

THE HEGELIAN-MARXIAN MACHINERY OF HISTORY: CEDRIC J. ROBINSON,  
UNILINEARITY AND THE DIALECTIC PROJECT OF LIBERATION

SALMAAN KHAN

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT  
YORK UNIVERSITY  
TORONTO, ONTARIO

APRIL 2022

© Salmaan Khan, 2022

## **Abstract**

Through his life's work Cedric J. Robinson had developed a historiographic and theoretical critique of Marxism that exposed it as reductive, Eurocentric, and built upon idealistic positions that did not reflect the concrete conditions of reality itself. However, his critical intervention has been largely ignored and where it has been addressed, it was dismissed as having engaged in a misreading or reductive engagement with Marxism which is otherwise signified as a much more dynamic and reflexive philosophy. The basic intention of this dissertation then has been to defend one aspect of Robinson's criticism of Marxism – his characterization of it as Eurocentric– through both drawing on Robinson's work itself and through supporting his conclusions by way of my own intervention into debates concerning Marx's Eurocentricity and the limitations that thus spring from this characterization. This supportive aspect has been carried out through two sections: 1.) through a contextualization of Marxian philosophy in its appropriation of the Eurocentric Hegelian philosophical and historical system, and 2.) through critical engagements with contemporary literature that seeks to disprove the claim that Marxism is in fact Eurocentric. The combined sections of this dissertation go beyond the intended defense of Robinson's criticisms of Marxian philosophy and carry implications for past and ongoing debates concerning the efficacy of Marxism as a theory of liberation for those people and populations that fall outside of its restrictive parameters. This dissertation encourages the reader to conclude with the sense that: 'Robinson was right. Marxism really is inherently antagonistic to both an anti-racist and anti-colonial politics. And I would like to read more of what he had to say'.

*For Cedric and Elizabeth Robinson*

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not be possible without the presence, the hard work and the care of my parents. Their decision to leave their home, to immigrate with 3 kids to a new land, to prioritize raising a family and to encourage my siblings and I to pursue without restriction has forever shaped the trajectory of my life. I would not be where I am, who I am, and why I am without them. Their presence is to be found within every page.

I cannot underestimate the support I have received from my wife. Nadia is the definition of a partner who always encourages you to be the best version of yourself. Without her I was at a far distance to where I have come now, and with her I know that there is a much farther place that I am able to go. I am grateful to be a part of her life and to benefit from her strength.

My little girl, Esma, helped me complete this dissertation. After she was born I would joke: ‘You think reading Hegel is hard? Try changing a diaper at 3am in the morning!’ All else in life paled in comparison to the magnanimous service that is being a father. After a few months of being her dad, I truly felt like I could accomplish anything that was set before me.

I also want to acknowledge my older sister for always looking out for me, and my brother, Sunny, for all the years that he and I spent philosophizing, debating, reflecting and hanging out. You have always been 10 years ahead of me and I have accepted the fact that there is much wisdom in the counsel of a younger sibling. I continue to see you as one of my teachers.

My dissertation committee cannot be ignored because they graciously stepped in to support me as I navigated the university. For that I want to especially thank Shannon Bell and Livy Visano for their time and feedback. My supervisor, Gamal Abdel-Shehid, is truly what every young, racialized – first generation university – student needs in this world. He has become a close friend, a mentor, and family. This dissertation would not be where it is, nor would it be complete without his constant presence and availability.

It is a weighty task to acknowledge: where to draw the line? How to quantify the role of the countless individuals who have shaped not only my work but who I am as a person? The baristas at Balzac’s Powerhouse whose time and labour made possible the hot coffee that kept me awake enough to write; the factory workers in Zhejiang, China whose labour produced the InkJoy pens that I have relied on to write and re-write my notes; the miners in East Congo who dug from the earth Coltan which has allowed the circuit board in my laptop to function. The farmers, the grocery store clerks, the janitors, the bus drivers, my mother-in-law, the warehouse workers, my daughter’s ECE teacher, and with special note, Judith Hawley who has guided me through the SPT program since my arrival there. They have all been indispensable in the writing of this dissertation.

Nonetheless, I cannot close without thanking the many teachers I have been privileged to come across in my life and who have truly helped me in ways I can only hope to embody: Tariq Amin-Khan for encouraging me to read; Aparna Sundar, Sedef Arat-Koç, and Grace-Edward Galabuzi for their mentorship, encouragement and for helping expand my view; Winnie Ng for mentoring me and grounding me in a way that can only be described as a schooling; Kiké Roach for time, support and constant encouragement; David McNally for his kindness and for introducing me to the work of Cedric Robinson; Himani Bannerji for being such an example of strength and courage, and for meeting with me for hours at a time at her place on Delaware; Eileen Eng for helping me be more brave and for not caring what anybody thinks; Sheikh Murat Baba for helping me open my heart, if even only a crack; Colin Mooers for being a shepherd; Mark Cauchi and Avron Kulak for requiring more of me and for helping me work through my comprehensive readings which in many ways acted as a foundation for this dissertation. I also want to thank those

teachers I have encountered, the writers, theorists, philosophers, world figures, whose lives, voices and works have all informed this dissertation: Frantz Fanon, KRS One, Zack de la Rocha, Khalil Gibran, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Grace Lee Boggs, Plato, Socrates, Tolstoy, Coltrane, Rumi, Kevin Anderson, Cedric Robinson, Hegel, Buddha, Edward Said, Maya Angelou, Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Malcolm X, all the folks at CPA, Charles Mills, Kant, and everyone else far and in between whose names have been lost in antiquity or who never stood a chance: the wives, the mothers, the fathers, the families, the children, the friends, the communities of all the above mentioned.

Acknowledgements can be an exclusive thing in a way. The true depth of gratitude and acknowledgement can never be justly captured. This is perhaps why on the Sufi path one is encouraged to remember: All praise is due to Allah.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	vi
Marx/Engels Chronology of Relevant Works.....	viii
Diagrams and Tables.....	x
Introduction.....	1
Section One: The Debate .....	
1: Marx's Eurocentrism.....	28
2: A Multilinear Marx.....	40
Section Two: Unilinearity and the Negation of the Negation.....	
3: The Hegelian Dialectic.....	53
4: Marx's Critique of Hegel's Abstraction.....	62
5: Hegel's Critique of Morality.....	71
6: Marx's Critique of Morality.....	104
6.1: The Elemental Class.....	111
6.2: The Critique of Utopianism.....	127
6.3: Scientific Socialism.....	140
6.4: Communism as the Riddle of History Solved.....	207
Section Three: Marx <i>from</i> the Margins: Multilinear Misconceptions of Marx.....	235
7: Tragedy in Marx: Capitalism and the Dialectic of Negativity.....	238
7.1: The Dialectic of Negativity.....	239

7.2: Dialectics as Science, as Emplotment.....	253
7.3: Colonialism and the Progress of Capital.....	256
7.4: Primitive Communal Forms as ‘Primitive’ Communal Forms.....	276
8: Marx and Engels’ Instrumentalist Politics: On War, Abolition and National Emancipation..	281
8.1: Instrumentalism and the Politics of War.....	282
8.2: Abolition and the Emancipation of Labour.....	288
8.3: The Strategic Support for National Emancipation.....	308
9: Marx on Russia: Indications of a Non-Suprahistorical Yet Unilinear Theory of History.....	351
9.1: The Unilinear Dimensions of Marx and Engels’ Theory of History.....	352
9.2: The Role of the ‘Vanguard Peoples’.....	369
9.3: The ‘late writings on Russia’.....	379
9.4: Some Closing Remarks to Section Three.....	407
Section Four: Conclusion.....	
10: Conclusion.....	413
Bibliography.....	421

## Marx/Engels Chronology of Relevant Works

- 1843
  - (M) *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Manuscript – unpublished until 1927)
- 1844
  - (M) *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction*
  - (M) *On the Jewish Question*
  - (M) *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Manuscripts – unpublished until 1932)
- 1845
  - (M & E) *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism: Against Bruno Bauer and Company*
  - (M) *Theses on Feuerbach* (Manuscript – unpublished until 1888 as an Appendix to Engels' (E) *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*)
  - *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (written during Engels' stay in Manchester 1842-1844).
- 1846
  - (M& E) *The German Ideology* (Manuscript – unpublished until 1932)
- 1847
  - (M) *The Poverty of Philosophy*
  - (M) *Wage Labour and Capital* (Manuscript – unpublished until 1849, as a series of articles)
- 1848
  - (M & E) *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Pamphlet commissioned by the Communist League just as the 1848 revolutions began in Europe)
- 1850
  - (M) *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850* (originally written as a series of articles but collate and published by Engels in 1895)
- 1852
  - (M) *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*
- 1853
  - Marx's articles on colonialism in India and China for the *New-York Daily Tribune*
- 1857
  - (M) *Grundrisse / Foundations of a Critique of Political Economy* (series of Manuscripts -unpublished until 1939)
- 1859
  - (M) *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*
- 1861-62
  - Marx's articles and letters on the American Civil War
- 1867
  - (M) *Capital, Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*
- 1871
  - (M) *The Civil War in France*



- 1875
  - (E) *On Social Relations in Russia*
  - (M) *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Originally a letter to the Socialist Democratic Workers' Party of Germany – published in 1890)
- 1876
  - (E) *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*
- 1877
  - Marx's letter to the Editor of the *Otecestvenniye Zapisky*
- 1880
  - (E) *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*
    - (M) Introduction to the French Edition
  - (M) 1880-1882, Marx would write what would later be collated and published in 1972 as the *Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*
- 1881
  - Marx-Zasulich correspondence (unpublished drafts + single published letter)
- 1882
  - (M & E) "Preface" to the Russian Edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*
- 1884
  - (E) *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*
- 1885
  - Engels' letter to Vera Zasulich
- 1886
  - (E) *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*

## Diagrams and Tables

Diagram 1.0: Marx and Engels' Stages of History.....	162
--	-----

## Introduction

On more than one occasion Cedric J. Robinson made reference to a declaration by W.E.B DuBois that “somebody in each era must make clear the facts with utter disregard to his own wish and desire and belief”<sup>1</sup>. DuBois himself filled these shoes and so would Cedric Robinson through his extensive and critical engagement with perhaps the most far reaching and profound philosophy of human liberation to assert itself in the modern period – Marxism. In Marxism, Robinson noted a kind of obfuscation; a distortion of reality - “of things that actually happened in the world”<sup>2</sup> – which functioned as a means of denying the historical agency, the experiences, the acts of resistance and the trajectories of people other than European.

Foremost, in Marxism Robinson (2000) would find no space or means for justly accounting for the histories and experiences of Black people in a way that did not make secondary their realities– as appendages, anomalies or deviations from the more apparent march of human historical and future experience. In Marxism these realities and experiences were simply wed to what Robinson (2000) had come to comfortably reduce as an example of “European Radicalism”. Thus, Marxism, rather than an account of human liberation that carried meaning for all of humanity, functioned to restrict the scope and potential of humanity, and was mired in a deep racialism that privileged the experiences of Western Europeans at the expense of all others; it was a racialism -as Robinson (2000) would expose in his most well known book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*- that was rooted within the very bowels of European civilization and by relation European literature, science, art and philosophy.

---

<sup>1</sup> DuBois as cited in Robinson (1977, pg.44)

<sup>2</sup> DuBois in Robinson (1977, pg.44)

In *Black Marxism* Robinson (2000) begins by unearthing some of the pillars of Marxist theory: the presumed objective character of capitalist development; the dialectic of proletarianization that was to accompany the capitalist mode of production; and subsequently the possibilities created for socialist revolution that was concretely universal in character and scope. Through a detailed reconfiguring of the history of European civilization, Robinson (2000) would demonstrate how Capitalism, as it developed in Europe, did so not as a negating force that proceeded from one stage of history to another, but was a mode of production which emerged from, and developed in relation to, the very cultures and civilization in which it was a part.

In arguing for the otherwise multilayered complexity of economic and social relations, Robinson (2000) challenges the Marxist presumption that capitalism had emerged as the negation of European Feudal and pre-capitalist social relations. It was assumed, perhaps hoped for, that the emergent bourgeoisie – driven solely by the demands of capitalist production and exchange – would “put an end to all patriarchal, feudal, idyllic relations”; the feudal ties that bound humans to their “natural superiors”, and thus leave nothing “between man and man than naked self-interest, than ‘callous cash payment’” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.475). It was this revolutionizing and levelling tendency of the bourgeois class that was to reflect the objective character of capitalist development, and as a result, allow for the first time in human history the kinds of universal social relations to result that would be required to– to use the Hegelian description – finally allow the “I” to associate itself as the “We” (Hegel, 1977).

To better understand this point, we need to clarify that for Marx and Engels, their materialism foremost signified a relational understanding of consciousness. That is, consciousness as we experience it as human beings was not inscribed with a timeless independence, or abstract character; consciousness was not distinct or separate from the body. And in turn, the body was

taken as not distinct from the material world and the conditions in which it survives, produces and consumes. But this materialist understanding of consciousness was not in an empirical sense where consciousness is simply a passive receptor or a Humean<sup>3</sup> bundle of experiences. For Marx and Engels, the relationality that signified our existence was dialectical; it was a relationality in which human agents played an active part (Fromm, 2004). Nonetheless, we humans within the circuit of dialectical relations were not able to behave or act simply on our own terms, but always within the confines of the existing material conditions.

For Marx and Engels, pre-capitalist material conditions were ones variously marked by individualized production, geographical isolation, limited technology and archaic ties and privileges founded on birth, blood, and faith (Engels, 1947). These were conditions that could never give rise, or put more accurately, never *allow* for the kind of mass based and universal-in-scope organizing, as well as *clarity*, that would be capable of overturning the existing mode of production and putting an end to conditions of alienation and self-estrangement that had marked the existing human experience.

However, through its novel rationalizing of social relations, partly through the socialization of production, partly through the negation of pre-existing “fetters”, capitalism was to create a working class that was *capable* of such a universal and world historic purpose and movement; it was to create its own “grave diggers”. It was believed that through their shared conditions, the individual workers – now a class of “general men” - would be able to associate themselves as that “we” and realize a *concrete* universality that was hitherto absent to humanity. Such universal notions about our shared purpose and humanity had previously existed, but never concretely; never

---

<sup>3</sup> See the works of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish Philosopher and influential empiricist David Hume (1975), particularly his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

as something *actual*. This is what was supposed to distinguish the “scientific socialism” of Marx and Engels from utopianism that sought universality of deed and thought in conditions of archaic, individualized and irrational being.

For Robinson (2000) however, there was no such negation of feudal ties and ‘pre-capitalist’ idyllic relations with the advent of capitalism. To start, Robinson takes to task the very neat and, what he describes as “idealistic” presumption, that capitalism had a kind of single emergent moment or *advent* that could be signified as a progressive leap into a distinct stage of human history. Instead, for Robinson (2000) capitalism remained clothed in the cultures and traditions which gave it life and meaning, extending these social relations into the larger tapestry of the modern world’s political and economic relations. It is a mode of production that is instead constantly in the process of emergence, with no strict temporal and geographic boundaries. One particular – among other - civilizational forms which capitalism developed along and within, argues Robinson (2000), is the centuries of racialism that had matured within Europe: “technologies of control and domination” that had been cultivated among Europeans through established hierarchies between cultural and ethnic groups, and which were utilized to legitimate conquest and domination over the course of European history.

In *Black Marxism* Robinson (2000) proceeds by tracing out this element of European civilization through a historical study of “Europe’s Formation” and of the accompanying role played by Christian lore and the construct of the “barbarian” that was to be so central to that formation. His historiography of European racialism is developed through accounts of: Early European agrarian production and the central place held by slave labour (*Slavs*) – a form of labour that would persist through the feudal era and into capitalism; detailed technologies of control that were developed to organize the “masses of poor” and that had accompanied the rise of the *mercati*

of the 11<sup>th</sup> century– the “first bourgeoisie”; and the preponderance of the construct of the “lower orders” which had constituted the vast majority of the people of Europe and who were organized to supply the privileged classes with the material and human resources required for the further accumulations of power and wealth (Robinson, 2000, pg.21). Like the “barbarians” - that “totalizing construct” of early Greek and Roman thinkers that informed systems of conquest and domination - the relation between the “lower orders” of Europe and the feudal nobility of the middles ages would also be mediated through such mythical constructs: the feudal lords were members of “Knightly classes” or descendants of Trojan heroes who followed the legendary Aeneas after the fall of Troy, and who would later settle in Germany, France and England. The peasants however were the descendants of Ham – the second son of Noah who was condemned to slavery for his sin (Robinson, 2000).

Here Robinson is doing what he read in the work of historian Norman Cohn in *Pursuit of the Millennium*: extending the historical data base beyond the parameters inherited from “the late nineteenth century’s historians and social analysts who were dominated by the immediate emergence of the modern, industrial world, and *shadowed* by the presumption of it as a critical parameter...” (Robinson, 1980, pg102). There was something important and equally relevant to gain through a glance at the pre-capitalist, pre-modern era, and as one understands more fully as they move through Robinson’s work, this temporal extension extends itself geographically too; into those spaces where there was not supposed to be any history.

Robinson concludes this section of his study, stating: “European civilization is not the product of capitalism. On the contrary, the character of capitalism can only be understood in the social and historical context of its appearance” (Robinson, 2000, p.24). The existing racial order would evolve in relation to capitalism rather than emerge from it, or simply as an appendage. It

would contribute to the ordering and domination of labour under capitalism, functioning as part of the logic of the system, further instituting distinction and differentiation and further exaggerating regional and subcultural differences (Robinson, 2000). Rather than develop – or in the Marxist sense, *emerge* – as the negation of such social “fetters” (Marx & Engels, 1932), capitalism drew its organizational logic from such a context, thus giving rise to what Robinson would describe as “racial capitalism”<sup>4</sup>.

Supported by capitalist expansion, the existing technologies of control and domination would evolve into “new mystifications” that were appropriate to the times (Robinson, 2000, pg.27). Existing notions such as *Herrenvolk* – of innate superiority - would find their way into rationalizations of domination and extermination of non-Europeans and developing into what we contemporarily characterize as racism. But, as we have noted above, it is incomplete to simply deposit the origins of racialism in the modern era, as a reflex of an expanding capitalist mode of production. For Robinson (2000), such an epistemology that explains racial hierarchy *a posteriori* to the development of capitalism limited the analysis of racism in the contemporary as something other than a much deeper and structural relation. Rather, racial hierarchy and difference was part of the DNA of capitalism; it made up the ground from which capitalism emerged. From the onset, as Robinson (2000, pg.26) notes, “the bourgeoisie that led the development of capitalism were drawn from particular ethnic and cultural groups; the European proletariat and the mercenaries of the leading states from others; its peasants from still other cultures; and its slaves from entirely different worlds”. As Robin D.G. Kelley (2017) clarifies, this was not meant to signify a chicken before the egg argument, or a debate about what came first – racism or capitalism - but instead was

---

<sup>4</sup> As noted by Robin D.G. Kelley (2017) though the term “racial capitalism” had its initial expression among anti-apartheid organizers who had used it to refer to South Africa’s economy, Robinson would develop it “from a description of a *specific* system to a way of understanding the *general* history of modern capitalism”.



meant to emphasize the reality of racism as something more than only the reflex of an objective mode of production; and in another sense, that the determinative forces in history were more than simply economic.

Once this was established, several clarifications – and complications - could ensue in relation to Marxist theory; not simply in its treatment of race, but of its potential as a project of liberation. As noted earlier, for Marx and Engels human consciousness – rather than carrying some semblance of independence- is always relative to the existing material conditions. However, these material conditions did not exist as we may more conventionally think of them – as the individualized and compartmentalized organization of matter existing as external objects to the phenomenal being. In this conventional understanding of matter, one is reminded of the 1618 engraving by Theodor de Bry<sup>5</sup> signifying *Prima Materia* through its illustration of boxes floating in the air, and distinct cubes forming the ground and water – all outside of us and playing on our senses through a relation of cause and effect.

Rather, “the thing, reality”, was to be conceived not “only in the form of the object”, but as “sensuous human activity” – “subjectively”; as relative to human activity. Thus, for Marx and Engels, their materialism implied not that “matter” played a determining force, but the mode of production [*Produktionsweise*] – the definite form of human productive activity through which human’s – as conscious beings – produced and reproduced their physical existence.

When I try to describe this concept to my students, I often find the analogy of the apple tree to be a useful example of how Marx was conceiving of this relational nature of reality – of the practical and *active* relation between “human” and “nature” – where nature is not only the direct

---

<sup>5</sup> In the German alchemist Michael Maier’s (1618) *Atalanta Fugiens*

means of life, but also constitutes humankind's "inorganic body" with which they must remain in continuous intercourse with (Marx, 1978, p.75).

In the analogy, the apple tree constitutes nature. To survive as a being I must eat, and so through my human activity, through my labouring activity, I pick the apple from the tree and I eat it. Without such nourishment I would not survive, nor would there be any remnant of what we describe as consciousness. Rather than two strictly defined and exclusive 'things', the apple, as nature, as the instrument of my life activity, exists as an indispensable object of my life. And through eating it, I express its being in return, as something with the power to nourish. Under conditions of capitalism however, this relational existence between self and nature exists in an alienated form since the apple from the apple tree now exists, not as an extension of my being or expression of my labour, but as something that belongs to another. Something that exists as a commodity, and not something immediate to me.

For Hegel, the very "essence of man" had equaled self-consciousness, and so all estrangement was nothing other than alienation of self-consciousness. Here "objecthood" or "thinghood" – the very perceived existence of external objects - was a consequence of this alienation of self-consciousness; and it was a form of self-estrangement which was to be overcome in *Absolute Knowing* (Marx, 1978, p.112); through resolving the discrepancy between subject and object. For Marx and Engels on the other hand, estrangement was taken not as the objectification of self-consciousness in the Hegelian sense, but was instead an "*expression of the real estrangement of the human being*":

Estrangement is manifested not only in the fact that my means of life belong to *someone* else, that *my* desire is the inaccessible possession of *another*, but also in the fact that everything is in itself something *different* from itself – that my activity is *something else* and that, finally (and this applies to the capitalist), all is under the sway of inhuman power (Marx, 1978, p.100).

What this entailed we have clarified as much above, and give further clarification in Chapter 4, “Marx’s Critique of Hegel’s Abstraction”. For them, this alienated condition could only be transcended by the abolition of the alienating conditions. As sensuous beings, the option of disalienation via intuition or conscious transcendence was never an option. But how was such a complete disalienation to occur, if not allowed through our free agency and intuitiveness?

The possibility was, for Marx and Engels, preconditioned in a very specific form of the alienated/ing and exploitative structure within and through which human beings exist, produce and reproduce. As we have already noted, it was through the objective character of the capitalist mode of production, that a class of workers, who made up the majority of the population, and with shared conditions, was created for the first time in human history; conversely, the law of immiseration – one of the only laws of capital- would ensure the continued swelling of its ranks, drawing even from the shrinking bourgeoisie, and further pushing down the general conditions of life. This class, the Proletariat, carried the material conditions necessary for the kinds of universal activity that would ensure the clarity of its historic mission:

From the relationship of estranged labour to private property it further follows that the emancipation of society from private property, etc., from servitude, is expressed in the political form of the emancipation of the workers; not that their emancipation alone was at stake but because the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation – and it contains this, because the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and every relation of servitude is but a modification and consequence of this relation (Marx, 1978, pg.80).

It was a class that could carry out this historic mission because it was believed, as Marcuse (1986, p.291) put it, that “all specific distinguishing marks by which men are differentiated lose their validity... property, culture, religion, nationalism, and so on, all things that might set one man off from another make no such mark among the proletarians”. The emancipation of the working class was not simply “political emancipation”, where humankind is emancipated in a

“devious way” (Marx, 1978, p.29); the emancipation of the working class meant “true human emancipation”. It can get a bit confusing here because we are talking about two separate but interrelated things: 1.) the historic mission of the working class movement which is alone capable of initiating true human emancipation through its overturning the *source* of its miserly conditions and servitude – private property; and 2.) the *possibility* having been created for such a universal movement, concretely for the first time in human history, through the very creation of this class and the levelling/homogenizing tendency of the capitalist mode of production. Capitalism creates its own “grave diggers”, as we noted, not only because it arms, trains, and equips them by breaking down previous barriers that existed between human beings (splintered, individualized, irrational, blood, feudal, kinship, patriarchal, religious, idyllic relations) and so in a way demystifies humanity, but also because it shows humanity what needs to be buried in order to put an end to human servitude.

It is precisely at this juncture, based on Marx and Engels’ presupposition of having initiated a scientific formula for human liberation, that Robinson intervenes, arguing that capitalism never proceeded in such a levelling way; one which was meant to create the conditions necessary to activate the world historical subject- the European proletariat. Capitalism as a mode of production did not function as a rationalizing or objective force with regard to difference and distinction; division and pre-capitalist social relations. There was no break with the past, and no rational organization for the future. Capitalism was racial, steeped in pre-existing civilizational forms; its development rooted in a socio-historical context. Not only was capitalism formed in this way, but in relation to difference and distinction, Robinson (2000) argues that what developed was an increase in disciplinary systems; that the forms of racialism that already existed in European

history and civilization were further evolved, manufactured and instituted as organizing tools of domination and control to much more stringent degrees.

The effects of racialism were bound to appear in every strata – “None was immune” he says (Robinson, 2000, pg.28). And this proved equally for the revolutionary subject which emerged under capitalism – the proletariat. Adding to the revised history of the development of capitalism in Europe, Robinson further highlights the consequences of its racialism through a detailed study of the formation and character of the English working class- the “blue print” for Marx and Engels’ understanding of the process of proletarianization and class formation under conditions of capitalist production. He begins this study by stating “We shall be guided, hopefully, less by what we have been led in the abstract to expect *should* have occurred than by what *did*” (Robinson, 2000, pg.29).

Robinson once again proceeds by disrupting history, and begins with a contextualization of our understanding of the “industrial revolution”, particularly of the notion of its coherence, its temporal emergence and its geographic concentration. For Robinson (2000, pg.31) the industrial revolution was never a coherent revolution per se, nor did it find strict location within the borders of England. Instead the “large scale [technical] and economic changes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” are best understood as having organically developed over the course of centuries of economic, technological and commercial development beyond English borders:

The recruitment, training, and disciplining of labour, the transportation of goods and raw materials, the political and legal structures of regulation and trade, the physical and commercial apparatuses of markets, the organization and instrumentation of communication, the techniques of banking and finance, these too would have already had to be of a character that could accommodate increased commodity production (Robinson, 2000, pg.31)

The inaccuracy of the notion of the industrial *revolution* as something revolutionary and geographically concentrated, according to Robinson (2000), stems partially from the tendency of

historians and analysts to proceed along “national (and much less frequently, subcontinental i.e., western European) lines”. This tendency to analyze within imaginary national confines would be identified as another flaw in Marxist theory, and Robinson would extend this critique with reference to the perceived development and character of *a* working class. For example, the “English” working class or the “English proletariat” were more generic terms rather than something concretely existing. Robinson (2000) notes that the working class in England was much more complex and multi-layered; made up of English, Irish and continental immigrant labour. Sections of the English working class were more economically privileged, constituting what Robinson describes as a “labour aristocracy”, and these differences would play out in worker responses to domination by capital and in their frames of resistance. For example, non-immigrant English labor was more prone to trade unionism and demonstrated a “trade-union consciousness”, as well as English nationalism and “Anglo-Saxon chauvinism”. Hostilities also persisted between the Irish and English workers, owing to the context of Ireland’s colonization by England, and antagonistic historical relations that go back centuries. The Irish were additionally seen as a source of “cheap labour”, owing to the belief that they were “descended from an inferior race” (Robinson, 2000, pg.39). Within this context of a complex working class in England there was no homogenizing or levelling tendency to follow the development of capitalism, and in fact the demands of capitalism tended to further discipline workers more across lines of difference in step with the demands of production. As Robinson (2000, pg.34 ) puts it:

The class-consciousness of English workers did not strictly adhere to the logic of working-class formation premised on capitalist exploitation and modeled by Marx from the histories of the French and English bourgeoisies. Indeed, the more profound reaction to an industrial capitalist order found among English “producers” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, largely deterred those political and social consequences of proletarianization that had already become the dogma of English radical thought and expectation in the years immediately following the Great Revolution in France. The development of Anglo-Saxon chauvinism, the earlier form of English nationalism, and the appearance of rather extreme

forms of racism among the English working class determined the form and character that English working-class consciousness assumed.

In the quintessential example of the “English working class” the negations resultant from the capitalist mode of production did not eradicate differences, and in fact the persistence, recreation, and utilization of such divisions “were a critical aspect of the triumph of capitalism in the nineteenth century” (Robinson, 2000, pg.42). The presumption of capitalism’s negating force in the thinking of Marx and Engels would have further consequences, contributing to their limited analysis of nationalism – the most significant ideological question of the nineteenth century (Robinson, 2000). As Robinson describes it, nationalism was not taken seriously because it was assumed that it was on its way out or that it was only incidental to the requirements of capitalist production. Later Marxists realizing the gross persistence of nationalism and of the equally determinative role of ideology would continue to struggle in accommodating their existing experiences to the theoretical models outlined by Marx – usually resorting to inconsistent positions on questions of self-determination and national liberation.

The arguments presented by Robinson challenge the very role and notion of the worker-as-historical-agent, and of the organizational potential of the category “class” in a project of liberation that has as its mantle a scientific – as opposed to idealistic, moralistic or utopian-explanation for the way a concrete universalism was to be realized. Thus, with reference to reality, “of things that actually happened”, Robinson sought to expose not only the limitations, but the biases in Marxism that resulted in its idealistic exaltation of the European worker as the revolutionary agent of change, and of the unilinearity with which it paved the way to a communist possibility.

The above noted are only some of the critical points that Robinson highlights with regard to Marxist theory, but as his critics<sup>6</sup> have responded, Marx was much more complex than that, and that the “later-Marx” is argued to have substantially moved away from the kinds of positions that Robinson relies on to discredit him. The Meyerson (2000) piece cited in footnote No. 7 rebuts Robinson’s critique of Marxism largely based on the argument that Robinson had a false understanding – a “gross distortion” - of Marx’s work and of Marxist theory: “The point of my essay, quite bluntly, is to show that Robinson is wrong about Marxism and that Robinson is not

---

<sup>6</sup> Cedric J. Robinson wrote 2 full length books directly on the topic of Marxism: *Black Marxism* (2000), and his understudied yet masterful *An Anthropology of Marxism* (2019). In addition, his other books: *Terms of Order* (1980), *Black Movements in America* (1997); and his study of race in American media in *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning* (2007) all critically engage with some of the foundational concepts informing Marxist theory, whether in terms of ideology, the relation between race and class, or the very possibility of an ordered political program. In addition to 5 books, he has written over 50 articles on the topics of race, culture, media, capitalism, Black liberation, class, studies of writers such as Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, W.E.B. Dubois, CLR James, and even more pertinent to the study of Marxist theory, discourses on historiography (Robinson, 2005). However, there exists only one scholarly publication that attempts a *critiquing* engagement with his writing, an article published in 2000 by Gregory Meyerson titled: “Rethinking Black Marxism: Reflections on Cedric Robinson and Others”. Robinson’s work has been widely taken up by former students, organizers, and activist scholars across the globe in creative and laudatory ways, and the very term “racial capitalism” which owes itself to Robinson’s work is increasingly becoming common parlance. However his engagement by Marxist writers and scholars has been barely minimal. A second article by Tom Jeannot titled (2007) “Marx, Capitalism and Race” engages with some aspects of Robinson’s critique of Marx, and the much influential *Marx at the Margins* by Kevin Anderson (2010), which seeks to speak to the very questions Robinson is pulling out, references Robinson only once in the whole text, and in that reference only regarding a quote from Marx on slavery that Robinson acknowledges. In Abbie Bakan and Enakshi Dua’s (2014) recent edited collection *Theorizing Anti-Racism: Linkages in Marxism and Critical Race Theories*, Robinson is mentioned only once, where it is said: “Cedric J. Robinson (2000) stresses the inherent incompatibility of a Marxist perspective with a consistent anti-racist paradigm”. Even more unfortunate, the soon-to-be published *Black Radical Tradition: A Reader* edited by Erin Grey, Asad Haider, and Ben Mabie (2020), which describes itself as “the most comprehensive gathering of revolutionary black voices ever assembled”, includes no reference to, or entry by, Cedric Robinson. It should be noted that along with “racial capitalism” the articulation and terminology of what is described as the “Black Radical Tradition” developed first in Robinson’s text *Black Marxism*. He coined the very phrase. ...When in their time Marx and Engels willingly left their *German Ideology* to the “gnawing criticism of mice”, it is unfortunate that Robinson’s unique and thorough critical engagement with Marxism has unwillingly received the same fate. But why? Does his work have nothing to offer to Marxist scholars? Or is the most efficient form of critique to ignore someone until they go away? As cited in the *Foreword* by Robin D.G. Kelley to the 2000 edition of *Black Marxism*, a review essay by Dr. Cornel West (1988) described Robinson’s text as having “fell through the cracks” largely due to the state of the academic-left which paid little or no attention to race. Through this dissertation, part of what I hope to do is develop through both these questions, demonstrating that Robinson’s collective work does in fact have much continued relevance for debates between and within Marxist theory and practice; and foremost, I seek to demonstrate the relevance of his critiques of Marxism for those interested in an anti-racist – as well as feminist and anti-oppressive - engagement with Marxism. In short, this is an exercise in dialogue.



alone...” (Meyerson, 2000). Rather than an empirical or historical critique of Robinson’s findings regarding the formation and development of capitalism, Meyerson (2000) develops his intervention on the argument that Marxist theory is much more reflexive than the economistic and deterministic way in which not only Robinson, but “a wide range of contemporary theorists”, paint it out to be. For Meyerson (2000) if “properly interpreted” historical materialism is able to meet the “significant challenge” that Robinson et al. pose and shows itself capable of incorporating questions of race and gender in ways that does not diminish or peripherize their importance. For example, for Meyerson (2000), a *dialectical* Marxism, what Lukacs would describe as “Orthodox Marxism”, is able to resolve the otherwise falsely compartmentalized categories and experiences of race, gender and class, and being the relational philosophy that it is, makes the “fight against racism and sexism itself basic” (Meyerson, 2000) – a politics able to address with the reality of a “racial capitalism”.

A similar argument, though not directly in engagement with the work of Robinson, is made by David McNally (2015) when he retrieves a dialectical and relational Marx in his “The Dialectics of Unity and Difference in the Constitution of Wage-Labour: On Internal Relations and Working Class Formation” in order to counter the “undialectical” dissociation between race, gender, and class that is often a means for critics of Marx to characterize his as a class-centric theory of liberation, and *ipso facto* the inability of Marxism to properly account for experiences of race/gender.

This intervention, via a retrieval of the *dialectic* in Marxist theory has developed as a critical response to anti-racist and feminist critiques of Marxism and largely relies on a demonstration of the relational links between race-gender-class, as opposed to the false and “positivist” approach which holds class to constitute the determining “base” while race and gender

exist in the determined “superstructure”. The task at hand for these writers is not simply a defence of Marx, but a demonstration of how Marxism – properly understood – stands as the best form of critique and analysis of race and gender, since the critiques of Marx’s class-centrism often in turn ignore the reality, experience, and role of class and of the economy in shaping and informing experiences of race and gender. Only a dialectical Marxism then is capable of an inclusive critique of the multiple dimensions and facets of our lives.<sup>7</sup>

A dialectical Marx is also emphasized in the Meyerson (2000) critique in another sense, and in this instance relating to the *assumed* mechanistic way in which Marxism marches through history and toward the possibility of a socialist future. For Robinson (2000; 2019), Marx was Eurocentric in that the European worker was conceived as the first world historical agent endowed with the capacity for realizing the universal. In turn the traditions, histories and cosmologies of non-Europeans were identified with the pre-modern or pre-rational by account of their pre-capitalist character, and so were incapable of signalling that historic mission that was the express volition of the proletariat of the most industrialized nations. Additionally, as a result of Marxist theory’s privileging of the capitalist mode of production in its conception of a socialist possibility, Robinson notes the falsely presumed modernizing force that was attributed to European colonialism – seeing it as a kind of necessary evil that was bringing even “the most barbarian”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> A variation of this point of critique is outlined by Bannerji (2006) through her use of the category the “social” as a more encompassing concept of what Marx meant by “mode of production”. She reminds us that Marx never meant to develop, or *do* political economy, but was interested in the *critique* of political economy. Marx never rooted determinacy in such a singular category – the “economy” – but instead conceived of the multiple determinations that make up “civil society”. This exploration of what exactly constitutes the “mode of production” for Marx is an important one to keep in mind and has received further elaboration, for example, in the works of Jarius Banaji (2011) as well as McNally (1993); Bertell Ollman (1977); Stuart Hall (1986); and Melvin Rader (1979) – to name just a few writers in the tradition of “Western Marxism”.

<sup>8</sup> “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”(Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.477).

people into bourgeois civilization, and so paving the way for the possibility of passing into the next stage that was marked by a resolution to humankind's estrangement.

Meyerson (2000) retorts with a long-standing defence of Marx on this issue which argues that a later-in-life Marx "changed his mind" regarding the positive effects of colonialism and of the unilinear path to socialism that necessitated the specific kinds of class formations and characteristics of production that accompanied capitalist development. This turn to a more "multilinear" position would also reverse Marx's uncritical and dismissive position toward slavery in his discourse on human freedom; revise his devaluation of the peasantry, which he once compared to a "sack of potatoes" (Marx, 1937, pg. 62); and consequently shift his gaze outside of Western-Europe when it came to the possibilities of socialism and of the emergence of social formations conducive to the kinds of human freedoms that were the aspirations of communists. A staple source of this multilinear understanding of Marx comes from a particular reading of his writings on Russia and the Russian commune, particularly via his correspondence with Russian writer and revolutionary Vera Ivanovna Zasulich.<sup>9</sup>

In such a reading of Marx, we are told that his acknowledgement of the possibility of the Russian commune in fostering the kinds of social relations necessary to transition into socialism – without having to go through the transitional stage of capitalism indicate a multilinearity that not only affords the peasantry an equally revolutionary role as was granted the workers in Western Europe, but that the progressive stages of development from feudalism- capitalism- socialism were never meant to signify a universal path of history for all humankind to tread. They were instead simply a very specific account relative to the nations of Western Europe. In Marx's (Shanin, 1983) *First Draft* of his letter to Vera Zasulich he clarifies that the "historical inevitability" of the genesis

---

<sup>9</sup> A detailed collection of this reading that draws on Marx's late writings on Russia is found in Teodor Shanin's (Ed.) (1978) *Late Marx and the Russian Road*.

of capitalist production which he outlined in *Capital* (1976), and the basis of this genesis, which involved the expropriation of the producer from the means of production, was restricted to “the countries of Western Europe”. Marx himself says that he was not describing a universal path of history through which all nations and people were destined to move through.

In his influential and widely received *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity and Non-Western Societies*, Kevin Anderson (2010) further develops this thesis of a multilinear turn in the late Marx, drawing not only on his writings on Russia and correspondence with Russian revolutionaries but on detailed historical evidence of what Anderson (2010, p.23) describes as a “dialectical” shift in Marx’s views on colonialism, evidenced through his post 1850’s changing tone on the “progressive role of Western capitalism” (2010, p. 162) as opposed to “Oriental stagnation”, and of his writings in support of anti-colonial activity such as the Sepoy uprising in India. Anderson (2010) also references Marx’s writings and letters on slavery in the United States which indicate a strong support for abolitionist movements, as well as his support for Polish and Irish national causes; struggles that were not reducible to the dichotomous politics of bourgeoisie vs proletariat.

Taken together Anderson’s text reflects a collection or synthesis of arguments in favour of a multilinear Marx; a collation which stands as a response to the kinds of criticisms that Robinson puts forward regarding Marx’s strict commitment to the organizational logic of the working class-as-revolutionary-subject, and consequently Marxist theory’s underappreciation of the kinds of revolutionary activity and radicalism that informed – for example - slave revolts throughout the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the related significance and meaning of the Black Radical Tradition in the face of a colonial and imperialist racial capitalism<sup>10</sup>. A multilinear, and dialectical,

---

<sup>10</sup> It is not without significance that I presented parts of a proposal for this dissertation at two conferences, and was met with the same response from audience members: “have you read Kevin Anderson’s book? You should.”

Marxist theory, as an alternative, is not blind to such experiences and possibilities outside of the working-class formation of Western Europe. In fact, a multilinear Marxism can give clarity and support to the writings of Marx on colonialism and slavery, demonstrating that the application of Marxist theory is not Eurocentric in its core; that as a theory of liberation it has continued relevance and capacity to give voice to such multiple experiences and traditions of revolt. It may not be clear by a closed glance at Marx's earlier writings, or a focus on his and Engels' polemical *Communist Manifesto*. But a study of the later-Marx is supposed to help show us the broader dimensions of Marxist thought. In short, Historical Materialism need not be blind to the lives of those whose experiences and conditions do not conform to the parameters with which it defines meaning or importance. Because those parameters shifted.

Another critique raised by Meyerson (2000) to discredit Robinson's work relates to his application of a Black radical historiography in lieu of an otherwise economic determinist theory of history that Robinson identifies with Historical Materialism. As with the other arguments posed by Meyerson, the critique of Robinson's intervention into the topic of historiography is here partially based on the claim that Robinson incorrectly reads Marxist theory and is blind to the humanistic side of Marxist historiography which does not interpret historical events as fatally determined by the economy<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, for Meyerson (2000) - and this argument is echoed by Asad Haider<sup>12</sup> in a publication for *Viewpoint Magazine* titled "The Shadow of the Plantation"

---

<sup>11</sup> Though Meyerson does not explore this critique too much, insight into the debate between the more "positivist" understanding of historical materialism vs. the relational and dialectical- that is, the more Hegelian and humanist - interpretation of historical materialism can be found in both Melvin Rader's (1979) *Marx's Interpretation of History*, and William H. Shaw's (1978) *Marx's Theory of History*. Both the Rader and Shaw texts locate the debate surrounding base vs. superstructure and of the defining parameters of "mode of production" as the most important questions when trying to grasp Marx's theory of history. What makes reading both texts together interesting is that the Rader argues for a dialectical and relational concept of mode of production, while the Shaw maintains that such a re-interpretation of the "mode of production" diminishes the explanatory - and thus revolutionary - potential of historical materialism.

<sup>12</sup> Author of the much praised and widely received *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* (2018)

(2017)– Robinson’s historiography is relativist, and due to its granting of supremacy to the cultural and metaphysical over the material, it lacks the kinds of rigorous epistemology that is capable of providing a coherent and rational deconstruction of history. Both authors identify in Robinson a “culturalist” analysis which is falsely premised on the assumption of coherent cultural experiences and categories. Not only then is Robinson adhering to a kind of “clash of civilizations” school of historical analysis, but as a consequence he contributes to a nationalistic politics through his identification of a coherent and singular “Black Radical Tradition”.

But what these criticisms ignore is that for Robinson, the Black Radical Tradition represents a counter narrative that a critical historiography is able to revive; a historiography that seeks to break beyond the strictures applied to history by Marxist historiography. For Robinson, the histories of slave revolts paint a counter picture showing how even if not organized through the assumed progressive outcomes of capitalist production, Black people were able to – and in fact did- revolt and re-imagine their futures. The fugitive slaves that rebelled and formed free communities such as the Quilombos of Brazil; the centuries of marronage; and the moments that Haitian slaves charged French forces without fear, shoving their arms into the cannon’s mouths; all these revolutionary moments involved people drawing meaning and resistance from traditions, histories, African cosmologies and metaphysics, kinship ties and social structures: “the actual terms of their humanity” (Robinson, 2000, pg.122). Their historical and social consciousness informed their acts of rebellion against their enslavement. This history, reflects a rich tradition of liberty and rebellion, whose potential and depth of meaning is not able to be accommodated – least recognized - within the strictures of Historical Materialism and its privileging of certain determinative forces of history. In this way, Historical Materialism as the application of a theory onto history obscures the realities of what historically happened, and contributes to the

dehumanization, the denial of agency, and the insignificance of people of African descent in the tapestry of our past-present-and future.

Nonetheless, in drawing out an oppositional Black Radical Tradition, Meyerson argues that Robinson opposes Marxism with a “grand narrative of his own”. This Robinsonian grand-narrative is argued to not only lapse into a kind of ethno-nationalism, but is incapable of forwarding the kind of reach and universalism that comes with the account provided by Marx. The question that is then posed is: what kinds of politics is the outcome of Robinson’s critical project? That is, of the identification of a *racial* capitalism; of the articulation of a Black Radical Tradition; of the exercising of a critical historiography that does not contain the kinds of “epistemological precision” (Bannerji, 1995) that comes with Historical Materialism?

Perhaps these questions would have received fuller attention had the response to Robinson’s significant body of work been more seriously undertaken by the left. Meyerson’s<sup>13</sup> 43 page long critique of Robinson is useful as a framework for further dialogue since it draws on ongoing debates concerning the relation between anti-racism and Marxist theory, and of the accommodating – or not - potential of the latter. The general gist of these debates have been noted above and were expressed in the Meyerson piece as responses to: (1.) the charge of Marxism’s Eurocentricity – its exaltation of (Western) European historical experience and its accompanying economic-social relations; (2.) its privileging of “class” and the “economy” at the expense of what are deemed secondary or superstructural phenomena; and (3.) the issue concerning Marxism’s

---

<sup>13</sup> The Meyerson (2000) article, that one scholarly critical engagement with Robinson’s work, is cited in 24 books and over 40 scholarly publications on the topics of critical race theory, Marxism, intersectionality, cultural politics, Africana philosophy, postcolonial literary studies, gender and feminist studies, political economy, epistemology, and more. The wide reception of this article demonstrates foremost the reach and breadth of Robinson’s critique (his intervention is not all together unknown), as well as the wide reception and utilization of Meyerson’s argument. Thus, the relevance of leaning on Meyerson’s central arguments as part of the framework for my own intervention.

obfuscating historiography which is argued to be incapable of accounting for the variety of determinative forces in human history. All three dimensions are related and as we have seen, in the service of retrieving an anti-racist and anti-colonial Marxism, these kinds of criticisms are often attributed to a “misreading” of Marx; to a false “positivist” understanding that fails to grasp the critical dimensions of Marxism which is an otherwise dialectical, humanistic and reflexive theory of liberation.

The debates concerning the relation between anti-racism and Marxism have thus tended to fall within an existing tradition in Marxist studies that distinguishes between a dialectical, critical and reflexive Marxism, what Alvin Gouldner (1980) distinguishes as “critical Marxism” from what is otherwise read as an un-dialectical, determinist, economistic, and positivist “scientific Marxism”. The antecedents of each tradition are not the point of focus here<sup>14</sup>. Rather, our interest is specifically with regards to the ways in which the distinction between a critical vs. a scientific/dogmatic Marxism has been utilized in responding to anti-racist critiques of Marx such as Robinson’s.

