimentation, and control, entirely different from what it had been under Lenin" (Callinicos 1991, p. 37).

14 V.I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (1917), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ (accessed December 6, 2024).

15 Callinicos (1991) argues that the establishment of the Congress of People's Deputies in the USSR in March 1989 "involved an appeal by the reformers for popular support in their struggle against the conservatives. This step, the decision to take the differences within the apparatus to a larger audience, marked the real turning point in the process of *glasnost*, the moment at which the revolutionary overthrow of the Stalinist regimes became a real possibility" (p. 49). Perhaps a moment of genuine radical reform did exist during the Gorbachev era, but it might also be the case that the system was corrupted beyond reform and that sufficiently revolutionary forces did not exist to overthrow it—an argument bolstered by the failed communist coup of August 1991 and subsequent collapse of the Gorbachev regime and ascendency of Boris Yeltsin and his reformers, who renounced Marxism and socialism, followed by Putin who restored a dictatorial state bureaucratic autocracy.

16 Della Volpe (1978), for instance, stresses the closeness of Rousseau, Marx, and the socialist tradition, while Miller (1984) stresses the importance of Rousseau for democratic theory and politics.

17 Rousseau (2012 [1762], Book 1, chap. 7).

18 .Karl Marx, "On Freedom of the Press Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly Debates on Freedom of the Press and Publication of the Proceedings of the

Assembly of the Estates" (1842), in *Rheinische Zeitung*, at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ (accessed December 28, 2024). Marx concludes: "the absence of freedom of the press makes all other freedom illusory. One form of freedom governs another just as one limb of the body does another. Whenever a particular freedom is put in question, freedom in general is put in question. Whenever one form of freedom is rejected, freedom in general is rejected and henceforth can have only a semblance of existence, since the sphere in which absence of freedom is dominant becomes a matter of pure chance … Freedom remains freedom whether it finds expression in printer's ink, in property, in the conscience, or in a political assembly."

One could object that this fulsome defense of the freedom of the press was an idealist residue of the early Marx, but in fact Marx supported himself through journalism in the 1850s and 1860s and never failed to support freedom of the press. In writing on the Paris Commune in 1871, he praised the Communards for publishing accounts for their deliberations and their proclamation of freedom of the press, so this issue remained a life-long concern and commitment of Marx.

19 On Rousseau as a democratic thinker, see Miller (1984).

20 On Left vs. Right Hegelians and connections between Right Hegelians and totalitarianism, see Lowith (1967), who distinguishes between conservative "old Hegelians" and radical "young Hegelians."

21 For example, see the discussions of the failures of bureaucratic communism in Callinicos (1991) and Blackburn (1991)—critiques also relevant to Putinism and post-Mao Chinese communism. In the following pages, I will explicate other important critiques of bureaucratic and autocratic communism as incompatible with Marx and Engels' views of socialist democracy.

22 This was an argument made as early as the 1940s by Max Shachtman and other U.S. critics of Soviet Communism. See Drucker (1994).

23 As I point out in my introduction to the 1985 Columbia University Press reprint of Marcuse's *Soviet Marxism*, he was the first member of the Frankfurt School to systematically analyze and critique Soviet Marxism and its divergences from classical Marxism. He also foresaw the "liberalizing trends" brought about by Gorbachev, though he did not anticipate its collapse.

24 For excellent documentation of the political-historical context in which Marx wrote his articles and books and participated in the radical politics of the era, see Rubel and Manale (1975).

25 Herbert Marcuse's and the Frankfurt School's revisions of Marxism during historical crises that required revisions of the theory were major themes of my book on Marcuse (Kellner 1984) and on the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (Kellner 1989a).

26 Stuart Hall, "For a Marxism Without Guarantees," *Salvage*, August 13, 2022 at https://salvage.zone/for-a-marxism-without-guarantees/ (accessed December 6, 2024).

27 On the difference between orthodox and scientific vs. critical Marxism, see Gouldner (1980).

28 I explicated the Marxian method of critique in earlier chapters, and in the previous three chapters I have illustrated how the Marxian method and theory can help us produce a critical theory of contemporary technocapitalist society. In addition, there are many versions of the Marxian method, which are more or less defensible; see, for example, Gouldner (1980), who contrasts the method of critical and scientific Marxism. See Kellner (1989a) for systematic defense of the relevance of the Marxian method of social inquiry and critique as elaborated by the Frankfurt School, where I also call attention to limits of the School's appropriation of Marxism.