The initial intention of this dissertation was to insert Robinson into these 3 debates between anti-racist and Marxist theory and to unpack his work in relation to the call for a corrected reading. I foremost wanted to answer the question of whether Robinson’s characterization of Marxism, and

---

<sup>14</sup> Ian Angus (2018) for example, dates the humanist reading of Marx to 1961 following the publication of Erich Fromm’s *Marx’s Concept of Man*. In a recently published edited collection by Anders Bartonek and Anders Burman (2018), this critical strand of Marxism is contained within the intellectual tradition of “Hegelian Marxism” and identified with authors such as Lukacs, Korsch, Marcuse, Adorno, Benjamin, and Lucio Colletti. Many of these writers also fall into the “coordinates” of what Perry Anderson (1976) identifies as “Western Marxism”. Kevin Anderson (1995) reaches further back and identifies this reading of Marx in the work of Lenin and more prominently later in the works of Gramsci, Raya Dunayevskaya and CLR James. Though they do not deal with the breadth of this tradition, historically or contemporarily, I am in agreement with Bartonek and Burman (2018, pg.9) when they write that what unites this critical engagement with Marxism is the use of Hegel, or of a bridging between Marx and Hegel in order to formulate “a non-dogmatic, Marxist humanism” in opposition to the “inflexible dogmatism of Soviet communism”. In addition to this unifying element, I will also add that what these traditions share – Fanon (2004) perhaps being the anomaly – is an explicit desire to retrieve or *correct* our reading and understanding of Marx.



his criticisms of it, were simply the consequence of a “one-sided and undialectical” reading – as Meyerson (2000) put it- or whether they were positions consistent with Marxian philosophy. I am particularly interested in the way that this call for a corrected reading is one that relies on unearthing the relation between Marx and Hegel in order to discredit intervention’s such as Robinson’s, which Meyerson (2000) for example even extends to the basic field of contemporary feminist and anti-racist criticisms of Marx.

What will thus follow in this dissertation is a clarification of Marx in light of the call for a corrected reading; a clarification that does not shy away from the understanding of Marx as a dialectical, non-deterministic and humanistic thinker. Additionally, it will be demonstrated that even when – correctly- read as non-positivist and non-deterministic/economistic, Marxism nonetheless remains mired within the kinds of racist and Eurocentric biases and limitations that Robinson identifies with it. This dissertation will thus demonstrate that these limitations not only maintain themselves whether one reads Marx and Engels as positivist or dialectical, but in fact, when read within the context of post-Hegelian philosophy, Marxism exposes the depth of its racist and Eurocentric positions. It is a Marx in the tradition of Hegel, and a Marx that employs the critical dimensions of the Hegelian dialectic, that paints himself with the same brush that Robinson exposes him with<sup>15</sup>.

In short, Marx in dialectical clothing, or Marx as that victim of Soviet positivist propaganda, remains problematic when it comes to the experiences of people other than European. As I proceed through this dissertation, I also draw on characterizations that Robinson makes of Marx – in both his *Black Marxism* and *An Anthropology of Marxism* - in order to demonstrate

---

<sup>15</sup> As a note, we are tacitly accepting the critique that a positivist reading of Marxism – which self-admittedly superstructuralizes race, or gender or other sites of difference as opposed to the primacy of the economic base; and which is often lumped together with mechanistic positions on class formation, and progress and development - as an inadequate theory of racial justice.

their consistency with a dialectical or reflexive understanding of Marxism. Additionally then, part of the intention here is to show that not only is Robinson correct in his criticisms of Marx and Marxism, but also with respect to his understanding of Marxism. Robinson's work may not have utilized the same language as in this dissertation, but his mainly historiographic approach nonetheless demonstrates a correct understanding of some of the basic tenets of Marxist philosophy.

In many ways then, this dissertation can best be thought of as a kind of preamble or accompaniment to Robinson's work, clarifying that the philosophy of Marx and Engels – whether dialectical or positivist – remains consistent with Robinson's anti-racist critiques of it. And as this preamble to Robinson's critical work on Marxism, this dissertation hopes to not only defend Robinson's conclusions, but to demonstrate the ongoing relevance of his work in the field anti-racist Marxist theory – a relevance that should not be dismissed so easily due to the charge of an incorrect understanding of an otherwise more complex and dynamic Marxist philosophy. Incidentally however, through this exercise I am also structuring my own intervention into these debates along two main lines: 1.) problematizing the presumption of having successfully retrieved an anti-racist Marx through a “corrected reading” that draws from the tradition of a dialectical, humanistic and non-deterministic “critical Marxism”; and (2.) I am critiquing the kind of distinction relied upon by the multilinear argument between an early (unilinear and Eurocentric) Marx and a late (multilinear and non-deterministic) Marx.

I had written above “initial intention” because for this dissertation I have only had enough time and space to address 1 rather than 3 of the intervening debates concerning Marx and anti-racism. Initially this dissertation was meant to be divided into 3 sections along the lines of the above identified three basic interventions. I have only had the opportunity to address the first of

these which focuses on the charge of Eurocentrism with respect to Marxist theory and of its exaltation of (Western) European historical experience and development.

This intended first section which is now the dissertation itself will be structured as follows: Section one is titled “The Debate” and will contrast the respective positions drawn between a Eurocentric Marx (as taken up by Robinson) vs. a multilinear, reflexive and consequently non-Eurocentric Marx based largely on Kevin Anderson’s influential work in *Marx at the Margins*.

Section two is titled “Unilinearity and the Negation of the Negation” and will attempt to develop a contextualization and clarification of Marx and Engels’ philosophy of liberation; one which demonstrates how a dialectical Marxism – as an aspired scientific account of liberation - holds within it certain foundational logics that make Eurocentrism inescapable, i.e. the privileging of Europe and European peoples in their philosophy is more than simply an unconscious bias on behalf of Marx and Engels but is in fact central to their whole project. It forms part of the foundation that affords their philosophy a rational core<sup>16</sup>.

Section three of this dissertation is titled “Marx *from* the Margins: Multilinear misconceptions on Marx” and will in three separate chapters address key aspects of the multilinear argument. In light of the contextual reading provided in section two, in section three we will proceed to unearth some of the misconceptions about Marxism that equally feed into a misreading or misappropriation of primary source evidence in order to indicate in Marx a departure from (earlier) Eurocentric positions. This section will conclude that when read in the broader context of

---

<sup>16</sup> A considerable amount of this work has already been developed in Robinson’s (2019) *An Anthropology of Marxism* which traces out the history of socialism/socialist thought in Europe that preceded Marx and Engels, and of the specific ways in which they attempted to distinguish the legitimacy (scientific nature) of their own intervention – either through outright elimination of previous traditions of rebellion from history, or via the reliance on a historical schema that placed their period and the capitalist mode of production at the pinnacle of human history (or rather, pre-history). In this section I build on some of Robinson’s work in *Anthropology* in highlighting the centrality of the historical schema – the ‘machinery of history’ – in the development of a rational – albeit dialectical – theory.

Marx's work, the evidence presented (the writings on abolition, Ireland, Poland, colonialism and Russia) indicate no shift at all and that they in fact confirm the criticisms waged against Marx. Given the breadth and significance of Anderson's (2010) book<sup>17</sup> in advocating for the multilinear argument – which nonetheless acts as a collation of similar works –, his work – though not exclusively – will behave as our primary interlocutor.

There is one more note to make on the format of this dissertation. As noted a few paragraphs above, I have utilized a different language here than Robinson preferred to take or to privilege. Robinson (2000) explains in the concluding sections of his *Black Marxism* that in his work he eschewed abstract theoretical discourse in favour of a historiographic approach that emphasizes the accounting of theories and ideas in relation to historical materials. Though I have drawn on the strengths of the historiographic approach, particularly in its lending clarity through helping build a context within which the respective writers and theorists were developing their work, in this dissertation I have in fact favoured the more abstract theoretical or philosophical approach. What I have tried to do is contextualize some of the foundational principles of Hegelian and Marxian philosophy within a developing discourse taking place in the tradition of post-Kantian German philosophy. In this way I have positioned the respective philosophical systems of Hegel and Marx/Engels as interventions that were building off of some of the positions developed before them, but nevertheless modified. I have done this to emphasize the degrees of continuity between for example Marx and Hegel, which helps lend fuller clarity concerning what sort of parameters come into play when speaking about a 'Hegelian-Marxism'. Despite the difference of approach, this dissertation intends to complement Robinson's work, utilizing the more theoretical or philosophical approach because for one it is a particular style and form that is my preference, and

---

<sup>17</sup> *Marx at the Margins* is an award-winning book and has been translated into 12 different languages.

two, because I believe that it is one necessary to speak in order to help expand dialogue with Robinson's criticisms of Marxism.

Another note on format is that this dissertation has been inspired by the method and meaningfulness of the Socratic dialogue. In the dialogue *Theaetetus*, the figure of Socrates – articulated through Plato – clarifies his art as one akin to midwifery: working with others through the labour and pains that come with delivering through an idea. As midwife, Socrates does not bear a child (idea or belief) of his own but helps guide the concept, the idea or belief, allowing it to reveal its true nature. In the process Socrates takes on the very experience of delivery, never outright dismissing the idea, position or experience of his interlocutor, but standing with them as they collectively try to move toward greater clarity. With humility he says: "Try and fall with me and we shall both be better." In this dissertation I have attempted to proceed while wearing the hat of midwife, allowing the engaged with philosophies to reveal themselves for what they are. In this attention to form and format I have nevertheless been inspired by the words of Karl Marx who with reference to his intention to focus his critique to political economy, wrote "Everything you see, depends on how it is said".

## Section One: The Debate

### Chapter 1: Marx's Eurocentrism

*"...Marx like Hegel recognized the corruption and social disaggregation of industrial capitalism. But Marx would inherit Hegel's Eurocentrism too. Marx preserved that Eurocentrism, first through his inordinate praise of bourgeois imperialism (The Communist Manifesto), and eventually by his privileging of the development of capitalist industrialism as the singular and unprecedented historical development of modern human society."*

Cedric J. Robinson, *An Anthropology of Marxism*, 2019

It may at first seem strange to apply the attribution of Eurocentrism to such a universalist theory as that of Marx and Engels'. Was it not from the pen of the "Philosophers of Praxis" that the declaration was made: *Proletarier aller Länder vereinigt Euch!*<sup>18</sup> Within its aspiration is the rallying cry of universal kinship and solidarity. And in their condemnation of the oppression of the many by the hands of the few there is found a truth that resonates in almost all hearts:

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles<sup>19</sup>. Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes (Marx & Engels, 1978 pg.474).

What Marx and Engels sought to reveal were the antagonisms that characterize/d human history. Through their opening declaration in the *Manifesto* - "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.473) – they demystified the illusions of grandeur and mystique that characterizes our existence as a human species. Human history was something more sombre; more real. It was a site of struggle and domination. It was a

---

<sup>18</sup> Literally translated into "Proletarians of all lands, unite!", and popularized in English as: "Workers of the world, unite!"

<sup>19</sup> That is, the stages of human pre-history following the dissolution of "primeval communities" into antagonistic and class divided societies. This is clarified in a footnote by Engels to the English edition of the *Manifesto*, 1888.

history of the oppressors and the oppressed. And if this was not fully realized before, it was so now.

But Marx and Engels were not of the idealistic bourgeois historians who conjured up philosophies and theories from the human imagination. In the footsteps of Hegel, who wrote that “each individual is in any case a child of his time“ (Hegel, 1991. Pg.21), they understood that their philosophy too was of its own time; was “its own time comprehended in thoughts“(Hegel, 1991). And if their philosophy was to be able to move beyond itself – as more than simply relativistic – and to provide a more generalized insight concerning their current context, it was because for Marx and Engels the time in which they existed afforded them the clarity and insight that was hitherto denied to others<sup>20</sup>. It was a clarity arising from the very conditions within which the philosophers found themselves; and for Marx and Engels, this was in large part due to the emergence of the capitalist mode of production, whose objective character of development and simplification of class antagonisms provided fertile soil for the “discovery“ of life’s secrets.

This is why Marx and Engels so frequently place emphasis on the revolutionary character, and role of the bourgeoisie – the oppressing class in capitalism-, writing:

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors‘, and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment‘. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation....[...]... In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious

---

<sup>20</sup> Like Hegel, Marx and Engels held no presumption of “objectivity” when it came to the question of greater clarity or insight. This would entail a philosopher stepping out of their time; beyond the conditions and context in which they exist. Instead, if they were able to see more clearly, it was only because a further developed, or higher stage of human development allowed for a more generalized perspective than was afforded to people in less developed modes. Bourgeois society, held as the most highly developed historical organization of production, thus furnished this insight. For more clarity on this, see Marx’s “Introduction” to the *Grundrisse*.

and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.476).<sup>21</sup>

The revolutionary character of the bourgeoisie and of bourgeois society lay partly in its stripping of the illusory and idealic relations – the “ancient and venerable prejudices” – that previously mystified, ossified, and clouded the inequalities and class antagonisms that characterized human history. For the first time – by a result of the dictates of the capitalist mode of production – “man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind”. There were no illusions, so to speak, that now characterized the relation and distinction between oppressor and the oppressed. Thus with its profaning of all that was *holy*, or all that “bound” us as beings to “*natural* superiors” [emphasis added], bourgeois society presumably simplified class antagonisms by splitting society into two hostile camps: the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (the propertyless workers who own only their labour power, which they must sell for a wage). Progressively, in their strive for surplus value, and by way of the antagonistic character of their competitive existence, the bourgeoisie enfolds more previously self-subsisting people into its net, and further distinguishes itself from the workers through pushing more from its own class into the ranks of the propertyless<sup>22</sup>. In opposition to the ever shrinking ruling class, there is emerging a growing mass of the working class: dispossessed, oppressed, exploited wage-labourers.

---

<sup>21</sup> And more poetically, they continue this characterization of bourgeois society when they write: “All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.476).

<sup>22</sup> I am here referring to: 1.) the process of primitive accumulation, or *original* accumulation through which people are separated from their livelihood and forced into the condition of wage work. Where they could previously live off the land, or communally, they must now sell themselves on the market as free wage-labour in order to survive; 2.) the extinction of the upper/middle/lower middle classes: the peasantry, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, who “decay and finally disappear” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.482) in the face of modern industry. Their fate is the ranks of the proletariat.



Thus in addition to its clarification of class antagonisms and social relations, the additional revolutionary contribution made by the capitalist mode of production is its creation of a population – the majority class – who in their conditions of existence reflect a universal state of misery as well as of interest:

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interests of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.482).

This class of people, unique in human history, was to be granted by Marx and Engels the world-historic mission of raising humanity to a higher level. On this score Marx writes in *The Holy Family*:

When socialist writers ascribe this world-historic role to the proletariat, it is not at all... because they regard the proletarians as gods. On the contrary. Since in the fully-formed proletariat represents, practically speaking, the complete the abstraction of all humanity, even of the semblance of humanity, is practically complete; since the conditions of life of the proletariat sum up all the conditions of life of society today in their most inhuman form; since man has lost himself in the proletariat, yet at the same time has not only gained theoretical consciousness of that loss, but through urgent, no longer removable, no longer disguisable, absolutely imperative need — the practical expression of necessity — is driven directly to revolt against this inhumanity, it follows that the proletariat can and must emancipate itself. But it cannot emancipate itself without abolishing the conditions of its own life. It cannot abolish the conditions of its own life without abolishing all the inhuman conditions of life of society today which are summed up in its own situation. Not in vain does it go through the stern but steeling school of labour. It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do. Its goal and its historical action are prefigured in the most clear and ineluctable way in its own life-situation as well as in the whole organization of contemporary bourgeois society (Marx & Engels, 1975, pg.47).

In their revolt against their inhumanity, the proletariat is “driven” to emancipate itself, and to emancipate itself, it must abolish “the conditions of its own life”. These conditions of the life of the proletariat - by virtue of the universal and abject nature of their existence - constitute “all the

inhuman conditions of life of society today in their most inhuman form”. As the “lowest stratum of our present society” they are the “abstraction of all humanity”<sup>23</sup>.

The conditioning principle of all this - of the life of the proletariat- their very existence - and the pivot upon which the capitalist mode of production exists- is private property, which is merely the “material sensuous expression of *estranged human life*” (Marx, 1978, pg.85). The transcendence of private property – a necessary objective made clear only by virtue of the spiritual and physical poverty through which the proletariat becomes *conscious* – signifies the “complete emancipation of all human senses and attributes” (Marx, 1978, pg.87). It is human kinds final disalienation, or “the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being...” (Marx, 1978, pg.84)

As this “conditioning opposite” of the proletariat, “private property presses towards its own dissolution” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.134), and it does this “only by giving rise to the proletariat *as* proletariat” (Marx & Engels, 1978, Pg.134). That is why Marx and Engels (1978, pg. 483) write that the capitalist mode of production produces its own “grave-diggers”<sup>24</sup>; a disciplined, organized and abject consciousness that can fulfill its “world-historical role” of abolishing private property, or “human self-estrangement”. This “*positive* transcendence of *private property*” is described by Marx (1978, pg.84) as “*Communism*”. Communism is specifically the

---

<sup>23</sup> When thinking of this description of “abstraction of all humanity” I find informative this excerpt – one of many - from the *Manifesto* (Marx and Engels, 1978, Pg.482) which describes the proletarian condition: “The proletarian is without property; his relation to his wife and children has no longer anything in common with the bourgeois family-relations; modern industrial labour, modern subjection to capital, the same in England as in France, in America as in Germany, has stripped him of every trace of national character. Law, morality, religion, are to him so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests”. The proletarian is stripped, reduced to no more than what they can sell on the market – labour power-, and yet in that stripping arises a salvation...

<sup>24</sup> “The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by the revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.483).

abolition of “Bourgeois property”, which is nonetheless “the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products, that is based on class antagonisms, on the exploitation of the many by the few” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.484).

If we are to summarize, we can infer the argument as follows: Communism is the positive transcendence of human self-estrangement (of private property), and that it is made possible only following the emergence of the capitalist mode of production and of its related progressive elements, one of which is the simplification of class antagonisms and the formation and conditioning of the proletariat<sup>25</sup>. And, the proletariat, by virtue of their conditions of life, are the world historical agents *actually* capable of the truly *revolutionary* - as opposed to minority interested or partial - movement of transcending and abolishing the “material sensuous expression of *estranged human life*” that is private property. With this, human suffering and estrangement come to an end and the history of humankind begins:

The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals' social conditions of existence – but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation (Marx, 1978, pg. 5).

For Marx and Engels this positive transcendence was not an isolated phenomena, limited to one nation or people, but implied human liberation as a truly universal or world phenomena. Nonetheless, it could only come about due to the conditioning principles of the capitalist mode of

---

<sup>25</sup> In addition to the socialization of labour, the other progressive development coming out of the capitalist mode of production is the creation of “more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.477). What this allowed, and what was also deemed a prerequisite for the transition into a higher stage of human life, was the “subjection of Nature’s forces to man”. Of course, the true potential of this is only realized following the demise of capitalism and with the conscious organization of production on a planned basis (Engels, ). Capitalism, through the development of technology (machinery; the application of chemistry to industry, steam-navigation; railways, etc.) allowed for the subjection of nature’s forces by man, however, these forces still confronted “man” in capitalism in an external and dominating way. But they nonetheless initiated man’s greater mastery.

production. Without capitalism there would be no world historical agents; there would be no highly developed productive forces; there would be no abstraction of humanity or simplified class antagonisms. That is precisely why literature and social movements in “the early undeveloped period” resulted only in reactionary or utopian experiments that were doomed to fail: “...these attempts necessarily failed, owing to the then undeveloped state of the proletariat, as well as to the absence of the economic conditions for its emancipation, conditions that had yet to be produced, and could be produced by the impending bourgeois epoch alone” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg. 497).

It is on this account that Robinson (2000; 2019) identifies the substance of Marx’s Eurocentrism: in Marx’s privileging of capitalist industrialism as an unprecedented key into the progression of human kind; and in his subsequent praise of bourgeois imperialism that spread the capitalist mode of production. According to Marx and Engels (1978, pg. 477) the “need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe”. *Compelled* by the dictates of the capitalist mode of production, by the need for an ever expanding market, by the desire for raw materials, and by the thirst for labour, the bourgeoisie “must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere”. But in this explanatory insight into the impulse and motivation for colonial expansion there was also prescription. The rising bourgeoisie and the expanding capitalist relations of production that accompanied the colonization of peoples and societies across the globe was to behave as a progressive force, just as it had in England and in Western Europe- the signified sites of its emergence. We outlined above the progressive consequences of the capitalist mode of production: its creation of a working class, its demystifying of social relations, its development of the productive forces of society to a status and level fit to be thought as the *crescendo* of human pre-history. This experience and outcome was to be no different in the colonized lands:

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. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image (Marx & Engels, 1978, Pg.477).

Where previously undeveloped and tradition bound societies existed – trapped in archaic and idyllic relations that mystified the human social condition (binding people to their “natural” superiors<sup>26</sup>) – with the disruptive invasion of bourgeois society, “even the most barbarian nations are drawn into civilization”. Even the most barbarian nations are drawn into bourgeois civilization; this form of civilization being contradictory<sup>27</sup>, though nonetheless superior in its stage in human pre-history. For more insight into the significance of this, Robinson (2000, pg. 332) directs us to Marx's *Tribune* article “The Future Results of British Rule in India”, where Marx writes: “England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia” (Marx, 1853). The material foundations of Western society brought a new life to an otherwise stagnant semi-civilization<sup>28</sup>. Unlike Western society, and England in particular - which

---

<sup>26</sup> For example, see Marx's (1853) comments re: British colonialism in India: “Modern industry, resulting from the railway system, will dissolve the hereditary divisions of labor, upon which rest the Indian castes, those decisive impediments to Indian progress and Indian power”.

<sup>27</sup> Though it has “torn away from the family its sentimental veil” it has now “reduced the family relation to a mere money relation”. Though it has “been the first to show what man's activity can bring about” and “accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals”, it has instituted “naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation” (Marx & Engels, 1978).

<sup>28</sup> On stagnation, or lack of progress, Marx is at least more lenient than Engels, who in an article he wrote for the *Tribune* in 1857 (rather, wrote for Marx, since the byline was always Marx's), he would describe China - another “semi-barbarian” nation that was falling prey to Western society – as the “rotting semi-civilization” of the oldest state. In the same article, which is focused on military organization, Engels writes about the benefits of the European system of military organization upon “Asiatic barbarity”. Nonetheless, he laments how even the best officers – the English, the French – struggle to reign the “jealousy, the intrigues, the ignorance, the cupidity, and corruption of the Orientals”. Marx would not shy away from such language entirely. In the *Tribune* article “Another Civilization War”, Marx (1859) would describe Mongols as “ogres” and in 1853 he would write, in what Edward

was the site of the industrial revolution, the hotbed of rapid technological development, the place of emergence for the modern proletariat-, the “semi-barbarian” countries, prior to their contact with Europeans, were “more or less strangers to historical development”<sup>29</sup> (Engels, 1969). In the same piece cited above, Engels writes approvingly:

Countries which had known no progress for thousands of years – for example, India – were thoroughly revolutionized, and even China is now on the way to a revolution.... In this way, big industry has brought all the people of the Earth into contact with each other, has merged all local markets into one world market, has spread civilization and progress everywhere and has thus ensured whatever happens in civilized countries will have repercussions in all other countries (Engels, 1969).

The English, unlike the “barbarian conquerors” that previously invaded India – “that unresisting and unchanging society” (Marx, 1853) -, were described as uniquely successful -owing to their superiority- in their destruction of Native industry and as a consequence Native community and society. This paved the way for the regeneration of India in line with modern civilization, through: political unity – imposed first by the sword but “strengthened and perpetuated by the electric telegraph” -; the organizing and training of a native army; the introduction of a “free press”; Western education; steam; European Science; sea-ports; improved communication; all and more contributing to the civilizing of India. With these developments, and with the battering down of walls that comes with the international market, the “old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency” gave way to “intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.476).

By way of the process of colonization, otherwise isolated, stagnating semi-civilizations, were brought into fold and pace with the civilized countries. The bourgeoisie, driven by the

---

Said (1994) would describe as Orientalist fashion,: “...who are the traders in Turkey? Certainly not the Turks. Their way of promoting trade, when they were yet in their original nomadic state, consisted in robbing caravans; and now that they are a little more civilised it consists in all sorts of arbitrary and oppressive extractions”.

<sup>29</sup> This comes from Engels’ (1969) “Principles of Communism” which functioned as the blue print for *The Communist Manifesto*.

demands of the market, were creating a world in their own image. And through “becoming bourgeois themselves” these conquered nations were setting the stage for the possibility of that “immanent society” (Robinson, 2000, Pg. 58) whose precondition was the capitalist mode of production. Just as it had done so in its nations of origin, the capitalist mode of production would *rationalize*<sup>30</sup> the rest of the world; developing the ideal material conditions for the possibility of a transition to communism.

For more clarity on this issue, I don’t think it is too much an abstraction to compare the disciplining force of capitalism on a national level to what Marx and Engels believed it was accomplishing on an international level. The pre-colonial international arena could be described as not so different from the pre-capitalist population of a nation who were “an incoherent mass scattered over the whole country” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.480). As we have outlined above, such disunity was a condition not conducive to the kinds of uniformity and concentration deemed a prerequisite for the development of a universality in self-consciousness – or at least for its concrete possibility. Marx and Engels (1978, pg.477) themselves make this comparative gesture when they write of capitalism saying:

It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.477).

Just as the potential for the supremacy of the proletariat was created on a national level through the uniformity, concentration and disciplining the population from the “idiocy of rural life”, so is it made possible on the international level as “National differences and antagonisms

---

<sup>30</sup> “Rationalize” may not seem as the best choice of words, but I use it here more so in the Weberian sense, of a structuring or ordering logic infused and imposed on society along the dictates of the Market. Robinson (2000, Pg. 9) uses a similar description when he begins his chapter critiquing the presumption of an *objective* character to capitalist development

between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world-market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.488).

In their development of a scientific theory of liberation these developments must have been deemed necessary, for how else can universality be realized if not through universalizing material conditions? And yet rather than scientific, Robinson (2000, pg. xxix). reads in this formula for universal salvation a “Eurocentrism and secular messianism” which were two of the “ideological elements which worked to constrict the Marxist imaginary”. For Robinson (2000, pg.xxix) this constriction of the Marxist imaginary was a rearrangement of history rather than a more insightful explanation of it; it was “an analytical procedure which resonated with bourgeoisie Europe” rather than in contradiction to it. The ideological elements of Marxist theory then, had a number of consequences: 1.) it validated European colonialism while at the same time implying the stagnation and isolation, as opposed to the progressive or dynamic nature of non-western societies<sup>31</sup>; 2.) Its implication of and focus on the phenomena of simplified class relations and emphasis on the world historical role of the proletariat recessed slaves, peasants, indentured workers, farmers, sharecroppers and peons from the discourse on human freedom, and “disqualified them from historical and political agency in the modern world” (Robinson, 2000, pg.xxix). Instead, slave and peasants were tossed in “the imagined abyss signified by precapitalist, noncapitalist and primitive accumulation” (Robinson, 2000, pg. xxix); 3.) All this of course limiting the internationalism to which Marxism espoused since its materialism and economic determinism behaved as an

---

<sup>31</sup> Marx’s ends his 1853 *Tribune* article “The British Rule in India” by noting the “crimes” committed by the English colonial power, and the “bitterness” of the “spectacle of the crumbling of an ancient world [India]”. Though he nonetheless validates the experience by describing England as the “unconscious tool of history” who through initiating a revolution in the social state of Asia, opens a door for mankind to fulfil its destiny. He ends with a stanza from Goethe’s “An Suleika”: “Should this torture torment us/ since it brings us greater pleasure?/ Were not through the rule of Timur/ Souls devoured without measure?” (Marx, 1853).



insufficient explainer of the cultural and social forces that informed freedom struggles outside the metropolises of Western Europe (Robinson, 2000, pg. xxx). Fundamentally then, Marxism has tended to neglect the nature, and genesis of liberation struggles which had occurred, and which had yet to occur, in populations outside of the centres of industrial capitalism and the form of the European proletariat.

## Chapter 2: A Multilinear Marx

In concluding his book *Marx at the Margins*, Kevin B. Anderson (2010, pg.237) contradicts what we have otherwise attributed to Marx in the chapter above, showing Marx to have instead “created a multilinear and non-reductionist theory of history, to have analyzed the complexities and differences of non-Western societies, and to have refused to bind himself into a single model of development or revolution”. This being contrary to the “problematically unilinear concept of social progress” that according to Anderson (2010, pg.237) is more characteristic of the earlier writings of Marx, particularly the polemical *Communist Manifesto*, which fails to grasp the dialectic and humanistic characteristics of Marxist theory.

Though not engaging explicitly with the work of Cedric Robinson, Anderson nonetheless engages in a clarification exercise that has implications for Robinson’s work, particularly since, as was noted, this clarification of Marx is used by Meyerson (2000) to discredit Robinson’s intervention<sup>32</sup>. Both the Meyerson (2000) piece and the Jeannot (2007) article invoke Marx’s writings on the US Civil War and the otherwise later “multilinear” writings on Russia as part of their defence and clarification exercise. These two examples in favour of a non-Eurocentric and multilinear Marx are given greater elaboration by Anderson (2010) who in his book on this topic provides greater analysis of primary source material supporting the multilinear defence, as well as additional topics related to: Marx’s shifting writings on colonialism; his evolving thoughts on questions of national emancipation; his growing attention to topics of race, ethnicity and nationalism as evidenced in his writings on Ireland; his theoretical revisions as evidenced in the French Edition of *Capital* and the *Grundrisse*; and his detailed study and interest in non-western

---

<sup>32</sup> A similar rebuttal directly aimed at Robinson’s (2000) *Black Marxism* is made by Tom Jeannot (2007) in his article “Marx, Capitalism and Race”

and pre-capitalist societies as evidenced in the often ignored *Ethnological Notebooks* (Marx, 1974).

Due to its comprehensive nature, this chapter finds utility in focusing primarily on Anderson (2010), only implying the writings of Meyerson, Jeannot and others. We are more interested in tracing out the contours of the arguments as a whole, as opposed to the merits of any of the authors.

To begin with then, in our recovery of “Marx’s multicultural, multilinear social dialectic” (Anderson, 2010) we are directed to what we used first as a point of critique: his writings on colonialism. Referencing the excerpts from the *Manifesto* that speak to the ways in which the capitalist world market draws “all, even the most barbarian nations into civilization”, Anderson (2010, Pg.7) does not deny that here Marx is adopting “an implicitly unilinear model of development, according to which non-Western societies would, as they were swept into the world capitalist system, soon develop similar contradictions to those of the already industrializing countries”. For Anderson (2010) this is only implicit owing to a general gap in Marx’s world-view, as a result of his “little specific attention to non-western societies in this period”. This gap, following the publication of the *Manifesto*, would be remedied from 1853 onwards as Marx’s attention would broaden, including non-western societies in his purview. As a consequence this broadening of perspective would lead to changes and developments in Marx’s thinking.

A similar point is raised by Kolja Lindner (2010) in his piece “Marx’s Eurocentrism: Postcolonial Studies and Marx Scholarship”, though, rather than attribute Marx’s *early* Eurocentrism to a gap or limitation in his perspective, he finds fault in the Orientalist and Eurocentric sources of information on the non-western world that were available to Marx: travel writings, parliamentary reports, theoretical treatises, etc. At the time of writing such pieces as the

*Manifesto* then, or of his earlier articles on India and colonialism, Marx did not have the sources available to him “that might have helped him develop an accurate understanding of precolonial societies” (Lindner, 2010). Like Anderson (2010) Lindner maintains that from the 1860’s onward [Anderson finds progress as early as 1857, and hints as early as late 1853] Marx’s attitude would shift into “a progressive abandonment of Eurocentrism” and he would produce “a more finely shaded” account of non-western societies and a “more carefully drawn picture of colonial expansion” (Lindner, 2010).

Part of the problem then lies with the critics reliance on the *Manifesto* and the earlier (pre-1857) *Tribune* writings for insight on Marx’s views on non-western societies and on colonialism; two sources which were written in a pre-critical, unilinear period in Marx’s thought. In these earlier writings, which Anderson (2010, pg.14) notes as having inherited a strong Hegelian influence in terms of its teleological notion of progress, there are two fundamental Eurocentric notions that come into play: 1.) Marx’s suggestions that all societies are destined to tread the same pathway of development as the West; 2.) that there are beneficial effects of a “higher” European (British) civilization on a “lower” one (Anderson, 2010, pg.20).

These Eurocentric notions, however, would begin to be abandoned as early as the publication of his article “The Future Results of British Rule in India”, which concluded his 1853 series of articles on India. Anderson (2010, pg.23) maintains that in this article the “structure and tone of Marx’s arguments shift subtly”; becoming more dialectical. It is here that in addition to the progressiveness of capitalism, Marx speaks on the need for a social revolution in Britain to change colonial policy; he points to the possibility of an Indian national liberation movement; and here he also refers to “the inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization” (Anderson, 2010, pg.23). These shifts in Marx signify a reversal of “the ethnocentric distinction between superior and inferior

civilizations with which he began the article”, as well as a “first sign of a shift from the position in *The Communist Manifesto*” (Anderson, 2010, pg.23).

What Anderson (2010, pg.34) describes as the development of an “anti-colonial tone” is further evidenced in Marx’s 1857 *Tribune* article on the Second Opium War in which he singles out Britain’s aggressive policies, and other articles on India and China in this period which provide “full reports of British brutality, with little reference to colonialism as beneficial”. Other than outlining the crimes of the colonial power, Marx also goes so far as to extend support for anti-colonial struggles, as evidenced in his 1857-58 articles on “the great Indian revolt” (Anderson, 2010, pg.37). Following the mutiny of the Sepoys in India – colonial soldiers who rose up and turned on their British officers – Marx would counter the crude racism of the British press by contextualizing the atrocities committed by the Sepoys as reflexes of England’s own conduct in India (Anderson, 2010). Marx, according to Anderson (2010, pg.41) would also find in the Sepoys something of a progressive contradiction, akin to “capitalism’s forging of the working class”, and in a 1958 letter to Engels, would write: “India is now our best ally” (Anderson, 2010, pg.41). For Anderson (2010) these acknowledgements of the crimes of colonial England, of the struggle of the colonized, as well as the relating of an anti-colonial movement to the revolutionary movement in the West signify a significant turn in Marx’s thinking from the *Manifesto* and 1853 articles. More pointedly, Anderson (2010) writes that Marx’s departure from lauding the supposed progressive effects of colonialism was a consequence of his “growing disillusionment with capitalism, in the sense that he no longer held as strong a belief in capitalism’s progressive effects” (Anderson, 2010,

pg.35). At this time Marx's tone becomes "mores somber, far less sanguine about capitalist progress than earlier"<sup>33</sup>.

With this shift in perspective, Anderson (2010) also notes changes in Marx's attitude toward agrarian societies such as Russia or Poland, and an interest in the revolutionary potential of movements outside the centres of industrial capitalism. Contrary to the belief that Marx reduced all politics to class and economic questions, Anderson (2010) points us to Marx's views on the national emancipation of Poland, upholding it as "a core principle for the labour and socialist movements" (Anderson, 2010, pg.239). In 1856 Marx would even describe agrarian Poland to Engels as the "external thermometer" of revolution, which is surprising if one has tended to assume that Marx was only interested in working-class movements in the industrial centres (Anderson, 2010, pg.57). This view would maintain itself with Marx till later in life, and as Anderson (2010, pg. 77) notes, as late as November 1880, Marx, and even Engels, would emphasize Poland's centrality to the European revolution.

With these shifts, revolution was no longer limited to emanating from the core of capitalism – strictly via the conflict between the bourgeoisie and proletariat classes. As with the Sepoy uprising in India, there was a recognition of the value and potential in these struggles in alliance and in relation to the movements in Western Europe. This extending of recognition beyond the Western European proletariat- as *the* revolutionary subject – would further make its way into Marx's analysis and writing on the US Civil War and on slavery in America. It is in Marx's "Civil

---

<sup>33</sup> Michael Lowy (2000) in his article "Marx's Dialectic of Progress: Closed or Open?" makes a similar argument when he attempts a rescue of Marx who is otherwise assumed to be "a prisoner of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideology of progress". Lowy (2000) instead argues that in Marx there is an "open dialectic of progress" (critical; non-teleological; fundamentally open) which is misread for a "closed dialectic of progress" (teleological; Eurocentric; 'progressive'; determinist). Like Anderson (2010) Lowy identifies the more linear notion of progress with the 1853 articles on India and the *Manifesto*. Also like Anderson, and as will be elaborated later, in Marx (at least later) there is a value afforded to aspects of pre-capitalist societies, which are lamentably destroyed by the intervening capitalist civilization.

War writings” – which as Anderson (2010, pg.79) notes have not received much discussion in the theoretical literature - that one finds in Marx not only a staunch “abolitionist perspective” but an “appreciation of African Americans as revolutionary subjects”. Anderson (2010, pg.85) notes a letter from Marx to Engels in 1860 where he writes: “In my view, the most momentous thing happening in the world today is, on the one hand, the movement among the slaves [ *Sklavenbewegung*] in America, started by the death of Brown, and the movement among the slaves in Russia, on the other...”. Marx’s appreciation of the movement among the slaves as “the most momentous thing happening in the world today” is significant to note given that, as was cited above, Robinson critiqued Marx for having a limited focus on only the industrial working class, and for disqualifying slaves, peasants, indentured workers, etc. from historical and political agency in the modern world.

For Anderson (2010, pg.82), such writings of Marx, where he values the abolitionist movement, acknowledges the movement of slaves, and recognizes the intimate connection between capitalism and slavery signifies an “intertwining of the dimensions of race and class”<sup>34</sup>.. This dialectic approach and of the concerned relationship between race, ethnicity, national emancipation and class struggle would be “hammered out” in Marx’s analyses of Ireland, having implications for his work and understanding “far beyond this particular historical juncture” (Anderson, 2010, pg.240).

In an almost contradictory position, Marx would write that agrarian Ireland, not the advanced industrialized nation of England, was now to be the “lever” of the revolution (Anderson,

---

<sup>34</sup> Anderson (2010, pg. 83) cites Marx’s letter to Pavel v. Annenkov: “Direct slavery is as much the pivot upon which our present-day industrialism turns as are machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery there would be no cotton, without cotton there would be no modern industry. It is slavery which has given value to the colonies, it is the colonies which have created world trade, and world trade is the necessary condition for large-scale machine industry... Slavery is therefore an economic category of paramount importance”.

2010, pg.144). Anderson (2010, pg.144) points us to a letter from Marx to Engels, noting the change in his position:

For a long time, I believed it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working class ascendancy. I always took this view-point in the *New York Tribune*. Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will never accomplish anything before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland...

Marx's focus here, argues Anderson, shifts from a focus on the societies comprising the core of capitalism, to including those societies peripheral to capitalism, which in their struggles in the periphery could "become sparks that might very well go off in advance of the workers' revolution in the industrially developed societies. Together, these two types of struggles could bring about a radical transcendence of the capitalist system itself" (Anderson, 2010, pg.151). In the specific case of Ireland, the struggle for Irish national emancipation was an important prerequisite for the greater potential of the British labour movement. British workers were imbued with such a "false consciousness" through their nationalist pride and arrogance over the Irish, that it was "binding them to the dominant classes of Britain, and thus attenuating class conflict within British society" (Anderson, 2010, pg.240). This could only be broken, it was believed, through advocating support for Irish independence on the part of British labour. Not only would this help break the bonds between British workers and the ruling class, but would help unite the British working class which included a significant amount of Irish immigrant labour (Anderson, 2010). Thus here we read a more nuanced conception of class conflict than is read in the *Manifesto*.

As we have noted above, the dimensions of class conflict, or the protected designation of revolutionary agency, were not the only points of revision in Marx. Part of Marx's progression also included a growing disillusionment with the progressive aspects of capitalism, and relatedly,



a more complex account of historical development than was outlined in earlier writings such as the *Manifesto* or the *German Ideology* (Anderson, 2010).

As Anderson (2010, pg.154-195) notes however, these developments may easily be dismissed as insignificant when related to Marx's larger theoretical work or critique of political economy, given the nature of the evidence presented: we have drawn mostly on Marx's letters, journalistic articles, speeches, excerpt notes, etc. Nonetheless, we are pointed to revisions and examples in some of Marx's major works that indicate that these concerns and evolving stances toward pre-capitalist and non-western societies were in fact central to his critique. One such text is Marx's *Grundrisse* where Anderson (2010) points us to multilinear themes concerning pre-capitalist societies and modes of production, either in terms of their arrangement as historical stages of development, or in terms of their portrayal which takes on a more "neutral tone". In terms of stages of development, Anderson (2010, pg.156) argues that Marx no longer tried to fit what he described as the "Asian form" into historically Western European stages of development, "which ran in a straight line from 'clan or tribal', to 'ancient' to 'feudal', and on to modern bourgeois forms of society". Instead, in a text like the *Grundrisse* there is an attempt to trace out distinct courses of development through history, the Asiatic- the Greco-Roman – the Germanic, without the attempt of a supra-historical (arguably Eurocentric) path for all peoples, at all times.

As well, aside from developing a more multilinear vision of historical stages of development, in the *Grundrisse* we see Marx change his tone concerning non-western and pre-capitalist communal forms, instead behaving "neutrally, or even a bit sympathetically" (Anderson, 2010, pg.156). For example, in reference to the Indian village, in 1853 Marx described it as a source of "Oriental despotism", but in the *Grundrisse* (1857-1858) - the writing of which coincides with the shifts in attitude we noted in his journalistic writings – Marx would focus more on its

*communal* aspects: of property and labour. Instead of the presumption that traditional society embodied no positive factors, Marx would, for example, begin to note the stability of the ancient Indian village, even referring to the possibility of a more democratic form of this communal system (Anderson, 2010, pg.157). And at the ending of the *Grundrisse*, Marx goes so far as terming pre-capitalist communal property forms as a “naturally arisen communism” (as cited in Anderson, 2010, pg.160). Drawing on the work of George Lichtheim, Anderson (2010) here notes that the recognition of “some genuine virtue” in something like the ancient Indian village was coinciding with Marx’s “growing hostility to capitalism”.

These multilinear themes would also find their way in Marx’s *magnum opus*, *Capital: Volume I*, particularly the French edition (1872-75), which was the last one he personally prepared for publication, and which he would note “contains many important changes and additions” (as cited in Anderson, 2010, pg.175). There are “two important alterations” that Anderson (2010, pg. 178) notes, and which I will reproduce here in contrast to excerpts from the English and German edition. First the German/English edition excerpt on the relation between industrialized and non-industrialized societies: “The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future” (*Capital I*, 91; emphasis added)” (As cited in Anderson, 2010, pg.177). By contrast, the French edition contains an alteration of the above excerpt, which instead reads: “The country that is more developed industrially only shows, *to those that follow it on the industrial path*, the image of its own future (emphasis added)” (as cited in Anderson, 2010, pg.178). In reference to this change, Anderson (2010, pg.178) writes:

I see two possibilities here. First, it could be argued that this textual alteration was a clarification on Marx’s part of a position he had already arrived at by 1867. A second, more likely possibility is that this change from 1867 to 1872 is an example of the evolution of his thought away from the implicit unilinearism of the Manifesto, a process that had been underway since the 1850s.

A second altered excerpt to be taken into account from Marx's *Capital: Volume 1*, chapter 26 "The Secret of Primitive Accumulation", reads in the German/English edition:

The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process. The history of this expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs. *Only in England, which we therefore take as our example, has it the classic form* (emphasis added) (as cited in Anderson, 2010, pg. 179).

By contrast the French edition reworked the original passage extensively. The revised excerpt reads:

But the basis of this whole development is the expropriation of the cultivators. *So far, it has been carried out in a radical manner only in England: therefore this country will necessarily play the leading role in our sketch. But all the countries of Western Europe are going through the same development*, although in accordance with the particular environment it changes its local color, or confines itself to a narrower sphere, or shows a less pronounced character, or follows a different order of succession (emphasis added) (as cited in Anderson, 2010, pg.179).

What do we make of this alteration? Anderson (2010, pg. 179) writes: "This altered text made clear, as far as Marx was concerned, that his narrative of primitive accumulation was meant as a description of Western European development, nothing more, and hardly a global grand narrative". The specification or limitation of Marx's analysis to Western Europe and to European history responds to criticisms such as Robinson's (2000) that charge Marxism with the imposing of a European narrative onto a supposed universal grand narrative. There were similar criticisms that were raised in Marx's own time, albeit not expressed in the same way as it is contemporarily. The Russian Populists for example, coming from an agrarian and predominantly peasant society, questioned the necessity of Russia having to tread the same brutal and disciplining path through capitalist development on the road to socialism. Was this a universal – and *necessary* - series of stages of development? Or could the Russian commune itself behave as the site of the kinds of

struggle that would allow a people and a society to move into the realm of what in *On the Jewish Question* Marx distinguished as *genuine* human emancipation?

As Anderson (2010, pg. 196) informs us, such questions were of interest to Marx, not only for reasons relating to his growing disillusionment with the progressive potentials of the capitalist mode of production, but also due to debates spurred by the Russian translation of *Capital* in 1872, and following the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871. The latter would move Marx to focus “on forms of resistance to capital outside Western Europe and North America”. It is in this context that Marx would make perhaps his most direct statements concerning the possibilities of a socialist transformation in predominantly peasant and agrarian non-western societies, which can be read in his 1881 correspondence with Russian writer and revolutionary Vera Zasulich.

In her letter to Marx, Zasulich would seek advice from no less an authority on the fate of the rural commune (Shanin, 1983). Was the Russian *Obschina* “destined to perish” in the face of an expanding global capitalism? And more pointedly, was the demise of the commune something necessary in order for Russian society to reach the adequate level of development – as in Western Europe – before it could develop in a socialist direction? Marx prepared four drafts of a response to Zasulich before finally sending a reply. His response directed Zasulich to the French edition of *Capital*, and to the excerpt cited above which restricts his outline of the genesis of capitalist production to Western Europe, thus distancing his general analysis from the Russian question: “The analysis in *Capital* therefore provides no reasons either for or against the vitality of the Russian commune” (Shanin, 1983). Nonetheless, Marx intervenes into the question, stating that:

...the special study I have made of it [Russian commune], including a search for original source material, has convinced me that the commune is the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia. But in order that it might function as such, the harmful influences assailing it on all sides must first be eliminated, and it must then be assured the normal conditions for spontaneous development (Shanin, 1983).

The specification of his analysis in *Capital*, and his validation of the potential of the commune in Russia is significant for the reasons we have stated earlier. The response to Zasulich is itself vague, but more insight can be found in the 1882 “Preface” to the Russian edition of the *Manifesto*, signed by Marx and Engels, which once again takes up the question of the commune, but here specifies in greater detail the “important *proviso*” as Anderson (2010, pg.224) puts it, which would require the necessity of a linkage between any such movement in Russia with the proletariat movement in the industrial West:

Now the question is: can the Russian *obshchina*, though greatly undermined, yet a form of primeval common ownership of land, pass directly to the higher form of Communist common ownership? Or, on the contrary, must it first pass through the same process of dissolution such as constitutes the historical evolution of the West? The only answer to that possible today is this: If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development.