29 For delineation of the contours of the classical Marxian theory and its dependence on a theory of proletarian revolution as its centerpiece, see my book *Karl Korsch: Revolutionary Theory* (Kellner 1977).

30 For contributions to the development of Marxian theory in many academic disciplines, see: Bertell Ollman and Edward Vernoff, eds., *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses*, 3 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill and Praeger, 1982–1986); Alex Callinicos, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Lucia Pradella, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Marxism and Post-Marxism* (New York: Routledge, 2021); and issues of *Rethinking Marxism, Historical Materialism, Monthly Review, New Left Review*, and other Marxian journals.

31 On postmodern theory, see Kellner (1989b) and Best and Kellner (1991, 1997, and 2001).

32 As I write in 2025, we face a global crisis of the expansion of Russian imperialism in the Ukraine war and crisis in Georgia, as well as global crisis in the Middle East with the Israeli genocidal assaults on Gaza and Lebanon and Trump's threatened tariff war in 2025 which many believe could destroy the global economy. I discuss these crises in Kellner (2025).

33 This has been the argument of Marxist-feminists who have argued for the intersection of class and gender since the 1960s; and Afro-Marxists since W.E.B. Du Bois in the 1930s have argued for the necessity of Marxian class politics to intersect with race and ethnicity. See Mojab (2015) and Du Bois (2021).

34 See Schorr (1992) on "the overworked American" and Gorz (1982 and 1985) on why it is a mistake to continue to organize society around work, how Marx himself repeatedly claimed the reduction of the length of the working day was a fundamental demand of socialism, and how Marx's valorized "free time" and non-alienated labor as self-activity that developed the wealth of human potential.

35 On the Paris Commune as a model of socialism, see Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* (1871) at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/ch05.htm (accessed December 6, 2024).

36 On the ecological crisis, see Al Gore's book *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It* (New York: Rodale, 2006) and the Academy Award-winning documentary released in conjunction, *An Inconvenient Truth*, dir. Davis Guggenheim (Paramount, 2006).

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10 Epilogue

The Limitations and Contributions of Classical Marxism

Throughout this book, I have been explicating the key ideas of Marxism, first in their historical context as they were developed by Marx and Engels, and then focused on key ideas and their continued relevance in the light of contemporary social conditions in the 21st century. In this Epilogue, I will highlight again some of what I consider the contributions of classical Marxism for contemporary critical theory and radical politics, but will also point to some of the limitations.

The limitations of classical Marxism are evident in "The Communist Manifesto" and its vision of capitalist societies "melting" down to two classes facing each other in irreconcilable hostility—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Only a class war and the victory of the proletariat can resolve this contradiction in the vision of classical Marxism. Yet the very tendencies of social differentiation and fragmentation in a multi-class and multicultural contemporary capitalism have confounded the two-class model and concept of a simplified class war, rendering this version of classical Marxism obsolete, or at least highly problematic. However, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* and his other historical writings, Marx deployed a more complex model of class differentiation and conflict in contemporary modern societies.[1]

Thus, certain versions of Marxism are antiquated, in particular Marxism as the theory and movement of the proletariat leading to proletariat revolution. Consequently, Marxism as a purported unity of theory and practice, as a project to totally transform the world through proletarian revolution, appears to be historically outmoded. For many critics, Marx was simply too uncritical of the proletariat, which he and Engels always saw as a universal class that represented universal interests of emancipation and that was inherently revolutionary. By virtue of the fact that it was the largest, most oppressed, and most potentially militant class, Marx identified the proletariat as the force of revolution from the early 1840s. He believed that bringing the working class together in factories produced a material basis for organization, and that the proletariat could disrupt the capitalist production process through strikes and revolutionary activity, thus producing conditions for the overthrow of capitalism. Yet it was not clear even in the 19th century how the uneducated and unorganized masses would be able to gain class consciousness and exhibit the will and resolve—and sacrifices—to overthrow capitalism.