For Anderson (2010, pg.236), such a condition of *possibility* need not be strictly limited to Russia alone, since for him the evidence of Marx’s evolving positions points to the belief in a potential for movements in the direction of socialism in places like India and other non-Western pre-capitalist societies. The provided evidence can be tallied as such: Marx’s growing disillusionment with the progressive nature of capitalism; his support for revolutionary and anti-colonial movements; his validation of movements for national emancipation (not reducible to class politics); his note on the revolutionary significance of “the movement among the slaves”; and his denial of the construction of a supra-historical theory of development. All of these, according to Anderson (2010) point to a multilinear, non-deterministic, non-teleological theory of development and liberation.

And yet, why the *proviso* when it came to the potential of the Russian commune? And if it is correct to say that Marx came to theorize the potential for “noncapitalist societies” to “move

directly to socialism on the basis of their indigenous communal forms, without first passing through the stages of capitalism” (Anderson, 2010, pg.224), then what are we to make of the *scientific* uniqueness of the *socialism* of Marx and Engels as opposed to the their utopian predecessors? And if we are to accept multilinearity, then do we not go beyond the domain of geography and into temporality, too? How then do we account for, as Engels would put it, the individual man of genius – who has realized pure reason, justice and truth - not having arrived 500 years earlier, and thus sparing humanity 500 years of error, strife and suffering? (Engels, 1978, pg.685). It is with these questions that we begin the next sub-section of this dissertation, which will seek to clarify some of the fundamental principles of the philosophy of Marx and Engels.

## Section Two: Unilinearity and the Negation of the Negation

### Chapter 3: The Hegelian Dialectic

The description included in the title of Section Two, “negation of the negation”, is meant to grasp the outcome – not as a finality, but as an infinitely progressing moment - of the Hegelian dialectic: the dialectical progression through which what is immediate – the *in itself* – through its determinate<sup>35</sup> relation to *something else* - is negated or sublated (*Aufheben*)<sup>36</sup>, and what is the *something else* in this relation, through its determinate relation to what we have taken as the original “what is”, is also negated, thus giving rise to something new; something which represents a “higher” (Gardner, 2015) or further progression by virtue of its reconciliation of the existing antagonism or contradiction, into a unity. It is a resolution however which in its own determinateness, is equally only a *potentiality* which is thus equally subject to negation, leading to a further progressive resolution, i.e. negation of the negation, and so on *ad infinitum*<sup>37</sup>.

---

<sup>35</sup> Determinate/determinateness is not so much the verb of a thing, but its very quality. It is essentially through its determinate quality – its determinateness – that it is undone; negated/sublated. Thus in this chapter when we refer to “determinate” we are using it both in the sense of the noun *Bestimmtheit*, and the verb *bestimmen* (to determine). See Michael Inwood’s *A Hegel Dictionary* (1992,pg. 77-79) for more on this otherwise complex term in Hegel.

<sup>36</sup> In his *Hegel: Glossary*, Sebastian Gardner (2015) notes the German *Aufheben* to be translated as either “sublate”, “superseded”, and “sublimate”. As a term, “it incorporates the senses of (i) to cancel out, abolish, do away with, or reverse (a judgement), (ii) to keep or preserve, and (iii) to lift or raise up. Sublation connotes progress, by virtue of (i)-(iii): when something is sublated, it is not done away with but retained and preserved in the higher product which supersedes it”.

<sup>37</sup> I have chosen to take a moment to describe the movement of the dialectic in this way even though for Hegel, the very objective character of the external world is always taken to be “the work of self-consciousness”, i.e., it obtains its very existence through self-consciousnesses externalization and separation of itself. As will be clarified as we proceed through this section, this means that even though what has been described in this first paragraph as the movement of the dialectic, it should not presume a kind of metaphysical statement about the inherent character of reality itself since that would suggest a dialectical movement outside of the machinations of thought. Instead, the movement is best understood as the movement of “concepts”, and the contradictions and the overcoming of contradictions as the impulse and activity of thought itself. It is thus through reflection on concepts that contradiction emerges, and it is through reflection and thought that a contradiction is overcome. Nonetheless, I think it is useful to include this entry by Glenn Alexander Magee (pg.66) in his *The Hegel Dictionary* under the definition of “Contradiction”: “Hegel also often speaks not just of thought as involving contradiction, but reality as well. Perhaps the most famous example of this occurs in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, where Hegel tells us that ‘the Bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom, and one might say that the former is refuted by the

In Hegel's (1977, pg.108) *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he describes this dialectic movement as the "simple substance of Life"; it is the very activity that constitutes Life. Rather than a collection of distinct and inert objects that relate to each other externally and causally, as if confronting each other as already existing beings-in-themselves, *Life* is a developing and related process; Life is "a *living thing*" (1977, pg.105). Life is the relating of moments, of concepts, and is given movement through negation and contradiction. Life, then, is not the interaction of static Things, but "Thing's" that have as their "*absolute character*" only this opposition or relation to *other* things. A Thing is "essentially only this relating", and yet this relating "is the negation of its [the Thing's] self-subsistence, and it is really the essential property of the Thing that is its undoing" (Hegel, 1977, pg.76).

This is perhaps what prompted Marx (1978, pg.143) to write in his Thesis No. 1, of his 11 *Theses on Feuerbach*, that in contrast to the objecthood and thinghood that characterized reality in a materialist philosophical system such as Feuerbach's, it was idealism – and here he is referring to Hegel and Hegelianism - that must be credited with developing "the *active* side", albeit abstractly. Active because reality was conceived of as activity and development. Abstractly, because it was not "real, sensuous activity as such", but only abstract mental activity.

To clarify, for Hegel, the Things that we spoke of, were not *themselves* progressing through a series of negations and contradictions, only to arrive at or emerge at higher forms. This would in an instance presuppose that there was some form of *objective* movement to *Life* which was distinct from *us*, human beings; the perceiving, philosophizing, intuiting subjects. In the footsteps of Kant

---

latter; similarly when the fruit appears, the blossom is shown up in its turn as a false manifestation of the plant, and the fruit now emerges as the truth of it instead'....For Hegel negation and opposition are an inherent part of all things, and all change and development- indeed, the realization of the Absolute itself – come about through their agency".



(1999), Hegel maintained that the sensuous was only ever the phenomenal<sup>38</sup> – so much Kant had laboured to prove. Yet though Kant was deemed right to declare that “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind”<sup>39</sup> (Hegel, 1977\*, pg.68), the resultant form in which the Kantian system presented itself maintained a separation of the subject, the “I think” (Hegel, 1977\*, pg.75), from Object, “the non-Ego”. It is true that for Kant the “object” of our experience existed only as something for the perceiving subject, organized by the universal categories of space and time with which we as “rational subjects” furnish our experience. Yet, the “thing in itself”, what lay outside of experience, still existed beyond the subject, as “absolute”, and “without any further categorical determinateness” (Hegel, 1977\*, pg.75). With this the “absolute identity of the subject and object has passed into this formal identity”, and they are “identical only as sun and stone are in respect to warmth when the sun warms the stone” (Hegel, 1977\*, pg.75). Kant’s philosophical system thus rested at this disparity between the subject and the thing-in- itself, and was thus unable to account for a means for consciousness to ever grasp the reality that lay beyond the object as it was experienced by the subject<sup>40</sup>.

---

<sup>38</sup> “The Kantian philosophy has the merit of being idealism [326] because it does show that neither the concept in isolation nor the intuition in isolation is anything at all; that intuition by itself is blind and the concept by itself is empty...” (Hegel, 1977\*, pg 68).

<sup>39</sup> Kant from the *Critique of Pure Reason* as cited in Hegel’s (1977\*) “Faith and Knowledge”

<sup>40</sup> Marcuse (1986, pg.pg.7) would describe this as Kant’s skepticism or cutting short of Reason’s capacity to “grasp the real”; thus leaving “reason...a mere subjective principle without power over the objective structure of reality” (Marcuse, 1986, pg.23). But this is not wholly accurate, nor adequately captures Hegel’s dissatisfaction with Kant on this score. Kant had in fact managed to devise a means of moving beyond mere subjectivity by claiming that though we cannot have insight into the realm of things-in-themselves, we do have insight into one “fact” of reason which is the categorical imperative: “Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” (Kant,2002, pg.37). The moral law as the only “fact of reason” is given primacy as the supreme principle of “practical reason” from which certain postulates can be formulated which are related to it. These “practical postulates” which were otherwise insufficiently attempted to be reasoned out by “theoretical reason” are now given the status of necessary conditions in relation to the moral law. For example, the existence of God is a postulate given credence not via some theoretical or speculative exercise of reason (either through an argument of intelligent design, or cosmological argument, or mathematic formula) which would assume our having insight into the *real*, but instead only because it exists as something necessary in relation to the moral law – its necessity is derived from the moral law (Kant, 1998). Hegel, in his *Faith and Knowledge*, criticizes Kantian philosophy

For Hegel, however, the objects of sense, “sensuous things”, like this pencil on my desk, did not possess an “intrinsic being” that was distinct from consciousness, in the sense imputed by Kant as the thing in itself. Sure the “pencil” is furnished by my subjective comprehension of it, but it does not exist as some-*thing* that exists beyond or before my reach. It is not an *is*, without me. Nor am I, the perceiving subject, a distinct and detached entity in relation to the object. The very categories of “object” and “subject” are, Hegel says, “inept” in that they only “signify what they are outside of their unity...since in their unity they are not meant to be what their expression says they are” (Hegel, 1977, pg.23).

But in such a unity of subject and object, do we not step even further away from insight into the True and the *real* as is required by objectivity? Is our *comprehension* then, due to the very nature of our *being* and consciousness, not entirely relative? Our experience of the object, still, only what it is for the subject? And more so, is my very *being* here simply something fleeting that exists only for and in relation to the object? What room exists in such determinate relation for Reason and claim to Truth? And, we add another question, perhaps the most obvious of them: If there is indeed no disparity of subject and object, then why and how do we account for the very fact that *I* am able to distinguish myself as an ‘I’ in opposition to the object of my sense: the pencil?

The resolution to these questions arises when we note that in Hegel, the disparity between the ‘I’ and the “substance which is its object” is relegated to only a stage in the dialectical progression of consciousness. For Hegel, it is only in going beyond sense-certainty or the notion that the objects we experience possess some intrinsic being that represents the highest wisdom,

---

for dealing with such Ideals of Reason as “mere possibilities of thought and as transcendent concepts lacking all reality” (Hegel, 1977\*, pg. 67), which he argues, rest on “a universal subjective postulate never to be realized”. This, for Hegel, did not reflect or afford the kind of “true objectivity” that is the supposed to the proper starting point of philosophy. Further, see also Onara O’Neill (1989) on Kant’s Categorical Imperative as the “common principle” of reason that can be used as a kind of yardstick for our thinking.

and yet its obviousness is evident even for animals, “And all Nature” which “celebrates these open Mysteries which teach the truth about sensuous things” (Hegel, 1977, pg.65). In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel (1977, pg.65) writes on the doubting of “the being of sensuous things” as so easily evidenced to animals:

Even animals are not shut out from this wisdom but, on the contrary, show themselves to be most profoundly initiated into it; for they do not just stand idly in front of sensuous things as if these possessed intrinsic being, but, despairing of their reality, and completely assured of their nothingness, they fall to without ceremony and eat them up.

The story of human experience however is far more complex for Hegel, as the human – not the individual “I” which is really a nought – but *Geist*, translated into English as Spirit<sup>41</sup> – the collective human essence (Wood, 1991, pg.374) – must laboriously *arrive* at this open mystery; this “knowledge of it’s own nature” (Wood, 1991, pg. 374). The human, like animals, initially emerges in nature in a kind of “simple unity” (Inwood, 1992, pg.37; Magee, 2010, pg.227), but Spirit then “raises itself out of the merely natural world through reflection on nature and on itself” (Magee, 2010, pg.227). In this reflection, Spirit, from its immediate existence as *consciousness*, falls into alienation – *Entäusserung*<sup>42</sup> - and makes external the objects of consciousness which are really only itself, though which now confront it as something external, and in that very

---

<sup>41</sup> The definition of *Spirit* in Hegel is sometimes contentious. According to Glenn Alexander Magee (pg.226) in his *The Hegel Dictionary*, “Spirit means for Hegel something close to what we mean by ‘human nature’”. But this is not in the sense of a fixed, timeless or ahistorical human nature, but rather, “Spirit refers to the *unique* form of consciousness possessed by human beings” [*emphasis added*] (Magee, 2010, pg.227). I emphasize the word “unique” because as will be elaborated further, Spirit in Hegel can be described as historical in that it is in a process of realization; it is “always engaged in moving forward”, never at rest. This is why Cyril Smith (1999) defines Hegel’s Spirit as ‘the totality of human life and *activity*’. This is also why in the same piece, Allen Wood (1991, pg.375) can, without contradiction, describe Spirit as the “collective human essence”, and as “essentially the search for knowledge of its own nature, and the quest to actualize the nature it knows”. Spirit as the collective human essence is essentially this self-developing activity.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Inwood (1992, pg.36) in his *A Hegel Dictionary*, notes the definition of *Entäusserung* as “to make OUTER or external”, surrender or “divestiture”, i.e. a voluntary disposal of ones own property. *Entäusserung* is related but distinct from *Entfremdung* – to “make alien” or estrangement – where the latter, according to Chris Arthur (1986) is better understood as “the phenomenological result to the active process of spirit’s positing of itself in otherness”.

confrontation gives consciousness its very identity as self-consciousness. If we are to use a Biblical analogy to make this clearer, we would describe this moment as the Fall of humankind, which like Adam and Eve, previously enjoyed a unity with God in paradise, but was now cast out<sup>43</sup>.

In this separation of subject and object that is reflective of our alienated condition - this “disparity which exists in consciousness between the ‘I’ and the substance which is its object” (Hegel, 1977, pg.21) – there is however a productive element. Hegel notes that though the apparent “disparity” is the defect in both subject and object, it is, as the negative principle between them, also “their soul, or that which moves them” (Hegel, 1977, pg.21). As we noted at the start of this sub-section, the “moving principle” of the dialectic is the negative, and that that which exists in determinate relation to something other, is through this relation negated: transcended and abolished, yet preserved and raised up. Negation thus gives rise to a higher or further relation.

Though we earlier described this outcome of the dialectic, the negation of the negation, as a potentially infinite series of negations and progressions, there is in Hegel a finality or a “coming to be” in which self-alienated spirit resolves the contradictions and returns to a unity<sup>44</sup>; not the

---

<sup>43</sup> Our reference is more than incidentally analogous because as Glenn Alexander Magee (2001) notes in his *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, Hegel was profoundly influenced by the 16<sup>th</sup> century German Christian Mystic Jacob Böhme, who Hegel described as “the first German philosopher” and whose theosophy was “one of the most remarkable attempts of a penetrating yet uncultivated man to comprehend the innermost essential nature of the absolute being” (2001, pg.133). Böhme, we are told by Magee (2001, pg.43) read in the myth of the Garden of Eden that “man *must* fall because the unity man enjoys with God in paradise is an *unthinking, unreflective*, and thus inferior unity. Man must become alienated from God and *return* to a higher state of unity, in *full consciousness* of his nature and the nature of God”. Nonetheless, Hegel maintains that Böhme’s theosophy was still limited, and approached the truth only very closely but was not quite there yet due to the “sensuous” mode of its expression.

<sup>44</sup> Self-alienated because Spirit is not alienated, but is itself the alienating movement: “..Spirit becomes object because it is just this movement of becoming an other to itself, i.e., becoming an object to itself, and of suspending this otherness. And experience is the name we give to just this movement, in which the immediate, the unexperienced, i.e. the abstract whether it be of sensuous [but still unsensed] being, or only thought of as simple, becomes alienated from itself and then returns to itself from this alienation....” (Hegel, 1977, pg.21). Another excerpt that captures this dimension of Spirit in Hegel – Spirit not as a thing, but itself as the process – comes from his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*: “The human being is essentially spirit, and spirit is essentially this: to be for oneself, to be free, setting oneself over against the natural, withdrawing oneself from immersion in nature,

“simple unity” from which it emerged, but a “differentiated unity”; a higher and conscious union (Inwood, 1992, pg.36); a “spiritual oneness” that only “comes forth out of severed being” (Hegel, pg.212). At this higher unity Spirit has:

...made its existence identical with its essence; it has itself for its object just as it is, and the abstract element of immediacy, and of the separation of knowing and truth, is overcome. Being is then absolutely mediated; it is a substantial content which is just as immediately the property of the ‘I’, it is self-like or the Notion. With this, the Phenomenology of Spirit has concluded” (Hegel, 1977, pg.21).

In *The Phenomenology* Hegel (1977) traces out what Chris Arthur (1983, pg.71) has aptly described as a “spiritual odyssey”, where we are presented with the progressive stages through which the self- development of spirit proceeds as it labours its way toward “Absolute knowledge” – its conclusion. If negation is the moving principle of the dialectic, it is the goal of Spirit which gives it purpose:

The goal is Spirit’s insight into what knowing is. Impatience demands the impossible, to wit, the attainment of the end without the means. But the length of this path has to be endured, because, for one thing, each moment is necessary; and further, each moment has to be lingered over, because each is itself a complete individual shape, and one is only viewed in absolute perspective when its determinateness is regarded as a concrete whole, or the whole is regarded as uniquely qualified by that determination (Hegel, 1977, pg.17).

Absolute Knowing as the dissolution of the disparity between knowing and truth, subject and object, being and essence, is a unity then, that is arrived at; that has endured, because, each moment in this odyssey leading up to its goal is necessary and gives to Spirit “the spiritually developed consciousness” and the “widespread wealth of its moments” that differentiate it from “the simplicity of the natural heart” (Hegel, 1977, pg.319). Without having progressed and laboured through these necessary moments of alienation, of negation and progress, a unity of Spirit

---

severing oneself from nature and only reconciling oneself with nature for the first time through this severance and on the basis of it; and not only with nature but with one’s own essence too, or with one’s truth. We make this truth objective to ourselves, set it over against us, sever ourselves from it, and through this severance we reconcile ourselves with it” (Hegel, pg 212-213)

would be only a “relapse into the wilderness of the nearly animal consciousness, which is also called Nature or innocence” (Hegel, 1977, pg.319).

By way of historical and logically necessary stages on the path to real Science – from sensuous immediacy to “absolute knowledge” – Hegel had created a philosophical system that allowed for the possibility of human self-consciousness<sup>45</sup> to attain the kind of certainty and Truth that was denied in Kantian philosophy<sup>46</sup>, which in its attempt to rescue Reason from the scepticism of empirical philosophy, was forced to posit a universe that was “impenetrable by human thought” (Robinson, 2019, pg.85). Yet in devising a philosophical system that relied on the dialectic relation between concepts – thus allowing for the articulation of their possible union and so of their ultimate objective correspondence –Hegel granted predominance to consciousness, which as we will see, would initiate the intervention by Marx and his critique of the Hegelian dialectic’s abstract and mystical form; its betrayal of the truly revolutionary potential of the dialectic and the germ of its “uncritical positivism” (Marx, 1978, pg.111).

If we recall, Hegel (1966, pg. 21) would describe the disparity between the ‘I’ and the substance which is its object as one existing “in consciousness [emphasis added]”. The reality, the encountered objects of sense, or what we would conventionally describe as externalized matter,

---

<sup>45</sup> It should be clarified that there is a distinction in Hegel between “consciousness” (*Bewusstsein*) and “self-consciousness” (*Selbstbewusstsein*). *Consciousness* refers to an initial stage denoted by simple awareness of objects. *Self-Consciousness* however emerges as “awareness of the self”, which comes about “not through *knowing* objects but through acting on them – acting to change or to overcome them” (Magee, 2010, pg.215). This is where Hegel introduces the term “desire” which he uses to “describe a primal, human will to alter objects in order to bring them into accord with the subject’s wishes” (Magee, 2010, pg. 215). But as Magee (2010, pg.215) puts the question, what has desire to do with self-consciousness or awareness of self? And he answers: “When we desire we are always aware of ourselves desiring. My hunger, for example – my desire to gobble up edible objects – makes me aware of myself”. Though, as Gardner (2015) notes, Hegel also sometimes uses the term “consciousness” (*Bewußtsein*) generically. In this paper too, when referring to the role and place of human consciousness in the dialectic and in its relation to objects, I have chosen to use the term generically, as Marx (1978) does in his engagement with Hegelian philosophy in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

<sup>46</sup> “...when Kantian philosophy happens upon Ideas in its normal course, it deals with them as mere possibilities of thought and as transcendent concepts lacking all reality, and soon drops them again as mere empty thoughts” (Hegel, 1977\*, pg. 66).

with which consciousness exists in relation, was only ever for consciousness and is never taken as objective in itself; hence why Marx (1978, pg.117) writes of the Hegelian system that: “Knowing is its sole act. Something therefore comes to be for consciousness in so far as the latter knows this something”. The dichotomous language, of subject and object, that we use to unravel the Hegelian system can therefore sometimes be misleading in presuming, even if for a moment, that there is some inherency to either or - subject or object. But that is why Hegel himself, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, behaves repetitively at times, constantly reminding the reader that the distinction is really one which is not. And yet, the determinate relation between subject and object is very real in Hegel; it is the very disparity between the two that supplies the negative element; the life force and movement of the dialectic. As Inwood (1992, pg.62) notes, it is consciousness’ very awareness of this discrepancy between itself and its object that “brings about the advance to a new form, whose object is the previous form of consciousness”. But what do we make of this reciprocal subject as object, and object as other relation that seems to exist within itself? In his “Foreword” to the *Phenomenology*, J.N. Findlay (1977, pg. xix) writes that for Hegel, in the relation between matter and mind, it is matter - in the “limited repertoire” we ascribe to it and as “pitiable ‘other’” - that is overreached and reduced to consciousness and spirit, which is instead “richer and more intrinsically intelligible”. Yet, the logic behind this reductionism in Hegel is still not so clear<sup>47</sup>.

---

<sup>47</sup> For more insight, and perhaps more questions regarding the relation between the subject and the “external world”, I find it useful to refer to this excerpt from Hegel’s (1977, pg.294/295) section “Culture” in the *Phenomenology*: “...the Spirit whose self is an absolutely discrete unity has its content confronting it as an equally hard unyielding reality, and here the world has the character of being something external, the negative of self-consciousness. This world is, however, a spiritual entity, it is in itself the interfusion of being and individuality; this its existence is the *work* of self-consciousness, but it is also an alien reality already present and given, a reality which has a being of its own and in which it does not recognize itself. This real world...this external world...[...]... obtains its existence through self-consciousness’s *own* externalization and separation of itself from its essence which, in the ruin and devastation which prevail in the world of legal right, seems to inflict on self consciousness

## Chapter 4: Marx's Critique of Hegel's Abstraction

For Marx (1978, pg.116) this kind of reduction in Hegel, where the disparity between objects exists simply within itself - i.e. that there is the existence of a being (consciousness) that has “no object outside of itself” (Marx, 1978, pg.116); that “does not have its nature outside of itself” – essentially results in something “unreal, nonsensical...something merely thought of (merely imagined, that is) - a creature of abstraction” (Marx, 1978, pg.116). In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx (1978, pg.116) writes:

A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a natural being, and plays no part in the system of nature. A being which has no object outside itself is not an objective being. A being which is not itself an object for some third being has no being for its object; i.e., it is not objectively related. Its be-ing is not objective. An unobjective being is a nullity – an un-being. Suppose a being which is neither an object itself, nor has an object. Such a being, in the first place, would be the unique being: there would exist no being outside it – it would exist solitary and alone. For as soon as there are objects outside me, as soon as I am not alone, I am another- another reality than the object outside me. For this third object I am thus an other reality than it; that is, I am its object. Thus, to suppose a being which is not the object of another being is to presuppose that no objective being exists.

A defender of Hegel could retort to Marx, however, that the determinate relation of the subject to the object – where the subject has its being in a sense outside of itself - is not something ignored in Hegel since as Inwood (1992, pg.62) reminds us, consciousness in Hegel is never

---

from without the violence of the liberated elements. These by themselves are sheer ruin and devastation and the dissolution of themselves. This dissolution, however, this negative nature of theirs, is just the self; it is their subject, their activity, and their process. But this activity and process whereby the substance becomes *actual* is the alienation of the personality, for the self that has an absolute significance in its *immediate* existence, i.e. without having alienated itself from itself, is without substance, and is the plaything of those raging elements. *Its* substance, therefore, is its externalization, and the externalization is the substance, i.e. the spiritual powers ordering themselves into a world and thereby preserving themselves. Substance is in this way *Spirit*, the self-conscious unity of the self and essence; each has for the other the significance of alienation. Spirit is the *consciousness* of an objective real world freely existing on its own account; but this consciousness is confronted by the unity of the self and essence, *actual* consciousness by *pure* consciousness. On the one side, actual self-consciousness, through its externalization, passes over into the actual world, and the latter back into actual self-consciousness. On the other side, this same actuality – both person and objectivity – is superseded; they are purely universal. This their alienation is *pure consciousness* or *essence*. The *present* actual world has its anti-thesis directly in its *beyond*, which is both the thinking of it and its thought-form, just as the beyond has in the present world its actuality, but an actuality alienated from it”.



something uniform or unaltered, but rather “the character of consciousness varies with that of its objects”. As well, in its progression from *Bewusstsein* (simple awareness of objects) to *Selbstbewusstsein* (the certainty of self), and so on, until Spirit reaches its Absolute form, the various determinate relations that consciousness manoeuvres through in relation to the external world are “...more practical than cognitive: desire (an endless process of consuming sensory objects); a struggle [the master-slave dialectic] for RECOGNITION by another self-consciousness and the enslavement of the vanquished by the victor; and, in PS [The Phenomenology], disregarding the external world (STOICISM), denying its existence (SCEPTICISM), and projecting the essential features of oneself and the world into a transcendent realm (the unhappy consciousness)...”(Inwood, 1992, pg. 62).

One could then argue against Marx, maintaining that Hegel does not risk lapsing into an unobjectivity - into un-being - because the being (consciousness) is always determined in relation to an “object” and so in many ways has its nature outside of itself – that is, it plays its part in the system of nature. But the resolution is still quite vague. For Marx (1978, pg. 66-126), whose intervention we are primarily concerned with here, and who we are apt to agree with, the understanding was that in Hegel “the object of consciousness is nothing else but self-consciousness, or that the object is only objectified self-consciousness – self-consciousness as object” (Marx, 1978, pg.112).

Thus, if in Hegel objectivity, not the character of objectivity but objectivity as such – that is the very existence of objecthood (of *Objekt*<sup>48</sup>) – is a consequence of human estrangement, then the logic follows that objectivity does not correspond to the “essence of man”, who can then only be regarded as a “non-objective, spiritual being” (Marx, 1978, pg.113). This is why Marx critiques

---

<sup>48</sup> See Inwood ( 1992, pg.203).

in Hegel the supposition that the essence of man equals self-consciousness; it is man as the self-abstracted; man as “abstract egoist – egoism raised in its pure abstraction to the level of thought” (Marx, 1978, pg.113); devoid of any objective sense.

Part of the limitation then, in Hegel, stems from this consequent reduction of the essence of the human to self-consciousness; the human appearing “only in the shape of mind” (Marx, 1978, pg.111). For Marx, this was not “real Man” – man as a “natural being”; “corporeal man, man with his feet firmly on the solid ground, man exhaling and inhaling all the forces of nature...” (Marx, 1978, pg.115). In Hegel there is only the abstraction of this otherwise corporeal man; the idea of man, or man only as idea.

Thus confined within the realm of thought, Hegelian idealism did not know “real, sensuous activity as such ” for in it, thought only imagined itself to be “directly the other of itself, to be sensuous reality”. But as Marx would write: “Sinnlich sein ist leidend sein”<sup>49</sup> (Marx, 1978, pg.116). The human, as “an objective sensuous being” and therefore a “suffering being” (Marx, 1978, pg.116) has external to them, and in relation to them, objects – “objects independent of him” though which are “indispensable to the manifestation and confirmation of his essential powers” (Marx, 1978, pg.115). To clarify the meaning of this objective relation, Marx (1978, pg.116) employs the analogy of the sun and the plant: “The sun is the object of the plant – an indispensable object to it, confirming its life – just as the plant is an object of the sun, being an expression of the life-awakening power of the sun, of the sun’s objective essential power”.

Just as the sun or the plant, in what Marx terms “the act of establishing” (Marx, 1978, pg.115), the human as sensuous, real, objective being is in turn established by the objects that she

---

<sup>49</sup> “To be sensuous is to suffer”. Robert C. Tucker (1978), in his edited collection *The Marx-Engels Reader* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) includes a clarifying footnote: “Here ‘to suffer’ [*leidend*] should probably be understood in the sense of ‘to undergo’ – to be the object of another’s action”.

establishes. The basic reality and obviousness of this relation is further evidenced in Marx's simple yet profound note on hunger: "Hunger is a natural need; it therefore needs a nature outside itself, an object outside itself, in order to satisfy itself, to be stilled. Hunger is an acknowledged need of my body for an object existing outside it, indispensable to its integration and to the expression of its essential being" (Marx, 1978, pg.115/116).

This externality of nature- of sense objects – is here taken productively by Marx, rather than, as with Hegel, as "something defective" (Marx, 1978, pg.125) which exists in contrast to thought and as a shadow of human alienation<sup>50</sup>. But this externality of nature, or of the objects of impulse and activity should not be mistaken as distinct from corporeal or objective human. We are not dealing with the object in Marx in the strict Feuerbachian sense, that would want to posit really distinct objects from the human. To step back to the analogy of the sun and plant, we see that there is no sun existing in itself only to react upon an objectively existing plant. Instead, the sun is indispensable to the plant, confirming its very life potential, and the plant confirms the "life-awakening" power of the sun. The plant as such would not exist as the plant without the sun. As an object, it is always an object of and for another (Marx, 1978, pg.116). This is why in discussing humankind, Marx (1978, pg.115) maintains that the human is not some thing in relation to nature: "...at bottom he is nature". This relating of objects permeates every aspect of existence, and we

---

<sup>50</sup> On this account, Marx is indebted to Feuerbach whom he credited as "...the true conqueror of the old philosophy" (Marx, 1978, pg.107). We get a sense of this indebtedness in Engels' *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* when he writes of Feuerbach's revelation: "Nature exists independently of all philosophy. It is the foundation upon which we human beings, ourselves products of nature, have grown up. Nothing exists outside nature and man, and the higher beings our religious fantasies have created are only the fantastic reflection of our own essence. The spell was broken; the 'system' was exploded and cast aside, and the contradiction, shown to exist only in our imagination, was dissolved. One must himself have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general; we all became at once Feuerbachians" (Engels, 1946).

feel the depth and true meaning of this philosophy when we read this statement by Engels: “the atom itself is nothing more than a relation” (Ollman, 1971).

From here we are now in a position to consider two fundamental points that relate and yet distinguish Marx from Hegel. The first point concerns this relating of concepts - and in their relation, the ensuing movement of the dialectic of negativity<sup>51</sup> - which Marx credited Hegel with being the first to present “in a comprehensive and conscious manner” (Marx, 1976, pg.102). Though, as we have noted via Marx, in Hegel the dialectic suffers mystification due to its being confined within thought and of its treatment of objects as only thought-entities; “spiritual entities” (Marx, 1978, pg.111), which are an estrangement of pure or abstract thought. Besides the identified illogicality of this position, and its resultant nullity of being, for Marx (1978, pg.111; 1976; pg. 103), the real tragedy of the Hegelian dialectic – despite its otherwise negative and critical appearance – lay in its tendency to glorify and restore the existing empirical world. Even though Hegel’s philosophy grasped and exposed the transient and fluid nature of what exists, in treating something like private property or wealth or state power as simply “thought-entities”, it seeks only to transcend these “in thought”. As Marx (1978, pg.120) would argue, in “this superseding in thought” it “leaves its object standing in the real world” only believing that it has really overcome it. In this way it was incapable of grasping real sensuous reality and “sensuous, real action” (Marx, 1978, pg.120)<sup>52</sup>.

---

<sup>51</sup> The movement being what we have outlined in the previous chapter in terms of: relation (between two determinate objects), negation/contradiction via that relation, and progression (negation of the negation).

<sup>52</sup> Marx’s ballad “On Hegel”, written in the late 1830’s captures his departure from the philosophical tradition from which he emerged:

*“Kant and Fichte soar to heavens blue,  
Seeking for some distant land.  
I but seek to grasp profound and true,  
That which – in the street I find.”*

Secondly, and related to the potential contained in the first, is what Marx (1978, pg.112) would identify as the “outstanding” development in Hegelian philosophy, which is conceiving the “self-genesis of man as process”, and the alienation and transcendence of alienation as the “outcome of man’s own labour”. As we noted in Chapter 3, through the “suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative” (Hegel, 1977) our collective (alienated) human essence – Spirit, or, consciousness - proceeds for Hegel from stage to stage, from simply unity, up to when existence is made identical with essence and where the separation of knowing and truth is overcome: Absolute Knowledge. In this odyssey, Marx reads in Hegel a grasping of the “essence of labour” where “objective man” is the “outcome of man’s own labour” (Marx, 1978, pg.112); i.e., an outcome of our own– as humans –activity. However, in confining this movement of overcoming human self-estrangement within the realm of thought, Marx (1978, pg112) writes that: “the only labour which Hegel knows and recognizes is abstractly mental labour”. To repeat once again, Hegelian idealism did not know “real, sensuous activity as such” (Marx,1978, pg.143). It did not grasp the true conditions of human self-estrangement nor was it capable of knowing the real history of human self-genesis: “...he [Hegel] has only found the abstract, logical, speculative expression for the movement of history; and this historical process is not yet the real history of man – of man as a given subject, but only man’s act of genesis – the story of man’s origin” (Marx, 1978, pg.108). Real history involved corporeal, objective, man, “man with his feet firmly on the solid ground”. In this way we can make better sense of what Marx (1976, pg.103) meant when he wrote that with Hegel the dialectic is “standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell”.

In grounding the Hegelian dialectic in this way, Marx claimed to give light to the “rich, living, sensuous, concrete activity of self-objectification” that was otherwise reduced to an abstract

movement in Hegel. This concrete activity of self-objectification involved corporeal human, and so, the labour involved was not simply abstract mental labour, but labour - as the “mediator of the metabolic interaction” (Lukacs, 1971, pg.xvii) between human beings and nature<sup>53</sup> - labour as “life activity” (Marx. 1978). In the conditions of this life activity lay the movement, the conditions, and the potentials concerning the history of human self-estrangement. For Lukacs (1971. Pg. xvii) this conception and role of labour constituted “the most important real pillars of the Marxist view of the world” and constituted its “genuinely economic foundation”.

It was this objective relation (materialism) of the dialectical method of Marx and Engels, of the materialist conception of history, that would oppose itself to Hegelian philosophy – and all philosophy hitherto<sup>54</sup>. It was the materialist footing required to realize the full potential of the dialectical method; the full critical form that did not validate the existing empirical world but sought to confront and change it. Together these two points frame the conventional focus in Marxist literature on the relation between Marx and Hegel, that is, (1.) the grounding of the dialectic; and (2.) the concrete appropriation of the conception of the human as a coming-to-be; of

---

<sup>53</sup> A succinct definition comes from Marx's (1976, pg. 283-284) *Capital Volume 1*, Chapter VII “The Labour-Process and the Process of Producing Surplus-Value”: “Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway. We are not now dealing with those primitive instinctive forms of labour that remind us of the mere animal. An immeasurable interval of time separates the state of things in which a man brings his labour-power to market for sale as a commodity, from that state in which human labour was still in its first instinctive stage. We pre-suppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality.

<sup>54</sup> Marx (1978, pg.145) concludes his 11 point *Theses on Feuerbach* with: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it”.

the “self-genesis of man as a process”; in short, the humanism that conceived humankind as the outcome of their own activity<sup>55</sup>.

There is however a third aspect to the relation between Marx and Hegel that will need to be taken up here, and which will lend clarity to our discussion in this section on the question of Marx’s multilinearity as opposed to the charge of a unilinear or Eurocentric theory of progress. It was necessary to go through the first two points in detail for two reasons: 1.) this understanding of the relation between Marx and Hegel will carry us through the other chapters of this dissertation; 2.) Tracing out the otherwise abstract and logical forms of the philosophical debates between The Phenomenology and Marx’s 1844 Manuscripts was necessary for us to better engage with the 3<sup>rd</sup> relation which focuses on the ethical dimensions of Marxist thought; of the relation between Marx and Hegel’s critiques of morality and of their proposed alternatives concerning humankind’s ability to realize the Good<sup>56</sup> and the Right.

Though Marx grounded the dialectic, and made concrete the act of humankind’s self-genesis, the epistemological and ontological demands of the Hegelian system remained in tact. If in Marx there remained a commitment to the relationality of concepts, then forwarding a moral or ethical project needed to grapple with the demands of universalism that are otherwise presumed to arise with separation or impartiality – and that subsequently give moral principles their legitimacy.

---

<sup>55</sup> One could include under the list of profound influences that Hegel had on Marx, the specific section of *The Phenomenology* that deals with the master-slave dialectic. However, according to Chris Arthur (1982, pg.67) the view concerning the significance of the master-slave dialectic for Marx was one popularized by writers in the tradition of French existentialism who, he argues, placed an overemphasis on the “life and death struggle”. According to Arthur (1983) there is no proof in Marx’s work itself that attests to this influence, nor does Marx ever refer to this section of *The Phenomenology*. The debate on this question is not the focus here, though nonetheless it will be excluded from our analysis.

<sup>56</sup> In Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, he writes: “THE good is the Idea as the unity of the concept of the will with the particular will. In this unity, abstract right, welfare, the subjectivity of knowing and the contingency of external existence, have their independent self-subsistence superseded, but they are at the same time essentially still contained and preserved within it. The good is realized freedom, the absolute and ultimate end of the world” (1991, pg.157)

In Hegel, this basic separation of the subject and object that obscured what could be described as an objective or true insight was resolved when Spirit emerges into Absolute Knowing – when subject recognizes itself as object and vice versa<sup>57</sup>. For Hegel, Absolute Knowing also signified, not just the fruition of truth<sup>58</sup>, but of “ethical life” and the realization of humankind’s fullest moral perfection. But if this eschatology was critiqued by Marx as an abstraction, what was the alternative? And how was this to emerge in a concrete way without sacrificing the critical forms that were inherited from Hegel?

To answer these questions, and as they relate to Marx and Engels’ theory of scientific socialism - as opposed to the utopian (simply moral or ethical; ideological) socialism from which they sought to distinguish themselves- we will here begin with a discussion of Hegel’s intervention as it relates to ethics and morality.

---

<sup>57</sup> “For Hegel... the Absolute is *the whole*. The Absolute is not something that transcends existence; it is the whole of existence itself understood as a system in which each part is organically and inseparably related to every other” (Magee, 2010, pg.20). “Absolute Knowing” thus “knows the Absolute” and knows this only once the separation of subject-object is overcome because “...for Absolute Knowing to succeed in grasping the whole it must prescind from any concern with *specific* objects...[...]... Thus, Absolute Knowing, in transcending the distinction between subject and object is, in fact, both subjective and objective...” (Magee, 2010, pg. 28).

<sup>58</sup> Like the “good” we use the terminology of “truth” in relation to Hegel carefully because “truth” as distinct from “falsehood”, like good as opposed to bad, are remnants of dualistic thought; of alienated consciousness. Truth or Good in Hegel instead signify the unity of intuition - immediate knowledge/knowledge resting upon itself - and concept - “...knowing that is mediated through socially determined forms of Reason, universal knowledge acquired in the form of abstractions, language, and so forth” (Blunden, 2005). The unity of intuition and concept is the Idea, or the Absolute (Gardner, 2015).



## Chapter 5: Hegel's Critique of Morality

We previously referenced the Biblical story of the fall, suggesting a parallel to Hegel's spiritual odyssey. The analogy however becomes more prescient in our exploration of Hegel when we read his (1988, pg.216) own description of the Biblical fall in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*:

We find in the Bible a well-known story [Vorstellung] abstractly termed the fall. This representation is very profound and is not just a contingent history but the eternal and necessary history of humanity – though it is indeed expressed here in an external and mythical mode...[...]. Therefore the story is not without inconsistencies. But the essential or basic features of the idea are contained in it: namely that, although human beings are implicitly this unity, they depart from this in-itself or leave the natural state behind because they are spirit, so that they must come into distinction, into (primal) division, must come to judgement between what is theirs and what is natural. Only thus do they first know God and the good. When one knows this, one has it as the object of consciousness; and when one has it as the object of consciousness, then, as an individual, one distinguishes oneself from it.... The basic features of this representation are as follows [cf Gen. 3]. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil portrayed in it belongs to the sensible mode; we see that straightaway. Then the story says that human beings let themselves be led astray and ate this fruit, and in this way they came to the knowledge of good and evil. This is called the fall, as if they had come only to the knowledge of evil, and had become only evil; but they came equally to the knowledge of good. The story says that this should not have happened. But on the one hand it is involved in the concept of spirit that human beings must come to the knowledge of good and evil. As for what the story | says – that they ought not to have come to this knowledge – this too is involved in the idea, inasmuch as reflection, or the rupture of consciousness, is contained in this knowledge of good and evil. In other words, there is posited here the cleavage that is freedom, the abstraction of freedom. Insofar as human beings exist for themselves (i.e., they are free), good and evil exist for them and they have the choice between the two. This standpoint of formal freedom in which human beings are face-to-face with good and evil and stand above both, are lords of both, is a standpoint that ought not to be – though not, of course, in the sense that it should not be at all or should not arise. On the contrary, it is necessary for the sake of freedom, else humanity is not free, and is not spirit; rather it is a standpoint that must be sublated, that must come to an end with reconciliation, in the union with the good.

In the above excerpt when Hegel says that “human beings must come to the knowledge of good and evil” he is describing what we have so far outlined as the necessary “rupture of consciousness”; of the departure from the innocent or simple unity that consciousness enjoyed in

nature, but that, as Spirit, estranged itself through reflection<sup>59</sup>, and it is in that estrangement, that it can overcome its self-estranged condition, and only thus can it go beyond its disparity between subject -object, being – essence, and of a duality such as between good and evil<sup>60</sup>.

The simple or unreflective unity that human beings find themselves in before the fall, before reflection - akin to the unity that “man enjoys with God in paradise” - is a state of innocence (Unschuld<sup>61</sup>). But Hegel clarifies that by “innocence” what is really meant is the absence of anything that is good or anything that is evil, “it is the state of the animal; paradise is in fact initially a zoological garden, it is the state where there is no accountability” (Hegel, 1988, pg.214). As a state of “natural oneness” the state of innocence is thus really “the state of savagery...a state of [natural] desire or general wildness”, and human beings in such an animal state “are wild, are evil, are not as they ought to be” (Hegel, 1988, pg.215).

In such a state of nature, “in a state of immediate desire, force, and action” (Hegel, 1988, pg.225), and absent of any theoretical will<sup>62</sup> - where desire is still the governing factor- human

---

<sup>59</sup> We have thrice so far referenced this act of “reflection” through which consciousness begins to distinguish itself, though without going into detail as to what this entails. The entry provided by Glenn Alexander Magee (2010, pg.79) will suffice: “Hegel explains that ‘The term “reflection” [*Reflexion*] is primarily used of light, when, propagated rectilinearly, it strikes a mirrored surface and is thrown back by it’ (Geraets, 176; EL SS 112 A). Something quite similar is happening when we say that we reflect on something or think it over. First, we consider it as it appears. Thought then, in a sense, ‘bounces back’ from the surface and tries to consider it in terms of deeper reasons or grounds which tell us why the thing appears as it does. It is for this reason that the dichotomy of appearance and (underlying) essence is basic to reflection”.

<sup>60</sup> Good and evil however are more than simply a duality among dualities in Hegel, for the question surrounding the moral good played a significant role in the formulation of Hegel’s own philosophy, not just in response to Kantianism, but spurred by the historical context and considerations of his own time. This, we will make clearer as we continue in this section.

<sup>61</sup> “to be without a will” (Hegel, 1988, pg.440)

<sup>62</sup> Where consciousness cannot ask questions such as: “Where does this come from?” “Who made it?” “Must it have cause?” (Hegel, 1988, pg.225). Further, “The theoretical element in willing is what we call the universal, right, duty, i.e., laws firm specifications, limits for the subjective will” (Hegel, 1988, pg.225). And so absent of will in this sense, human beings in this state are “altogether devoid of consciousness of anything universal...” (Hegel, 1988, pg.224)

consciousness give rise to “nature religion”<sup>63</sup> – the first phase of which is the religion of magic – which is also the first of the 3 forms of “determinate religions” that are the expressions of humankind’s alienated condition, and are necessarily prior to the possibility of “consummate religion”<sup>64</sup>. Despite the difficulties that would arise in transposing oneself into the conditions of human consciousness in another period – for example, Hegel writes that we can “grasp the Greek divinities” but we can never “bend the knee to them” (Hegel, 1988, pg.224) – he nonetheless attempts to account for the conditions, fears, and sensibilities of historical consciousness at these stages that gave rise to the corresponding religious impulses and forms. For example, the initial religion of magic is said to receive its impulse from the existence of fear, not of the Lord, but fear of “contingency, of the forces of nature, which display themselves as mighty powers over against humanity” (Hegel, 1988, pg.225). This gives form to a religion in which “the spiritual aspect is the power over nature”- hence magic<sup>65</sup> – , and where self-consciousness comes to know itself as a power transcending nature. Though an initial condition, or primitive state, for Hegel the religion of magic maintained itself into his own day, which he described as present among “wholly crude and barbarous peoples” such as the Eskimos - “who know no other world than their icy rocks”,

---

<sup>63</sup> Why the attention on religion? More will be elaborated on this as we move on, particularly as regards the relation between religion and philosophy for Hegel. However in answer to the question posed so far, we can refer to Inwood (1992, pg.253) who writes: “Hegel’s age was an age of deep religious FAITH. Thus any philosopher had to come to terms with religion and assign a place to it in his thought”. Though we should also note that describing Hegel’s engagement with religion as simply a coming-to-terms-with can risk underemphasizing the very real theological dimensions that were central to Hegel’s philosophy. For example, see Glenn Alexander Magee’s (2001) *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*.

<sup>64</sup> “determinate” as opposed to “consummate” religion because in its determinate – limited in form - condition it is not religion as such; religion being “the relationship of spirit to spirit, spirit’s knowledge of its truth” (Hegel, 1988, pg.202). Consummate because only thence it is actual; it is absolute religion.

<sup>65</sup> Not the kind of magic that we see in prayer, which can be found in even higher forms of religion, but “black magic” (Hegel, 1988, pg.228); the kind that turns not to God – as a representation of a universal essence - an absolute will – but one which wants to grant the human will command and authority over the natural; those objects that surround us. As evidence for his argument, Hegel (1988, pg.230) suggests the prevalence and veneration of ancient magicians (*angekoks*) among the Eskimo; the *Singhili* in Africa and the *Shamans* of the Mongols.

who had no representation of God, and who held the moon and sun in awe (Hegel, 1988, pg.229) – and among what he collectively defines as “the Africans” (Hegel, 1988, pg.230).

Progressing from here, in and through this estrangement that begins with reflection, spirit is said to proceed to the second phase of nature religion which is the religion of being-within-self, where consciousness withdraws from its immediate externality and concentrates itself internally, and which Hegel identifies with Buddhism (Hodgson, 1988, pg.41). From here, Spirit progresses to the third phase of the nature religion where consciousness discovers itself to be both outside and inside an abstract self-contained being, and is identified by Hegel with the religion of phantasy or Hinduism. From Hinduism we proceed to the Persian (religion of light) and Egyptian religions, characterized by objectification of the divine and which make up the final and fourth phases of the initial or primitive stages of nature religion.

Next comes the second major stage of determinate religion which signifies the elevation of spirit above nature, or the religion of “spiritual individuality” which is identified with Greek religion, and then later advanced in Judaism. The pinnacle achievement of Judaism being the comprehension of the “spiritual subjective unity” of God (Hodgson, 1988, pg.55). The third and last stage of the determinate religions is the religion of “purposiveness” or Roman religion which comprehends a universal purposiveness, but which is flawed because it is “external, empirical, finite, utilitarian” – it is a religion “reduced to a means to extrinsic, worldly ends” (editors intro, Hegel, 1988, pg.57).<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Though the empirical content presented in Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (LPR) as well as in other works such as the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (Hegel, 2001) might at first seem at odds with what we are presented with in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel, 1977) (PS), it is important to remember that – what Marx would describe as – the relegation of the human essence as “self-consciousness” remained an integral principle in all of Hegel’s works. In other words, though we are here dealing with empirical content in the sense of referencing actual human beings – people, civilizations, cultures, religions – we are not dealing with phenomena that should be understood as outside of consciousness or of Spirit – understood both as the collective human

The determinate religions are each sublated, as is the nature of the dialectic of negativity, and are said to give rise to higher forms. The Consummate or ‘absolute’ religion emerges out of these forms in spirit’s odyssey and is identified by Hegel with Christianity<sup>67</sup>. The most basic definition Hegel offers of the consummate religion is that it is a “religion that is for itself, that is objective to itself” (Hegel, 1988, pg.391). But what does this mean?

For Hegel, religion that is for itself and objective to itself is religion that is “in accord with its general concept”, that is, “the consciousness of God as such, consciousness of absolute essence” (Hodgson, 1988, pg.59). In the finite or determinate religion of self-estranged consciousness, the relation between human consciousness and “absolute or divine essence” is only ever juxtaposed and “consciousness knows God only as an otherworldly ‘supreme being’” (Hodgson, 1988, pg.59). According to Hegel, only with Christianity, or consummate religion, is the opposition recognized

---

essence and the activity of self actualization. Rather, these contents are merely the finite moments in spirit’s odyssey as it progresses towards its self-actualization. They are “thought-entities” of estranged human consciousness<sup>(a)</sup>. And as a complementary parallel in the LPR, just as in the PS, we are presented with a narrative centred on the “self-genesis of man”, of “man as process”, of the human as a coming-to-be. The larger question however, would be: how does the odyssey of consciousness in the PS match up to what we are presented with in the LPR? For example in the PS consciousness proceeds through a logical sequence of stages from a natural state, to the life-and-death struggle (master slave dialectic), to Stoicism (an inward turn, and an abased mysticism), and then to Reason. How do these phases match up to those described in relation to determinate religion, or consummate religion? Nonetheless, we will follow Marx (1978, pg.110-11) who held the PS as the Hegelian philosophy’s point of origin, though whose content, particularly the uncritical aspects associated with its abstract character -abstract not in the sense of being void of empirical content, but abstract in its conception of the human essence - reverberated in his later works.

(a) “That for which religion is, its determinate being, is consciousness. Religion has its reality as consciousness. What is to be understood by the realization of the concept is this: that the content is determined by its being for consciousness and being in a certain way” (Hegel, 1988, pg.202)

<sup>67</sup> Hegel’s taxonomy of religion, or more particularly of the historical emergence of religions, is important to note in that it provides us with concrete content regarding the odyssey of spirit; one which privileges Judaeo-Christian civilization as the consummate point as opposed to the primitive, the savage; those devoid of theoretical will and consciousness of the universal. If we read this narrative back into the story of the fall, we see that those closest to realization of the Absolute – to unity and reconciliation with the good - are the heirs of Christianity – the civilizations of modern Europe – while those at stages further away, within nature religion, are “the Africans”, the “Asiatics”. It is also important to note that not only do the Africans and Asiatics reflect a primitive – albeit necessary - stage of human consciousness, but also a stagnant or static existence in the sense that for Hegel they are still there – still just a stage beyond the natural or animal state. The parallels with the Marxian appropriation of this self-genesis are striking...

as false and “consciousness comes to itself in knowing God, and this knowledge is at the same time God’s self knowledge, by which absolute essence becomes true, infinite, absolute spirit”<sup>68</sup> (Hodgson, 1988, pg.59). Hegel would write in the *Encyclopedia of Logic* that “...God alone is truth” (Magee, 2010, pg. 99) and that truth is the whole, “consciousness and God together”.

The consummate stage thus reflects a higher unity, a differentiated unity that truly allows for a conscious unity with God, and which is distinct from the unreflective unity enjoyed in humankind’s initial stage, akin to what was enjoyed in paradise, before the fall, before reflection; in a state of savage innocence. It is a “return of the concept to itself”, and could only achieve this feat through having sublated- cancelled out, but preserved- what was true in the previous forms of determinate religion (Inwood, 1992, pg.174). For example, it is the unity and spirituality of the God of Judaism that behaves as the necessary foundation of the true religion; hence Christianity necessarily having to arise among the Jewish people<sup>69</sup> (Hodgson, 1988, pg.52).

The consummate religion, in its reconciliation between consciousness and divine being, sets the terrain for transcending the rupture of consciousness- reflection – that is expressed through humankind’s knowledge of good and evil. Instead, there is now the possibility of “union in the good”; the good not as distinct from the bad, but ‘good’ understood as something realized through

---

<sup>68</sup> “In Christianity, man becomes conscious of God as Spirit itself, for Christianity teaches that God became a man, Jesus Christ. But the inner truth of Christianity, Hegel holds, lies not in the historical Jesus but in the idea of the realization of God *through man*. This truth is not revealed explicitly by Christianity. It is revealed by speculative philosophy [Hegel’s]....” (Magee, 2010 pg.175)

<sup>69</sup> We get a better sense of this in Hegel’s (1977, pg.2) “Preface” to the *Phenomenology* where he utilizes the metaphor of the bud: “The more conventional opinion gets fixated on the antithesis of truth and falsity, the more it tends to expect a given philosophical system to be either accepted or contradicted; and hence it finds only acceptance or rejection. It does not comprehend the diversity of philosophical systems as the progressive unfolding of truth, but rather sees in it simple disagreements. The bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom, and one might say that the former is refuted by the latter; similarly, when the fruit appears, the blossom is shown up in its turn as a false manifestation of the plant, and the fruit now emerges as the truth of it instead. These forms are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another as mutually incompatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole”.

this higher unity; between human and divine; finite and infinite. But if this is not made explicit in Christianity, it is so in Hegelian philosophy, and expressed in the terms of Absolute Knowing. It is a conscious debt to Christianity that Hegel makes, in allowing for this insight, for in any given epoch religion necessarily precedes philosophy – affording a higher insight through its sublation of earlier forms – though nonetheless limited in its presentation when compared to philosophy (Inwood, 1992, pg.255). Philosophy, as a higher form is able to reflect upon and interpret religion, as well as present the content which it shares with religion as a “Rational whole”<sup>70</sup> (Inwood, 1992, pg.255).

Yet, this divergence in form of presentation between philosophy and religion can give rise to discrepancies as relates to the content. For example, though Hegelian philosophy claims to apprehend the consummate content of absolute religion (Christianity) – that is, its conceiving of the reconciliation of the apparent disparity between God and consciousness – a philosophy such as Kant’s, equally in engagement with Christian theology (Kant, 1998\*), is in apparent contradiction. Like Hegel, Kant draws on the narrative of the fall which for him is equally illustrative as a model for comprehending the human condition (Kant, 1998\*). In Hegel, if we recall, the fall signified the estrangement of consciousnesses from a state of stupor – animal like innocence – and through that state of fallenness – or self-estrangement – comes the progression toward a conscious unity – a realization of Absolute, or God. It is, if we are to draw back to Bohme, God’s very own self-realization or self-awareness that is arrived at; a desire which is “inherent in all things” (Magee, 2001, pg.44).

---

<sup>70</sup> For Hegel, “...philosophy is ‘higher’ than art and religion, because neither of these is able to give an account of itself; i.e., they are incapable of true self-understanding. Philosophy is able to reveal the ‘inner truth’ of art and religion because philosophy is able to know the Idea directly, rationally and conceptually. Both art and religion are, in effect, groping to achieve something that can only be achieved by philosophy. Art and religion fail to deliver true self-knowledge, for they utilize ‘picture-thinking’: images, metaphors, stories, myths, etc. Hegel believes that true self-knowledge is possible only through conceptual thought” (Magee, 2010, pg.176).

In Kant, however, such a union with the divine was something incomprehensible due to the epistemological limits he imposed in his philosophy. If we could never gain insight into the noumenal – the things-in-themselves a priori to our sensory experience – then how could we ever truly know God? We can't<sup>71</sup>. Instead, in Kant's reading, the fall signifies not human kinds departure from an initial unity, but its fall into sin from an initial state of innocence. It is innocence not understood in the way Hegel described it, but innocence with respect to the moral law, as divine command, which is transgressed when the choice is made to eat fruit from the forbidden tree (Kant, 1998\*, pg.63). In the Kantian account of the fall we read that "Evil begins....not from a fundamental propensity" that is, something innate in our nature – something inescapable – but "from freedom"; from a choice. In it, the moral law – what Kant would catalogue as: "I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law" – is presented in the form of a prohibition, which is then transgressed through external incentives: "...the preponderance of the sensory inducements over the incentive of the law is incorporated into the maxim of action, and thus sin came to be (III:6)" (Kant, 1998\*, pg.64). In this way, humankind is not programmed to sin, to evil, but *falls into sin*.

For Kant there thus exists in the human condition a "disharmony in our power of choice" (Kant, 1998\*, pg.64). Though we are not programmed for evil, we are nonetheless finite beings of sense who have a propensity<sup>72</sup> [*Hang*] to evil; a propensity to transgress the moral law - our conscience – in favour of satisfying our personal wishes – our "self-love". The moral law is the

---

<sup>71</sup> As noted earlier, concepts such as "God" or other ideals such as immortality or freedom are not denied in Kant (1998) even though we can have no cognition of them. Instead they are resolved as "practical postulates"; things we can logically assume out of a certain necessity that arises in relation to the moral law. More clarification on this can be drawn from Kant's (1998) second critique, *The Critique of Practical Reason*.

<sup>72</sup> "It is important to address the issue of radical evil as "Hang," propensity. Auweele, in "Depraved will": 124 writes: 'Kant clarifies in a footnote that propensity [*Hang*] differs from a predisposition [...]... A propensity is contingent to humankind, while a predisposition is a universal a priori necessary constituent of human nature.'" (Vestrucci, *theology as Freedom: On Martin Luthers "De servo arbitrio"*, pg.183).



“ought” that is always latent within us, even though we so often behave contrary to its dictates.

This is why Kant (1998\*, pg.62) writes:

Every evil action must be so considered, whenever we seek its rational origin, as if the human being had fallen into it directly from the state of innocence. For whatever his previous behaviour may have been, whatever the natural causes influencing him, whether they are inside or outside them, his action is yet free and not determined through any of these causes; hence the action can and must always be judged as an original exercise of his power of choice. He should have refrained from it, whatever his temporal circumstances and entanglements; for through no cause in the world can he cease to be a free agent.

By “free agent” Kant does not mean a kind of free floating freedom or agency, because it is a freedom always tethered to the moral law (Kant, 1998). As “rational beings”<sup>73</sup> the moral law is self-evident to “us”; Reason inscribes it in our hearts and thus imposes itself upon us as an “ought”; a duty<sup>74</sup> (Kant, 2002, pg.17). It is when we do behave solely out of duty and obedience to the moral law that we realize our freedom (Kant, 1998); free action that is not determined by our inclinations. Thus, to have all maxims of our actions in perfect accordance with the categorical imperative is to attain moral perfection. However, as finite beings that are part of the world of sense- an existence conducive to vice and corruption – for Kant, we can only infinitely strive for moral perfection, but never completely attain it (Kant, 1998\*, pg.80). Nonetheless, he holds that it is our duty as rational beings to strive for this end.

At base, the Kantian project can be read as one of rescuing the legitimacy of our ability to make rational/moral judgements<sup>75</sup>. Though, as Robinson (2019, pg.86) also notes, the Kantian

---

<sup>73</sup> Though the notion of “rational beings” plays a central role in Kant’s moral philosophy, see Mills (2005) for ways in which Kant disqualified all humans from meeting the threshold of the rational capacities necessary for full *moral personhood*. Thus the categorical imperative was not relevant nor meant to be applied to the *Untermensch*, to non-white people. Like Hegel, for Kant only select ‘humans’ were capable of knowing the universal. And as we will see, this racist ethics is maintained and replicated in the philosophy of Marx and Engels.

<sup>74</sup> “The human being (Even the worst) does not repudiate the moral law, whatever his maxims...the law rather imposes itself on him irresistibly because of his moral predisposition” (Kant, 1998\*, pg.58).

<sup>75</sup> A conventional way of positioning Kant’s epistemological and moral philosophy is as a response to the kinds of scepticism that developed out of empirical philosophy; particularly the work of David Hume. Kant’s first encounter

project had “an immediate, political purpose: a soul-deep desire for a new social order”. In his *Anthropology*, Robinson (2019, pg.81) traces out the historical and biographical circumstances that would influence Immanuel Kant, a member of the professional and urbane middle class that would form the social base of German Pietism – a reform movement that emphasized inner discipline in opposition to the kinds of religio-military-state bureaucracies that imposed themselves on the German lands following the Thirty years’ War (Robinson, 2019). Sharing the concerns of his class, Kant’s moral philosophy would suggest that order and authority was not something to be imposed, by self-appointed rulers or intermediaries with God (Kant, 1998\*), but existed as potentialities within us; through a moral predisposition that all rational beings shared. Thus, the basis for obedience, duty and order was to be found in a new social contract that had its foundation in reason and morality.

Kant would engage with this notion of a social contract in his *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (Kant, 1998\*) and expressed in his call for an “ethical community”<sup>76</sup> which would lend to the flourishing of moral life through the union of individuals who would “instruct, encourage and support each other in virtue, instead of providing each other with

---

with Hume’s work was between 1752-54, a year prior to the completion of his Master’s. Though it would be shortly after February 1772 that he would make the famous statement suggesting that Hume had awoken him from his “dogmatic slumber” (Wolff, 1973, pg.22). According to Hume (1975), all cognition is furnished by sense perception. This much Kant, and even Hegel, had come to accept. However, in Hume, all thought was only ever this compounding and augmenting of sense experience, and thus all we could, and did, ever know was only out of our sense- experience. There is thus nothing coherent to the conscious “I” who is nothing other than a bundle of experiences. Thus there is equally no concept of *will*, and neither can we admit the existence of an entity such as “God” since by our very knowledge of such a concept, it is clear that it can only be the product of human sensation; a creation of the human mind. With respect to morality (Hume, 1983) there is equally no validity to moral principles, since any concept of the good as opposed to evil are only ever products of custom; they are relative depending on the context and experience of a people.

<sup>76</sup> “...the ethical community can also be called an *ethical state*, i.e. a *kingdom* of virtue (of the good principle)” (Kant, 1998\*, pg.106). In its complete sense, the ethical community reflects the otherwise hypothetical “Kingdom of Ends” in which human beings – rational beings – are treated as ends in themselves and not as mere means to an end. It is hypothetical because for Kant it is never fully attainable by finite beings. It nonetheless represents the Kantian appropriation of the Biblical Kingdom of God on earth (Kant, 1998\*, pg.107)

temptations to vice” (Wood & Di Giovanni, 1998\*, pg. xxviii). And yet, given our finite and corruptible nature, it is always a “sublime, never fully attainable idea of an ethical community”<sup>77</sup>. Though, this does not dissuade Kant from the notion of an ethical community, even if not perfectly existent. Instead, as a necessary grouping of individuals, it is a community that strives toward realization of the moral law, and one which Kant identified most closely with the institution of the church<sup>78</sup>. Thus is the true vocation of religion for Kant, or at least the *true* or *pure* moral religion— which Kant believed was one that centred obedience to the moral law<sup>79</sup> (Kant, 1998\*, pg.163).

We have gone in some detail through an account of the Kantian moral project not as a divergence from our discussion of the ethical dimensions of Hegelian philosophy, but because

---

<sup>77</sup> Kant (1998\*, pg.111) asks the question: “But how could one expect to construct something completely straight from such crooked wood?”

<sup>78</sup> It is true that Kant (1998\*) was strongly critical of organized religion, and frequently outlines the crimes committed in the name of Christianity and by the church. Though he nonetheless, like Hegel, privileges Christianity, which for him was a purely “moral religion” and which was “in closest proximity to reason”, though nonetheless subservient to reason. As a moral religion it “from the beginning bore within it the germ and the principles of the objective unity of the true and *universal* religious faith to which it is gradually being brought nearer...” (Kant, 1998\*, pg.130). If there is any contradiction, it is only because of the “bad propensity in human nature”, and of corruption having infiltrated the Christian doctrine. More so, we get a better sense of the privileging of Christianity when we read Kant’s (1998\*, pg.130) criticisms of other historical faiths such as “the *Jewish* faith” which in its establishment was “only a collection of merely statutory laws supporting a political state”; or Islam, what he calls Mohammedanism, which is “distinguished by its pride, because it finds confirmation of its faith in victories and in the subjugation of many peoples rather than in miracles, and because its devotional practices are all of a fierce kind” (Kant, 1998\*, pg.177).

<sup>79</sup> The theological dimensions of Kant’s moral project are best understood as more than incidental, as Kant frequently notes certain requirements for reason in making possible the pursuit of the highest good- complete conformity with the moral law – which we would otherwise relegate to a distinct domain of religious faith. For example, in his *Religion* (pg.110), we are told that “...an ethical community is conceivable only as a people under divine commands, i.e., as a people of God...”. This being so because an ethical community requires that all laws governing the people are commands of a “common lawgiver” and not the legislation of people or individuals. In another way too, Kant (1998\* ) notes that though he is distinguishing a *true* moral or universal religion founded on the principles of reason, he nonetheless acquiesces that historical or ecclesiastical faith functions as a necessary vehicle. Consequently the historical faith he identifies as best suited to the task is Christianity, not only for its centering of obedience to God’s will – identified with the moral law – but in the provision of the example of Christ as a prototype of perfection to which we as individuals strive toward; as a touchstone to guide our moral action (Kant, 1998\*, pg.80). Additionally Kant (1998\*) notes the utility of prayer, church going, baptism and communion in encouraging the moral disposition. That is not to say that Kant harboured any literal belief in the actual existence of religious figures or narratives such as Christ or Adam/Eve, but that in these accounts he found narratives that were in conformity with reason.

doing so will help us better frame the intervention Hegel was trying to make. But before we proceed back into Hegel, it will be useful to tally what we can so far take from our discussion of Kant: 1.) Though there exists in us as human beings a propensity to evil, there equally exists in us as rational beings an awareness of the moral law. We can attribute to this moral law, or categorical imperative, the title of sole “fact of reason” because of its self-evidence and non contradictory nature. It thus imposes itself on us as a duty and we implicitly render our obedience to it, even though we so frequently transgress it<sup>80</sup>; 2.) Kant reads this dimension of the human condition into the narrative of the fall, which for him is illustrative of the frailty of human nature, though which is nonetheless not something innate, but the consequence of a choice made to transgress the divine command. It is, as such, a story of freedom ; 3.) Religion - which is more than simply illustrative, but plays a mediating role in the Kantian moral project - is less about things divine and more so about morality<sup>81</sup>. Thus, Kant (1998\*) writes that there is one true religion, but many faiths. The one religion is the pure or universal religion, that has as its principle, command of the moral law. And as we have noted, of all the various faiths, what he describes as historical or ecclesiastical faiths, Christianity contains within it the germs of the moral religion and thus comes in closer proximity to reason. It is “a complete religion, which can be proposed to all human beings comprehensibly and convincingly through their own reason” (Kant, 1998\*, pg.159); and 4.) Kant believes that human beings mutually corrupt each other’s moral disposition and so what is necessary for the cultivation of morality is a kind of union “which has for its end the prevention

---

<sup>80</sup> Any maxim of our action influenced by incentives such as love, empathy, etc. are for Kant empirically conditioned and so do not meet the criteria for truth and universality, and thus do not count as moral. Rather it is, as rational beings, the categorical imperative’s rational character that impresses itself upon us – as the imperative of the maxim of our actions. We follow it out of duty and obedience, and when we transgress it we are burdened with the known guilt of having done so.

<sup>81</sup> Following in the footsteps of Rousseau – who had the honour of having his portrait as the sole piece art in Kant’s study (Cassirer, 1945) - Kant’s rational theology would reduce all questions religious and religion to those concerning Morality.

of this evil and the promotion of the good in the human being” (Kant, 1998\*, pg.106). A “new social contract” (Robinson, 2019, pg.81) – an association of human beings under the laws of virtue, which Kant identifies with the hypothetical “ethical community”<sup>82</sup> (Kant, 1998\*, pg.106). It is a never attainable, fulfilled Kingdom of Ends, but an association suited and intended for moral cultivation and an infinite striving.

From what we are able to draw from our initial discussion on Hegel’s interpretation of the story of the fall, we see that the Kantian account fails to move beyond the determinate stages that are characterized by a duality between good and evil<sup>83</sup>. It is a form of *reflexionphilosophie*<sup>84</sup> that,

---

<sup>82</sup> We earlier noted that the Kantian “ethical community” is identified with the church. While this is true, leaving it at that risks simplifying Kant’s political philosophy, particularly as relates to his conception of the state. The church and state were no doubt distinct institutions for Kant, though they are better understood as parallel; “equally rooted in practical principles” (Wood & di Giovanni, 1998\*, pg.xxxviii). The state enforces the laws of justice and right and the church inculcates voluntary compliance with the “laws of virtue” (Wood & di Giovanni, 1998\*, pg.xxviii). Though, this distinct character of church and state should not be thought of as a separation of “political community” vs. “religious community” but rather a relation between the two that contributes to the kind of union required for encouraging compliance and obedience to the moral law.

<sup>83</sup> Our interposing of Kant into Hegel’s taxonomy of religions as relates to the narrative of the fall is not altogether experimental or novel. As the editors of Hegel’s (1988, pg.301) *Lectures on the philosophy of Religion* note, Hegel is himself doing this when for example he implicitly relates the philosophy of Kant in his discussion of Persian religion, and particularly as regards the “weakness or impotence” of the “ought” in overcoming evil and allowing for the good<sup>(a)</sup>. For Hegel, Kantian philosophy represents a higher dimension of spirit, though nonetheless it maintains that “Oriental dualism” - the “great antithesis” (Hegel, 1988, pg.300) between the “realm of the good and that of evil”; and subsequently the limited potential in truly allowing for the good. Further, in Hegel’s account of the fall we read a familiar triadic model that maintains itself throughout all of Hegel’s work: *innocence* (implicit unity/simple unity/ savage/ animal) – *the fall* (alienation/distinction/ self-consciousness/ good vs. evil) – *reconciliation* (Absolute/ unity with the good/ universal self-consciousness / God’s self-awareness). At a macro cross section, Kantian philosophy has an evident location in the triadic model.

(a) Though we can refer to the fallen realm – the realm of reflection, or the rupture of consciousness – as generally as we have here, it is important to note that it does not exist homogeneously. There are, in estrangement, necessary and progressive stages of development, each one sublated and giving form to a higher stage. Persian religion signifies that stage of consciousness wherein for the first time, consciousness exists with reference to something *objective* – Zoroaster’s Light. Light as the universal element embodies all that is true, universal and good, and through this “Abstract Good”, thus emerges its antonym: Evil. Morality in the sense of a duality between Good and Evil is first given fruition here, hence Hegel’s interest in implying Kantianism in his critique of the referred to “Oriental dualism”. On the other hand, something like “morality” is for Hegel in a sense absent from what he chooses to designate as falling within the earlier and more primitive stages of Spirit – that of nature religion (Hegel, 1988, pg.249)

<sup>84</sup> “Hegel regards reflection as an extremely important philosophical standpoint, which reaches its zenith in the thought of Immanuel Kant. However, from Hegel’s standpoint reflection does not go far enough. It tends to think in terms of dichotomies, to which it adheres rigidly. It does not reach the standpoint of speculation (Hegel’s own

granted, does not simply accept what is given in an unreflective way, though nonetheless, it conceives of the reflective subject as distinct from an external object (Inwood, 1992, pg.249) - a dichotomy of subject-object that is characteristic of the rupture of consciousness – the fallen condition.

Mired in dichotomy, Kantian philosophy was not able to grasp the true essence of Christianity whose “inner truth” was the idea of the realization of God through man<sup>85</sup> (Magee, pg.175). This kind of reconciliation, that departed from the otherwise juxtaposed relation between the human and divine essence is what -for Hegel - gave Christianity its consummate or complete character, not simply as one religion among others but “as the return of the concept to itself” (Inwood, pg. 174); as religion that is for itself and objective to itself<sup>86</sup>. Yet, for Hegel there was an added, and related dimension to Christianity that afforded it the stature of the higher manifestation of Spirit, and this being the teaching, and the knowledge that “Spirit – Man as such – is free” (Hegel, 2001, pg.31). In Inwood’s (pg.110) Dictionary, we are given a definition of the Hegelian notion of *Freiheit* (Freedom) and *Frei* (free) that tries to grasp Hegel’s attempt at a “single theory of freedom”; one which interconnects freedom’s contrast to slavery, dependence, compulsion,

---

standpoint) in which appearances are grasped not as the deceptive covering of a hidden essence, but as a self display of the whole (or Absolute)” (Magee, 2010, pg.79). Nonetheless, as indicated in the included excerpt by Hegel on the fall, reflection – or the rupture of consciousness- behaves as a necessary stage. It is “necessary for the sake of freedom.... It is a standpoint that must be sublated, that must come to an end with reconciliation...”

<sup>85</sup> In addition to the kind of reconciliation read in the story of the fall, this teaching is for Hegel equally exemplified in the figure of Christ “a Man who is God — God who is Man” (Hegel, lphis, pg.343). In Kant, as a consequence of his rational theology, the narrative surrounding the figure of Christ was instead that of an example; a (required) prototype of moral perfection for rational subjects to follow. There could be no semblance of reconciliation or relation with a divine essence.

<sup>86</sup> It is important to clarify, as Inwood (pg.174) does, that this revelation is not made explicit in Christianity, but through the speculative philosophy that it makes possible; that of Hegel’s. As Hegel held Christianity to be consummate, over and above the determinate forms of religion that preceded it, and that made it possible (that remain, as germs, contained within it and that have enriched it), he equally held his own philosophy to the same elevation.

necessity, etc.: “something, especially a person, is free if, and only if, it is independent and self-DETERMINING, not determined by or dependent on something other than itself.”

There are two dimensions to the way Hegel (2001) expounds on the notion of freedom in his Lectures on the Philosophy of History, where we are told in the concluding remarks that “...the History of the World is nothing but the development of the Idea of Freedom” (Hegel, 2001, pg.477). The first begins with the declaration that the essence of Spirit is Freedom. In clarifying, Hegel (2001, pg.31) - in a sense, analogously, depending on ones interpretation of Hegel - contrasts Spirit to Matter. By virtue of its tendency to fall toward a central point, for Hegel Matter’s essence is Gravity (Hegel, 2001, pg.31). For Hegel, matter thus “seeks its Unity” through “verging toward its opposite”; it is a potentiality that exists outside of itself (Hegel, 2001, pg.31). Spirit on the other hand is “self-contained existence (Bei-sich-selbst-seyn)”<sup>87</sup> (Hegel, 2001, pg.31); it “may be defined as that which has its centre in itself. It has not a unity outside itself, but has already found it; it exists in and with itself. As we read earlier, for Marx (1978, pg.116) this self-contained character of Spirit wherein there exists no objective relation outside itself – with no being outside it – was a paradox of sorts, something of the imagination, since it would result in the logical consequence of “un-being”; a nullity. For Hegel, however, Spirit’s self-contained existence is what makes freedom the sole truth of Spirit: “For if I am dependent, my being is referred to something else which I am not: I cannot exist independently of something external. I am free, on the contrary, when my existence depends upon myself. This self-contained existence of Spirit is none other than self-consciousness – consciousness of one’s own being” (Hegle, 2001, pg.31). For Hegel, this notion of freedom, independence rather than dependence, is the truth that exists for Spirit, and the

---

<sup>87</sup> Literally translated as, “Be with yourself”; “*bei sich* (at one, at home with oneself, etc.) which occurs in such contexts as ‘to keep to oneself’, but sometimes contrasts with *ausser sich* (‘outside, beside oneself (with grief, etc.)’)” (Inwood, 1992, pg.133).



realization of freedom is Spirit knowing this truth of itself; it is the act of making itself “actually that which it is potentially” (Hegel, 2001, pg.31).<sup>88</sup> The History of the World, or “universal history” is thus the working out of this Idea of Freedom; Spirit’s knowledge of itself.

The second, and related dimension of Freedom outlined by Hegel is more concrete than the first, self-admittedly “abstract definition” (Hegel, 2001, pg.31), and proceeds through various grades “in the consciousness of Freedom” as lived and expressed by humanity through “universal history”. For Hegel, the Idea of Freedom develops via a parallel taxonomy as was outlined in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1988), with the African and Oriental situated at the lowest rungs, proceeding then through the Greeks and Romans, and culminating in Judeo-Christian civilization. In its most basic order, Hegel (2001, pg.32) writes:

The Orientals have not attained the knowledge that Spirit – Man as such – is free; and because they do not know this, they are not free. They only know that one is free. But on this very account, the freedom of that one is only caprice; ferocity – brutal recklessness of passion, or a mildness and tameness of the desires, which is itself only an accident of Nature – mere caprice like the former. – That one is therefore only a Despot; not a free man. The consciousness of Freedom first arose among the Greeks, and therefore they were free; but they, and the Romans likewise, knew only that some are free – not man as such. Even Plato and Aristotle did not know this. The Greeks, therefore, had slaves; and their whole life and the maintenance of their splendid liberty, was implicated with the institution of slavery: a fact moreover, which made that liberty on the one hand only an accidental, transient and limited growth; on the other hand, constituted it a rigorous thralldom of our common nature – of the Human. The German nations, under the influence of Christianity, were the first to attain the consciousness that man, as man, is free: that it is the freedom of Spirit which constitutes its essence.

For Hegel, the religious consciousness of a people bore on the political life of a society and on the character of individuality, and since we are always dealing dialectically, we will add to this relation vice versa. For example, Hegel writes that the lack of awareness or consciousness of a

---

<sup>88</sup> This is not contrary or distinct to what we earlier referenced from Hegel as the goal of Spirit, that is, as “insight into what knowing is”. For Freedom is Spirit’s knowledge of its nature. Nor is it separate from the description of Absolute Knowing, or the reconciliation of subject-object, for these all bear on consciousness as its Truth. They all speak to that higher union, or reconciliation with the divine essence (Spirit as such; the Absolute; God) that is made possible through the fall and rise of humankind.



divine being – “an Other and a Higher than his individual self” among “the African” meant the absence of a “substantial objective existence” (Hegel, 2001, pg.111) through which the human can realize their own individual being. There is here thus an “undeveloped oneness” or lack of distinction between the individual self and essential being, and hence “the African in the uniform” (Hegel, 2001, pg.112). Consequently, the absence of a consciousness of a divine being or higher power gives rise to what we noted Hegel had described as a “religion of magic”, and where if:

...man is regarded as the Highest, it follows that he has no respect for himself; for only with the consciousness of a Higher Being does he reach a point of view which inspires him with real reverence. For if arbitrary choice is the absolute, the only substantial objectivity that is realized, the mind cannot in such be conscious of any Universality. The Negroes indulge, therefore, that perfect contempt for humanity, which in its bearing on Justice and Morality is the fundamental characteristic of the race. They have moreover no knowledge of the immortality of the soul, although spectres are supposed to appear. The undervaluing of humanity among them reaches an incredible degree of intensity. Tyranny is regarded as no wrong, and cannibalism is looked upon as quite customary and proper (Hegel, 2001, pg.113).<sup>89</sup>

These moments in Spirit are for Hegel sublated, as is the progressive movement of the dialectic, and give rise to further, yet still limited moments leading to Spirit’s realization of its essence – to Freedom. Indiscriminate tyranny gives way to the despotism of “the Orientals”. Among the Chinese this is expressed through the submission of all before the Emperor, where “...no honour exists, and no one has an individual right in respect of others” (Hegel, 2001, pg.148). In such a condition, “the consciousness of debasement predominates”, there is yet no clear distinction between freedom and slavery, and thus explains “the great immorality of the Chinese” (Hegel, 2001, pg.148). Among “the Hindoos” on the other hand, a limited form of subjectivity and individuality first manifests itself through the division of society into occupation based classes:

---

<sup>89</sup> Further discussion on such excerpts from Hegel are addressed in Robert Bernasconi’s (2003) “Hegel’s Racism: A Reply to McCarney” and “Hegel at the Court of Ashanti” (1998). Here, Bernasconi argues that Hegel was not simply reproducing existing stereotypes in his outlines of history, but was fabricating and inventing his own details, which were often unsourced. The anti-Black and Anti-African narratives served a purpose in Hegel, supporting “his contention that they were not yet ready for freedom” (Bernasconi, 2003, pg.36).

Castes. Here, the Divine or “Absolutely Universal” is presented and brought to bear on the community through a particular class of society – the Brahmins (Hegel, 2001, pg. 162).

Yet despite their progressed position, India, like China, as civilizations in “Farther Asia” and belonging to the “Mongolian Race”, are described by Hegel (2001, pg.191) as remaining in a “natural vegetative existence”. It is, for Hegel (2001, pg.191), only among the civilizations of “Hither Asia”, those that are part of the “Caucasian race, i.e. the European Stock”, where the “principle of development” first begins, and this with the Persians. The Persians are described as “the first Historical People” where for the first time we see “a pure exalted Unity” – “Zoroaster’s ‘Light’” – through which the human sustains a relation to something objective – a universal physical element; spiritual purity; the Abstract Good (Hegel, 2001, pg.193). Here a Unity is elevated above the merely natural, and the “purity of light” is elevated above the “purity of Castes”; it is something that “all are equally able to approach, and in which all equally may be hallowed” (Hegel, 2001, pg.193). There is thus an awareness of freedom that is realized in this now achieved degree of universality which for Hegel is a means of explaining why among the “Zend people” (Persians) there was not the same rigid structure of Caste as in India. Granted there were distinct classes, such as the Priests, Warriors, Agriculturalists, and Craftsmen, but these were not rigidly exclusive, as for example there were no restrictions on intermarriage (Hegel, 2001, pg.195). Among the Egyptians too, there existed caste like classes, but these, says Hegel (2001, pg.224), often came in contact with each other, and sometimes broke themselves up in states of rebellion.

Nonetheless, it is only with emergence of Christianity that consciousness now attains the knowledge that “all men absolutely (man as man) are free” (Hegel, 2001, pg.33). This is made possible through the Christian Religion’s affording of the true conception of the “Absolute Idea of God” and of the human, both comprehended in their true nature: That is, the unity or reconciliation

of Man with God<sup>90</sup>. It is a unity that is possible only through Man having annulled all that was merely Natural or Limited in his Spirit<sup>91</sup> (Hegel, 2001, pg.343), and only then and thus is Man elevated to God. Thus comprehended, the human is endowed with an “infinite value, an eternal destiny” (Hegel, 2001, pg.351). And for this reason, Hegel (2001, pg.351) for example remarks that under Christianity “Slavery is impossible”:

...for man is man – in the abstract essence of his nature – is contemplated in God; each unit of mankind is an object of the grace of God and of the Divine purpose: ‘God will have all men to be saved’. Utterly excluding all speciality, therefore, man, in and for himself – in his simple quality of man – has infinite value; and this infinite value abolishes, ipso facto, all particularity attaching to birth or country.

But slavery still persisted following the emergence of Christianity<sup>92</sup>, among numerous other forms of exploitation and inequity, and many times perpetrated in the name of Christian principles. This glaring reality is something Hegel (2001, pg.32) does acknowledge, when he writes:

In proof of this, we may note that slavery did not cease immediately on the reception of Christianity. Still less did liberty predominate in States; or Governments and Constitutions adopt a rational organization, or recognize freedom as their basis. That application of the

---

<sup>90</sup> In Robinson’s (2019, pg.87) *Anthropology*, he references Heinrich Heine, whose words I am reminded of here: “I was young and proud, and it pleased my vanity when I learned from Hegel that it was not the dear God who lived in heaven that was God, as my grandmother supposed, but I myself here on earth’.

<sup>91</sup> The full excerpt reads: “...the unity of Man with God is posited in the Christian Religion. But this unity must not be superficially conceived, as if God were only Man, and Man, without further condition, were God. Man, on the contrary, is God only in so far as he annuls the merely Natural and Limited in his Spirit and elevates himself to God. That is to say, it is obligatory on him who is partaker of the truth, and knows that he himself is a constituent [Moment] of the Divine Idea, to give up his merely natural being: for the Natural is the Unspiritual”. This is an important point if we want to better grasp the relation between Freedom – understood in the abstract sense that was initially discussed, that is, of the self-contained existence of Spirit – and Freedom in the more conventional sense that is reflected in the social and political organization of a society, as well as relates to the value of human worth based on a notion of universality. The two expressions of Freedom are dialectically related. The universality and greater abstraction of the human from the otherwise rigid particularities allows for consciousness to progress toward and realize – through annulling “the merely Natural and Limited in his Spirit” - that reconciliation [*Versöhnung*] that is the principle of “Spiritual Freedom”. Subsequently, the recognition of the “divine worth” of all humans is itself made possible through the divine principle that the Human is God and God is the Human.

<sup>92</sup> Hegel both applauded and condemned slavery. He applauded it in that he claimed slavery had improved Black people (Bernasconi, pg.36); and he condemned it, not on moralistic grounds but in applauding its abolition as a positive step in the progress of humanity- in the progress of Spirit toward Absolute Knowing (Inwood, 1992, pg.111).

principle to political relations; the thorough moulding and interpenetration of the constitution of society by it, is a process identical with history itself. I have already directed attention to the distinction here involved, between a principle as such, and its *application*; i.e, its introduction and carrying out in the actual phenomena of Spirit and Life.

The above excerpt is noteworthy for two principle reasons: 1.) It distinguishes between the emergence of a universal principle – such as the divine worth and infinite value of all humans as relates to the knowledge of the unity of the human and God – and its application. The principle is first attained by consciousness through consummate religion – Christianity<sup>93</sup>, but only as “the *δυνάμει* for that *ἐνέργεια*”<sup>94</sup> (Hegel, 2001, pg.351). For Hegel, in order to make actual what is now potential, “humanity must become capable of it” (Hegel, 2001, pg.351); that is, what is required are the “...conditions of humanity which are the necessary corollary to the consideration that Man is Absolute Self-consciousness” (Hegel, 2001, pg.351). Thus for Hegel not only was it necessary for the concept to develop for consciousness through universal history, but it required a corollary in order to make “concrete” what are only “the first *abstract principles*...” (Hegel, 2001, pg.351). This nuance between potentiality and actuality that exists in the Hegelian system leads us into point 2.) which is that from this we are better able to position the move that Hegel makes in allotting a world historical significance to the German people, who through the modern state form have it as their historical vocation to realize and make actual what hitherto existed only as the *δυνάμει* in the Christian teaching.

This “higher spirit” that manifests itself in relation to the Christian religion can only become *ἐνέργεια* when the “Naturalness of Spirit – that in virtue of which man is a special, empirical existence” is “destroyed” (Hegel, 2001, pg.337). If we recall what has been discussed

---

<sup>93</sup> Though as Hegel reminds the reader, it is *speculative philosophy* (his in particular) that succeeds in making explicit what is contained in Christianity

<sup>94</sup> Hegel uses the term *δυνάμει* [*dunamis* – “capacity, active or passive power or potentiality” ] which is taken from Aristotle’s ( ) *Metaphysics*, as a contrast to *ἐνέργεια* [*Energeia*- “activity, act, actualization, actuality”].

above, for Hegel, in the lower forms of Spirit, such as among “the Hindoos”, there exist hierarchical distinctions- Caste identities -which are referred to Nature. The developments of such social formations are related to the kind of subjectivity that was achieved by self-alienated Spirit, which in themselves can be taken – dialectically – as both consequences and hindrances to the form of religious consciousness that is possible at this stage. Hence, even if the Christian principle were hypothetically transposed onto such a civilization – one mired in rigid particularities, and thus which does not comprehend that the human *as such*<sup>95</sup> is Free - it would not become *actual* due to the limitations imposed on self-consciousness in realizing<sup>96</sup> its true essence.<sup>97</sup>

For Hegel, it is only in the “Modern period” (Inwood, 1992, pg.171) of European, and more particularly, German<sup>98</sup> history - inaugurated by the Reformation, the rise of the modern state, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution - that the concrete conditions for freedom are finally made possible; the necessary corollary being created<sup>99</sup>. The Modern period in a sense restores the

---

<sup>95</sup> As a general category of human. Human in the universal sense. For Hegel this kind of equality does not signify the annihilation of difference, which would be reflective of the kind of unthinking equality of the “servile consciousness” of China (Hegel, 2001, pg.156). Rather it is an equality that asserts the “worth of the inner man” while maintaining a consciousness of difference and a protection of privileges – namely private property.

<sup>96</sup> Realizing, not speculatively, not intuitively, but concretely; actually. This is perhaps why in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel (1977) writes that Absolute Knowing is never something “comprehended” but “felt”.

<sup>97</sup> “Every caste has its especial duties and rights. Duties and rights, therefore, are not recognized as pertaining to mankind generally, but as those of a particular caste. While we say, “Bravery is a virtue,” the Hindoos say, on the contrary, ‘Bravery is the virtue of the *Cshatryas*’. Humanity generally, human duty and human feeling do not manifest themselves; we find only duties assigned to the several castes. Everything is petrified into these distinctions, and over this petrification a capricious destiny holds sway. Morality and human dignity are unknown; evil passions have their full swing; the Spirit wanders into the Dream-World, and the highest state is Annihilation” (Hegel, 2001, pg. 165). In such a caste system, according to Hegel, divinity is the express being of only the *Brahmins*, and all others remain “limited mortals” (Hegel, 2001, pg.166).

<sup>98</sup> It is among the Germans, whose “Heart”, “time honoured sincerity” (Hegel, 2001, pg.433), “inwardness” (Hegel, 2001, pg.439), and love of freedom (Wood, pg.377) creates the “proper soil” for the emancipation of Spirit. Despite the tempting appearance of a logically formulated philosophy of history, the Hegelian ladder of civilizations is ripe with such general sentiments, whether in the favour of, or to the detriment of whole peoples and cosmologies. They are otherwise sentimental betrayals of an attempt at a logical system that can only be chalked up to an unconscious (or rather conscious) racial bias.

<sup>99</sup> Hegel identifies 3 periods of European/German history leading up to the modern: 1.) Is identified with the Kingdom of the Father, where the Christian world presents itself as “Christendom”; “one mass, in which the Spiritual and the Secular form only different aspects” (Hegel, 2001, pg.361); 2.) The Kingdom of the Son, where the

essence of Christianity that is otherwise obscured and corrupted in the earlier periods of European/German history: “The Christian principle has now passed through the terrible discipline of culture, and it first attains truth and reality through the Reformation” (Hegel, 2001, pg.362). It is through the Reformation - initiated by “a simple *Monk*” (Hegel, 2001, pg.431) – Martin Luther - though, nonetheless a *world-historical figure*<sup>100</sup> in the Hegelian odyssey – that *the* advance of Spirit is made, and the “principle of Free Spirit is made the banner of the World” (Hegel, 2001, pg.362). In response to “the corruption of the church”<sup>101</sup> (Hegel, 2001, pg.431), Luther would initiate the Reformation which would instead emphasize a direct relation between the individual and God, absent of any mediations or particularities. It was an emancipation of consciousness that reanimated that Christian teaching ‘God will have all men to be saved’. It is a reconciliation, if one may describe it as such, of both dimensions of Freedom as Hegel draws them out in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, where Spirit now strips itself of everything that is merely Natural and Limited, and where “true spirituality” exists in being “reconciled to God” rather than sought externally, objectively, in “an earthly sepulchre of stone” (Hegel, 2001, pg. 433). It is a unity now not “superficially conceived” but made possible.

---

two sides of the antithesis (the secular and the religious) develop into an opposition; the “Church for itself a *Theocracy*, and the State for itself as a *Feudal Monarchy*” (Hegel, 2001, pg.361). Here in the second stage Christian Freedom is “perverted to its very opposite, both in a religious and secular respect; on the one hand to the severest bondage, on the other hand to the most immoral excess – a barbarous intensity of every passion” (Hegel, 2001, pg.361); and 3.) The Kingdom of the Holy Spirit which in a dialectical sense emerges as the negation of the negation. It is the harmonizing of the antithesis; the restoration of Christian Freedom.

<sup>100</sup> “Among the historical peoples, Hegel insisted, one of Reason’s extraordinary and frequent instruments for propelling the species into greater consciousness was the *world-historical figure*, an individual whose genius propels human society beyond its apparent and immediate limitations” (Robinson, 2019, pg. 96). Incidentally, as Robinson (2019, pg.97) notes, such “divine crystals” never eventuated in the East where there were only “the periodic appearances of the ‘brooms of God’, whose genius for destruction and bloodlust fell on cultures, sweeping whole regions of the world completely clean’. Having no consciousness, the ‘brooms of God’ did not replace the cultures they destroyed; unlike the world-historical figures of the West nothing of the Absolute Spirit, of Reason, could be deciphered from their occurrences”.

<sup>101</sup> Hegel is here referring to the Catholic Church

Yet, for Hegel (2001, pg. 442), the Reformation is not yet the concrete comprehension of Spirit's knowledge of itself or of the Idea of Freedom realized, but only another moment – an abstract advance – that was *necessary*<sup>102</sup> in Spirit's progression to Absolute Knowing. For Hegel, it is the Rational state – the “modern European nation-state” (Wood, 1991, pg.377) – that emerges as a consequence of the progress<sup>103</sup> initiated by the Reformation, and as the *form* which the “perfect embodiment of Spirit assumes” (Hegel, 2001, pg.31).