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For neo-Marxists like Herbert Marcuse, Marx's concept of the proletariat was rooted in concrete analysis of the industrial workers in the factory system of his day, and thus the concept of proletariat should not be applied to post-industrial conditions that exhibited a fragmentation of the working class into different class sectors and manifested different types for labor.[2] On this account, while Marx provided a penetrating empirical analysis of the industrial working class of his day, and while his scheme of revolution was justified by the nature of the class antagonisms of his time and was manifest in later socialist revolutions, new theories of socialism and revolution are needed for the contemporary era based on analysis of contemporary class and political configurations.

Moreover, in historical retrospect, lack of a theory of subjectivity, of the development of revolutionary consciousness, in the classical Marxian theory also vitiates its theory and practice. Marx seemed to think that class and revolutionary consciousness would develop naturally, as a result of the workers' position in the process of production. Later Marxian theorists, however, engaged in a heated debate concerning whether class consciousness developed spontaneously (as Rosa Luxemburg claimed) or would have to be brought to the workers from outside through the party and education (as Kautsky and Lenin argued).

Yet subsequent neo-Marxian theorists and others, by contrast, would develop more sophisticated theories of consciousness, communication, and education whereby political subjectivities could be formed that would strive for progressive social change and democratic socialism. Later neo-Marxist theorists argued that Marx underplayed the role of culture in shaping consciousness and behavior and ln integrating the working class within bourgeois society. From this perspective, Marx put too much faith in the working class as an inherently revolutionary class, and did not anticipate its fragmentation, integration within the capitalist system, and growing powerlessness and conservatism in later stages of capitalist development. Moreover, the emphasis on a unified proletarian working class contradicted the tendencies of modernity toward class differentiation and fragmentation, tendencies recognized in some, but not all, of Marx's own work.[3]

Many of Marx's texts also seem to place too heavy an emphasis on labor as the distinctly human activity, as the key to the development of the human being. Overemphasis on production is accompanied by an inadequate concept of intersubjectivity, lacking a fully developed theory of individual consciousness and its development in communication, symbolic action, and culture.

Unlike later social theorists such as Émil Durkheim, George Herbert Mead, John Dewey, and Jürgen Habermas, Marx failed to perceive the importance of wider communication in the development of new forms of association and solidarity. He therefore put too much emphasis on class struggle, on direct action, and not enough on communication and democratization as means of organizing working people and transforming society. Indeed, Marx never grasped the significance of the institutions of liberal democracy as an important heritage of modern societies that should be absorbed into socialism and serve as

a lever to a higher form of socialist society in what Marx and Engels described as "the battle for democracy."[4] Although Marx espoused a model of radical democratic self-government in his writings on the Paris Commune, and while he long championed democracy as an ideal, he never properly appreciated the separation of powers and system of rights, checks and balances, and democratic participation developed within bourgeois society.

Thus, Marx failed to develop an institutional theory of democracy, acknowledging its constraints under capitalism, and how socialism would make possible a more participatory and progressive democracy, providing more power to the people. There are also certain methodological limitations to the Marxian theory having to do with a too uncritical acceptance of modern science. There are certain dogmatic and positivistic tendencies within Marxism having to do with Marx and Engels' failure to criticize modern science in a sufficiently radical fashion.

From the moment of *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels always saw their theory as exhibiting the method, rigor, and other virtues of natural science. They described their theory as science and adopted the term "scientific socialism" to describe the specificity of their theory. In his later works Marx wrote of "the natural laws of capitalist production" and of "tendencies working with iron necessity toward inevitable results."[5] Such determinist discourse runs against the voluntarism and emphasis on revolutionary practice in other Marxian texts, and points to a too uncritical bias toward science typical of modern theory.

Other dogmatic elements in the Marxian theory include an excessively reductive focus on production and economic factors which sometimes took the form of economic reductionism and determinism. Yet here the emphasis on social relations and a dialectical model of social and historical analysis provides a more critical optic and method. Likewise, although there is a version of Marxism close to historical determinism and a tendency to project the inevitable triumph of socialism in some Marxian discourse, there are other examples of historical analysis in the Marxian oeuvre that contrast tendencies of capitalist crisis with those of stabilization and that delineate the possibilities of historical regression and working-class defeat (as, for example, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*). And, while some Marxian narratives of history are rather grandiose and sweeping in their import and reach, there is also patient and detailed historical research that does not fit facts into the preconceptions of the theory. Finally, I shall consider the continuing relevance of Marxian theory in the present age.