The significance allotted to the form of the modern European state emerges in the Hegelian odyssey not so much as a betrayal of the dialectic; a compromising resolution to the question of “self-realization” which Hegel otherwise failed to push through to (Lukacs, 1971, pg. xxiii). Rather, as early as 1803, in his early political writings<sup>104</sup>, Hegel had proposed the modern state as the means and the form of the complete realization of the German peoples (Robinson, 2019, pg.89). It was the Rational state that would behave as the Hegelian response to the Kantian imperfect ethical community; that social contract that could only ever pursue the moral good though never fully realize itself as the Kingdom of Ends.

---

<sup>102</sup> Necessary because the Reformation allows for the “emancipation of conscience” (Hegel, 2001, pg.473) which alone allows for breaking “the fetters which bind Right and Freedom”. This is his explanation for why the French Revolution – despite being “World-Historical” in its implications - ultimately failed, for there can be no real Revolution without a Reformation (Hegel, 2001, pg.473; Inwood, pg.256)

As Hegel notes, there can be no Revolution without a Reformation (Hegel,

<sup>103</sup> Among the progressive developments that Hegel notes as a result of the Reformation, beyond the ecclesiastical domain, include: Initiating the “hegemony of self-cognizant thought” in lieu of the kind of “blind obedience” (Hegel, 2001, pg.363) that accompanied the Catholic Church. In this way, reason, as the “*intellectual principle*” of the State emerges as the authority to which all other authority – monarchic, aristocratic, etc. – becomes subsumed, and which is made the principle of all human conduct; further there is a harmony created between the religious and the secular / state and religion, which was previously a source of conflict and contradiction (Hegel, 2001, pg.353) and which limited the development of Reason and Freedom (Hegel, 2001, pg.442). Now the secular is imbued with a sense of the Divine (Hegel, 2001, pg.441) and as commanded by God; Other consequences of the Reformation listed by Hegel (2001, pg. 437) include: breaking up of episcopal foundations, alteration of educational arrangements, abolishing of fasts and holy days, rebellion raised against temporal authorities, in Munster the Anabaptists expelling the Bishop and establishing a government of their own, and the peasants rising *en masse* to emancipate themselves from the Yoke of serfdom.

<sup>104</sup> See Hegel's *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*, written in 1802/03 and published posthumously in 1913 (Avineri, 1974)

As Robinson (2019, Pg.87) reminds us, Hegel's upbringing in the predominantly Protestant German state of Old Wurttemberg had from early on conditioned him to reject Kant's displacement of the moral good "to a divine realm, leaving to human kind the mere shadow (duty) of an ethical responsibility or aspiration". Instead, Wurttemberg piety taught that an individual's path to salvation – and full moral perfection - could be secured "in a collectivist striving for the construction of an ethical (*Sittlichkeit*) civic life" (Robinson, 2019, pg.87). In his *System der Sittlichkeit*, Hegel describes "ethical life" in relation to the state, as follows:

...not the sum but the indifference of all virtues. It does not appear as love for country and people and law but as absolute life in one's country and for the people. Such an ethical life is absolute truth, for untruth is only in the fixture of a single mode: but in the everlasting being of the nation all singleness is superseded. It is absolute culture; for in the eternal is the real and empirical annihilation and prescription of all limited modality. It is absolute disinterestedness: for in the eternal there is nothing private and personal. It, and each of its movements, is the highest beauty: for beauty is but the eternal made actual and given concrete shape. It is without pain, and blessed: for in it all difference and all pain is superseded. It is the Divine<sup>105</sup>, absolute, real, existing and being, under no veil; nor need one first raise it up into the ideality of divinity, and extract it from the appearance and empirical intuition; but it is, and immediately, absolute intuition.<sup>106</sup>

According to William Wallace (1894, pg. cxcvii) when Hegel describes ethical life as such, he is "engrossed with the glory of the ideal nation" in which there is affirmed an "essential unity of life – the true, complete, many-sided life", where art, religion, science, morality, culture, are not

---

<sup>105</sup> It may seem confusing that the arrived at ethical life of the state is synonymously described as "the Divine", or the Absolute. However, we find clarity when we recap through reading the particularity of Hegel's notion of the Divine, of God (*der Gott*): "...Hegel rejects the traditional idea that God transcends the world. Instead, he holds that nature is part of the being of God, and that God is truly actualized or realized in the world only through human consciousness. Furthermore, because Hegel holds that history is the story of the development of human consciousness, he also claims that in a sense God himself develops over the course of time. Hegel thus replaces the traditional conception of God as existing apart from creation, perfect and complete, with one which claims that God only truly becomes God *through* creation" (Magee, 2010 pg.99). It is an appropriation of the mystic Jacob Boheme's notion of existence imbued with, and reflective of, God's desire for self-awareness (Magee, 2001, pg.35). God, as self-realization, as arrival into being, is the "only fully real, with no negation whatsoever" (Inwood, pg.200). This "reconciliation between God and the World" (Hegel, 2001, pg.443) which is really the *actualization* of God, is "limited in the first instance to an abstract principle" so long as it is not yet made *actual*, "expanded into a system" by which "the moral world could be regulated" (Hegel, 2001, pg.443). This system is the ethical life of the modern European state.

<sup>106</sup> Hegel as cited in Wallace (1894, pg. cxcvi)



anti-thetical but co-extensive. Thus the state, the *ideal*, rational state - as the “supreme real appearance of the Eternal and Absolute” (Wallace, 1894, pg. cxcvii), or the “fully realized concept, the idea, analogous to the fully grown plant” (Inwood, 1992, pg. 222) – emerges as an organic, self-determining totality. And it is in this conscious unity - void of the estrangement and dichotomies that characterized Spirit’s fall from innocence or simple unity - that the idea of Freedom is made concrete.

In this “self-determining and self-differentiating” unity, the state exists not as something distinct from individual subjective consciousness but it “moulds and forms the individuals who constitute it” (Inwood, 1992, pg. 125). It is thus from a determinacy that, for Hegel, moral perfection is made possible; as is Freedom. This at first seems a contradiction in terms since liberal moral theories – Kantian in particular – had hitherto defended the human capacity for moral judgement through extrapolating the individual from the empirical world. If human consciousness was nothing but a reflection of empirical reality, then no such notion of morality or a universal Truth could be justified, let alone a defence of reason and rationality. All human behaviour and action would be contingent; subjective articulations emerging from our lived experience. For Kant (cpurereason), as has already been noted above, it is not in denying determinacy or the role of sense experience in furnishing our consciousness, but in the positing of a realm *a priori* to our experience – the intelligible realm (the *noumenal*) – that salvages an aspect of our existence that is untainted by experience or contingency. The *noumenal* realm thus emerges as a shelter where Kant (1998) can couch the sole objective principle that we as rational subjects have insight to: the categorical imperative that impels us to “never act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law” (Kant, 2002) . It is the moral law, that through its self-evidence and non contradictory nature as a practical principle, imposes itself on us as an “ought”;

a duty. The “ought” of the moral law, timeless and universal, elevates us above our inclinations and influencing conditions; it is our conscience, so to speak, rationally conceived. It thus grants us the power of choice and the potential to act as free agents.

For Hegel, however, the “moral standpoint” – of which he regarded Kantian moral philosophy as the most developed theoretical expression (Wood, 1990, pg.155) – was dissatisfying on two principle accounts, not least for its commitment to an “ought” which could never be fully realized. The first is perhaps Hegel’s most well known critique of *Moralität*<sup>107</sup>, which is the “emptiness charge” (Wood, 1990, pg.154). The emptiness charge made by Hegel can be framed along two related dimensions, which are that it is 1.) defective, and 2.) deceptive. In his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, which is where Hegel (1991, pg.163) outlines more pointedly his critique of *Moralität*, he describes the moral standpoint and Kantian morality in particular as “defective” due to the abstract character of its presentation. For Kant (2002) the abstract nature of the categorical imperative, that is, its avoidance of including anything empirical in itself as a maxim, is what granted it its supremacy – its command- since any maxim drawn from determinate, particular or empirical content could never be reasonably justified as objective or universal<sup>108</sup>. It

---

<sup>107</sup> Definition: Morality. Hegel uses the term *Moralität* in his critique, as distinct from *Sittlichkeit* (Ethical life). Morality in Hegel is associated with the standpoint of “ought”, and stresses the inner Will and intention of the individual agent. So for example, in the stage of “simple Greek *Sittlichkeit*” responsibility is placed on an individual based on the consequences of their action despite their intentions (Hegel references the story of Oedipus who through ignorance killed his own father and married his own mother, though who nonetheless was guilty (Inwood, 1992, pg. 1919). By contrast “pure *Moralität*” is concerned not with the outcomes of one’s actions but solely with the inner intention of the individual, regardless of consequence, or even of social setting. Kantian morality is a form of *Moralität*, and Hegel’s critiques of Kantian morality are meant to encompass the broader dimensions of morality as such (Wood, *hegelsethicalthought*, pg.154). Other notions associated with *Moralität* include: “...duty (*Pflicht*); the good (*das Gute*), in contrast to the bad or evil (*das Böse*); virtue (*Tugend*), in contrast to vice (*Laster*); RESPONSIBILITY (*Schuld*); conscience (*das Gewissen*)...” (Inwood, 1992, pg.191). The dimensions concerning *Sittlichkeit* will be clarified as we proceed.

<sup>108</sup> Universal because it is devoid of any determinate or particular empirical content. The moral law is thus not derived from our senses or does not rest on empirical grounds. If it did so, it would not be able to “judge with unanimity what is morally good and what bad” (Kant, 1980, pg. 11). Instead, the moral law is derived strictly from “intellectual grounds”, in “the understanding” (Kant, 1980, pg.13), having its source in “pure reason” – *a priori* to any experience.

would then instead spring from our inclinations and our senses, and not from a sense of duty, derived from rationality; from “pure reason”. For Hegel (1991, pg.161) determining the *good* solely in relation to duty, as a “*universal abstract essentiality*”, and absent from anything determinate or particular, was a contradiction, a defect, since, and he argues, “the good” cannot ever “be fulfilled as an abstraction but must first acquire the further determination of a particularity” (Hegel, 1991, pg.161). For Kant justification for the moral law as a universal and objective law as such, was based on the principle of non-contradiction, which alone would be satisfying to reason. However, Hegel maintains that “a contradiction must be a contradiction with some thing, that is, with a content which is already fundamentally present as an established principle”<sup>109</sup> (Hegel, 1991, pg.165). Essentially, he is arguing that moral action always presupposes a content; something to which the moral principle can “stand in relation [*Beziehung*]”. Without this content, *Moralität* is merely an “empty formalism”, a reduction of moral science to the empty rhetoric of “*duty for duty’s sake*” (Hegel, 1991, pf.165). It is thus defective because without content it leads to nothing determinate (Hegel, 1991, pg.163), and thus it is unable to grant any contentful moral standards or principles (Wood, 1990, pg.154).

The second dimension of the critique here, that *Moralität* is deceptive, springs from the first, since as Hegel identifies, because of the abstract character of the good, particularity now falls within subjectivity (Hegel, 1991, pg.163), and through this relation either good or evil – treated as abstractions – nonetheless receive a determination from one’s subjectivity. In short, the good, the abstract good “...evaporates into a complete powerlessness which I can endow with any content

---

<sup>109</sup> The example Hegel (1991, pg.163) uses to illustrate this point is theft and murder. He argues that judging theft and murder as contradictions with reference to the moral law would require the presupposition that property and human life exist as something to be respected. Hence, the requirement of the determination of a particularity in order to fulfill the “good”.

whatsoever” (Hegel, 1991, pg.186). Thus, any content one pleases, subjectively derived, can be subsumed under the marker of the good since there is no determinate content to contradict it.

It is thus deceptive in that:

...a person is able to transform whatever he does into something good by the reflection of good intentions and motives [*Bewegungsgründe*], and the element [*Moment*] of his *conviction* renders it good. Thus, there is no longer such a thing as crime or vice in and for itself, and instead of those free and open, hardened and undiluted sinners referred to above we have a consciousness of complete justification by intention and conviction. My good intention in my action and my conviction of its goodness make it good (Hegel, 1991, pg.178).<sup>110</sup>

*Moralität*, by its very standpoint of “ought”, aspires to transcend the empirical world, positing the good as something timeless and universal. Here, the individual subjects of history can be judged and measured according to the standards of morality, regardless of time, context and circumstance. Hegel, however, had sought to demonstrate how even the most developed theoretical expression of *Moralität* remained lacking in any objective significance. Hence, why Hegel (1991, pg.29) found it fitting to reference Montesquieu, who he writes:

...stated the true historical view, the genuinely philosophical viewpoint, that legislation in general and its particular determinations should not be considered in isolation and in the abstract, but rather as a dependent moment within ‘one’ totality, in the context of all the other determinations which constitute the character of a nation and age; within this context they gain their genuine significance, and hence also their justification.

For Hegel, it would be folly to assume that one was able to identify *Moralität* or defend any legislation on grounds of objectivity or universality, because doing so would be considering

---

<sup>110</sup> Hegel (1991, pg.178) adds a note to the original text, an excerpt from a letter between F.H. Jacobi to Count Holmer that captures the situation well: “That he feels completely *convinced*, I do not doubt in the least. But how many people proceed from such felt conviction to commit the gravest misdeeds! Thus, if anything may be excused on such grounds, no *rational judgement* of *good and evil* or of *honourable* and *contemptible* decisions is any longer possible; delusion then has equal rights with reason, or rather, reason no longer has any rights or valid authority [*Ansehen*] whatsoever...”. Plenty examples of this fault of abstract moral legislation can be found through history, not the least from Kant himself, whose own subjectivity and racial bias limited the scope of the moral law. And of course, one can point to the U.S constitution whose declaration “that all men are created equal” was penned by Founding Fathers who owned slaves.

them in isolation from the kinds of determinate and relational conditions that characterize *Life*. Life, as we had initially stated with reference to Hegel, is taken not as the coherent arrangement of distinct objects, distinguishable and separable from each other, but as the movement of the dialectic; as a relational process. To then aspire comprehension and apprehension of the “ought” would be to make a demand of the *individual* that they remove themselves from the world, but as Hegel (1977, pg.319) reminds us in the *Phenomenology*, “even Diogenes in his tub is conditioned...”<sup>111</sup>. Determination is then in a sense inescapable for the “I”, which is not a being able to transcend empirical conditions, as if it were able to step outside the dialectical process, but is only a moment in a larger totality. Thus, finding reason through extrapolating oneself from experience is folly, and so the proper task of any philosophy is never to aspire for comprehension of the “ought” but only ever the “what is”:

To comprehend *what is* is the task of philosophy, for *what is* is reason. As far as the individual is concerned, each individual is in any case a *child of his time*, thus philosophy, too, is *its own time comprehended in thoughts*. It is just as foolish to imagine that any philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as that an individual can overleap his own time or leap over Rhodes. If his theory does indeed transcend his own time, if it builds itself a world *as it ought to be*, then it certainly has an existence, but only within his opinions – a pliant medium in which the imagination can construct anything it pleases (Hegel, 1991, pg.21-22).

Though, as Allen Wood (1991) rightly reminds us in his piece “Does Hegel Have an Ethics?” despite Hegel’s critique of the possibility of developing universal moral claims, it would be a mistake to identify him as a historical skeptic or historical relativist in the style of an empiricist critique of morality<sup>112</sup>. Like Kant, Hegel shared a commitment to rationality (Inwood, pg.191) ,

---

<sup>111</sup> Diogenes The Cynic (c.412 BC – 323 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher who sought to withdraw from the world, living and behaving in defiance of social values and institutions. Conventional representations depict him finding refuge in a tub on the streets and living with the dogs whom he claimed lived more virtuous lives than humans

<sup>112</sup> Ex. We can revisit what we above said of David Hume, and the contention that social values, morals, etc. are merely customs, habits, developed out of experience and context.

and the conviction that it was “cognition” that was the true principle of ethical action (Hegel, 1991, pg.171). It is thus imperative for Hegel that the proposed system of ethical life carry an objective rational validity<sup>113</sup>. This validity is afforded through the very odyssey of Spirit as we have outlined it above, as Spirit progresses toward greater knowledge of itself and toward fuller actualization of Freedom. Thus, even though historically situated, Hegel’s “system of right” (Wood, 1991, pg.378) is able to claim objective validity by and through the very narrative of human self-genesis, not infinitely proceeding, but as having actually achieved or reached its goal<sup>114</sup>. The modern European state thus emerges as the “ultimate marker of species development” (Robinson, 2019, pg.96), having traversed through the various stages that have allowed for a reconciliation that resolves the kinds of disharmony that characterize the fallen or estranged condition: between subject and object, individual will and universal will, intuition and concept<sup>115</sup>.

In the rational state – what Hegel also describes as the “reality of the Kingdom of Heaven” (Marcuse, 1960, pg.88)-, this reconciliation makes possible the conditions for ethical life, or the “truly moral life” (Findlay, 1977, pg. xxi), where there is a “positive supersession” of individualism, and where particularity gives way to “universal purpose” (Wallace, 1894, pg. cxiv). Wallace captures the poetics of such a state, as Hegel envisioned it, when he wrote:

---

<sup>113</sup> As Robinson (2019, pg.86) notes, Kant’s moral and political philosophy was “the Archimedean point” for a new science of politics. Like Kant, Hegel too would aspire for the same scientific rigour. Robinson (2019, pg.106) references Karl Mannheim on this point: “The rise of the bourgeoisie was attended by an extreme intellectualism... This bourgeois intellectualism expressly demanded a scientific politics, and actually proceeded to found such a discipline”. And as we will see further, this aspiration of “scientific rigour” finds new meaning in the philosophy of Marx and Engels.

<sup>114</sup> Robinson (2019, pg.90) makes a similar argument as Wood (1991) when he writes in the *Anthropology*: “To solve Kant’s antinomy, Hegel was forced to move beyond the boundaries of Christian theology and eschatology, the closed universe of human consciousness to which he had initially adhered. Hegel maintained that history was an expression of *Reason*. The purpose of historical study, then, was to apprehend the ‘cunning of Reason’, the evolution of the human species from alienation into absolute consciousness...History was the record of progress of Reason’s achievement in the human species. Until now, Hegel insisted and Marx would later concur, human history was really human *pre-history*. Humanity was in the process of evolving into its true *species-being*.”

<sup>115</sup> Intuition = Immediate knowledge, sense perception; Concept = Knowledge mediate through socially determined forms of reason. The reconciliation of the two is the *Idea*, which is the identity of intuition and concept.

It is what some have spoken of as the True life, as the Eternal life; in it, says Hegel, the individual exists *auf ewige Weise*<sup>116</sup>, as it were *sub specie aeternitatis*<sup>117</sup>: his life is hid with his fellows in the common life of his people. His every act, and thought, and will, get their being and significance from a reality which is established in him as a permanent spirit. It is there that he, in the fuller sense, attains, *αὐτάρκεια*<sup>118</sup>, or finds himself no longer a mere part, but an ideal totality...Such a unity is neither the mere sum of isolated individuals, nor a mere majority ruling by numbers: but the fraternal and organic commonwealth which brings all classes and all rights from their pluralistic independence into an ideal identity and indifference. Here all are not merely equal before the laws: but the law itself is a living and organic unity, self-correcting, subordinating and organising, and no longer merely defining individual privileges and so called liberties.

In such a state there is no discrepancy between duty and inclination, between reason and passion (Robinson, 2019, pg.90); the antinomies that rendered the Kantian ethical community in a constant state of frustration and endeavour. Further, in bringing individuality in harmony with the collective, “empirical consciousness” no longer merely imagines itself to know the good in opposition to the bad, nor do individuals exist in restrained, externally imposed, relations with each other<sup>119</sup>. In the rational state individuals are “with themselves” in the institutions; their individuality is not frustrated by the demands of social life, and the duties of ethical life do not restrict them, but liberate them (Wood, 1991, pg.xiii). This is why we noted Hegel’s definition of the good as “...the unity of the concept of the will with the particular will” and as “freedom realized”. We recall that for Hegel, Freedom, as “the absolute end and aim of the world”, is not freedom of the will, as expressed through the freedom to choose between good and evil<sup>120</sup>, but self-determination (Wood, 1991, pg. xi). But, one can be tempted to ascribe to Hegel’s ethics more

---

<sup>116</sup> *In an eternal way* (Google translate)

<sup>117</sup> *Under the perspective of eternity / under the aspect of eternity*

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sub\\_specie\\_aeternitatis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sub_specie_aeternitatis))

<sup>118</sup> *Autarkeia*; Self-sufficiency, which is taken from Aristotle’s, Nicomachean Ethics

([https://academic.mu.edu/taylorr/Ancient\\_Philosophy\\_Spring\\_2016/Greek\\_terms.html](https://academic.mu.edu/taylorr/Ancient_Philosophy_Spring_2016/Greek_terms.html))

<sup>119</sup> In his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel (Inwood, 1992, pg. 62) describes this “mutual recognition of self-conscious individuals coexisting in an ethical community” as “*universal-self consciousness*”. With universal self-consciousness, there is a concrete or actual realization of the universal as opposed to the empty/abstract universality of Kantianism or *Moralität*.

<sup>120</sup> For Hegel this is only “formal freedom”

than simply a reconciliation of the subject with the existing world, the equation of actuality with rationality. There is, one could argue, undergirding Hegel's exaltation of the rational state a means for the attainment of that moral perfection, of righteousness, so longed for by *Moralität*, and one initiated – apparently – through the Christian principle that the human – the human as such – that all humans, are free:

It is a common notion and saying, in reference to the power of Religion, abstractly considered over the hearts of men, that if Christian love were universal, private and political life would both be perfect, and the state of mankind would be thoroughly righteous and moral. Such representations may be a pious *wish*, but do not possess truth; for religion is something internal, having to do with conscience alone. To it all the passions and desires are opposed, and in order that heart, will, intelligence may become true, they must be *thoroughly educated*; Right must become Custom — Habit; practical activity must be elevated to rational action; the State must have a rational organization, and then at length does the will of individuals become a truly righteous one. Light shining in darkness may perhaps give color, but not a picture animated by Spirit (Hegel, 1991, pg.356)<sup>121</sup>.

Thus in drawing out the Hegelian eschatology and its identification with the rational state as both the form and the means of/for the destiny of Spirit, we are in a position to conclude with the question of whether the ethical life of the state in actuality reflected the kinds of harmony and higher unity between self-conscious individuals that was the condition for moral perfection. Variations of this question would fuel the debates among Hegel's followers, some who drew on Hegel's doctrine that everything actual is rational<sup>122</sup> in order to endorse the existing Prussian state

---

<sup>121</sup> The context of this excerpt is one in which Hegel is critiquing the Byzantine empire in not having the potential to make *actual* the Christian religion which existed there only in an abstract character.

<sup>122</sup> Thom Brooks, in his chapter in *Hegel and Contemporary Practical Philosophy: Beyond Kantian Constructivism* (Stein & Glendhill, Ed. 2020) uses the term "rational reconciliation" to describe this aspect of Hegel's philosophy, and quotes Allen Wood saying: "Hegel seeks to overcome alienation by rationally reconciling us to the world, comprehending a divine reason, akin to our own, immanent in it". Reconciliation then, writes Brooks, is "...a kind of *endorsement*. Michael Hardimon says: 'Hegel sought to enable the people of the nineteenth century to overcome their alienation from the central social institutions – the family, civil society, and the state – and to come to 'be at home' within them' in a 'project of reconciliation' (Hardimon 1994:1)" (Stein & Glendhill, Ed. 2020, pg. ).



(the Right Hegelians) (Inwood, 1992, pg.223) , while others (Young/ Left Hegelians) sought to draw on Hegel's veneration of Reason and Freedom to move beyond the status quo.

Marx would emerge from the Left Hegelian tradition, though would undoubtedly come to point out the conservative aspects of the Hegelian system that reconciled us to the existing empirical world; a consequence of the abstract and mystical form of the Hegelian dialectic. Thus, Marx would seek to correct and unearth the truly revolutionary potential of the dialectic through materializing it. In the following section on "Marx's critique of Morality" we will engage in a comparative exercise between Marx and Hegel, and in doing so will demonstrate how the *objective* or material dialectic in Marx 1.) alters the historical narrative of human self-genesis – attesting to instead outline the "*real* history of man" – and yet 2.) maintains or mirrors the Hegelian critique in terms of the *necessary* form of the evolutionary historical outline<sup>123</sup>, which as we have noted, met the prerequisites for maintaining rational or objective validity in a dialectic relation. Both writer's, it will be maintained, were concerned foremost with the development of a more rigorous Science<sup>124</sup>; one absent of the metaphysical and ideological pretensions that preceded their time<sup>125</sup>.

---

<sup>123</sup> Robinson (2019. Pg.95) calls this the "Hegelian machinery of History" that was requisitioned by Marxian philosophy.

<sup>124</sup> In his "preface" to the Phenomenology (1977, pg.3) Hegel writes: "The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of such truth. To help bring philosophy closer to the form of Science, to the goal where it can lay aside the title '*love* of knowing' and be *actual* knowing – that is what I have set myself to do".

<sup>125</sup> Learning from Robinson (2019) one could add a third dimension in the relation between Marx and Hegel's positions on morality, and this being Hegel's critiques of "bourgeois ethics" and the resultant corruption and social disaggregation that accompanied industrial capitalism. For Robinson (2019, pg.95) Hegel's "revulsion to capitalism" and attack on modern industrial society were part of the "fuller debt" that the Marxian intervention owed to Hegel; a debt which was unduly ignored and thus leant to the Marxist dismissal of Hegel as simply a mystical idealist (Robinson, 2019. Pg.95).

## Chapter 6: Marx's Critique of Morality

In her autobiography *Living for Change*, Grace Lee Boggs (1998, pg.151) described Marx as having been determined to create a theory of “scientific socialism” that was grounded in laws just as rigorous as the physical sciences, and which thus sought to exclude all morality, choice or emotion. Yet, Boggs (1998, pg.151) also points out, with special reference to works such as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (1978), that one can read so clearly in Marx's work his “moral outrage” at the ways in which capitalism – as the prevailing mode of production – so readily degraded human life. For Boggs, despite the moral outrage, it is the message of economic determinism that radicals have more closely adopted from Marx's work.

Mihailo Marković, a proponent of the Marxist humanist “Praxis School” that originated in 1960's Yugoslavia, makes a similar observation to Boggs, though perhaps with more of an intention of vindicating Marx. In his article “Marxist Humanism and Ethics” Marković (1963) argues that the presumption of economic determinism in Marx has led to an inflexible politics that rules out all possibility of freedom of choice, responsibility, and the “relative independence of morals from economic conditions and political ends”. Instead, read as a humanist philosophy, in Marxism, Marković argues for the compatibility of “concepts of universal human value”, where all “human nature” is not reduced to just “class nature” and where there is room for the possibility of “universal human morals” that transcend class and epochal limits (Marković, 1963, pg.21). These norms, Marković (1963, pg.21) argues, appear “in all historical forms of morality” and for example include prescriptions such as a fundamental duty to children and community, or the discounting of lying, cheating, stealing and killing. In this way Marxism need not be read as antithetical to morality, or to human choice and freedom, but can instead be read as finding

motivation through morality; through acting with the aspiration of what is right and just in this world.

Contrary to a position such as Marković's, Richard Miller in his (1983) "Marx and Morality", argues that the Marxist materialist critique of ideology had "shattered the basis of all morality" and that according to Marx, talk of "equal right" was "obsolete verbal rubbish... ideological nonsense..."<sup>126</sup> (Miller, 1983, pg.3). Instead, Miller (1983) articulates a Marxism that is better understood as a "nonmoral" social theory which offers an "antihumanitarian" basis for political action.

Steven Lukes (1985) points to this conflicting or "paradoxical" tradition within Marxism concerning the topic of morality, not just in analyses of Marx's work, but within Marx's own writings. For Lukes (1985) Marx and Marxism rests on a "conceptual incoherence" which on the one hand disdains moral vocabulary and all ethical standpoints, which it critiques as "unscientific", yet at the same time vociferously denounces the evils of capitalism and advocates for a more just or equitable world. In her review to Lukes (1985), Kate Soper (1987) in the *New Left Review*, acknowledges the existence of this "paradox" in Marx and Marxism, but points out the lack of analysis on the distinction between "morality" and "moralism". For Soper (1987) "morality" – "...a general belief in the importance and validity of moral values and judgements..." - should not be mistaken for Marx and Engels' critique of "moralism" – "...that adherence to moral values is in itself sufficient to their realization." (Soper, 1987, pg.103). Read in this way, there is not so much an attack by Marx on the holding of moral positions, but "...on the idealistic conception that it is values themselves which determine the extent to which they are realized" (Soper, 1987, pg.103).

---

<sup>126</sup> Marx as quoted in Miller (1983, pg.3). Original source: *Critique of the Gotha Program*

Like Marković (1962), Soper (1987) draws out what she describes as Marx's humanism that does not deny us consciousness of the responsibility of our actions, individually and systemically.

Going beyond the proposition of a paradox all together, and approaching with the kind of nuance we read in Soper (1987), Allen Wood (2004) in his *Karl Marx*, argues that clarity on this question comes from recognizing the distinction in Marx between "moral goods" and "nonmoral goods" (Wood, 2004, pg.129). According to Wood (2004) moral goods and evils include such things as "virtue, right, justice, the fulfillment of duty"; in short the 'ought' that motivates our conscience. By contrast, nonmoral goods include things such as pleasure, happiness, security, physical health, comfort, "things which we would regard as desirable and good for people to have even if no moral credit accrued from pursuing or possessing them" (Wood, 2004, pg.129). Though Wood (2004, pg.129) acknowledges that this distinction is never made explicit in Marx, he maintains that Marx's critiques of capitalism are based on the claim that it frustrates many important nonmoral goods. There is thus no doubt that we can read in Marx a moralistic or principled critique of capitalism, however, these criticisms are never grounded in goods that people "ought" to be provided with or that they have a *right* to (Wood, 2004, pg.129). Such would be to venture into morally based critiques of capitalism - "ideological mystification" - which Marx, as Wood (2004, pg.129) recognizes, thoroughly avoided or disdained. Instead, Marx's critiques of capitalism are always concerned with the potentialities, needs and interests of human beings (nonmoral goods) (Wood, 2004, pg.130).

Additionally, Wood (2004) argues that any notions of right or justice in Marx are not an aberration or signify a paradox once we understand that for Marx (and Engels) moral judgements – their validity or correctness- rests on their correspondence to the prevailing mode of production. For example, Wood (2004, pg.133) argues that for Marx the institution of slavery in the ancient

world cannot be judged as unjust because it corresponded to the prevailing mode of production at that time. To do otherwise would be to lean on “eternal rational principles” concerning justice and right which would be contrary to Marx and Engels’ materialist conception of history, ideology and consciousness. An “unjust” transaction on the other hand is one that “contradicts” or clashes with the prevailing mode of production. Concerning this, Wood (2004, pg.134) writes: “Material production thus provides a basis for moral standards, the only real basis Marx thinks they can have. For Marx, as for Hegel, the morally rational is determined by the socially actual”.

In the above cited literature on the topic of Marx and morality, Wood (2004) is the exception in drawing a relation between Marx and Hegel on this topic, though even so, he does not explore the full scope of the debt owed to Hegel by Marx. Wood (2004) acknowledges Hegel’s influence but only in drawing a relation to the identified conservative or reconciliatory aspects of Hegel’s philosophy: that the actual is rational<sup>127</sup>. Thus, the only way in which Wood can make sense of Marx and Engels’ critiques of capitalism and of the call for a “higher mode of production” – beyond the actual – is along the demands of nonmoral goods in favour of the interests of the

---

<sup>127</sup> In an appended Note to his translation of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, T.M. Knox (1942, pg. 330) points to the significance of the phrase “Hic Rhodus, hic salta! In Hegel’s work. Translated as “Rhodes is here, here is where you jump”, the maxim is taken from one of Aesop’s fables, of an athlete who boasts that when in Rhodes, he had performed a stupendous jump. A bystander listening to the story of the feat remarks ‘Alright! Let’s say this is Rhodes, demonstrate the jump here and now’. The interpretation of this fable that Knox (1942) offers is that “people must be known by their deeds, not by their own claim for themselves”. As Knox (1942, pg.330) further notes, in Hegel the reference to the fable and the maxim could be taken to suggest that “the philosophy of right must have to do with the actuality of modern society (‘What is rational is real; what is real is rational)’ and “not the theories and ideals that societies create for themselves, or some ideal counterposed to existing conditions” (1942, pg.330). Though, as we have also noted earlier and above, to leave the analysis at this – that the rational is actual – would be to mire Hegel in a kind of relativism; absent of the eschatology through which he enables the realization of Freedom and Reason – of the Absolute. Though it is true that for Hegel philosophy cannot leap beyond its time and that the philosopher is always a child of their own time, there are still *times* -stages of history – that through their emergence and negation reflect something higher and closer to the Truth. And this through their conscious harmony with actuality. Thus, in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel behaves in a reconciliatory manner because he is attempting to demonstrate that his time- his moment and his people – are at that emergence of Freedom and Reason, and as Robinson (2019) so aptly described it: as the “ultimate marker of species development”.

proletarian class; these demands being justified only in so far as they seek to remedy conditions that are becoming incompatible with the existing mode of production. Anything else, from a moralistic position, would be tantamount of applying a “foreign standard”- an “ought” - to the existing mode of production, which would essentially mark an attempt to step outside the relativistic nature of existence in general –to step outside of one’s time.

Thus in limiting Marx and Engels critique of capitalism to – plausibly - only nonmoral goods that are in the interests of the working class and justifiable solely in relation to what is actual, Wood (2004, pg.160) is able to conclude with a remark on the reductive and deflationary treatment of moral conceptions and moral consciousness in Marxism. This is explained through a quandary that Wood (2004, pg.160) raises concerning how – amorally – one is actually able to determine whether an existing “economic transaction”, such as the exploitation of labour, is in essence *not* in correspondence with the prevailing mode of production, and so *unjust*. The presumption created for the reader then is that a critique of the exploitation of labour under capitalism in effect springs from a *moral* indignation; one tacitly held by Marx - as evidenced in his vociferous criticisms of the exploits of the bourgeoisie - but which finds insufficient treatment and analyses in an otherwise reductive and anti-moral account of justice and right. Wood’s (2004) treatment of the topic of Marx and morality ultimately lack the coherence with which he wanted to bring to the subject, resulting in a similar paradox which we noted in the sources earlier: Is Marx a moralist? Is Marx an anti-moralist?

Though Wood (2004) should be commended for drawing a relation between Marx and Hegel on the topic of morality, by focusing on only the reconciliatory aspects of Hegel’s philosophy, he ultimately fails to acknowledge the crucial role played by, what Robinson (2019) described as “the Hegelian machinery of History” - which was requisitioned by Marx – and which

arguably underlay his position on morality among other aspects of his materialist and dialectic philosophy. The way we understand the term “Hegelian Machinery of History” here is not separate from what we have also described above as the Odyssey of Spirit or the narrative of human self-genesis that one reads in Hegel. As noted earlier, for Hegel, Spirit progresses through a series of stages through a kind of universal human pre-history, motivated by the movement of the dialectic - that is, propelled to a higher unity through the experience of negation - and given purposive movement through Spirit’s desire into what knowing is – that is, the realization of its own nature. As Robinson (2019) recognized, it was through making history move in such a way that Hegel was able to resolve the Kantian antinomies: the discrepancy between being and knowing; reason and passion; subject and object: the “unnecessary dualisms” that impeded the kind of objective insight that Hegel believed to be the true starting point of philosophy. For Hegel, this progression through history did not proceed infinitely but achieved its resolution in the form of the modern European state which thus emerges as the “ultimate marker of species development” (Robinson, 2019, pg.96).

Also noted earlier, was how Wood (1991) had pointed to this element of Hegel’s philosophical system as the means through which Hegel is able to establish objective rational validity, as opposed to a relativistic position concerning ethics and morality. And so it is surprising that he does not identify a similar dimension at play in the philosophic system articulated by Marx and Engels. This is even more surprising when we remind ourselves that Marx (1978, pg.112) had identified the “self-genesis of man as process”, the alienation and the transcendence of alienation, as the “outstanding” development and contribution from Hegelian philosophy- albeit limited in Hegel due to its confinement in thought.

Earlier at the start of this section we discussed Marx's grounding of the Hegelian dialectic, though noted that the ontological and epistemological demands of the Hegelian system - the relationality of being and of concepts - remained in tact. The question posed then was how would it be possible to forward a moral or ethical project, as well as grapple with the demands of universality and rationality that were otherwise assumed to arise only in an objective sense; that is, understood in relation to separation and impartiality? With this question in mind, we realize that the progressive movement of history in Marx's theory is not an unconscious inheritance or remnant of a 19<sup>th</sup> century ideology of progress that only crept into his philosophic system, but is rather a means that is consciously utilized in order to justify the rational validity and scientific character of his theory.

In the cited literature on Marx and morality (Lukes, 1985; Riley, 1983; Soper, 1987; Wood, 2004) all the authors make either direct or indirect references to Marx's identification of a "higher society" or "higher mode of production", though read it as an indication of a latent morality in Marx, since the articulation of a higher phase or higher form would constitute the application of a "foreign standard" (Wood, 2004) onto the existing context. In other words, it would be an exercise in what Hegel identified as *Moralität* – a conviction of what and how the world "ought" to be, beyond what it currently is. For Lukes (1985) this is indicative of Marx's uneasy straddling between utopianism and his critique of utopianism – a paradox in his theoretical system. Soper (1985, pg.106) would critique certain dimensions of Lukes critique, but otherwise agree that in Marx there is an undeniable "theoretical incoherence" on this score. For Wood (2004), there is no incoherence a such, but only an insufficiently thought through advocacy of nonmoral goods on the part of Marx – insufficient because without a moral stance there would be no justifiable way



of identifying what really is or isn't in contradiction with the actual, and so deserving of the label *unjust*.

However, when we read Marx more closely in relation to Hegel, we are able to appreciate the way in which he is able to forward the premise of a higher or more just future without contradicting himself; without lapsing into utopianism and thus sacrificing the critical dimensions inherited from the Hegelian dialectic: the relational nature of Life, and thus the presentation of all universal and “fixed thought-forms” as transient; only *moments* of the abstraction process (Marx, 1978, pg.122). As inheritors of the Hegelian system, and with it the dialectic, Marx and Engels were bound to the machinery of history and to the narrative of human progress if they – like Hegel – sought to develop a theory that held an objective rational validity.

It was through making history move – and relatedly, in identifying progressive stages leading up to the capitalist mode of production – that Marx and Engels were thus able to justify their ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’ positions, while maintaining the standard of “scientific”. It is this thesis that will be clarified and defended in this chapter, and which will both: 1.) intervene into the existing debates concerning Marx’s position on morality; and 2.) contribute to the central concern of this dissertation which is with Marx’s Eurocentrism and the debates concerning his multilinearity vs. unilinearity. Though the path of a discussion concerning morality may seem a digression, we hope to demonstrate how it will have afforded us the means of an intervention into clarifying the impracticability of a multilinear Marx – especially if it is supposed to be a Marx that is argued to have moved away from a commitment to notions of progress through human history.

### ***6.1: The elemental class***

On October 25<sup>th</sup> 1842 the *Rheinische Zeitung* - a 19<sup>th</sup> century German “opposition paper” (Tucker, 1978, pg. xv) – would publish a series of articles by Marx in which he would report on

the debates occurring in the Rhineland Provincial Assembly regarding the law governing the gathering of fallen wood (Sherover, 1979). An otherwise seemingly ambiguous moment in Marx's career as a writer, what would come to be known colloquially as the "Wood Theft Debates" would mark a turning point in the intellectual evolution of the then young Marx. It was the first time that Marx would touch on the material interests of the popular masses, and this experience would behave as a starting point for his continuing elaboration and advocacy for the concept of the Proletariat<sup>128</sup> (Sherover, 1979, pg. 53). These articles concerned the criminalization of the gathering of fallen wood which was deemed to be theft committed against the "forest owner" by "*die Standeslosen*"<sup>129</sup> aka the poor. This description of the poor, as those with no estate, is borrowed directly from Hegel's characterization of the "unincorporated poor", who for Hegel, through their character of being unincorporated, were thus a rabble; a poverty stricken and rebellious group of people (Sherover, 1979).

In her piece "The Virtue of Poverty: Marx's Transformation of Hegel's Concept of the Poor" Erica Sherover (1979) uniquely engages with the Wood Theft Debates to draw out this transformative moment between the Marx and Hegel relation, pointing to the ways in which Marx's discussion of the poor *vis a vis* their relation to civil society marks a significant shift from Hegel's view of the poor, and a modification in the location and prerequisites of what may be considered the "elemental class of human society" (Marx, 1842). Not only is this moment

---

<sup>128</sup> This is not a position universally held when it comes to tracing the antecedents of Marx's image of the proletariat. For Robert Tucker (1964, pg.113) Marx's understanding of the poor and of the workers is "not of empirical origin" but is instead strongly influenced by writers such as Lorenz von Stein – a conservative Hegelian and author of a government commissioned study on French radical thought. For Tucker (1964, pg.113) Marx's earliest meetings with the proletariat were in 1843; well after his philosophical positions had been more or less solidified. Nonetheless, it is our opinion here that Tucker (1964) underemphasizes the role played by the Wood Theft Debates and as will be demonstrated in the following pages, the influence played by the unincorporated poor in the future vision of the Proletariat.

<sup>129</sup> "those with no estate"

insightful in drawing out the initial means and methods through which Marx would come to privilege the epistemological position of the impoverished in society, but the discussion in the Wood Theft debates also lends to our focus in this section on the implications of that positionality for the concept of *right* – i.e. what may be deemed moral<sup>130</sup> in a universal or rational sense, as opposed to the customary laws such as those in the interests of the wealthy, and that only guise themselves as universal.

As Sherover (1979) notes, throughout Marx's discussion in the Wood Theft Debates there pervades a sense of "cosmic rightness" as regards the activities of the poor; and of their possession of not a particular consciousness but an "elemental human consciousness" (Sherover, 1979, pg.59) - a "universality of consciousness" (Sherover, 1979, pg.60). The poor, the "politically and socially propertyless" (Marx, 1842), are thus unlike those members of the Provincial Assembly or the forest owner who have made of wood a "*Rhindelander's* fetish" and who enthrone above humanity "the immoral, irrational, and soulless abstraction of a particular material object and a particular consciousness which is slavishly subordinated to this object" (Marx, 1842). This distinction however will become clearer as we focus in on the significance that Marx places on the discussion of civil society, and of the implications of this concept between Marx and Hegel.

As we have noted in detail earlier, the state form – more particularly, the modern European state – would for Hegel fulfill the appearance of the Eternal, the Absolute. It is Ethical Life, "the true, complete, many-sided life" wherein an essential – conscious – unity - an organic, self-determining totality - would finally allow for a resolution to such dichotomous relations as good vs. evil that are a mark of our estrangement. It was to be the resolution to a defective and deceptive

---

<sup>130</sup> Marx is careful never to use the word "moral" in an advocative sense, though here we mean what he distinguishes in his articles between the "customary rights" which have no rational basis, and those customary right which do (Marx, 1842)

*Moralität* that was insufficient to guarantee a True, rational and achieved moral perfection. As Inwood (1992, pg.278) notes, for Hegel, the state was a device to “make us into full human beings... to bring individuals back into unity, out of the dispersal into private interests promoted by civil society”. And though Marx would come to critique the proposition of Hegel’s rational state as a figment of abstraction, it was a project very much concretely imbued with a proposed political structure that was to guarantee its rational and objective character.

Though the potentiality had now existed for that universality of “Christian love” over the hearts of the people, it was a mere “pious wish” so long as heart, will, and intelligence were not “thoroughly educated” (Hegel, 2001, pg.356). For this, and in Platonic fashion<sup>131</sup>, Hegel maintained that the State must have a rational organization, “and then at length does the will of individuals become a truly righteous one” (Hegel, 2001, pg.356). The Rational state, as the highest achieved form of social and political organization by humankind, was divided into three branches: sovereign (individual), executive (particular) and legislative (universal) (Magee,2010, pg.230). The sovereign or/individual was the branch of the constitutional monarch: a hereditary ruler who would behave as a unifying figure for the population and who would have the final word. The executive/particular was the branch tasked with making recommendations to the monarch, as well interpreting and executing legislation. This branch included the heads of civil service, the police<sup>132</sup>

---

<sup>131</sup> See Plato’s *Republic* (1997). For Plato, the *Kallipolis* -the just city state – was to be organized along the hierarchy of three main class: the producers (at the bottom); the auxiliaries; and the rulers. What predominated in the producers, the majority of the population, was the appetitive part of the soul. They were thus money minded, and characterized by irrationality. The rational or “golden” souls were to take the places of the rulers, i.e., the philosopher kings who because of their philosophical natures- their pursuit of truth above all else – would be the most ideal to lead and preserve a just society.

<sup>132</sup> As a clarifying note, we refer to Inwood (1992, pg.54) who writes: “The police... *Polizei* (from the Greek *politeia*, 'constitution', via Latin) is wider than our 'police'. From the fifteenth to the eighteenth century it was used for 'government, public administration'. Hegel still equates it with *öffentliche Macht* ('public POWER, authority'). Thus it covers not only law enforcement, but also the fixing of the prices of necessities, control of the quality of goods, the provision of public almshouses, hospitals, street-lighting, etc.

and the judiciary, i.e., the “civil servants” who were educated to see their jobs as public service and who were trained to keep in mind the interests of the whole of society (Magee, 2010, pg. 231). For Hegel the civil servants have as their goal universality (Sherover, 1979, pg.52); they are drawn from the middle classes and so educated and imbued with an ethic of industriousness which made them best suited to carry out the activities of government (Magee, 2010, pg.231).

The third branch was the legislative/universal which included the people as a whole (excluding peasants and workers), not as private individuals, but as members of estates (*Stände*) (Inwood, 1992, pg.279). For Hegel this legislative branch consisted of two houses: 1.) the “upper house” which was made up of the *Stände* of the hereditary landed gentry, and who because of their inherited property, were ideally equipped for this privileged role since they were free from concerns with trade or the quest for profit (Magee, 2010, pg 231). And 2.) the “lower house” which was to be made up of: the business class – merchants and manufactures - which was less able to perceive the good because of their concern with profit; as well as those belonging to “corporations”: guilds, unions and professional associations which behaved as a means of self-regulation and policing, and so also behave as “organs of universality”. The corporations would elect people to the lower house of the legislature<sup>133</sup> (Magee, 2010, pg.231).

But it was the civil servants, those who could be educated to see their jobs as public service that were for Hegel the universal class: “a class within society whose interest were identical with the interests of the society as a whole” (Robinson, 2019. Pg.109). Preceding this more detailed theory of social classes that Hegel associated with the rational state, Hegel had previously located

---

<sup>133</sup> Hegel’s divisional organization of the rational state may at first seem to be a glaring betrayal of the achieved knowledge that “all men are free”, which was supposed to distinguish the post-Christian era from the kinds of caste based societies in the East. Though these hierarchies could be defended if one maintained that here they are not *Natural* distinctions, as well as the reminder that for Hegel the achieved universality was never meant to be an undifferentiated universality – the kind that Spirit first experienced. Instead, for Hegel it is the very organization of estates that gives rise to universality, in the same way that it is determination gives rise to Objectivity.

this Absolute or universal class among the nobility, as opposed to the Burger class and the class of “raw ethical life” aka the peasantry (Robinson, 2019, pg.108). But in the end it was the class of middle-class public servants: civil servants, scholars, soldiers, the police, the judiciary, who were to emerge as the historical expressions of the Rational state (Robinson, 2019, pg.93). What had maintained itself throughout Hegel’s theory of social classes in both its earlier and later more detailed form was the denigration of the unincorporated poor: the peasantry, the day labourer. As Sherover (1979, pg.55) put it succinctly:

Hegel’s description of the poor and their state has nothing in common with the notions of ‘genteel’ or ‘honorable’ poverty. His discussion of the unincorporated poor is free from any traces of idealization. There is nothing honorable in Hegel’s eyes in being a member of the *Pöbel*.<sup>134</sup>

*Die Standeslosen* - who did not belong to any authorized corporation<sup>135</sup> or recognized estate - were entirely excluded from Hegel’s scheme for the cultivating and directing of the state along the lines of the universal. Through their very condition of not belonging to any kind of regulatory body, they could not be relied upon for any rational contribution to society. Nor were they considered by Hegel to be members of civil society as such (Sherover, 1979, pg.55):

Hegel’s reasoning on this point is as follows: the only common element (*Das Gemeinsame*) which really exists in civil society is “what is legally constituted and recognized” (*ibid*), and it is clear that a social order which consists of Corporations and estates cannot bestow

---

<sup>134</sup> See also Wallace (1894, pg. ) for a detailed description of Hegel’s position on the various classes of society: Ex. The “Burger” or bourgeois class who “knows no country” and for whom money is the supreme universal; for whom exchange is honoured while “honour and morality go to the dogs”. As well, the “peasantry” which are for Hegel an undifferentiated mass whose only allegiance – as a partial consequence of their weakness of intelligence - is always and only to “a commanding superior” as opposed to “law or a general view” (Wallace, 1894, pg.) . Robinson (2019) had argued that part of the fuller debt Marx owed to Hegel can be located in Hegel’s critique of the money minded bourgeois or industrial class, but here we can also see how Marx may have also inherited Hegel’s belittlement of the peasantry, which in the Marxian schema would occupy a similar abject position in the hierarchy of social order. We are of course reminded of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* where Marx (1852) infamously compared the peasantry to a “sack of potatoes”.

<sup>135</sup> Inwood (1992, pg.55) writes that for Hegel the *Korporation* as a concept, in addition to guilds and professional associations, included religious bodies , town councils and learned societies; all with the effect of mitigating the “competitive individualism of the system of needs”. Thus members of a corporation have the benefit of belonging to an “organ of universality” – a particular and limited universality nonetheless - (Sherover, 1979, pg.55) but a universality in as much as one’s individual interests are subsumed to the ends of a “whole” (Hegel, 1991, pg. 271).

legal recognition on an "estate" of unincorporated individuals . In terms of the standards of civil society such an "estate" is a non-estate.

By logic of their unincorporated condition, the poor were thus absent of the requirements to be members of civil society. But where Hegel would dismiss the lower classes, Marx would appropriate the notion of a “universal class” – whose interests were identical with those of society as a whole - and locate it among these same unincorporated poor, and this by consequence of their very condition of being outside of civil society.

In article No. 300, from October 27<sup>th</sup> 1842, Marx would make the first reference to *Die Standeslosen* as “the elemental class of human society” (Marx, 1842) whose “customs”, unlike the customary rights of the aristocracy, are not “contrary to the conception of rational right” (Marx, 1842). So what makes their customs fundamentally correct or rational? In her piece, Sherover (1979, pg.57-58) points to what she identifies as the “ontological significance” that Marx affords to the poor based on two primary accounts: 1.) in gathering fallen wood the poor demonstrate a “sure instinct” regarding the “*indeterminate* aspect of property”, i.e. of the true nature of something like fallen wood which has “little connection with the growing tree as the cast-off skin has with the snake” (Marx, 1842); And 2.) Sherover (29179. Pg.58) points out the element of “cosmic rightness” on behalf of the activities of the poor, who for Marx (1842) are acting not out of private interests but are driven by “an urge to satisfy a natural need...a rightful urge”. Thus, in their activity of gathering fallen wood, which they require for the basic maintenance of their life, the poor demonstrate an “instinctive sense of right” (Marx, 1842) that is not contrary to nature.

A third justification for the rational customs of the poor concerns the subjectivity of their consciousness, which for Sherover (1979, pg.59-60) is reflected in Marx’s criticisms of the kinds of “*abject materialism*” and “fetishism” that plague the “partial consciousness” of those individuals who are within civil society. Within the fold of civil society, among the privileged

classes – such as among those members of the Provincial Assembly or the forest owner - private interest dominates and the will is “chained to the most petty and selfish interests like a galley-slave to his rowing bench” (Marx, 1842). With this attachment to “particular interest” comes “particular consciousness”, which for Marx can only express and gives rise to customary rights that through their content conflict with “the form of universal law”; they are rather “formations of lawlessness” that are contrary to universality and necessity – and so contrary to rationality (Marx, 1842).

The poor however, as we have noted, are outside of civil society – they are the propertyless, and those with no estate- and through this state of abject being they are not clouded by the artificial values and false conceptions of civil society (Sherover, 1979, pg.59). Whereas the privileged have their interests wedded to the material property which they possess, the propertyless poor “who own nothing except themselves” have their interests only in “life, freedom, humanity, and citizenship of the state” (Marx, 1842); what can otherwise be described as “universal interests” (Sherover, 1979, pg. 60).

For Marx (1842) the non universal and irrational customs of the privileged classes reflected not the “human content of right”, but only its animal form; and despite its “animal mask” it was nonetheless enshrined as the custom of the state, i.e. it was made *legal*. The consequence then is that instead of concern with the “safety of citizens”, in its legislation, the state considers to be harmful only that which implicates the interests and property of the wealthy, such as those of the forest owner. Despite Marx’s later rejection of the state, as Sherover (1979, pg.65) notes, he here still considers it to be “the locus and guardian of universality”, and so he writes that where the wood thief may have robbed the forest owner, “the forest owner has made use of the wood thief to purloin *the state itself*” (Marx, 1842). Despite safeguarding the interests of the wealthy over and



above the citizens, Marx (1842) still maintains a sense of hope in the state form, and in his final article on the Wood Theft Debates, he makes his plea:

The state can and must say: I guarantee right against all contingencies. Right alone is immortal in me, and therefore I prove to you the mortality of crime by doing away with it. But the state cannot and must not say: a private interest, a particular existence of property, a wooded plot of land, a tree, a chip of wood (and compared to the state the greatest tree is hardly more than a chip of wood) is guaranteed against all contingencies, is immortal. The state cannot go against the nature of things... .

These sentiments would be further developed however, and receive fuller articulation just one year later in Marx's 1843 manuscript *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Though left unpublished during his lifetime, Marx saw the work as a milestone on his road to historical materialism (Tucker, 1978, pg. 16) and it would mark his first explicit critical engagement with Hegelian philosophy. In the *Critique* Marx (1970) would echo "The Wood Theft Debates", writing:

In the true state it is not a question of the possibility of every citizen to dedicate himself to the universal in the form of a particular class, but of the capability of the universal class to be really universal, i.e., to be the class of every citizen. But Hegel proceeds from the postulate of the pseudo-universal, the illusory universal, universality fixed in the form of a particular class.

The "German Philosophy of the state and of right" (Marx, 1870) had found in the modern European state the means for the realization of right- one based on custom nonetheless, but custom which was rationally and universally valid. Though as was evidenced in Marx's experience of "The Wood Theft Debates", rather than uphold "the sunlit path of justice" (Marx, 1842), the state was sacrificing "the immortality of the law" to the private interests of a particular class. What was clear, with especial reference to Hegel who had sanctified the modern state along with a hierarchy of estates, was that the universal could not be secured through a particular class, for example, the educated civil servants. What resulted was a "pseudo-universal", the illusory universal. Rather, what Marx had come to argue was that the "true state", the true guardian of universality, required

“the capability of the universal class to be *really* [Emphasis added] universal, i.e. to be the class of every citizen ”.

For Marx, this limitation of insight or confusion on the part of Hegelian philosophy was a consequence of the abstraction with which it approached reality. We earlier discussed Marx’s critique of Hegelian abstraction with particular focus on the discussion as outlined in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. There, Marx (1978) would critique the non-objective character of the Hegelian dialectic – where the disparity between objects exists only within itself, i.e. within consciousness and as a consequence of human self-estrangement. For Marx, such a non-objective relation that implied no external relation to the human, signified non-objectivity; a *nullity* or “un-being”. And we repeat that for Marx (1978, pg.117) an unobjective being that “does not have its nature outside itself” is “something unreal, nonsensical... something merely thought of (merely imagined, that is) – a creature of abstraction” (Marx, 1978, pg.116).

Marx would also argue that in Hegel, *objectivity* as a consequence does not correspond to the very “essence of man” who is in that speculative philosophy only regarded as a “non-objective, spiritual being” (Marx, 1978, pg.113). Thus in Hegel the human appears “only in the shape of mind” (Marx, 1978, pg.111); as self-consciousness, rather than as “*real Man*”, “corporeal man, man with feet firmly on the solid ground...” (Marx, 1978, pg.115)<sup>136</sup>.

In his critique of the German philosophy of right and state, Marx would anticipate this same critique of Hegelian abstraction that we read in the *Manuscripts*. In the *Contribution to the*

---

<sup>136</sup> It is again clarify that when Marx argues this he does not imply an alternative objectivity that would reduce the dialectic to a kind of causal relation between distinct and already defined objects. This was the very form of materialism that he would critique Feuerbach – and all “hitherto existing materialism” – for in his Thesis No. 1 on Feuerbach. Instead we are better understanding this relation as we have clarified earlier, through Marx’s employment of the analogy of the sun and the plant and of how they each establish themselves as what they are through their objective relation to each other. For more clarification see the previous sub-section on “Marx’s Critique of Hegel’s Abstraction”.

*Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction*, which Marx (1970) wrote at the end of 1843 - as an introduction to a proposed revised version of his original *Critique* - he would write: "...Man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society" (Marx, 1970, pg.131). This central placement of the human -as real, as lived, as concrete- was an inheritance of the "intellectual innovation of epochal importance" (Tucker, 1978, pg.xxiii) that was initiated by Feuerbach as a response to Hegelian philosophy; or what he and Marx would both describe as "speculative philosophy". We have already noted earlier the indebtedness Marx had to Feuerbach, as "...the true conqueror of the old philosophy" (Marx, 1978, pg.107), but it is in Marx's critique of the German philosophy of right and state - which he says was "given its most logical, profound and completed expression by Hegel" (Marx, 1970, pg.136) – that the meaning and significance of this indebtedness to Feuerbach is first really witnessed.

For Feuerbach, as Engels (1946) would explain "nothing exists outside of nature and man" including all philosophy, and all "religious fantasies". Such concepts and ideas as of a divine being were then only creations out of our own essence. But not our essence as such but a consequence of our human estrangement; our estrangement from our essence; from our selves. In the "Introduction" to *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tucker (1978, pg. xxii) describes the "transformational criticism" – the inversion – that Feuerbach made of Hegelian philosophy's principal propositions in order to reveal its "scientific truth". Where as for Hegel "man is spirit (or God) in the process of self-alienation and self-realization" the actual truth of the matter for Feuerbach was that God is self-alienated man (Tucker, 1978, pg. xxii). The very conception or idealized image of a God was then a feature of human estrangement; it was a cosmology, a belief or a philosophy that sprang from our estranged human condition; from nature, of which the human was a part. In it's inverted form, the solution to estrangement then was not the concrete realization

of humans' divine essence – the kind of resolution we read in Hegel – but of the human taking God “back into himself” (Tucker, 1978, pg. xxii). In *The Essence of Christianity*, the text where Feuerbach (1881, pg.231) would initiate this transformational critique, he wrote:

If the divine qualities are human, the human qualities are divine. Only when we abandon a philosophy of religion, or a theology, which is distinct from psychology and anthropology, and recognise anthropology as itself theology, do we attain to a true, self-satisfying identity of the divine and human being, the identity of the human being with itself.

Thus Hegel would be made use of by being turned “right side up”. Though it is important to clarify that the corrective was made not simply by the abstract act of inversion, but through literally grounding oneself in the empirical reality. In the inversion, the idealism of the Hegelian system was metamorphosed into a “humanism” that recognized the fundamental centrality of the human and of nature (Tucker, 1978, pg.xxiii). Thus it would be through a similar inversion – a “transformational criticism” – that Marx would critique Hegel's political philosophy, and more specifically, of the Hegelian rational state.

For Hegel, the rational state reflected the supreme and real appearance of the Absolute. It emerged in human history as “the fully realized concept”; as the organic, self-determining totality. And in its self-determination it reflected the kind of conscious unity that moved the human species beyond the dichotomies of estrangement and toward the realization of Freedom. The state, as this “organic unity” thus existed for Hegel not as something distinct from individuals but instead moulded and formed the individuals who constitute it (Inwood, pg.125). It was through this determination in relation to the state – as a greater social whole with which we identify ourselves (Magee,2010, pg.232) – that Ethical Life – the “truly moral life” (Findlay, 1977, pg. xxi) – was made possible, absent of the contradictions between individual and general interest that had made ineffective *Moralität*.

Corresponding to the rational state – as the expression of Reason – in addition to the previously noted hierarchical divisions, was the distinction drawn between Family and Civil Society. The Family, according to Hegel, reflected a kind of simpler unity where family members learned to “subordinate their individual desires to the good of the whole” (Magee, 2010, pg.54). From the Family, emerged the domain of Civil Society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) which was the anti-thesis to the “protective cocoon of the family”; it was for Hegel -to put it simply - the “dog-eat-dog business world of the middle class” (Magee, 2010, pg.54) where individuals related to each other as traders and where the division of labour determined life. As noted earlier, civil society, within, yet distinct from the greater social whole – the rational state – was for Hegel divided into “estates” (*Stände*) which through the arrangement of “corporations” were to encourage people within civil society- where the motivation was self-interest – to behave in the direction of cooperation and to be educated for life in the state.

What was unique in this outline by Hegel was the relative distinction that was drawn between state, civil society and family. Of course, dialectically speaking there was no strict distinction possible within the Hegelian universe, but the determinative relation between family, civil Society and state was in Hegel directed in the service of the state – as the existent realization of universality and Reason – or what Marx (1970, pg.57) would describe as Hegel’s “actualization of free mind”.

For Marx (1970), this separation of the state from civil society and from the family in effect made the latter products of the state; as finite moments of the “Idea” [the state]. The consequence was a mystification of the actual constitution of the state which rather than an abstract ideal had in actuality and as its presupposition the family and civil society :

The Idea is given the status of a subject, and the actual relationship of family and civil society to the state is conceived to be its inner imaginary activity. Family and civil society

are the presuppositions of the state; they are the really active things; but in speculative philosophy it is reversed. But if the Idea is made subject, then the real subjects – civil society, family, circumstances, caprice, etc. – become unreal, and take on the different meaning of objective moments of the Idea<sup>137</sup>.

The determinative relation between civil society and the state, where the state was now taken to be itself a determination of civil society, was the inversion, the “transformational criticism” of Feuerbach that Marx would apply to the Hegelian philosophy of the state and right. For Marx, family and civil society were those very species-forms [*Gattutigsgestaltungen*] in which “the actual person brings his actual content into existence, objectifies himself, and leaves behind the abstraction of *person quand meme*”. The flaw in Hegel was treating the “mystical substance”, i.e. the abstract state as the starting point, as the “subject” rather than with starting with the “real subjects”; the concrete forms in which people actualized their being<sup>138</sup>. It was instead civil society – the economic life, the legal and social arrangements (Inwood, 1992, pg.53) – and not the abstraction of the “state” that provided the keys to insight into the actuality of modern life.

In its false inversion of (real) subject as object and object as subject, Hegelian philosophy could only treat the “empirical existent” (Marx, 1970, pg.39) in an uncritical manner. The concrete was necessarily, despite its actual content or organization, expressed as “rational” since its empirical significance had a “different significance from itself” (Marx, 1978, pg.18), i.e. it was taken not for what it was but as a “result” of the actually rational existent – the rational state. Thus, Hegel was not able to see that the privileges and hierarchies of the estates and of civil society, rather than providing a rational organization to the state and in the service of universality, in fact created greater individuation, separation and difference in society. They were in fact in the service of irrationality, and inculcative of particular as opposed to universal consciousness. Thus Marx

---

<sup>137</sup> We see here how Marx was further developing, and building upon what he had begun to critique in the Wood Theft Debate.

<sup>138</sup> Marx (pg. 28) would put it succinctly: “The state is an abstraction. The people alone is what is concrete.”

(1978, pg.64) would write: “The claim that the rational is actual is contradicted precisely by an irrational actuality, which everywhere is the contrary of what it asserts and asserts the contrary of what it is”.

For Marx, Hegel’s failure to treat the concrete conditions of life as the real starting point had led to a failed construction and attribution of “organic unity” which was meant to characterize Ethical Life and which was to be achieved in the rational state. Instead, Hegel had taken refuge in an “imagined organic unity” (Marx, 1970, pg.59); an imagined universal that did not pertain to the essence of the *actual*. In its actuality, the modern state was not a vehicle for concrete freedom, nor for the realization of moral perfection. Though at this stage in his critique Marx does not explicitly dismiss the state form in the same manner that he and Engels would a year later in the 1845 drafting of *The German Ideology*<sup>139</sup>, he would write – in the *Critique of the Philosophy of Right* –that despite Hegel’s critique of morality, “he has done nothing but develop the morality of the modern state and modern private rights” (Marx,1970). Situating his own work, and his own critique of Hegel on this score, Marx would follow up by writing “A more complete separation of morality from the state, its fuller emancipation, was desired”.

For Marx (1970) the fuller emancipation of morality, the truer realization of Ethical Life was a matter of *praxis* – not a consequence of thought as with speculative philosophy, or of the universal realized in the form of a particular class – but of the universal *actually* existent; that is, of the capability of a universal class “to be *really* universal, i.e., to be the class of every citizen”. This would be the concrete form of the “real subjects” that could then lend to something like a concrete universality for the state. As we noted earlier, in The Wood Theft Debates, Marx had begun to identify the universal class - what he there described as “the elemental class of human

---

<sup>139</sup> “To this modern private property corresponds the modern State, which, purchased gradually by the owners of property by means of taxation, has fallen entirely into their hands...” (Marx and Engels, 1978, pg.187)

society” with the *Die Standeslosen* [“the unincorporated poor”] whose customs reflected an “instinctive sense of right” and who in their propertyless condition and position outside of civil society safeguarded them from the corruption of private property and self-interest. For Marx, as Sherover (1979) would explain, the poor held fundamentally “universal interests”.

It should be noted, however, that in *The Wood Theft Debate*’s we are still not treated with the kind of scientific rigour that we read in Marx’s later works concerning the prerequisites for universal self-consciousness, and here in his description of the instinctive rightness of the poor – evidence through their valuation of human life over a material object- there is still the hint of reliance on morality, or the presupposition of a moral value such as the greater worth of human life as opposed to that of an object. Would such still not be an example of *Moralität*?

It is then in *The Contribution to the Critique of the Philosophy of Right: Introduction* where Marx would further concretize this notion with respect to the identity of a class who fit the prerequisites for a genuine universality – a “universal class” whose subjective interests were identical with those of society as a whole. This class held the authority as the guardians of universality, not through a “cosmic rightness” (Sherover, 1979), but because of the concrete character of their conditions of life, and subsequently, of the interests which those conditions informed. It was an appropriation of the Hegelian “universal class” that was not mired in particular interest or clouded by “particular consciousness”, and one that spoke to that character of a “true state” wherein it is not about the ability of every citizen to dedicate themselves to the universal, but of the universal class being *really* universal.. In the *Introduction* he would write:

No class of civil society can play this role unless it arouses in itself and in the masses a moment of enthusiasm, a moment in which it associates, fuses, and identifies itself with society in general, and is felt and recognized to be society’s general representative, a moment in which its demands and rights are truly those of society itself, of which it is the head and heart. Only in the name of the universal rights of society can a particular class lay claim to universal dominance.



With specific reference to Germany, Marx (1970, pg.141-142) would write that there was no such class of civil society that had the need or capacity for universal emancipation, save one:

Our answer: in the formation of a class with radical chains, a class in civil society that is not of civil society, a class that is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society having a universal character because of its universal suffering and claiming no particular right because no particular wrong but unqualified wrong is perpetrated on it; a sphere that can claim no traditional title but only a human title; a sphere that does not stand partially opposed to the consequences, but totally opposed to the premises of the German political system; a sphere, finally, that cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all the other spheres of society, thereby emancipating them; a sphere, in short, that is the complete loss of humanity and can only redeem itself through the total redemption of humanity. This dissolution of society existing as a particular class is the proletariat.

Upon completing the *Introduction* in 1844 Marx would send a copy to Feuerbach along with a long letter where he would credit Feuerbach with providing a “philosophical foundation for socialism” by bringing the idea of the human species from “the heaven of abstraction to the real earth” (Tucker, 1978, pg.53). Through “transformational criticism” Marx had made his first step in turning Hegel “right side up” and through this, had identified the real subject-object of history, not within the machinations of the abstract state, but in the very concrete and very corporeal “class with radical chains”. It was this class that through its revolutionary activity and insight would be able to usher in the Kingdom of God on Earth that was not to be found in and through the state, but through the abolition of the state, and of private property.

## **6.2: The Critique of Utopianism**

Emerging from within the disputes that plagued the “Hegelian school”, Feuerbach would carry the uniqueness of having “pulverized the contradictions” (Engels, 1886) and in essence having stepped out of the idealistic realm within which both Old and Young Hegelians disputed. In *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*<sup>140</sup> - which Engels (1946) wrote

---

<sup>140</sup> In his “The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism” Lenin (1975, pg. 641) notes this text of Engels’, along with the *Communist Manifesto*, as “handbooks for every class-conscious worker”.

as a more complete section on Feuerbach, which he felt was lacking in his and Marx's *The Germany Ideology* - he would write that Feuerbach had without circumlocutions "placed materialism on the throne again". And this, through the position that nature was the basis of all humanity, and with it, the thoughts, conceptions and beliefs held by humanity – human consciousness.

For Feuerbach, though Hegel had succeeded in abolishing the contradiction between thought and being, particularly as expressed in the work of Kant, it was nonetheless an abolition only existing "*within* thought"<sup>141</sup>. A Similar and inherited point as been remarked above with reference to Marx in regard to Hegel. For Feuerbach, this limitation in Hegel failed to allow him to see that religious consciousness was itself a consequence of estrangement – real, experienced, lived estrangement – and that a concept such as god or the gods were simply the estranged projections of our own idealized or perfected humanity (Robinson, 2019, pg.8). So much has already been noted above, particularly as relates to the transformational nature of this critique where the relation between the subject and predicate is inverted.

But we must here ask, if the resolution to alienation in Hegel is the self-realization of humans as God (Absolute), then what was the alternative to this resolution in Feuerbach? And what alternative form of morality or ethics was to accompany this resolution? It is on this question that Engels would note the seeming betrayal of materialism by Feuerbach and the "real idealism" (Engels, 1946) that continued to plague his inverted system. For Feuerbach the criticism of Hegelian philosophy, and with it the kinds of religious consciousness it adopted, was complete with the criticism itself, and of the simple substitution of theology with anthropology. Through this, the human, and human experience, was placed at the centre, and so the possibility was created

---

<sup>141</sup> Feuerbach as quoted in *Dialectical Logic* by Evald Ilyenkov, chapter 6 "Idealism or Materialism?"

for humanity to, with clarity, discover the “greatness of themselves in themselves” (Bischoff, 1985), and thus, a re-appropriation of the abstract human essence that hitherto confronted humanity through a distinct and exalted divine being.

This re-appropriation of the human essence and the “self-satisfying identity of the divine and human being” (Feuerbach, 1881, pg.231) was to be accomplished through no less a force than Love. The kind of love that had hitherto otherwise been identified with God:

The devil too loves man, but not for man’s sake – for his own; thus he loves man out of egotism, to aggrandise himself, to extend his power. But God loves man for man’s sake, i.e., that he may make him good, happy, blessed. Does he not then love man as the true man loves his fellow? Has love a plural? Is it not everywhere like itself? What then is the true unfalsified import of the incarnation but absolute, pure love, without adjunct, without a distinction between divine and human love? For though there is also self-interested love among men, still the true human love, which is alone worthy of this name, is that which impels the sacrifice of self to another. Who then is our Saviour and Redeemer? God or Love? Love; for God as God has not saved us, but Love, which transcends the difference between the divine and human personality (Feuerbach, pg.53).

This kind of indifferent and divine love was for Feuerbach a truth implicit and inherent in human nature, if simply for the fact that its expression existed, albeit in a super-natural way through its identification with a deity<sup>142</sup> (Feuerbach, 1881, pg.54). Disalienation is achieved through this taking of God back into the human self, and through recognizing and exercising the potential for such love in relation to fellow human beings. Engels (1946) would scorn this turn to love by Feuerbach, writing that with it “the last relic of the revolutionary character disappears from his philosophy”.

Though Feuerbach sought to replace theology with a kind of atheistic-humanism, as Engels would argue, what resulted was not the abolition of religion but its perfection: “the religion of love”. Such a resolution was a betrayal of the progress made by Hegel, particularly with regard to

---

<sup>142</sup> For example Feuerbach (pg.231) writes: “...in the being of God it is only thy own being which is an object to thee, and what presents itself *before* thy consciousness is simply what lies *behind* it”.

morality. In Hegel, ethics was considered – as Marx and Engels believe it rightly should be – in determinate relation to the context around it: family, civil society, the economy, etc. This was Hegel’s critique of abstract right or *Moralität* with its presumption of a timeless or indeterminate “ought”. However, as Engels (1946) would write, with Hegel the content was realistic but the *form* was idealistic. By contrast, in Feuerbach, despite starting with *form* that was realistic – with humankind as the starting point – he nonetheless develops an idealistic content – an ethics of Love – and so lapses like his predecessors – preceding Hegel – into a theory of morals that is “designed to suit all periods, all peoples and all conditions” (Engels, 1946). It is, thus, and “as regards the real world”, as “powerless as Kant’s Categorical Imperative” and as intolerable as the “sovereign rule of *pure reason*” (Engels, 1886). The love which Feuerbach preaches is, in reality – like the rest of the conceptions that frame human consciousness – related and informed by subjective impulses; and thus in its abstraction and emptiness it is not free of the defective and deceptive limitations that Hegel found with the Kantian Moral Law: “And love which is to unite all, manifests itself in wars, altercations, lawsuits, domestic broils, divorces, and every possible exploitation of one by another” (Engels, 1946).

In reality, every class, every profession and every people have their own determinate consciousness and so also their own morality, and their own exercise of love. Despite Feuerbach’s “deadly hatred” for the abstract, Engels (1946) would argue that he lacked this insight into the determinate nature of morality and love because he never truly escaped from the “realm of abstraction” and into that of “living reality”: “he [Feuerbach] clings fiercely to nature and man; but nature and man remain mere words with him. He is incapable of telling us anything definite either about real nature or real men”. Though in form Feuerbach started from the human, “there is absolutely no mention of the world in which this man lives” (Engels, 1946). Feuerbach had proven

that God is only the fantastic reflection and mirror image of the human; but it was not real man but only “man in the abstract”, and thus also only a “mental image” (Engels, 1946). Likewise the humans that this abstract man existed in intercourse with were also only abstractions, where even, as Engels (1946) notes, the distinction between the sexes is not present.

Marx and Engels (1978, pg.169) had presupposed this criticism in *The German Ideology*, perhaps just as fruitfully, despite Engels’ comment, when they wrote of Feuerbach that he only ever says “Man” instead of “real historical man”. Integral to this flaw on the part of Feuerbach was his lack of historical insight, coupled with his failure to see that the sensuous world around him was not a “thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same”; but rather it was the “product of industry and of the state of society” (Marx, 1978, pg.170). This brings us back to Thesis #1 of the *Theses on Feuerbach* and the point about how Feuerbachian materialism erroneously conceived of the “thing”, “reality” only as *object* rather than as “sensuous human activity”. In this latter view, man is likewise not simply another “object of the senses” – apart from their “social connection”-, but are themselves “sensuous activity” (Marx, 1978, pg.171); and this human activity is rather “the basis of the whole sensuous world” (Marx, 1978, pg.171). In turn, humans-as-*sensuous activity* implies human beings that are conceived in relation to their context (their social conditions), and can only thus be taken as “really existing active men”<sup>143</sup> (Marx, 1978, g.171). Without this attention to the concretely active existence of human beings, a theory of ethics such as that of Feuerbach’s itself lapsed into an idealism and at most a powerlessness and impotence with regard to actually achieving the kinds of kinship and happiness that were to accompany Love (Engels, 1946).

---

<sup>143</sup> This implies the “*active side*” that was instead developed – albeit abstractly- in the idealism of Hegel. Instead of appropriating this significant development in Hegelian philosophy, Feuerbach, as Marx and Engels would continuously maintain, erroneously “threw Hegel aside”.

The Feuerbachian ethics of love was nonetheless emergent and provided itself as a starting point to a form of utopian socialism described as “true socialism” that was developing in Germany between 1843-47 (Cornu. 1948). Like the “French Socialism” from which it partly emerged and to which it was closely related, True Socialism took a rationalistic and moralistic stance with regard to its criticisms of social and economic exploitation as well as in its program for reform (Cornu, 1948). It was a form of “Utopian Socialism” that appealed to reason and the inherent and timeless “good” in the breast of the abstract human – absent of any determination of circumstance – and that opposed itself to the equally ahistorical “bad” (Cornu, 1948).

On the topic of “utopian socialism” it is instructive to turn to Engel’s (1978)<sup>144</sup> *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* where as a subject of analysis and critique it receives its fullest enunciation in the Marx/Engels canon<sup>145</sup>. The most basic definition of Utopian Socialism, as a broad category, that is offered by Engels (1978, pg.693) is analogous to what we have identified with “True Socialism” above; that is, of a socialism which “is the expression of absolute truth, reason and justice”, which “has only to be discovered to conquer all the world by virtue of its own power...as an absolute truth it is independent of time, space, and of the historical development of man, it is a mere accident when and where it is discovered”. Engels (1978) would identify this kind of “utopian”<sup>146</sup> thinking in the writings and projects of first Étienne-Gabriel Morelly and Gabriel

---

<sup>144</sup> Our drawing from Engels need not limit our direct engagement with Marx, as a distinct thinker, since Marx himself would write the 1880 “Introduction” to the French edition of this pamphlet by Engels, almost as a biographical sketch and celebrating the man as “one of the foremost representatives of contemporary socialism”. Marx ends the Introduction writing “In the present pamphlet we reproduce the most topic excerpt from the theoretical section of the book [ Engels’ *Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft* published in 1878] which constitutes what might be termed an *introduction to scientific socialism*” (Marx, 1970\*)

<sup>145</sup> One can also turn to the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.491), Section III “Socialist and Communist Literature”.

<sup>146</sup> The word “utopia” was coined – with relation to its contemporary meaning - by Sir Thomas Moore in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and literally translates as “nowhere” or “non-existent society”. A Utopia is a construct of an idealized society; ideal in the sense of not materially existing in time and space in the present. It is a kind of an “ought” that *should* be or *can* be, but which at present is not.

Bonnot de Mably in the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, followed by “the three great Utopians” Henri de Saint-Simon, Joseph Fourier and Robert Owen. Though constructions of utopias can be traced back to much earlier writers, what distinguished these utopian idealists and what perhaps warranted the *attaché* of socialism was that, according to Engels (1978), in these utopians “the demand for equality was no longer limited to political rights; it was extended also to the social conditions of individuals. It was not simply class privileges that were to be abolished, but class distinctions themselves”. In these utopian socialists there was then to be read an element of progress, of having proceeded beyond the limited political ideals of earlier social reforms, and now toward a desire for the emancipation not of “a particular class” but “all humanity at once” (Engels, 1978). The utopian socialists wanted to “bring in the kingdom of reason and eternal justice”; something they imagined to have conceived of for the first time in human history.

Saint-Simon – “the son of the great French Revolution” (Engels, 1978, pg.688) for example sought a means to liberate the people from capitalism and the bourgeois state (Robinson, 2019, pg.9), and even drew a distinction between the “socially privileged” (idlers) and the workers (wage-workers, manufacturers, merchants, bankers). The experience of the French Revolution had taught Simon that the capacity for the “intellectual leadership and political supremacy” (Engels, 1978, pg.688) of the idlers had been lost. Additionally, the experiences of the “Reign of Terror” had led him to believe that the “non-possessing classes” were not fit for such a capacity. Rather, it was from the ranks of the elite (*les industriels*) – manufacturers, technicians, bankers, merchants, scholars, laborers – that the proper reformation of society would need to be initiated (Robinson, 2019, pg.10). Through their good will, and on behalf of *la classe la plus nombreuse et la plus pauvre, les industriels* would reform the ills of modern bourgeois society, and help usher in a kind

of “new Christianity” whose ideals had been lost since the time of the Reformation (Engels, 1978, pg.688).

On the other hand, Robert Owen – a Welsh textile manufacturer - attempted to develop a form of communism based on a “purely business foundation” (Engels, 1978, pg.692), and which he sought to utilize to bring some order out of the chaos of the industrial revolution. Through experiments such as with the cotton mill in New Lanark, Scotland, he wanted to prove that production could coincide with the humane treatment of workers and their families. In fact, for Owen such communistic experiments centred around production sites were to contribute to increases in productivity in revenues generated<sup>147</sup> (Engels, 1978). Though, as Engels (1978, pg.693) notes, these experiments were all doomed to failure within the larger social and economic context, and as he claims, Owen himself came to realize that there were “great obstacles” to social reform such as private property, religion and the institution of marriage.

The progressive insight which they held however, of an extension of freedom and universal equality to all humanity, despite class, was – from a historical and materialist point of view- not from the imagination of the “individual man of genius” who by some “happy accident” happened to appear now and not 500 years earlier<sup>148</sup>, but were ideals developed in correspondence with the conditions of their time. The “reformers”, the utopians, were developing their ideas in relation to the crude conditions of early capitalistic development, which on the one hand exposed them to solutions to social problems that were till now hidden in previously and existing undeveloped

---

<sup>147</sup> Owen’s appeal to manufacturers, intellectuals, statesmen for reform of conditions for workers relied on an appeal to rationality, through demonstrating the greater yields that better working and living conditions contributed to. In 1834 he would launch a publication seeking to publicize such views and titled it “New Moral World” with subtitle “A London Weekly Publication. Developing the Principles of the Rational System of Society”.

<sup>148</sup> This is a paraphrase of a comment made by Engels (1978), and it is not totally without warrant. Robert Owen for example imagined himself to be such an individual man of genius, and on his deathbed told a visiting cleric: “My life was not useless; I gave important truths to the world, and it was only for want of understanding that they were disregarded. I have been ahead of my time” (Vallely, 2020).



economic conditions; and on the other - given that these progressive conditions were still yet “early” and so “crude” – it limited their solutions and insight to moralistic or rationalistic criticisms. For example, Engels (1978, pg.700) writes:

The socialism of earlier days [utopian socialism] certainly criticized the existing capitalist mode of production and its consequences. But it could not explain them, and, therefore, could not get the mastery of them. It could only simply reject them as bad.

There was a fundamental limitation in the approach of the utopian socialists: They committed the same sin of abstraction that was identified with Feuerbach and so imagined their prescriptions to be genuine expressions of an absolute truth into reason and justice; insight – independent of space and time - which till now only had to be discovered. Though Engels (1978, pg.689 – 691) would note and credit the materialist aspects of their respective positions (for example, Saint-Simon would presuppose a kind of historical materialism with his claim that political institutions were reflections of production and of economic conditions; Fourier would develop a familiar architectonic of history, dividing the progress of humanity into four stages – savagery → barbarism → patriarchy → and bourgeois civilization; and Robert Owen adopted the belief that “man’s character” is partly the product of heredity and partly the environment) the utopians nonetheless failed to interrogate their own respective positions, and clung to fantasy like ideals of “absolute truth” irrespective of context. Like Feuerbach, they could be described as materialists, but they reflected a “metaphysical materialism”, that lacked an attention to “really existing active men” and with this attention, the kind of determinativeness that resulted regarding how one conceives of human consciousness. Thus, the forms of socialism which the “Utopian’s mode of thought” governed – drawn from subjective understandings determined by different “conditions of existence” (Engels, 1978, pg.693), and which at the time “dominated the minds of

most of the socialist workers in France and England” - resulted in a “conflict of absolute truths”,  
a:

...mish-mash allowing of the most manifold shades of opinion; a mish-mash of such critical statements, economic theories, pictures of future society by the founders of different sects, as excite a minimum of opposition; a mish-mash which is the more easily brewed the more the definite sharp edges of the individual constituents are rubbed down in the stream of debate, like rounded pebbles in brook (Engels, 1978, pg.694).

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (1978, pg.149) would write that, contra to abstraction, the premises of their program begins with “real premises... the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity”. The “first premise” they note is, very simply, “the existence of living human individuals” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.149). From this basic premise “the first fact to be established is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.149). But this relation to nature did not imply an attention to “geological, orohydrographical, climactic” conditions, etc. taken as externally existing causal determinants of ones being; but of the modification of these natural bases “in the course of history” and “through the action of men” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.150). To better understand what Marx and Engels are suggesting here, it is worth turning back to the discussion above in Chapter 4 where in contrast to Hegelian idealism which confined itself within the realm of thought, we pointed to Marx’s arguments regarding humankind’s corporeal existence, as “an objective sensuous being” who exists in relation to other external objects – objects independent, and yet “indispensable to the manifestation and confirmation of his essential powers” (Marx, 1978, pg.115). The external objects and the corporeal human exist in dialectic relation, and establish each other, just as the plant, which is the object of the sun, confirms the sun’s life-awakening power, and the sun confirms the life of the plant as an indispensable object to it. The

externality of objects and their relation - of always existing as an object for an other - becomes for Marx (1978, pg.116) the fundamental nature of *objective* existence. Thus the human is not ever a thing in relation to a *thing* of nature, but “...at bottom he is nature”<sup>149</sup>.

The mediating *activity* between corporeal human and the objects of nature - external yet intrinsic to man - was labour (Lukacs, 1971, pg.xvii), as the concrete activity of self-objectification. This is why Marx also describes labour as “life activity” (Marx, 1978). Hence, why as the first premise of analysis, the starting point is an examination not of the physical/material conditions and existences distinct from the human being – such being an abstraction – but of the modifications of these material and objective existences – natural bases – “through the action of men”. As the first premise, the existence of human individuals, becomes their relation to nature, which becomes their activity in relation to nature, which in turn signifies their existence:

The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the actual means of subsistence they find in existence and have to reproduce. This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a *definite mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.150).

The mode of production (*Produktionsweise*)– the definite style/form of activity through which human beings, through their “conscious life activity”<sup>150</sup>, not only produce and reproduce

---

<sup>149</sup> “The universality of man is in practice manifested precisely in the universality which makes all nature his *inorganic* body – both inasmuch as nature is: (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the material, the object, and the instrument of his life activity. Nature is man’s *inorganic body* – nature, that is, in so far as it is not itself the human body. Man *lives* on nature- means that nature is his *body*, with which he must remain in continuous intercourse if he is not to die. That man’s physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature” (Marx, 1978, pg.75).

<sup>150</sup> To Clarify, the “mode of production” signifies more than simply the dialectic or metabolic relation between the human and nature. Thus we cannot, for example, speak of the objective relations that exist for the plant (its relation to the sun and the rain, etc.) as the mode of production of the plant. Rather, for Marx and Engels (1978, pg.150) this

their physical existence, but express their life in relation to the rest of nature- emerges as the defining and determinative category of human existence. As such, the empirical existences of human life – the nature of our consciousness, the social structure of societies, the ideologies, the culture, the religions, technological innovation - no longer carried a semblance of independence for Marx and Engels<sup>151</sup>, but could only justifiably be apprehended and explained in relation to this productive and active aspect of human life: “What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce”. To proceed otherwise would be to commit the fallacy of abstraction, and to ignore the essence of “living reality”.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (1978, pg.154) further expand their materialist conception, outlining its further implications:

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity 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. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process.

We are in a better position now to appreciate the meaning behind the popular quote by Marx (1999) from his “preface” to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their existence that determines their

---

concept develops uniquely for human beings who distinguish themselves from the rest of nature (plants, and animals, etc.) through actively *producing* their means of subsistence. Thus *Produktionsweise* signifies the “definite form of activity” - what is also distinguished as “conscious life activity” (Marx, 1978, pg.76) – through which humans produce their means of subsistence. An animal on the other hand is “identical with its life activity...it is *its life-activity*” (Marx, 1978, pg.76).

<sup>151</sup> “Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking”.

consciousness”. Through beginning not with abstractions, but with ascending “from earth to heaven”, Marx and Engels had demystified all ideas and moralities, and their corresponding forms of consciousness, demonstrating that they were not universal expressions of Truth and eternal laws of justice, but were conceptions formed in relation to the material life-process of real living individuals<sup>152</sup> (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.155).

In their abstraction the utopians did and could not come to terms with this, and thus in their moral programs for social reform, they imagined themselves to be pronouncing eternal truths irrespective of context. In reality, their forms of socialism reflected false truths which in their application were “foredoomed” to drift into “pure phantasies” (Engels, 1978, pg.687). Part of the limitation lies in the fact that the ideals were never really expressions of absolute truth and justice, but rather contingent expressions of particular interests and consciousnesses in society as had developed within the overarching mode of production. And to be more specific, since for Marx and Engels all societies hitherto have been rifted with class distinctions, these ideals have only always reflected particular class interests (Engels, 1947).

The other limitation refers to the actual potential of moral or ethical appeals in effectively moving people beyond their own contingent class positions and interests in society. We see this point come out in Marx’s critique of the utopian Karl Heinzen in a series of articles published in 1847 the *Deutsche Brüsseler-Zeitung*. There Marx criticizes Heinzen’s appeal to “morality” and “dignity” for socialist ends both because he fails to see the contingent nature of moral principles and because his appeals to humanity fail to actually effect the reality of the situation:

However, if Herr Heinzen believes that whole classes which are based on economic conditions independent of their own will and are forced into the most virulent contradiction by these conditions, can by means of the quality of *humanity*, which attaches to all men,

---

<sup>152</sup> Thesis # 8 of the *Theses on Feuerbach*: “All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice” (Marx, 1978, pg.145).

shed their real relationships, how easy must it be for one particular prince to rise by the power of *humanity* above his *princely condition*, above his *princely craft*?

These socialisms were “impotent” like Kant’s Categorical Imperative, or Feuerbach’s Love, and could only ever reflect “disappointing caricatures” of reason and justice. They were not yet able to pass beyond subjective and class interests and into the abode of “a really human morality which stands above class antagonisms” (Engels, 1947).

But the question that again arises is: if all consciousness, ideologies, morals, beliefs are determined in relation to the mode of production and reproduction of life, that is, they are never stand alone, timeless (eternal), and objective, then how are Marx and Engels able to justify a “really human morality” as opposed to simply a class morality – as opposed to a contingent morality which by its nature cannot be applied to all times and places, and which fails to carry a universal authority over the minds and hearts of human kind?

To be clear, for Marx and Engels it could never simply be a question of counterposing an alternative ethics or morality to what they criticized. If by virtue of their critique they had, in the concretized footsteps of Hegel, demonstrated the contingency and partiality of all moral and ethical ideals or programs, they had thus to demonstrate a ways and means for a rational alternative to stand in place – without lapsing into either a relativistic criticism with no solution, or without devolving into a paradox or “theoretical incoherence” with respect to in their own critical position.

### ***6.3: Scientific Socialism***

In contrast to the utopian socialisms, Marx and Engels claimed to discover an alternative that was free of the bourgeois mystifications, ideologies and morality that had plagued its predecessors. In stead they propounded a “scientific socialism”, one which, according to Engels’ definition in his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1978), rested on two principle discoveries: the materialist conception of history and “the revelation of the secret of capitalist production through

surplus value”. These discoveries owed to Marx were echoed by Engels in his eulogy at Marx’s graveside in 1883, crediting the discovery of 1.) the determining role played by the mode of the production – as the “law of development of human history” – and 2.) surplus value as the “special law of motion governing the present day capitalist mode of production”. Informed by these two discoveries scientific socialism was, unlike utopian socialism, able to gain mastery over the capitalist mode of production through being able to clearly show both “in what this exploitation [of the working class] consisted and how it arose” (Engels, 1978, pg.700).

The second listed discovery, of “surplus value” as the secret of capitalist production, exposed the inherency of the exploitation of the worker under the capitalist mode of production. The concept of surplus value develops itself into a key feature of Marx and Engels’ characterization of the capitalist mode of production and can be defined as the value generated through the appropriation by the capitalist of “gratis labour” (Marx, 1978, pg.535) or “unpaid labour” (Engels, 1978, pg. ) over and above the value paid in wages for the labour power of the worker. In essence what Marx discovered was that the creation of a greater yield in the production of a commodity rested on the extraction of a ‘surplus value’ which was generated specifically through the exploitation of labour power, and that it is a form of exploitation facilitated by the “system of wage labour” (Marx, 1978, pg.535). This is why in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, written as a letter by Marx in 1875 but published posthumously as a pamphlet, Marx describes the system of wage labour as “a system of slavery”; one which stands as the pivot for “the whole capitalist system of production” which “turns on the increase of this gratis labour” and so also turns on the increased degree of the exploitation of the labourer. The discovery of surplus value thus also exposed the increasing exploitation of unpaid labour and of the increasing misery of the workers that the progressive consumption of surplus value demanded– through for example

“lengthening the working day, or by developing the productivity, that is, increasing the intensity of labour power, etc.,” (Marx, 1978. pg.535)

In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* Marx was responding to a draft programme for the united German Social Democratic party which was sent to Engels and himself for review in 1875. As Tucker (1978, pg.525) notes in his introduction to the pamphlet, both Marx and Engels found the party program fundamentally flawed due to the strong influence of the ideas of Ferdinand Lasalle – a German socialist and party leader who advocated for political reform on behalf of the workers through the beneficence of the state. This and other points of the programme Marx criticizes point by point as he proceeds through the letter. In the section referenced above from where the description of surplus value is drawn, Marx is specifically addressing Lasalle’s demand for the abolition of the wage system by means of “the *free state*” and thus with it, what Lasalle identified as the “iron law of wages”, which holds that competition will always and inevitably draw wages down to the exact minimum to sustain life. And so, hence, the call for the wage system to be abolished.