Marx in the Present Age

Here I argue that there are critical tendencies within Marx's voluminous corpus that undercut some of the more reductive tendencies in his thought that often are grounds for dismissal. Moreover, I contend that, despite failures of communism to be successfully constructed in many parts of the world, Marx's ideas continue to be relevant for comprehending and criticizing the contemporary era

and providing radical democratic and socialist alternatives. Marx is widely acknowledged as one of the first theorists and critics of capitalist globalization; and as capital continues to be the major organizing force in the world today—relentlessly destroying past forms of life as it creates new forms of economy, society, culture, and everyday life—Marx's critical optic on the system of global capitalism is as relevant as ever.

Moreover, Marx's mode of dialectical thought and analysis helps avoid the twin forms of economic and technological determinism which are dominant modes of theorizing the new economic and technological social forms and forces of the current era.[6] Indeed, Marx's intense focus on the dialectic of technology and capitalism in its social, political, and cultural forms and relations provides a useful optic to theorize the new forms of economy, society, politics, technology, and culture in the contemporary era. His dialectical thought articulates the interaction between the economy and other domains of life, providing a method and a mode of thought that continues to be pertinent during an era in which the global restructuring of capital is producing vast transformation, turmoil, and conflict requiring new theories and oppositional practice. Moreover, as the 21st century unfolds, anti-globalization movements are reconfiguring and expanding Marxian ideas throughout the world while movements for socialism, such as are being promoted by Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez which I described in the last chapter, are growing throughout the United States in response to autocracy and assaults on democracy.[7]

Arguably, growing divisions between the haves and the have-nots in the current constellations of global capitalism render Marx's critique of exploitation, poverty, and oppression a still valuable legacy; and whether Marx's crisis theory and analysis of capitalist contradictions producing a new form of civilization will anticipate future development remains an open question. Marx's stress on democracy is an important political legacy; and it should not be forgotten that Marx himself never posited a vanguard party, was critical of all forms of bureaucracy, and advocated radical democratic self-government and not party rule, and thus cannot be held responsible for the failures of "really existing communism"—which itself is giving way to party-led state capitalism and autocracy.

From the vantage point of philosophy and social theory, Marx's great intellectual and political achievement was to develop a synthesis of existing knowledge linking economics, politics, history, and human nature. The Marxian theory developed in a comprehensive and critical fashion, a critical theory of contemporary society, linking it with a theory of democratic and emancipatory social transformation. Marx and Engels produced a body of writings which is still one of the most impressive and influential theoretical achievements of all times, and that presents us with one of the great legacies of thought in the Western philosophical tradition, as well as a vision of an alternative socialist society that overcomes the limitations of capitalism and a model of social transformation relevant to social circumstances and conditions in various historical societies.

A product of its time, some aspects of the Marxian theory are obviously obsolete; but since we continue to live in an era defined by capitalist globalization, growing divisions between the haves and have-nots, political conflict, and multiple socialist societies and movements, Karl Marx's thought continues to speak to our contemporary situation.

Notes

1 See Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ (accessed December 29, 2024).
2 See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1964) and Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (London and Berkeley: Macmillan and University of California Press, 1984).
3 See the discussion of modernity, class differentiation, and fragmentation in Chapter 6 ("Marxism, Colonialism, and Modernity").
4 See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm (accessed January 17, 2025).
5 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume One, "Preface to the First German Edition" (1867), at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/p1.htm (accessed December 29, 2024).
6 See Douglas Kellner, *Technology and Democracy: Toward a Critical Theory of Digital Technologies, Technopolitics, and Technocapitalism* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2021).
7 See Douglas Kellner, "Dialectics of Globalization: From Theory to Practice," in *Postmodernism in a Global Perspective*, ed. Samir Dasgupta and Peter Kivisto (London: Sage, 2014), pp. 3–29. On the Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez campaign, see Kellen Browning, "Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez Electrify Democrats Who Want to Fight Trump," *New York Times*, April 16, 2025 at https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/16/us/politics/bernie-sanders-aoc-trump-democrats.html (accessed April 17, 2025).

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Note: References following "n" refer notes.