Yet, in Marx pointing out the otherwise centrality of the wage system in the exploitation of workers under capitalism, and of its relation to the generation of surplus value - the pivot of the capitalist mode of production - Marx draws out what could otherwise be described as Lasalle’s utopian, or at least unscientific, demand for the abolition of wages, and on top of that, by “legal means” from the state: “..which is nothing but a police-guarded military despotism, embellished with parliamentary forms, alloyed with a feudal admixture, already influenced by the bourgeoisie and bureaucratically carpentered...” (Marx, 1978, pg.538). The call for the abolition of wages or for “the elimination of all social and political inequality”<sup>153</sup> are on their own simply phrases,

---

<sup>153</sup> Another demand listed on behalf of the German Worker’s Party. Referenced by Marx (1978, pg.534).



lacking meaning or effectivity. Rather, as Marx (1978, pg.535) notes, what ought to be said is “with the abolition of class distinctions all social and political inequality arising from them would disappear of itself”.

Concerning the first listed discovery, of the materialist conception of history, a basic outline – as relates to the determinative role of the mode of production – has already been explained in the above sub-section “the critique of utopian socialism”. However, we will here turn to a more succinct definition of the “materialist conception of history” and of its functionary role for “scientific socialism”. The term itself – “materialist conception of history”<sup>154</sup> - can only be found in the pamphlet – *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* - by Engels (1978, pg. ), and where he defines it as follows:

the materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life, and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men’s brains, not in men’s better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the mode of production and exchange.

This is in line with what we have referenced from *The German Ideology* in the sub-section above, concerning the production of ideas and consciousness in relation to the mode of production and exchange<sup>155</sup>- that “Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men,

---

<sup>154</sup> The analogous term “historical materialism”, which along with “materialist conception of history” was also only ever used by Engels in their joint project, and is fruitfully discussed in what has come to be known as Engels “Letters on Historical Materialism”: a series of clarificatory letters following distribution of his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.

<sup>155</sup> Elsewhere Marx and Engels (1978, pg.172) use the term “mode of production and intercourse”. I flag this because too often “mode of production” or “mode of production and exchange” are terminology employed in a way that limits the determinative forces in history to only what is singled out as the “economy”. But we get further insight into the encapsulating sense of what they deemed to be determinative when they also use the term “civil society”: “The form of intercourse determined by the existing productive forces at all previous historical stages, and in its turn determining these is, *civil society*” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.163). This is a somewhat related, yet distinct use of the

as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these...” (1978, pg. 154). Though, we are also apt to note here that with this dialectical and materialist outlook there is a referenced temporal and historical dimension that is to lend clarity regarding existing forms of consciousness and intercourse among human beings.

But why an attention to history? And what does history have to do with materialism, and more specifically, with a materialist dialectics that relates all human cognition and consciousness to the contingent form of human productive activity? One can approach this question with an attention to strategy. That the application of a materialist and dialectical “general world view” (Tucker, 1978, pg.xx) to human history was a methodological means of demystifying pre-conceived notions concerning the existing forms of human intercourse. Thus, and so fulfilling one of the two critical interventions of scientific socialism which included presenting “the capitalist mode of production in its historical connection”. A “materialist treatment of history” would make it much more difficult to advocate for existing forms of class hierarchy, social organization, property, wealth distribution, etc. as timeless or ahistorical formations of human life. They were, rather, temporal and contingent formations determined by the existing (historically situated) mode of production; ones which – like all other aspects of human life – were absent of a definite stamp or seal, and thus they were able to be confronted, and their legitimacy challenged<sup>156</sup>. This critical aspect of a materialist treatment of history can be read in Lukacs’ (1971, pg 223-224) Chapter

---

term “civil society” compared to what we took of its usage in Marx’s earlier interventions, as outlined in the subsection above on “The Elemental Class”. Nonetheless, the seemingly varying terminology – mode of production, forms of intercourse, civil society – are all meant to capture – in their most basic sense – “the relation of man to nature” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.165). See also Marx and Engels’ (1978, pg.165) description of “the sum of productive forces, capital funds and social forms of intercourse” which they describe collectively as the “real basis” of history which philosophers have hitherto conceived of as either “substance” or “essence of man”. Of course, this is not such a simple debate, and the determinative role of “production” is often argued to be the “measure” that is empirically needed when making any kind of logical deductions about society and history. This debate will be expanded on a future project focusing on the concept of ‘racial capitalism’.

<sup>156</sup> For a contrary view to which HM responds see for ex. Hayek and the Mont Pelerin Society (Harvey, 2007, pg.20)

“The Changing Function of Historical Materialism” where he describes historical materialism as an “intellectual weapon” in the hands of the proletariat:

What is historical materialism? It is no doubt a scientific method by which to comprehend the events of the past and to grasp their true nature. In contrast to the historical methods of the bourgeoisie, however, it also permits us to view the present historically and hence scientifically so that we can penetrate beneath the surface and perceive the profounder historical forces which in reality control events.

In explaining history with reference to the mode of production, historical materialism can thus undertake a dual intervention of 1.) demystifying existing bourgeois historiography and ideology, and 2.) counterposing a more scientific or true comprehension of history (and of the present) by virtue of its ability to apprehend and present the “profounder historical forces which in reality control events”<sup>157</sup>.

However, as Robert C. Tucker (1978, pg. xx) informs us in the “Introduction” to the second edition of *The Marx -Engels Reader*, the difference made between a materialist dialectics – “dialectical materialism” - on the one hand, and its application to human history – “historical materialism” - on the other, is entirely foreign to the classical Marxist position and was instead a

---

<sup>157</sup> As will be made evident as the discussion proceeds, the scientific merit of the materialist conception of history goes beyond simply discovering and applying-in- analysis a determinative role to the profounder historical forces which control events. If the attribute of Science stopped here, then one would eventually be drawn to the paradox noted by the Marxist Cyril Smith (2005) in his chapter “Marx Versus Historical Materialism”. Here Smith (2005) criticizes the methodology of Historical Materialism asking– if there are “causal processes” that shape human consciousness- how do those purporting to “explain” human history justify their own perspective, as if immune to these forces? However, if Smith (2005) had noted the centrality of history as the “comprehensive category” in Marx, he would also be able to see how the *subjective* and equally determined position of those employing the materialist conception of history is made justifiable as scientific: simply put, because they are doing so from a stage of development in history that affords them that kind of vantage and elevates their particular methodological insight. This aspect of Marxist historiography will be discussed in detail in a future project titled “The Black Radical Tradition and the Critique of Marxist Historiography”. Though for some insight into this see *The Grundrisse* (Marx, 1978, pg.241) paragraph with the well known reference to human anatomy (as a higher form) containing the key to the anatomy of the ape (the lower or subordinate form). In this section of the dissertation however we are relying on an outline of Marx and Engels’ scientific socialist project to demonstrate the role of the historical narrative of human progress in affording the status of science vs. utopian, moralistic, etc.

later development associated with Russian and then Soviet Marxism<sup>158</sup>. Rather, the relation between history, dialectics, and materialism was more intrinsic than later made out to be. For Marx, history was not simply a terrain to be demystified and explained through a critical methodology, but was itself *the* “comprehensive category” (Tucker, 1964, pg. 23) when accounting for “all existence”. For Marx, everything, “nature and its transformations belong to the historical process” (Tucker, 1964, pg.24).

Tucker (1964, pg.23) expands on this point in his detailed study of Marxism in his book *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, where he positions the Marxist materialist conception of history within the tradition of Christian eschatology, and where like the Christian religious system, all existence is viewed “under the aspect of history”. Christian theology of the thirteenth century had “presented the story of man according to the divine plan of salvation” – a philosophy of history; a drama of existence - framed around “paradise lost and paradise regained”. Tucker (1964) parallels this drama to the Marxian outline of the historical process where “mankind’s historical existence is framed by a temporalized pre-history at one end (primitive communism) and temporalized post-history at the other (future communism). Communism lost and communism regained”. For Tucker (1964) then it is quite telling that in the four main “general formulations of Marxism” that were written by Marx– the *Economic Manuscripts of 1844*, *The German Ideology*, the *Communist Manifesto*, and the “Preface” to the *Critique of Political Economy* – they all take the shape of “an exposition of world history”.

Thus, in Marx, sensuous reality is not a reality approached distinctly from human history; but both aspects combine to form the matrix of Marx’s materialist, dialectical and historical

---

<sup>158</sup> Tucker (1978, pg.xx) notes the emergence of a distinct term, “dialectical materialism” as opposed to “materialist conception of history” through the work of Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This distinction was also made authoritative through Joseph Stalin’s “Dialectical and Historical Materialism”.

position: “His all inclusive worldview is historical in essence” (Tucker, 1964, pg.23). This centrality of history in the dialectical and materialist philosophy of Marx and Engels (1978, pg.169-172) can also be gleaned from their criticisms of Feuerbach’s materialism in *The German Ideology*, which they argue lack’s an attention to history and so is not able to comprehend the truth concerning man’s relation to nature:

He [Feuerbach] does not see how the sensuous world around him is, not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society; and, indeed, in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one...

Instead, conceived historically, nature is always “historical nature”<sup>159</sup>. Even, as they note, an object of the “simplest ‘sensuous certainty’” like the cherry tree can only really be approached historically and as the product of human activity, since it is only present/exists sensuously for them due to having been brought into their “zone” a few centuries ago by commerce<sup>160</sup> (Marx and Engels, 1978, pg.170). Thus part of understanding the existing world dialectically implied not simply a relationality within the current prism of time and space, but one linked – historically- to “separate generations”:

History is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which exploits the materials, the capital funds, the productive forces handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus, on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances with a completely changed activity (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.172).

---

<sup>159</sup> Marx and Engels are careful not to lapse into some kind of metaphysical statement here about something intrinsic to nature outside of human consciousness and activity. And so, it is important to footnote that they are talking about nature as it exists within the realm of human history contra to nature preceding human history. The latter which following the world historical dominion of capitalism “no longer exists” “(except perhaps on a few Australian coral-islands of recent origin)” (Marx and Engels, 1978, pg.171).

<sup>160</sup> Although described here conceptually by Marx and Engels, they later describe how one of the distinctive features of communism will be the general conscious and concrete treatment of all nature in this way; that is as “the creatures of hitherto existing men” and thus stripping natural premises of “their natural character”, and consequently allowing for their subjugation “to the power of the united individuals”. As will be elaborated further in this section, the distinctive feature of capitalism, beside its creation of an elemental class, is its development of productive forces to such a degree that nothing of nature escapes human mastery and control. (Marx and Engels, 1978, pg.193).

This underlying historical form can be grasped within the very logic of the dialectic itself as was described at the beginning of Chapter 3 “The Hegelian Dialectic”. There we noted with reference to the term “negation of the negation” the progressive movement of the Hegelian dialectic which through negation via existing determinate relations, gives rise to a higher or further progression; higher by virtue of reconciling the existing antagonisms or contradictions into a unity. This higher form is the negation of the negation, but which itself is only ever related in a determinateness and so by way of negation<sup>161</sup> undergoes the dialectic progression itself and thus leads to a further progressive resolution. The progressive movement of the dialectic – in thought - constitutes for Hegel the “simple substance of life”; it is the activity that constitutes life itself. Life is thus never a collection of inert objects, but is a “living thing” (1977, pg.105); it is a developing and related process. Thus what exists in life cannot ever be taken in isolation, as if it were never related, or as if it were never itself only part of a process; a movement; and in this related movement always having its “*absolute character*” in this opposition or relation to *other* things.

---

<sup>161</sup> Magee (2010, pg.65) uses “contradiction” interchangeably with conflict, opposition and negation. In our outline of the movement of the dialectic here, and earlier in this dissertation, we have also used the term contradiction interchangeably with negation or antagonism. Nonetheless given its centrality to the Hegelian dialectic and dialectical thinking as a whole, some focused outline is warranted: Contradiction (*der Widerspruch*) is in philosophy more commonly associated with the “law of non-contradiction” - as “one of the fundamental ‘laws of logic’” (Magee, 2010, pg.64) - that holds that something cannot be two oppositional things at the same time, i.e. an apple cannot be both green and not green, or it cannot be raining and not raining at the same time. Such would be a contradiction. In Hegel, however, contradiction takes on the meaning of “something more widespread and significant” (Inwood, 1992, pg.64), as an inherency in everything determinate; everything finite. And since all reality is determinate, it is as an inherence in all reality: “For Hegel, all finite concepts are inherently ‘contradictory’ because they are always partial and one-sided and usually derive their meaning from opposed ideas” (Magee, 2010, pg.65). Thought seeks to overcome this contradiction- Inwood (pg.64) describes it as “an impulse (*Trieb*)” - in a determinate relation, and so does so by moving to a “higher concept” which is “intrinsically related to the first and removes the contradiction in it”. As another example see Magee’s (2010, pg.65) description of “becoming” as the result – as a higher form – to the initial “being” and “non-being”. As also noted however, this negation of the negation is itself finite/determined and comes into contradiction, thus proceeding to a further concept: “...thought proceeds by successively revealing and overcoming contradictions, until it arrives at the (infinite) absolute IDEA, which is free of the sort of contradiction that generates further movement” (Inwood, 1992, pg.64).

Hegel (1977) clarifies the implications of this movement and relatedness of Life, in the second paragraph of his “Preface” to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where he describes the dialectical approach to understanding, for example, the various philosophical systems that one confronts through history. “Conventional opinion” he writes, gets fixated on the truth or falsity of either or philosophical system, their antagonistic forms being simple disagreements. This approach however fails:

...to comprehend the diversity of philosophical systems as the progressive unfolding of truth...The bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom, and one might say that the former is refuted by the latter; similarly, when the fruit appears, the blossom is shown up in its turn as a false manifestation of the plant, and the fruit now emerges as the truth of it instead. These forms are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another as mutually incompatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole (Hegel, 1977, pg. 2).

The metaphor of the fruit, blossom and bud is meant to signify the progression, and distinction-yet-interrelation, that accompanies Life taken dialectically. The fruit represents the higher form, though which is a form directly linked to what preceded it – the blossom, the bud. So with philosophical systems, and this, as clearly outlined in Hegel’s overlapping stages of human “pre-history” in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. These have been discussed in some detail above in Chapter 5 “Hegel’s Critique of Morality”, where we noted the latter texts utilization of the biblical narrative of the Fall to illustrate the odyssey of Spirit as it progressed from a simple or unreflective unity (the bud), into a (primal) division (the blossom), and then to reconciliation (a higher unity; the fruit). As with the basic form of the dialectic, Life/existence itself progresses by means of determination and sublation, proceeding to a higher reconciliation, which is in turn negated. The all encompassing category that Hegel uses as a vehicle in this progressive and dialectical movement through history is Spirit

(*Geist*): understood both as a verb and a noun. As we already noted, Spirit can be described as “the collective human essence” (Wood, 1991, pg.374), the historically contingent and thus “*unique* form of consciousness possessed by human beings” (Magee, 2010, pg.277), but also, as the self-developing *activity* itself, as the movement or quest for knowledge of its own nature (Wood, 1991, pg. 375). More particularly, the category is not simply Spirit, but self-estranged Spirit, which through reflection distinguishes itself (the fall), and now estranged from itself, seeks to overcome its self-estranged condition – toward a reconciliation; not the animal like or unreflective unity from which it initiated, but a higher reconciliation that is enriched by its journey – by its historical experience.

In both texts by Hegel referenced above we are provided with a detailed taxonomy of a kind of universal world history that is meant to reflect this movement of self-estranged Spirit, and that mirrors the familiar tripartite movement of the dialectic but which rather than proceed *ad infinitum*, reconciles itself in the experience of modern Europe, via the advent of Christianity, the protestant reformation, and the development of the modern European state – the latter behaving as the abode of Freedom realized, of “ethical life”, of the Absolute or conscious unity with God<sup>162</sup>. What preceded this potential reconciliation of Spirit is the realm of estrangement or disunion, existing both historically and contemporaneously; historically through the great civilizations

---

<sup>162</sup> “...a final term, a state where knowledge need no longer transcend or correct itself, where it will discover itself in its object and its object in itself, where concept will correspond to object and object to consciousness” (Findlay, 1977, pg. xiv). Hence, the disparity of the Kantian dualism is resolved, and subject-object need not conflict with each other. Subjectivity and objectivity are reconciled, and Truth is at once given fruition. It is also useful to turn here directly to Hegel’s (Iphis, pg. 54) articulation of the State in his Lectures on the Philosophy of History: “The State is the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth. We have in it, therefore, the object of History in a more definite shape than before; that in which Freedom obtains objectivity, and lives in the enjoyment of this objectivity. For Law is the objectivity of Spirit; volition in its true form. Only that will which obeys law, is free: for it obeys itself — it is independent and so free. When the State or our country constitutes a community of existence; when the subjective will of man submits to laws — the contradiction between Liberty and Necessity vanishes. The Rational has necessary existence, as being the reality and substance of things, and we are free in recognizing it as law, and following it as the substance of our own being. The objective and the subjective will are then reconciled, and present one identical homogeneous whole”.



immediately preceding Christian Europe, such as the Roman, Greek and Persian civilizations; and contemporaneously, though still at a lower and antiquated rung on the historical ladder of progress, are the Oriental, Indigenous, and African peoples. The latter reflective of an “insipient subjectivity” (Hegel, 2001, pg.193) either evolved only so far as to mire themselves in rigid – “unspiritual” - distinctions of caste, or, having remained stuck in the natural or animal like state of an unthinking unity.

As outlined above in Chapter 4 “Marx’s Critique of Hegel’s Abstraction”, Marx had noted this as the outstanding development in Hegelian philosophy; of conceiving the “self-genesis of man as a process” and the alienation and transcendence of alienation as the outcome of “man’s *own labour*”. But, as Marx would critique, in confining the process of overcoming self-estrangement within the realm of thought, the only labour that Hegel recognized was “*abstractly mental* labour”, and thus Hegel could only find “the *abstract, logical, speculative* expression for the movement of history” (Marx, 1978, pg.108). It was a “historical process” that was “not yet the *real* history of man – of man as a given subject...” (Marx, 1978, pg.108).

Real history involved corporeal, objective man, “man with his feet firmly on the solid ground”, and not as with Hegel “man...regarded as a *non-objective, spiritual* being” (Marx, 1978, pg.113). Corporeal man was man existing in relation to nature; as conditioned by nature. And this relation was not causal, but understood actively; dialectically, and historically. Thus what was significant was not so much the form or object of nature in which the human existed in relation to, but the mediation of this relation; the *conscious* “form of activity” through which humans modified the material and objective existence, and through this activity, producing their means of subsistence. Thus, the determinative category throughout human history was for Marx and Engels,

not the abstract permutations of Spirit in pursuit of self-knowledge – as with Hegel, but the “mode of production and intercourse”.

In utilizing the Feuerbachian method of “transformational criticism” Marx had centred human experience, and thus translated Hegel’s “epoch-making conception of history”<sup>163</sup> into what was taken to be its valid scientific form – as opposed to its mystical or abstract/idealist form. Transformed this way, history was described by Marx as the “history of production” (Tucker, 1978, pg.xxv); of the conscious productive activity through which “working man” (Tucker, 1978, pg.xxv) created themselves and the world. More so, history was no longer a process of the self-development of the Concept (*der Begriff*) as with Hegel, but – conceived along its “real basis” (Marx, 1978, pg.165) - was a process of the self-development of the human species; a self-development which culminated in communism (Tucker, 1978, pg.xxiv).

Marx nor Engels developed anything close to the scale and detail of Hegel’s taxonomy of history<sup>164</sup>, nor can it be said that the Marxian appropriation is a direct re-rendering of Hegel’s progressive historical outline, both in terms of substance or form. Nonetheless, what we are apt to emphasize here is the role and place of history and of progress in their material and dialectical approach as a whole, particularly with regards to the narrative of human self-development; the

---

<sup>163</sup> Cited in Tucker’s “Introduction (1978, pg.xxii) from Engel’s 1859 review of Marx’s *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

<sup>164</sup> One can of course point to Engels’ (2004) *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which he published in 1884 utilizing Marx’s notes on Lewis H. Morgan’s – among others – researches into ancient and primitive societies. Though I stand by my point, since despite its incidences of detailed engagement (for example, on the communal family forms among the Iroquois, or the development of inheritance and patriarchal lineage among the Greeks), it nonetheless lacks the breadth of scope we read in Hegel’s *Lectures*, or basic philosophy for that matter. Of course this is simply my opinion and reading, but one partially influenced given the intention of the project which –by Engels’ own admission in the “preface” to the first edition - was not so much an extrapolation of their own theory of historical progress, but a presentation of Morgan’s results in light of their own existing conclusions – “within certain limits” – as already developed through their “materialist examination of history”. Engels would nonetheless credit Morgan with aptly outlining the “main lines” of humankind’s development from savagery to civilization. I will touch back to this piece by Engels’ later, as it will nonetheless factor into our outline to come.

“self-genesis of man as a process”. Of course, one could charge me with being tautological on this point since self-development – as we have suggested above - seems to be intrinsic to the form of the dialectic of negativity; which through negation moves to a higher form; a higher unity. However, leaving it at this would leave this section of the dissertation open to the charge of falsely attributing a kind of blind, almost teleological movement to Marx’s theory of history or human self-development; one motivated by the logical form of the dialectic itself. The question we would then digress with for a moment here is: is our reality – by virtue of it being dialectical - necessarily progressive in its orientation?<sup>165</sup> And if so, does this constitute a form of progressive determination when applied to human history? After all, was it not Marx (1978, pg.99) himself who in the *Manuscripts of 1844* described communism – the culmination of the progressive movement through human pre-history – as that very consequence of the dialectical movement - “the negation of the negation”? In responding to this however, one could reference that excerpt from Marx and Engels’ (1975) in *The Holy Family*, where they wrote:

*History does nothing*, it ‘possesses *no* immense wealth’, it ‘wages *no* battles’. It is *man*, real, living man who does all that, who possesses and fights; ‘history’ is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve *its own* aims; history is *nothing but* the activity of man pursuing his aims.

---

<sup>165</sup> Though this would be a foreign question to Marx and Engels – given that abstracting such movement from reality itself would be the height of abstraction – I nonetheless find it conceptually interesting. Particularly for reasons regarding the popular utilization of the description “internal relations” to describe the relational aspect of Marx and Engels’ philosophy. Is there something lost when we describe their philosophy as one of “internal relations” as opposed to “dialectical”? Or in other words, what is specific about the relational character of the dialectic *movement* that is more than simply one of internal relations- of “conceiving of *things* as relations” (Ollman, 1977). Relatedly, my interest in this question is further sparked by this excerpt from Engels (1978, pg.697): “This new German philosophy culminated in the Hegelian system. In this system-and herein is its great merit-for the first time the whole world, natural, historical, intellectual, is represented as a process, i.e., as in constant motion, change, transformation, development; and the attempt is made to trace out the internal connection that makes a continuous whole of all this movement and development. From this point of view the history of mankind no longer appeared as a wild whirl of senseless deeds of violence, all equally condemnable at the judgement-seat of mature philosophic reason and which are best forgotten as quickly as possible, but as the process of evolution of man himself”.

From this excerpt, it is clear that for Marx and Engels there is no justifiable motivating force to history outside of or absent from human activity. Thus, we cannot conclusively say that for them the very nature of the dialectic – as something abstracted from human activity - propels human beings to further stages of self-development. Just as we were not able to do so with reference to Hegel, for with Hegel this progressive movement, as it was motivated by contradiction and its overcoming, was a movement spurred by our collective human essence – by Spirit; more precisely, by self-estranged Spirit’s desire to know the truth of itself.

Nonetheless, this is not the question we are so much concerned with in this section of the dissertation<sup>166</sup>, nor need it contradict or take away from the central thesis in this section which is to demonstrate how Marx and Engels appropriated a dialectical – read simultaneously as historical-theory of human evolution – a “machinery of History” (Robinson, 2019, pg.99) as a means of developing a scientific theory of socialism; one which, like Hegel’s, confirmed its rational and objective character by virtue of historical location (relative to a very specific mode of production [capitalism] and moment in history) and historical differentiation (in contrast to other, antiquated modes of production). Just as Hegel had made history move in order to resolve the Kantian dilemma, so had Marx made use of history in order to justify the critical propositions of his own project (Robinson, 2019, pg.99).

---

<sup>166</sup> The implications of a teleological view – premised on a point such as this, and others pertaining to the role of a goal, or destiny to the movement of history are, in my opinion, more significant when discussing the various dynamics of class consciousness and of revolutionary class consciousness in particular. Though not entirely foreign to this section - in terms of our demonstration of the uniqueness of proletarian class consciousness in world history for Marx and Engels - this discussion will be further engaged with in section 2 of this project: “The Meaning of Racial Capitalism and its Application in Theory”.

And yet, despite the particularities of Marx and Engels' translation of Hegel's historical philosophy/philosophy of history into their own, in very Hegelian fashion<sup>167</sup> they initiate their materialist conception of history with the identification of an initial stage marked by a simplistic, undifferentiated and animal/sheep like consciousness, or "tribal consciousness"<sup>168</sup> (Marx and Engels, 1978, pg.158). As with the Hegelian abode of "nature religion", Marx and Engels bracket a primordial zone of "(natural religion)" (1978, pg. 158) where human beings and their corresponding consciousness is "at first, of course, merely consciousness concerning the *immediate* sensuous environment" and more so a particular "consciousness of nature, which first appears to men as a completely alien, all-powerful and unassailable force with which men's relations are purely animal and by which they are overawed like beasts..."<sup>169</sup> (1978, pg.158).

---

<sup>167</sup> In the *Dictionary of Sociology*, John Scott and Gordon Marshall (2007) write that Marx and Engels' were heavily influenced by Lewis H. Morgan's evolutionary stages of history. However, as clarified in footnote #151, when Engels engaged with Morgan's work – via the notes penned by Marx- he was doing so more as a political act in order to further demonstrate the validity of their own existing materialist examination history in light of Morgan's extensive empirical research. Additionally, it is worth noting that Morgan's ( ) *Ancient Society*, the text which Marx and Engels engaged with, was published in 1877, a good amount of years after Marx and Engels had already begun to outline their progressive stages of human history, particularly in *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels), written in 1846, *The Grundrisse* (Marx) written in 1857-58, and even *Das Kapital*, first published in 1867. It was thus less a heavy influence, and more a reciprocation. Engels and Marx would make the same remarks – that of validation- with reference to Darwin and the advances made in the natural sciences. As well, one could surmise that Fourier had a similar impact on Marx and Engels, since Engels himself noted the most promising element of Fourier's work to be his division of history into the four stages of savagery-barbarism-patriarchate-and civilization. But it would still be impulsive to locate the source for their progressive outline of history here. What we hope to demonstrate in the following pages is the significant overlap that exists between Marx and Hegel's stages of history and how they respectively tie into the odyssey through which humans create themselves out of estrangement and into essential being.

<sup>168</sup> Marx does not premise this rudimentary form of being with a kind of biblical "fall" from a undiluted oneness – even if analogously - as with Hegel, particularly since this would mark an attempt to conjure up an otherwise unsubstantiated *fact* – much like the political economists attempt to "go back to a fictitious primordial condition" or the theologians attempt to explain the origin of evil "by the fall of man" ( Marx, 1978, pg.71). Nevertheless, these stages of human history preceding communism are taken to be indicative and inclusive of humankind's alienated and estranged condition. The way in which Marx deductively substantiates the reality of human alienation – contra to Hegel's premise of a "fall" from a simple unity or oneness – will be made clearer at a further point of discussion.

<sup>169</sup> In *Capital: Volume 1*, Marx (1976, pg.53) further writes that this "narrowness" of the relation between man and nature among primitive tribal communities is further evidenced in the "ancient worship of Nature"; which is an example of the "religious reflex" of the real world.

If we recall, in Hegel, the stage of nature religion reflected self-consciousnesses fear of “contingency, of the forces of nature, which display themselves as mighty powers over against humanity” (Hegel, 1988, pg.225), and so gave rise to a form of religious consciousness that either sanctified the forces of nature – the divinity of the moon and sun (among the Eskimos) – or celebrated acts of power/transcendence over nature – “the religion of magic” (among “the Africans”). *Spirit* progressed from here onto other determinate, yet higher, forms of religious and philosophical consciousness that in turn informed the empirical character of whole people and civilizations. In Marx and Engels, forms of being and consciousness similarly progress, but not as consciousness in and of itself, or proceeding religiously and philosophically – ideationally or conceptually in the Marxist sense – but in determinate relation to the existing forms of human productive activity, i.e. the productive relations between human and nature. In their materialist outline of human history, this productive activity also comes to be expressed through the form of the “division of labour” which emerges as a central determinative category; one which is not distinct from the human’s active – productive and modifying - relation to nature, but signifies a “form of intercourse” that exists in dialectical relation to this activity. In the initiate stage of man’s primitive existence in relation to nature, there then thus emerges a corresponding primitive or undeveloped division of labour, and thus of a general, similar relation of human’s to one another – and vice versa:

Here, as everywhere, the identity of nature and man appears in such a way that the restricted relation of men to nature determines their restricted relation to one another, and their restricted relation to one another determines men’s restricted relation to nature, just because nature is as yet hardly modified historically<sup>170</sup>... (Marx and Engels, 1978, pg.158).

---

<sup>170</sup> On what “yet hardly modified historically” implies, it is worth turning to Marx and Engels’ (1978, pg.189) distinction between “natural” and “civilized” instruments of production, the former which precedes the latter, and which entails for example “the field (water, etc.)” [i.e. nature] and to which humans are subservient.

The above excerpt demonstrates that for Marx and Engels the division of labour – and with it the “internal and external forms of intercourse” – combine with the level or the form of human productive activity to effect the internal structure of any given society; at any given moment in history. That is why, in addition to the kinds of emphasis placed on terminology such as “mode of production” in the determination of human being throughout history, Marx and Engels (1978, pg.170) can without contradiction describe division of labour “as one of the chief forces of history up till now”. With this in mind, we can also make sense of why Marx and Engels (1978, pg.157) describe the mode of co-operation as itself a “productive force”. In similar fashion, they also go on to describe the division of labour – and the various stages of its development- as “just so many different form of ownership, i.e., the existing stage in the division of labour determines also the relations of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument, and product of labour’ (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.151)<sup>171</sup>.

Thus when taking into account the form of the division of labour through human history- as an empirical category of analysis- we are dealing not only with the existing development of productive forces, but the existing economic, social and political relations between humans, and corresponding to these relations, the forms of ownership and property. The matrix of these determinative relations of our being becomes for Marx and Engels the site of collision and so of progress through human history, where by way of contradiction (that motivating force of the dialectic) between the productive forces and the forms of intercourse, the existing human productive and social relations undergo an evolution, on to a next stage, only until a moment is reached when the then existing matrix of conditions precipitate further collisions and

---

<sup>171</sup> In the same sense, they (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.160) write: “..division of labour and private property are, more over identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of activity”.

contradictions. More on the role of contradiction in the movement of human history will be raised as we move along but for now we are apt to return to our discussion of the specific stages of human development which Marx and Engels trace out as part of their materialist conception of history.

As has already been noted, the initiate form of human existence is for Marx and Engels identified with an animal or sheep like tribal consciousness. Corresponding to this initiate stage is an undeveloped relation between the human and nature, the latter which still overpowers the human, and relationally to this, an undeveloped division of labour and corresponding primitive development of human social relations. Other than this maintained conceptual position - i.e., of a generalized initiate tribal or primitive stage throughout their dealings with the topic of pre-capitalist social formations - the specific characteristics of this tribal stage are hard to pin down, and this we owe to the relatively undeveloped study that Marx and Engels managed to undertake of pre-capitalist society<sup>172</sup>. The same can be said of the general outline that Marx and Engels developed of pre-capitalist societies all together, which differ in details according to which text one refers to, but which nonetheless fall within a developed trajectory leading up to the pinnacle of civilization; what was identified with bourgeois society – i.e., the capitalist mode of production.

In *The German Ideology* (1846) for example, we are presented with a breakdown of three stages of development that correspond to 3 stages in the development of the division of labour, which are in themselves reflective of “different forms of ownership”. The first stage of ownership is the tribal [*Stammeigentum*] wherein there is only an elementary division of labour, confined to a natural extension of the division of labour within the family; the second form is “ancient communal and state ownership”, which proceeds from the union of several tribes (into a city) and

---

<sup>172</sup> This in turn explains Marx’s ongoing interest and study into the nature of pre-capitalist social formations, and why in the “preface” to *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* – the most extant outline of pre-capitalist societies out of the Marx and Engels canon – Engels ( ) would write of his book as “the execution of a bequest” for his dearly departed friend.



where beside communal ownership there now develops moveable and immovable private property. Here there is thus a more developed division of labour which comes to express itself as the division between town and country, citizen and slave; the third form of ownership is “feudal or estate property” which emerges with the decline of the Roman empire and which relates to a mode of ownership influenced by the Germanic military constitutions – i.e. the development of Western European feudal relations. Not explicitly listed as a fourth, but #4 following the dissolution of feudal or estate property is the stage corresponding to modern bourgeois private property.

In Marx’s (1978, pg.5) “preface” to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) he traces a similar history of humankind in admittedly “broad outlines”, stating that “..Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production...”. In Marx’s *Tribune* articles, as was noted much earlier, he refers to contemporaneous civilizations such as India or China as belonging to the “ancient world” or as at a semi-barbarian stage of development, while also suggesting the capitalist mode of production – as spread through colonialism – as bringing even the most barbarian nations into civilization. In Marx’s *Grundrisse* (1858) he echoes what in *The German Ideology* was identified with tribal consciousness, here describing the “original unity” of the initial condition of the human which is reflected through both the relations between individuals and of their relations to inorganic nature (Marx, 1978, pg.261). Hence why in this same line he writes that man originally appears as “a *species-being* [*Gattungswesen*], *clan being*, *herd animal*...” (Marx, 1978, pg.262). This “herd-like existence” however is eventually made superfluous with the development of industry, of exchange and commerce through which

individuation develops<sup>173</sup>. We read something similar in *Capital: Volume 1*, where Marx (1976, pg.53) describes “ancient social organisms of production” as simple and founded on “the immature development of man individually, who has not yet severed the umbilical cord that unites him with his fellowmen in a primitive tribal community...”. Further in *Capital* we are provided with a differentiation between the “ancient modes of production”, those corresponding to the “middle ages” and of course the always present and latent situating of the bourgeois or capitalist mode of production as the highest developed form to date. The latter characterization of the capitalist mode of production, in opposition to the preceding feudal and even further removed ancient or “primitive form of society” is of course also made manifest in *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels, 1978, pg.472-474).

These existing cursory outlines spattered throughout Marx and Engels’ texts, as undeveloped as they may be, nonetheless provide us with a general – and by and large consistent – insight into their relied upon outline of the “progressive epochs in the economic formation of society”. (For an attempted sketch of what this looks like please see Diagram 1.0). These varying stages, however are given a more succinct trajectory in Engels’ above cited *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which was an attempt to complete a project that Marx had set himself out to do (Engels, 2004, pg.26). Utilizing Marx’s notes and research – what would later be published as *The Ethnological Notebooks* – Engels sought to build on, and utilize Lewis Morgan’s “main lines” through which he outlined human primitive history– “within certain limits”

---

<sup>173</sup> Marx writes “...human beings become individuals only through the process of history”. The context of this sentence in the *Grundrisse* is to dispel the myth that slavery corresponds to an original or initiate form of human society, or was something spontaneously or naturally developed via the domination of a strong individual – physically dominant – over the weaker individuals. Why? Because such a deduction presumes the inherent existence of “isolated individuals”. Rather, slavery is a historical form, corresponding to a form of individual distinction which is itself a historical product. Instead, man originally appears as *Gattungswesen*

– in order to confirm and present their own existing conclusions developed via their materialistic conception of history.

Morgan (Engels, 2004) had delineated human history into 3 main epochs: #1 savagery; #2 barbarism; #3 civilization. Savagery corresponded to what we above described as the stage of tribal consciousness in Marx and Engels outline in *The German Ideology*, and reflected the “childhood of the human race”. Following Morgan, Engels’ divides this epoch into 3 progressive stages: a. lower stage; b. middle stage; c. upper stage. At the lower stage, we see man’s development of speech and the distinctive features develop that mark the evolution of man from animal. Though acknowledging that an account of the transition out of the anthropoid ape stage and into the human stage would be inexplicable, Engels (2004, pg.49) nonetheless identifies a prerequisite feature which was a “replacement of the individual’s inadequate power of defence by the united strength and joint effort of the horde”. Thus “mutual toleration among the adult males, freedom from jealousy, was, however, the first condition for the building of those large and enduring groups in the midst of which alone the transition from animal to man could be achieved” (Engels, 2004, pg. 50). This mutual toleration and freedom from jealousy among the adult males, was for Engels reflected in the primitive form of the polygamous/polyandrous family aka “group marriage” of which “undeniable evidence can be found in history”, says Engels– and which itself corresponded to a communal form of life<sup>174</sup>.

---

<sup>174</sup> On this point we see a maintenance, though modification, of the characterization of primitive human social life in the Marxist canon. In *The German Ideology* it was argued that the division of labour based on the sexual act develops as the natural or spontaneous division of labour, which then develops into the peculiarities of the family relation, and from the patriarchal family relation, the relation within the tribe. Nonetheless, this was meant to reflect a stage in human history more adept to communal forms of production, and with an undeveloped degree of individuation. This position would be corrected in light of Morgan’s research and Engels would subsequently include as a footnote to “Chapter 14” in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of *Capital* (Marx, pg.255): “Subsequent very searching study of the primitive condition of man, led the author to the conclusion, that it was not the family that originally developed into the tribe, but that, on the contrary, the tribe was the primitive and spontaneously developed form of human association, on the basis of blood relationship, and that out of the first incipient loosening of the tribal bonds, the many and various forms of the family were afterwards developed. [F. E.]”

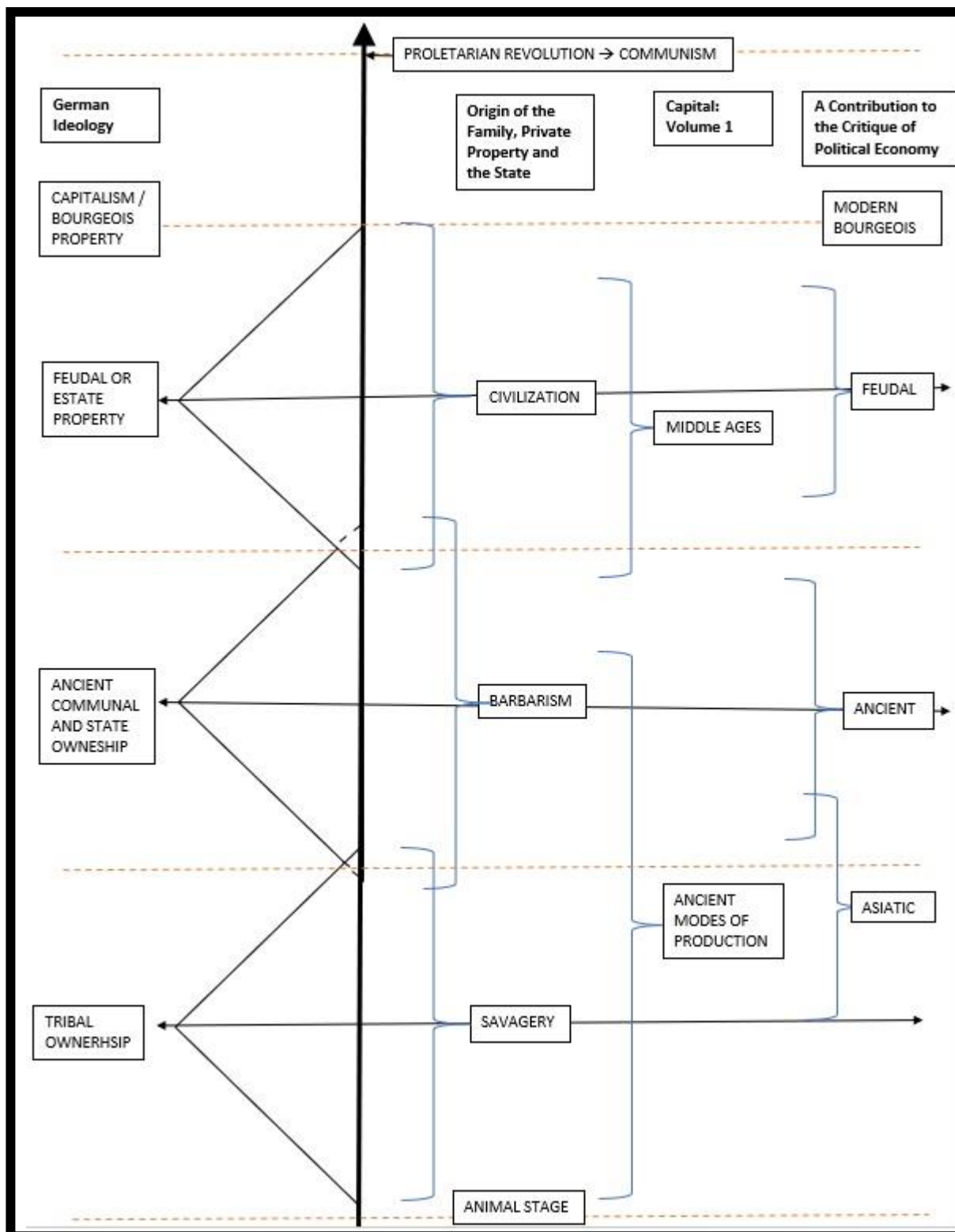


Diagram 1.0: An overlay sketch of the varying ways in which Marx and Engels divide the identified stages of history. Excluding the proletarian revolution and communism stage, the others can be envisioned as belonging to 3 separate blocks – in varying degrees of development and delineated by the dotted line. It is a dotted line for more than aesthetic reasons since each progressive stage it related to the former, and carries the experiences of the former within it.

Following this lower stage of savagery was the middle stage, wherein the human achieves the use of fire and subsequently the development of hunting and fishing. What then ensues through the consumption of meat and fish is a growing independence of man from climate and locality. What transpires is human migration across rivers and coasts. According to Engels, contemporaneously one can identify the “Australians and many Polynesians” as still in this state of middle savagery. Following middle savagery is upper stage savagery which is initiated with the invention of the bow and arrow and of the development of more technical instruments – a consequence of “long accumulated experience and sharpened mental powers” (Engels, 2004, pg. 40). There is also the phenomenon of settlement in villages as well as the “mastery of production of means of subsistence”: wood vessels and utensils, finger weaving, etc. According to Engels, these advances of upper stage savagery are reflected in the example of the Iroquois and “Indians of north-western America”<sup>175</sup>. The sparseness of the population and wide hunting grounds allowed those at the upper stage of savagery to maintain the communal character of the “gentile constitution”<sup>176</sup>, and here as elsewhere in savagery, the division of labour exists in its simple and natural form<sup>177</sup> as one between the two sexes<sup>178</sup> (Engels, 2004, pg.149). Further, with respect to

---

<sup>175</sup> Engels (2004, pg.98) at one point also suggests that at this upper stage of savagery can be found the example of the “Zulu Kaffirs”. Their relevance as an example here is illustrated through their bravery – and in a sense personal disregard- in the infamous “Battle of Rorke’s Drift” where the Zulu charged toward the English infantry – “armed only with pikes and spears” and under a hail of bullets.

<sup>176</sup> Engels makes over 40 references to “gentile constitution”[*Die Gentilverfassung*] in this work, which can be taken broadly to refer to the *frame of being* adopted by those at the stage of savagery: “And this gentile constitution is wonderful in all its childlike simplicity!” (Engels, 2004, pg. 97). The word “gentile” itself is derived from the Biblical term to designate a “heathen” or “pagan” i.e. someone who is not a Jew, but in its usage here it refers to tribe or clan.

<sup>177</sup> We can for a moment go back to *The German Ideology* where in relation to the stage of tribal consciousness, Marx and Engels (1978, pg.158) describe with reference to the simple division of labour between the sexes the absence as of yet of that truly significant division of labour between material and mental labour, the latter which gives rise to philosophy, ethics, theory, etc. At this primordial stage consciousness does not yet flatter itself as something other than “consciousness of existing practice”.

<sup>178</sup> “The men went to war, hunted, fished, provided the raw material for food and the tools necessary for these pursuits. The women cared for the house, and prepared food and clothing; they cooked, weaved and sewed. Each

the limited division of labour, groupings of people in the state of savagery are as yet absent of class distinctions (Engels, 2004, pg.98).

Though specification has been made with examples to groups such as the Iroquois or the Australian aborigine, for Engels (2004) the progression through savagery is nonetheless a “gentile line of development” that is universal to all people at a given period in history. With the progression into barbarism however, human historical development ceases to progress in such a way, owing largely – at least initially- to differences springing from human activity in relation to geographic and hemispheric conditions. For example, the transition into barbarism – at the lower stage- involves, for Engels (2004), the characteristic activity of herding and breeding animals. As such, Engels (2004) argues that such animals available for domestication can only be found in the “Eastern Hemisphere” which explains the advance of populations in that region as opposed to tribes in the Americas– who remain at the stage of savagery<sup>179</sup>. We see clearly through this example what it means when Marx and Engels describe human productive activity as the determining feature of our lives. Further, with the domestication of animals there subsequently developed “the first great social division of labour” as certain tribes, for example, made the raising and tending of cattle their principal occupation.

In this Eastern Hemisphere, through the domestication of animals and greater consumption of meat and milk, races of humans such as the Aryans and Semites are argued by Engels to have then experienced a “superior development” due to the beneficial effects of these foods. This is in

---

was master in his or her own field of activity: the men in the forest, the women in the house. Each owned the tools he or she made and used: the men, the weapons and the hunting and fishing tackle, the women, the household goods and utensils. The household was communistic, comprising several, and often many, families. Whatever was produced and used in common was common property: the house, the garden, the long boat.” (Engels, 2004, pg.149)

<sup>179</sup> Nonetheless he notes that some “Indian tribes” living East of the Mississippi developed horticulture – another characteristic activity of advance – and thus also progressed toward a lower stage of barbarism.

contrast to “the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico, who are reduced to an almost entirely vegetarian diet” and so as a consequence “have a smaller brain” (2004, pg.42). In addition to a division of labour initiated by pastoral life, there is also increased productive activity at the middle stage of barbarism due to horticultural activity: of field agriculture; or the cultivation of grain as food not just for cattle but for humans (particularly as reserved food during the harsh winters). Here as previously, there still exists the “gentile constitution” and the cultivated land and products for consumption were treated as collective tribal property<sup>180</sup>.

It is only at the upper stage of barbarism; at the threshold of civilization – and with the smelting of iron in the Eastern Hemisphere – that there begins to develop a significant increase in production and corresponding significant developments in the division of labour. For example, the iron ploughshare and axe “made possible field agriculture on a larger scale and the clearing of extensive forest tracts for cultivation” (Engels, 2004, g.151). Increased production and increased cultivation through improved tools were not only limited to agriculture – in terms of quantity and quality-, but also construction of houses, weapons, and other crafts (Engels, 2004, pg.151). With this increase in production there then subsequently grew an increase in the demand for labour, and so not only did division of labour develop along lines of specialization – agriculture vs handicraft production – but also through the development of distinctly slave labour. Thus corresponding to increased production was a greater value placed on human labour power, and so the enslaving of human beings for purposes of labour now became “an essential part of the social system”. There was now a further distinction created in society – corresponding to a division of labour described by Engels as “the first great social division of labour” (2004, pg.150) – which was that between freemen and slaves. In addition to this division, for Engels, increased productive activity and

---

<sup>180</sup> Examples of such communities, referenced by Engels (2004, pg.150), included the tribes of the Turanian highlands and those at the steppes north of the Black Sea.

specialization in production created a surplus beyond consumption needs, and so led to increase in production for exchange; a phenomenon that helped contribute to greater increases in individual wealth. And so an additional division was added to that of freeman and slaves; that of the distinction between the rich and the poor. As Engels (2004, pg.152) notes, this increase in individual wealth, and of wealth between various families caused “the old communistic household communities” to break up<sup>181</sup>; putting an end to the communalism of that gentile constitution, and initiating the division of society into classes<sup>182</sup>.

Belonging to this stage - that is characterized by increased productive activity<sup>183</sup>, the formalisation of the institution of slavery, and the division of society into classes - are the “Greeks of the heroic age”, the “tribes of Italy” shortly before the foundation of Rome, and the “Germans of Tacitus and the Norseman of the Viking age”. The description of this stage corresponds to what was described in *The German Ideology* as the second form of ownership which is ancient communal and state ownership. There, with reference to the Greek and Romans, there is described: the development alongside communal ownership, of moveable and immovable private property<sup>184</sup>; the great divide between citizens and slaves; and the union of several tribes by agreement or

---

<sup>181</sup> “The gens of the Greek is therefore no longer the archaic gens of the Iroquois; the impress of group marriage is beginning to be a good deal blurred. Mother-right has given way to father right; increasing private wealth has thus made its first breach in the gentile constitution”. (Engels, 2004, pg.100). With this “father-right” there also develops transmission of property to children, and so accumulation of wealth within one family and a further breakdown of the gentile constitution.

<sup>182</sup> This analysis is directly from Marx’s notes, as Engels (2004, pg.153) includes in quotations: “property differences in a gens changed the community of interest into antagonism between members of a gens” (Marx)”.

<sup>183</sup> Engels (2004) writes of other developments: “We find the upper stage of barbarism at its highest in the Homeric poems, particularly the Iliad. Fully developed iron tools, the bellows, the hand-mill, the potter’s wheel, the making of oil and wine, metal work almost developing into a fine art, the wagon and the war chariot, ship-building, with beams and planks, the beginnings of architectural art, walled cities, and towers and battlements, the Homeric epic and a complete mythology..”

<sup>184</sup> It is important to note that here private property is regarded as still subordinate to communal ownership since the citizens are still bound to the community; i.e. a citizen would hold power and ownership over their slave only in the community. And so, we are here still dealing with what Marx and Engels (1978, pg.151) describe as “communal private property”.



conquest. With this latter development there then also develops the formation of “towns” as distinct from the country, and so the germs of the antagonism between town and country here begins to form<sup>185</sup>.

With the existing developed divisions of labour, the division between town and country, and the undermining of communal property, we begin to proceed into the stage of civilization<sup>186</sup>, which in the *Origin* Engels (2004) locates at the “the grave” of the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. Like the description of the third form of property in *The German Ideology* – “feudal or estate property” – this stage is associated with the development of feudalism – or the “feudal epoch” (Marx and Engels, 1978, pg.153) - in those areas of the European continent previously under the domain of the Roman Empire- and particularly those associated with the German, Northern French and English people<sup>187</sup>. Yet despite its progressive positioning at the grave of the ancient world, the feudal era initiates itself with what seems to be regression: “agriculture had declined, industry had decayed for want of a market, trade had died out or been violently suspended, the rural and urban population had decreased” (Marx and Engels, 1978, pg.152). Additionally, in those territories previously under the domain of the Roman empire there was a

---

<sup>185</sup> The distinction between town and country, according to Marx and Engels (1978, pg.176) also signals a greater division between mental and material labour, something absent from the stage of savagery which did not theorize, philosophize, or moralize.

<sup>186</sup> Civilization: “the period in which man learns a more advanced application of work to the products of nature, the period of industry proper and of art” (Engels, 2004)

<sup>187</sup> The Germans are singly privileged as a kind of initiator of the European feudal system which as Marx and Engels (1978, pg.196) note, was largely influenced by the Germanic military constitution, and so came to influence Northern France or England through the act of conquest (i.e., the Norman conquests of England), combined with the activity of the settled conquerors and the existing mode of production in those respective regions. It is important to note here that our general intention in this section of the dissertation is to outline the account given by Marx and Engels, even if there are evident irregularities. For example, I am thinking of the absence of any influential role suggested to be played by the Huns of Central Asia, whose soldiers played a significant role in not only the collapse of the Western Roman Empire but in subsequent development and culture as they settled across Europe - including Germania.

loss of supremacy of town over country, owing largely to the rising power of rural landowners<sup>188</sup>, beneath whom laboured small peasants- serfs – that were attached to the land.

As Engels (2004, pg. 144) explains, this feudal relation was not entirely novel to these regions, and people, as it partly owed itself to the model of the Roman *angariae* [forced service] and of the Roman *Coloni* [tenant farmers]. And so with the dissolution of the Roman Empire there not only seemed to be regression, but stagnation: “Thus, it looked as if, after 400 years, the mass of the population had come back to the point it had started from”. And yet, in this feudal relation there existed the progressive elements of the new civilization, owing to its other partial influence: the barbarism of the Germans. Though in these territories the general class relations remained almost the same following the fall of the Western Roman Empire, “the people who constituted these classes had changed”. To explain, according to Engels (204, pg. 144) with the collapse of Roman domination, the free Frankish peasants soon found themselves in a position similar to the Roman *Coloni* that preceded them, i.e., exhausted by civil war, plunder, brutal extortion and internal disorder, they “had to seek the protection of the new magnates or the church” and in doing so transferred to them [their patrons] “property in their land” and received it back from them as tenants paying their dues through performing services and payments. With this the peasants were driven into a relation of dependence, and “after a few generations most of them became serfs”. Infused in this relation of Feudal servitude however was the barbarism of the Germans, i.e. the remnants of “their gentile constitution” – their “personal efficacy and bravery, their love of liberty, and their democratic instinct which regarded all public affairs as its own affairs” (Engels, 2004, pg.146) – that brought to the Feudal relation, and subsequently to the Western European continent,

---

<sup>188</sup> Marx and Engels (1978, pg.152) note an additional element in contributing to the predominance of the country over the town which was the sparseness of the population which was scattered over a large area: “In contrast to Greece and Rome, feudal development at the outset, therefore, extends over a much wider territory, prepared by the Roman conquests and the spread of agriculture...”

a “vitality” that would refashion it “for impending history”<sup>189</sup> (Engels, 2004, pg. 144). These gentile customs of the Germans would carry into the novel feudal relations a “milder form of servitude” which increasingly displaced the ancient form of slavery, metamorphosing the “the new race” of masters as well as servants into “a race of men” (Engels, 2004, pg. 144). The absence of “complete slavery”<sup>190</sup>, the increased mobility of the peasantry, local cohesion, and the remnants of communal customs – which at times manifested in the form of Mark communities – signified the conditions that contributed to the progressive character of the feudal era<sup>191</sup>; conditions which had supplied the oppressed – for the first time – as Fourier would suggest, “the means of gradual emancipation *as a class*” – i.e., means of resistance which were not available to the slave of antiquity (Engels, 2004, pg.146).

As we will see, these specific characteristics of the Feudal era in Western Europe, coupled with otherwise “accidental” becoming’s such as the “discovery” of the Americas or the rounding of the Cape, would set in motion the “processes of dissolution” (Marx, 1978, pg.267), the conditions adequate, to manifesting the pinnacle of civilization – bourgeois or capitalist society. The specifics of this transition are given a more detailed outline in *The German Ideology* (1978) rather than in Engels’ *Origin* and so it is worth turning there when trying to decipher a Marx/Engels account of how and why Capitalism arose out of the contradictions within the Western European Feudal era.

---

<sup>189</sup> “All that was vital and life-bringing in what the Germans infused into the Roman world was barbarism. In fact, only barbarians are capable of rejuvenating a world labouring in the throes of a dying civilization. And the highest stage of barbarism, to which and in which the Germans worked their way up previous to the migration of peoples, was precisely the most favourable one for this process. This explains everything”. (Engels, 2004, pg. 146).

<sup>190</sup> There is not here complete slavery, though we are still not dealing with a “free” labourer in the sense of the wage worker under capitalism. The “free” small peasant is still fettered; in a bondage relation between themselves and the soil and the lord of that soil. The absence of complete slavery however nonetheless contributes to what Marx describes in *The Grundrisse* as the “process of dissolution” that presupposes the “free wage labourer”

<sup>191</sup> Engels (2004, pg.146) makes the additional note that the gentile customs of the Germans would endow women with a higher social status than ever enjoyed in the ancient world.

Despite Engels' above reference to Fourier regarding the potential of the oppressed serfs to free themselves "*as a class*", in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (1978, pg.199) outline the process through which "refugee serfs" freed themselves from their servitude, not as a class "but separately"<sup>192</sup>. These serfs, who were nonetheless in a position to see and to treat their "servitude as something accidental to their personality" (Marx and Engels, 1978, pg.199), fled into the towns, which as already noted, during the Feudal era had lost their dominance and had been reduced to shells of what they previously were. These towns, nonetheless, existed in an antagonistic relation to the country<sup>193</sup>, and it would be here that fleeing serfs would enter and free themselves separately. The emphasis here on "separately" is important not only to reemphasize our point regarding the liberation of serfs not-as-a-class, but to also point to the varying conditions and circumstances that led to them freeing themselves from servitude. When we read descriptions such as "runaway serfs" (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.199) or "the flight of serfs into the towns" (Marx and Engels, 1978, pg.177), that went on through the Middle Ages, we are apt to simplify this "flight" as their literal fleeing escape from their lords. While this may be true, the "flight of serfs" also included their manumission by other means: For example, Marx and Engels (1978, pg.199) note how it became possible for serfs to accumulate "moveable property", and through this "facilitated his escape out of possession of his lord and gave him the prospect of making his way as an urban citizen". Those serfs who were "masters of a craft" - like Blacksmiths - had a better chance of acquiring moveable property, which also impacted their stature upon arrival into

---

<sup>192</sup> This is not to wholly undermine what Engels was nudging to when he drew on this observation of Fourier. In *The German Ideology*, the peasants are still described as one of the more revolutionary classes in society, especially when compared with the day-labourers, journeymen and apprentices of the towns: "The great risings of the Middle Ages all radiated from the country" BUT "equally remained totally ineffective because of the isolation and consequent crudity of the peasants" (Marx and Engels, 1978, pg.178).

<sup>193</sup> That antagonism – between town and country – being one of the true marks of civilization, and concomitant to the great division of labour between material and mental labour (see Marx and Engels, 1978, pg.176). This antagonism only intensifies with the full development of the feudal era.

the towns. In addition to literally running, and buying their way out, some serfs also fled into the towns through their being rendered superfluous, partly due to the improvements in agriculture.

The additional emphasis on them entering the towns separately, and not as a class, is also significant in drawing out their relative powerlessness when entering the towns, where they confronted “organized urban competitors” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.177). Based on their level of skill or property ownership, the serfs entered the towns powerless and were subject to the existing forms of economy, thus either bending to the will of guild-masters or journeymen which took them in or existing as day-labourers (an unorganized rabble), and vagabonds. Those serfs who fled with enough skill and capital were already “half burghers” who would develop into the chartered burghers – wherein the first elements of the bourgeoisie were developed (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.474).

The arrival of the free serfs helped form the towns anew (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.176), not simply through the increase in population, but through the productive activity that accompanied this phenomenon. The growing competition of the serfs “swarming into the rising towns” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.153, pg.176/177) is included in the list of contributions that helped give rise to “the union of workers of each craft in guilds”, in addition to the need for association against the robber nobility, the necessity of protecting their laboriously acquired skill, the necessity for common buildings for sale of wares, and the consequent exclusion of the “unauthorized” from these common buildings. Guilds would play a significant role in the towns, reproducing a similar hierarchy as existed in the country but with the distinction of commanding

capital independent of landed property – the “beginning of property having its basis only in labour and exchange”<sup>194</sup>.

The rising guilds thus played a conservative and productive role: conservative in their reproduction of feudalistic patriarchal hierarchies that limited the revolutionary potential of part of the town’s work force, and productive in: their institution of corporative moveable property, their strengthening of the organization and stature of the town in the Medieval era, and subsequently of the role of guilds in the accumulation of capital in the hands of individuals (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.180) –a phenomenon which would contribute to the rise of manufactures, particularly in countries like France and England.

The rise of manufactures is a significant turn in the transition out of the feudal era, and the other significant impulse behind this development – in addition to accumulation of capital - is the formation of the merchant class. In *The German Ideology*, the emergence of the merchant class is not explicitly related to the formation of the guilds, and abruptly we are told, following a discussion of the guilds:

The next extension of the division of labour was the separation of production and commerce, the formation of a special class of merchants; a separation which, in the towns bequeathed by a former period, had been handed down (among other things with the Jews) and which very soon appeared in the newly formed ones (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.178).

One can only surmise that the rejuvenation of the activities of the merchant class owed itself to both the productive activity and political role played by the guilds in the now revived towns of the Medieval era. Although, to emphasize again, no such explicit explanation is made by Marx and Engels on this account. Nonetheless, the merchants, and along with them their

---

<sup>194</sup> “The journeyman and the apprentices were organized in each craft as it best suited the interests of the masters. The patriarchal relationship existing between them and their masters gave the latter a double power – on the one hand because of their influence on the whole life of the journeyman, and on the other because, for the journeymen who worked with the same master, it was a real bond which held them together against the journeymen of other masters and separated from these” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.178).

commercial activity would have a profound effect on the guild-system, and on production in general. Where previously there existed limited communication between the individual towns, with the commercial activities of the merchant class – which had commerce as its prerogative- there arose an extension of trade beyond the immediate surroundings of the town, and through this commercial activity, “the possibility of commercial communications transcending the immediate neighbourhood” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.178). Subsequently, the towns now

... enter into relations *with one another*, new tools are brought from one town into the other, and the separation between production and commerce soon calls forth a new division of production between the individual towns, each of which is soon exploiting a predominant branch of industry. The local restrictions of earlier times begin gradually to be broken down (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.179).

Transcending the physical and geographical isolation that characterized not just much of the early Medieval era but much of what can be described about life in the stages of barbarism and savagery, commercial activity now allowed for relations to be established beyond “local restrictions”; relations between towns which both altered productive activity in existing towns and strengthened bonds of interest between the towns over and against the landed nobility of the country. With reference to the latter point, with increased communication and the establishment of trade between towns there now develops a “burgher *class*”, which began to share common customs, interests, and conditions of life, and which contained the germs of what would develop into the “Big bourgeoisie” of the industrial era (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.179-180). With reference to the former, we see that with increased relations between towns there now begins division of labour between towns, and subsequently “regional specialization”, the immediate consequence of which was “the rise of the manufactures” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.180); branches of production which had now outgrown the restrictive guild system – whose characteristics now behaved as

fetters in relation to the demands created by increased commercial -and subsequently productive – activity<sup>195</sup>.

Combined, the above evolution of conditions through the Medieval era – primarily the accumulation of moveable capital in the hands of individuals and the advanced concentration of individuals via the towns - would create the required premises for the formation of guild-free manufacture (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.180), which though increasingly threatening and displacing the guild system, had its first developments not in a hitherto industry associated with the guilds, but in weaving:

The rising demand for clothing materials, consequent on the growth of population, the growing accumulation and mobilization of natural capital through accelerated circulation, the demand of luxuries called forth by the latter and favoured generally by the gradual extension of commerce, gave weaving a quantitative and qualitative stimulus... (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.180).

The growing development of guild-free manufacture would signal a number of consequences: 1.) property relations quickly changed owing to manufacture now creating a mass of moveable capital; 2.) Manufacture – and with it its increased range of productive activity – became the refuge of peasants and vagabonds (the latter set free with the gradual abolition of feudal bodies) who were fitted to work in manufacture owing to its lack of required skill on behalf of the workers; 3.) In relation to the latter point, a novel relationship between worker and employer was now created where contrary to the kind of patriarchal relationship of the guild - between journeyman and master, apprentice and journeyman – in manufacture there was only a monetary relation between the worker and capitalist, which in the towns had “lost almost all patriarchal complexion”; 4.) Trade now took on a political significance since with manufacture and the

---

<sup>195</sup> Thus in this example we see empirically what it means when contradiction and collisions - between the existing productive forces and forms of intercourse - are described as the forces of evolution and progress in human history.



increased quantity and reach of trade “various nations entered into a competitive relationship...which was fought out in wars, protective duties and prohibitions” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.181); 5.) And as already noted, the emergence of manufacture would undermine the guild system – outplacing and outpacing it – both in terms of productive activity, and subsequently in terms of political influence: “Trade and manufacture created the Big bourgeoisie; in the guilds was concentrated the petty bourgeoisie, which no longer was dominant in the towns as formerly, but had to bow to the might of great merchants and manufacturers” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.178).

Beside the play of productive and commercial activities described above, according to Marx & Engels (1978, pg.182), the growth of manufacture partly also owed itself to the extension of commerce which came with the “discovery” of America and the rounding of the Cape<sup>196</sup>. With the importation of gold and silver from the Americas, for example, the workers and remaining feudal landed property was dealt a heavy blow (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.182) and the spread of commerce and subsequent improvements in navigation and transport – the opening up of the world market<sup>197</sup> - all lent to the continued rise of the big bourgeoisie and of “Big industry”<sup>198</sup>.

We already noted above some of the novelties as a result of guild-free manufacture, but the extensive – and novel - consequences as a result of “Big industry” – according to Marx and Engels (1978, pg.185) are best captured in this lengthy excerpt:

Big industry universalized competition..., established means of communication and the modern world market, subordinated trade to itself, transformed all capital into industrial

---

<sup>196</sup> This is repeated in *The Communist Manifesto*: “The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonization of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.474).

<sup>197</sup> The world market was opened up through trade, trade (importation/exportation) via colonization, and the eventual loosening of national protective duties and restrictions (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.183).

<sup>198</sup> Hence also why according to Marx and Engels (1978, pg.183) England – “the mightiest maritime nation” – dominated in trade and manufacture. This owing not only to their seafaring superiority as regards to trade, but the “naval wars” which settled disputes around trade competition, “in the last resort”.

capital, and thus produced the rapid circulation (development of the financial system) and the centralization of capital. By universal competition it forced all individuals to strain their energy to the utmost. It destroyed as far as possible ideology, religion, morality, etc., and where it could not do this, made them into a palpable lie. It produced world history for the first time, insofar as it made all civilized nations and every individual member of them dependent for the satisfaction of their wants on the whole world, thus destroying the former natural exclusiveness of separate nations. It made natural science subservient to capital and took from the division of labour the last semblance of its natural character. It destroyed natural growth in general, as far as this is possible while labour exists, and resolved all natural relationships into money relationships. In the place of naturally grown towns it created the modern, large industrial cities which have sprung up overnight. Wherever it penetrated, it destroyed the crafts and all earlier stages of industry. It completed the victory of the commercial town over the countryside.... Generally speaking, big industry created everywhere the same relations between the classes of society, and thus destroyed the peculiar individuality of the various nationalities. And finally, while the bourgeoisie of each nation still retained separate national interests, big industry created a class, which in all nations has the same interest and with which nationality is already dead; a class which is really rid of all the old world and at the same time stands pitted against it. Big industry makes for the worker not only the relation to the capitalist, but labour itself, unbearable (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg. 185-186).

With the emergence into the era of capitalism – of big industry; of the bourgeois mode of production – Marx & Engels (1978, pg.186), acknowledge the specificity of their historical sketch to “those nations which grew out of the Middle Ages” and summarize the process through which “the first form of property in the ancient world” – tribal property- evolved to modern capital: “feudal landed property, corporative moveable property, capital invested in manufacture – to modern capital, determined by big industry and universal competition, i.e., pure private property, which has cast off all semblance of a communal institution...”.

Yet, given the seemingly negative characteristics of the capitalist mode of production – which forces all individuals to strain their energy to the utmost, which resolves all natural relationships to money relationships, which is characterised by competition and the domination of a new class- the bourgeoisie – which stands over and above a mass that toils and for whom labour itself is made unbearable – the immediate question is how and why the capitalist mode of

production is located at the apex of civilization, and taken as a signification of *progress* through human history? For example, compare what has been described of capitalism in just the details and excerpt above to the following excerpt from Engels' (2004, pg.98) *Origin* with reference to the "gentile constitution" of Savages and Barbarians :

Everything runs smoothly without soldiers, gendarmes or police; without nobles, kings, governors, prefects or judges; without prisons; without trials, All quarrels and disputes are settled by the whole body of those concerned – the gens or the tribe or the individual gentes among themselves... [...]... There can be no poor and needy – the communistic household and the gens know their obligations towards the aged, the sick and those disabled in war. All are free and equal – including the women. There is as yet no room for slaves, nor, as a rule, for the subjugation of alien tribes. When the Iroquois conquered the Eries of the "Neutral Nations" about the year 1651, they invited them to join the confederacy as equal members; only when the vanquished were refused were they driven out of their territory. And the kind of [the] men and women that are produced by such a society is indicated by the admiration of the personal dignity, straightforwardness, strength of character and bravery of these barbarians.

In contrast to the communalism, equality, "personal dignity" and "strength of character" associated with those in savagery and lower stage barbarism, in bourgeois society, as Marx (1978, pg. 262) describes in *The Grundrisse*, the individual – the worker- does not exist communally, but in a community of individuals; a community which "he tries to make a meal of, and which makes a meal of him". Further, as Engels' (1978, pg.706) describes, what predominates in modern industry, in exchange, in production, is a kind of "Darwinian struggle of the individual for existence, transferred from Nature to society with intensified violence. The conditions of existence natural to the animal appear as the final term of human development". Surely then, are we not a far way off having regressed from the communalism, dignity and equality of our gentile character; only now to confront each other in a dog-eat-dog world of commerce, commercials, and consumption?

The resolution to our question concerning the seemingly contradictory exaltation of the capitalist mode of production rests on two principle points: 1.) The forms of "primitive

communism”<sup>199</sup> that characterize “what mankind and human society were like before class divisions arose” (Engels, 2004, pg.98) were “doomed to extinction”. Though the human originally appears as a “species-being” [*Gattungswesen*] (Marx, 1978, pg.262) – as “clan being, herd animal” – it was a form of existence that relied on geographic isolation and “never developed beyond the tribe” (Engels, 2004, pg.98). Marx (1881) echoes this point in the first and third drafts of his letters to Vera Zasulich where he describes how the character of “earlier primitive communities” rested on the natural kinship of their members, on “blood relations among their members” – “a strong yet narrow tie”. These narrow ties eventually broke as the relative isolation was altered through “contact with strangers”. In Engels’ (2004, pg.98) *Origin* he references the empirical example of the Confederacy of Tribes to illustrate the downfall of this original unity through this process, and specifically of the attempts of the Iroquois to “subjugate others”. In Marx’s (1858) section on “Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations” in *The Grundrisse* he similarly writes that:

The purely primitive character of the tribe may be broken by the movement of history or migration; the tribe may remove from its original place of settlement and occupy *foreign* soil, thus entering substantially new conditions of labour and developing the energies of the individual further. The more such factors operate – and the more the communal character of the tribe therefore appears, and must appear, rather as a negative unity as against the outside world – the more do conditions arise which allow the individual to become a private proprietor of land – of a particular plot – whose special cultivation belongs to him and his family.

Thus the species-being character of our original state is disrupted not only through geographic contact with “others” or “strangers” who are thus differentiated from the community,

---

<sup>199</sup> “Primitive communism” is a descriptive term associated with these early social forms, though one largely developed by later “Marxists”. The term itself cannot be found in any of Marx or Engels’ texts, except perhaps in a footnote by Engels to the 1888 English edition of the *Manifesto* where he references “primitive communistic society” with reference to Morgan’s work. Nonetheless it is apt as a term in that it captures what is described in both *Origin* and *The Grundrisse* as that “original unity” from which humans eventually and inevitably depart via. developments in the division of labour – a phenomena in dialectic relation with the existing forms of productive activity.

but through individuation<sup>200</sup> [*Vereinzelung*] within the tribe itself that also results – at least partly – from migration and of the “new conditions of labour”, of both production and exchange, that come with that migration. Hence also why in *The Grundrisse* Marx (1978, pg.262) writes that individuals only become individuals through the process of history.

2.) The second principle point concerning the exaltation of capitalism over and above all previous modes of production and stages of human “prehistory” relates to the conditions of/for a concrete universality<sup>201</sup> that it brings into existence. The conditions are described here as “of/for” because the universality ushered by capitalism is something that exists partly as a potentiality, akin to that moment concerning Hegel’s *potentiality* of Christian love, and further developed potentiality of realizing that universal ethic with the Reformation- i.e. there is not yet the concrete expression of its realization, which to remain with Hegel, is instead made manifest through the modern European state and the express role of the universal class. In other words, the conditions of a concrete universality exist in essence due to capitalism, but they are not yet universal in a manifest sense. For Marx, the latter is realized through communism - the potential consequence of the potentiality created through the universalizing nature of capitalism.

---

<sup>200</sup> The term Marx uses in *The Grundrisse* is “*Vereinzelung*” which is distinct from man’s basic existence as an individual [*der Einzelne*]. The use of the term is here similar to the way in which Hegel is using it in his discussion of the process of individuation through which Spirit proceeds in its Odyssey. *Vereinzelung* as “individuation” can thus also be defined as “to isolate, individualize, ‘isolating individualization’” and carries “a strong suggestion of human individuality and individualism than *einzelne*” (Inwood, 1992, pg.302).

<sup>201</sup> Concrete [*Konkret*] as opposed to the Abstract [*Abstrakt*]. Like Hegel, Marx treats the universal never as something abstract but only ever concrete. If we recall from above, in Hegel, the abstract universal in Kant was criticized for its deceptive and defective quality. In its abstraction it was empty, and corrupted itself unwillingly into subjectivity and particularity. Rather, the universal – taken as *konkret* - develops itself *into* and through the particular and the individual (Inwood, 1992, pg. 304). We see this through the notion of Hegel’s ideal/rational state in which the moment exists for the unity of individual and universal, etc. of a concrete universality. For Marx, the universality sought to be achieved in the Hegelian rational state was a *pseudo*-universal; the reflection of only the interests and customs of the privileged classes; a conceptual flaw owing to Hegel’s idealistic system which abstracted from humankind the real – concrete - conditions of their being.

The universalizing tendency of the capitalist mode of production - driven by the needs of a constantly expanding market - is on one account captured in those passages from *The Communist Manifesto* that describe it as bringing a “cosmopolitan character” to production and consumption in every country: the bourgeoisie “must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.476). In the process, geographical isolation, national industry, tradition bound forms of consumption are all undone, and what results is “intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.476). In relation to this global dynamic to production, there is now a global or world literature, world art, world culture, world “civilization” that leaves no corner of the earth untouched: “The bourgeoisie, by rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian nations into civilization”.

This establishing of connections of interdependence and relations across national boundaries is mirrored within the newly emerging national borders as the bourgeoisie does away with the scattered state of the population through the creation of “enormous cities” and through the centralization of legal and political authority. Similarly, both within and outside the nation, one-sidedness, narrow-mindedness, tradition, religion, morality, all idyllic relations and venerable prejudices and opinions “are swept away” in the face of the demands of the bourgeois mode of production (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.476): “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”. In short, the revolutionizing and expansive tendency of capitalism tears away the existing modes of production and corresponding forms of intercourse; and across the globe, it creates a world after its own image.

On another, intimately related – yet somewhat more significant – account, the universalizing tendency of the capitalist mode of production is evidenced through its creation of a “universal class”. Related because the globalizing and cosmopolitan character of capitalism has the potential to spread the conditions of/for a universal class across the globe. We said ‘more significant’ because of the place and the role of a “universal class” in justifying and expressing principles of rationality and universality in the midst of contingency<sup>202</sup>.

Earlier in this Chapter on “Marx’s Critique of Morality” – in the sub-section “The Elemental Class” – we noted the debt Marx owed to Hegel in providing a means for a resolution to the question concerning how to justify the premise of a “higher society” – one beyond the depredation of the present – without contradicting oneself or lapsing into the idealistic domain of *Moralität*. The means of this resolution was found through the express role of the “universal class” – a class whose subjective interests were identical with the interests of the whole; a class, not having always existed but emerging for the first time and as a consequence of progressive developments in human productive activity<sup>203</sup>. In Hegel, the universal class was to be found among the civil servants of the ideal, rational state. However, as we have noted already, this was criticized by Marx because for him the universal could never be realized in the form of a particular class, but only through the capability of a universal class “to be *really* universal”<sup>204</sup>. The experience of the

---

<sup>202</sup> We have already outlined some of the specifics concerning this identification of a universal class, both in Chapter 1 “Marx’s Eurocentrism” and in those pages dedicated to the *Wood Theft Debates* and the identification of an “elemental class” of humanity. We will repeat only some of what we have already mentioned in our outline here, but with a further insight owing to both greater detail and deeper elaboration of terms; and due to the situating of this discussion at the cusp of the odyssey we have just undertaken: from a primitive communalism or original and simple unity, through to increased division of labour and class antagonism, and into the domain of a concrete or actualized universal.

<sup>203</sup> Mental activity in Hegel; objective or material in Marx.

<sup>204</sup> There is a fitting excerpt from CLR James’ (1986) *State Capitalism and World Revolution* where utilizing a materialist conception of history he assess Hegel’s limited insight, in concert with the character of the mode of production in his time: “Hegel could not carry the dialectical logic to its conclusions in the socialist revolution

*Wood Theft Debates* had demonstrated enough the stunted and irrational outlook of the privileged classes. Theirs was a “particular consciousness” rather than a universal consciousness. Instead, for Marx it was among *Die Standeslosen* that rationality and universality of custom could be found; owing both to their protection from property ownership, from life within the estates, and by way of their “instinctive sense of right” or what Sherover (1979) termed “cosmic rightness”. But however undeveloped this notion of the universal class – and of its rational and universal position – was in *The Wood Theft Debates*, it nonetheless laid the groundwork for Marx’s identification of the universal class with an abject and labouring class that was both within and without civil society. It was a class unique in human history, and emergent with the capitalist mode of production: the proletariat.

While the Hegelian civil servants of the rational state were considered significant, having been drawn from the industrious middle classes, educated to see their jobs as public service, and trained to keep in mind the interests of the whole of society, the proletariat was taken as universal, and so elemental, on two principle accounts: 1.) We have already referenced in Chapter One “Marx’s Eurocentrism” that section from *The Holy Family* where Marx describes the fully-formed proletariat as the “abstraction of all humanity”. This description can in one sense be read as the depredation of the proletariat whose conditions of life “sum up all the conditions of life of society today in their most inhuman form”, and so through this condition, impels them to revolt through “absolutely imperative *need*” (more on this later). In another sense however, “abstraction of all

---

because he did not and could not base himself on the advanced industrial proletariat. He saw and described with horror the fragmentation and loss of individuality by the worker under the capitalist division of labour. But the workers whom he knew were not the organized, disciplined and united proletariat which by Marx’s time had begun to announce itself as the new organizer of society and which we know so well today. Hegel could not know these and therefore he could not envisage universal freedom for the masses of men. The result was that in the politics, economics and philosophy, he was compelled to reinstate the old rationalistic division of labour between intellectual elite and the masses. Hegel did not imply this. He stated it. The universal bureaucratic class, the intellectual class, must rule society”.



humanity” can be read as the very real ways in which the various markers, identities, entitlements, property ownership and relations of being that attach themselves to individuals are abstracted *from*. We saw a similar abstraction emerge for Hegel, who traced through history the progressive realization that “man as man is free”. For Hegel, conceptually, this abstraction of the human from all that was Natural and particular was something made fully realizable only following the advent of Christianity – for “God will have *all men* to be saved” – and more so was something consciously attained first by the Christianized German Nations. Unlike the Orientals, for Hegel, who had no concept of human freedom and remained mired in caste and despotic relations, or the Greeks and Romans who had held slaves, the German Nations under the influence of Christianity were in a position to attain consciousness of the true essence of Spirit – freedom - and so able to pave the way for the unity of man with god – the reconciliation [*Versöhnung*] that concludes Spirit’s odyssey; a reconciliation that is impossible if man has not annulled the “merely Natural and Limited in his Spirit”. For Marx, this abstraction of the human from varying particularisms (often taken as natural and immutable) was instead the express condition of the modern proletariat – that abstraction of all humanity.

Through Marx and Engels’ account of history we read how varying patriarchal, idyllic and familial/tribal relations, and/as property relations, informed, and were informed by, the corresponding forms of production and human intercourse. Previously, the division of labour in relation to these conditions was determined, for example, along either tribal/kinship relations, the sexual division of labour, an attachment to the soil and lord of the soil (in the case of serfs), guild relations, or the labourer taken to form part and parcel the means of production themselves (in the case of slaves). The capitalist mode of production however -taken as the gradual outcome of a historical process that dissolves these “objective conditions of labour” from the worker (Marx,

1978, pg.275) - holds as both a presupposition and a distinctive feature the “free worker”, i.e. the complete separation of the worker from bondage relations and from property and means of production (Marx, 1978, pg.266). We have already noted above some of the historical developments requisite for the existence of this “free worker” via the dissolutions experienced through the Western European feudal era i.e., with respect to antiquated – and now restrictive-guild relations, the dissolving of feudal ties, the flights of serfs into towns (at times forcibly through the appropriation of common land<sup>205</sup>), and the advent of big industry with its demands of increased production and lower skilled labour. For a summary of these developments, with respect to the condition of the worker, it is worth turning to Marx’s (1978, pg.432-433) Chapter “The Secret of Primitive Accumulation” in *Capital, Volume One*:

The economic structure of capitalistic society has grown out of the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter set free the elements of the former. The immediate producer, the labourer, could only dispose of his own person after he had ceased to be attached to the soil and ceased to be the slave, serf, or bondsman of another. To become a free seller of labour-power, who carries his commodity wherever he finds a market, he must further have escaped from the regime of the guilds, their rules for apprentices and journeymen, and the impediments of their labour regulations. Hence, the historical movement which changes the producers into wage-workers, appears, on the one hand, as their emancipation from serfdom and from the fetters of the guilds, and this side alone exists for our bourgeois historians. But, on the other hand, these new freedmen became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production, and of all the guarantees of existence afforded by the old feudal arrangements. And the history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.

This “free worker” is in actuality the “free wage labourer” – “...individuals forced solely by their lack of property to labour and to sell their labour” (Marx, 1978, pg.267). The Free wage labourer, unattached and owning nothing but their “labour power” must thus sell “his very self”

---

<sup>205</sup> What is usually singled out as the process of “primitive accumulation”, particularly with reference to the English experience, in terms of its role in contributing to the rise of capitalism.

piecemeal on the market for a wage<sup>206</sup>, for money, which they will utilize to purchase the necessities for their livelihood: “Labour power is, therefore a commodity which its possessor, the wage-worker, sells to capital. Why does he sell it? In order to live” (Marx, 1978, pg.204).

The novelty of the “freedom” here is that the labourer belongs neither to the soil, nor to an owner, but are themselves free to sell themselves to the capitalist – the owner of the means of production. The worker can thus leave the capitalist or whomever he sold himself to as often as he chooses (Marx, 1978, pg. 205). However, this “freedom” is restrictive in the sense that the worker still belongs to the “capitalist class”, since he cannot leave the whole class of buyers of labour power without jeopardizing his own existence. This is why in *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels (1978, pg.199) write that though individuals seem freer under the dominance of the bourgeoisie than before, they are “in reality, of course...less free, because they are more subjected to the violence of things”<sup>207</sup>

Under these conditions of violence the free wage labourer exists only as a laborer; not as nobleman or serf or slave, but as the abstract seller of labour power – the seller of a commodity among other commodities. Further to the point, Marx (1978, pg.264) makes it clear that capital is not interested in the worker – in substance or as a condition of production – but rather, it is the labour capacity that is of interest: “if it can make machines do it, or even water, air, so much the better”. Additionally, the condition of the free worker, and more importantly, of “free labour” – its “release” from any and all “objective conditions of existence through the process of history” –

---

<sup>206</sup> “...wages are the sum of money paid by the capitalist for a particular labour time or for a particular output of labour” (Marx, 1978, pg.204).

<sup>207</sup> This is not to undermine the significance of this achieved degree of freedom. In the posthumously published *Resultate to Capital, Volume One*, Marx included a footnote quoting T.R. Edmonds: “A free labourer has generally the liberty of changing his master: this liberty distinguishes a slave from a free labourer, as much as an English man-of-war sailor is distinguished from a merchant sailor...The condition of a labourer is superior to that of a slave, because a labourer *thinks* himself *free*; and this conviction, however erroneous, has no small influence on the character of a population” (Marx, 1976, pg.1027).

behaves as a requisite for the transformation of money into capital, since on one hand it frees up “the necessities and materials, etc. which were in one way or another the property of the masses” but which have now become purchasable. The system of capitalism thus rests on an exploitable-property less-mass and a mass of materials and property which can be appropriated by individual capitalists. This is why in *The Grundrisse* Marx (1978, pg. 293) describes capitalism as “the mode of production founded on wage labour”.

And so, a kind of universality via abstraction<sup>208</sup> is taking place for the proletariat through the institution of wage labour because: 1.) there is the separation of workers from objective conditions of labour, and so their existence is framed – not by caste, or as slaves, etc. – but simply as “free” labouring capacities; 2.) the formalization of the relation between worker and employee – not through a relation of bondage, or a patriarchal relation – but a strictly - and presumably objective - monetary relation; one increasingly losing all “patriarchal complexion”<sup>209</sup> (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.182). The combined result is a novel class of workers who are universal in the sense of not being restricted by localisms or particularisms, nor by occupation or ownership. They are “free, unprotected and rightless proletarians” (Marx, 1976, pg.876).

The *freer* form of the relation of supremacy and subordination – objective in nature, voluntary in appearance, and purely economic – that is part and parcel the mode of production

---

<sup>208</sup> I want to continually emphasize that it is a universality premised on an ‘abstraction’ that is created within concrete conditions. In this way we are not contradicting ourselves if earlier we described the notion of universal in Marx and Hegel as conceived as concrete as opposed to abstract as in the case of Kant.

<sup>209</sup> A succinct excerpt describing this from Marx’s (1976, pg.1027) *Capital, Volume One* reads: “Lastly, it [the formal subsumption of labour under capitalism] dissolves the relationship between owners of the conditions of labour and the workers into a *relationship of sale and purchase, a purely financial relationship*. In consequence the process of exploitation is stripped of every patriarchal, political or even religious cloak. It remains true, of course, that the *relations of production* themselves create a new relation of *supremacy and subordination*...[...]... If supremacy and subordination come to take the place of slavery, serfdom, vassalage, and other patriarchal forms of subjection, the change is *purely one of form*. The form becomes *freer* because it is objective in nature, voluntary in appearance, *purely economic*.”

founded on wage labour is given further significance through its gradual extension over existing relations of production owing to the revolutionizing tendency of capitalism – a universalizing tendency described above with regard to the cosmopolitan character which capitalism bring to the world via the demands of a constantly expanding market. Through this tendency, the objective relation between employer (the owner of the means of production) and the now [abstracted] free wage labourer is generalized as the condition of existence for a growing mass of individuals. The result implies both a simplification of class relations (and subsequently, antagonisms) in society, both nationally and globally, and the creation of conditions of a shared/common existence for a majority of the population as a class of free-wage labourers. With reference to the former, the simplification of class antagonisms, Marx and Engels (1978, pg.474) write:

In earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank...[...]... Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified class antagonisms: Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.474)

The complicated arrangements of previous epochs had veiled class antagonisms and exploitation under religious, political and mystified relations that bound us as beings to a gradation of natural superiors – relations that lent to the powerlessness of those workers<sup>210</sup>. In their stead the capitalist mode of production substitutes all these for the “naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation“ of a growing mass (the oppressed) at one end and the shrinking ranks of a monopolizing class on the other (the oppressor).

With reference to the latter, the creation of conditions for a shared/common existence, we see the organization and subsumption of a majority of individuals under ones class – the class of

---

<sup>210</sup> See for example the previously referenced account of feudal day labourers and apprentices being bound through patriarchal relations in the guilds.

wage workers. Consequently, along with this subsumption of individuals under a class comes class conditions; conditions which both frame the individual interests of the workers as well as their personal development (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.179). The result is the creation of “general men”<sup>211</sup>, workers previously dispersed and isolated – existing in distinctive relations of domination and subordination – but who are now socialized with respect to the generalization of individual interests and their basic form of existence<sup>212</sup>. Combined, the simplification of now generalized relations of supremacy and subordination and the socialization of labour – both in essence of being and with respect to their labouring activity – results in the creation of a revolutionary subject. Revolutionary because they possess both a (potential) clarity as regards the conditions of their subjection – a consequence of the simplification of class relations, and because they are capable of constituting themselves as a class with shared interests as a result of their subsumption under definite class conditions.

However, these conditions are still only potentialities, since as Marx (1978, pg.218) writes in the concluding passage to *The Poverty of Philosophy*, that though “The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself”. It is only through struggle, he continues, that the mass becomes united and becomes capable of constituting “itself as a class for itself”. This is noteworthy because despite the constitution of workers as a class against capital - conditions informing shared

---

<sup>211</sup> The term “general men” is cited in Chattopadhyay (2006, pg.68) from the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe: Volume 2*.

<sup>212</sup> Of no small significance is the socialization that also takes place with regard to production and the labouring activity of the workers itself. Previous modes of production rested on individual labour, isolated, specially developed, etc. However, with Capitalism and the centralization and mechanization of production, the labour process – production itself- takes on a co-operative and interdependent character. This socialization of production and of labour eventuates the inevitable contradiction between socialized production and individual appropriation. It also, like the potential for greater mastery over nature, behaves as a kernel of potentiality in establishing the requisite conditions for a consciously organized communist future. This is taken up in Marx (1978, pg.437-438) and Engels (1939).

interests – for Marx, the condition of bourgeois society (1978, pg.262) is one that has separated the individual, the worker, from any objective being. Whereas the human emerges initially as *species-being*, in bourgeois society there is only the individual who “stands there purely without objectivity, subjectively“, and confronting their now externalized relations “which he tries to make a meal of, and which makes a meal of him“ (Marx, 1978, pg.262). A similar observation is raised by Engels (1845) in his *Condition of the Working Class in England*, where he writes:

Competition is the completest expression of the battle of all against all which rules in modern civil society. This battle, a battle for life, for existence, for everything, in case of need a battle of life and death, is fought not between the different classes of society only, 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. The workers are in constant competition among themselves as are the members of the bourgeoisie among themselves.

In *The German Ideology* (1978, pg.179) Marx and Engels make a parallel point to that raised by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, with reference to this dissonance between individual and class interest, when they write: “The separate individuals form a class only insofar as they have to carry on a common battle against another class: otherwise they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors<sup>213</sup>“ (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.179).

---

<sup>213</sup> This point is repeated succinctly in a footnote by Marx in *The German Ideology* (1978, pg.186) where he writes: “Competition separates individuals from one another, not only the bourgeois but still more the workers, in spite of the fact that it brings them together. Hence it is a long time before these individuals can unite, apart from the fact that for the purposes of this union - if it is not to be merely local- the necessary means, the great industrial cities and cheap and quick communications, have first to be produced by big industry. Hence every organised power standing over against these isolated individuals, who live in relationships daily reproducing this isolation, can only be overcome after long struggles. To demand the opposite would be tantamount to demanding that competition should not exist in this definite epoch of history, or that the individuals should banish from their minds relationships over which in their isolation they have no control. [Marx]”. The competition between the workers reflects another kind of “isolation”, similar to geographic isolation, etc. Nonetheless, through both struggle and the universalising developments of Capitalism, Marx and Engels write that “the advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association”.

It is the imperative behind the struggle<sup>214</sup>, and the battle itself against another class that is capable of unifying the separate individuals, who despite existing in shared conditions, nonetheless exist within the competitive and individualistic frame of the capitalist mode of production. The conditions informing this imperative to struggle, or the terms of the battle against another class, though also gestured to in the above reference to the clarification afforded through the simplification of class antagonisms, nonetheless finally brings us to the 2.) second principle account concerning why the proletariat was taken as universal and so the elemental class by Marx and Engels; and this with recourse to the initial description concerning the proletariat as the “abstraction of all humanity”; not only as we have discussed above in the sense of the stripping of particularities, but here as the sum of “all the conditions of life of society today in their most inhuman form”. Though this point may seem tautological – because what else are the wage workers but the exploited or the oppressed of capitalist society- it nonetheless comes to frame both the unifying potential of the workers – who are impelled to revolt against the conditions of their inhumanity- and their world historic mission in revolutionizing society through overturning all class relations.

---

<sup>214</sup> The question we want to engage with moving forward from here is: what allows for revolutionary combination despite the competition? Though not unrelated, is the question surrounding the terms of the struggle, or the form that it takes. In Marx, and Marxism, this is a debated and nuanced terrain. For example, in Marx’s (1873) short article “Political Indifferentism”, he criticizes the tactics and demands of the Anarchists – “the apostles of political indifferentism” – who in their disdain from any reformist activity, suggest for the working class no “real means of struggle”. The Anarchists, as it were, were decrying any formation of the working class as a political party within the framework of the state, as well as political struggles framed around “extracting concessions” from the bourgeois state – such as shortening the working day, or fighting for a minimum age requirement for work in factories. All such struggles and exertion of energies were simply compromises that did not overturn the systemic exploitative relations. For Marx, there was equally no illusion concerning the emancipatory potential of bourgeois society – see for example his earlier referenced *Critique of the Gotha Program* that criticizes the political reformism of Ferdinand Lasalle and the demand to abolish wages. There was however also an understanding by him of the the significance of terrains of struggle, which were important in terms of both addressing the immediate needs of the workers, and of helping contribute to their revolutionary combination – a combination with a clarity concerning the systemic conditions of their oppression, and so of the requirement of revolutionary action. The significance of Marx’s tactical and very pragmatic approach to workers’ struggle and the struggle against capitalism will be further evidenced in Section Three of this dissertation.



Let us step back once again to The Wood Theft Debates where Marx had expressed a valuation of the experience of the poor and the miserable in society *contra* to Hegel - who in his scheme of a rationally organized state, had designated the unincorporated poor - the peasantry, the day labourers - as an unintelligent, submissive, poverty stricken rabble. Marx (1842) however would find among *Die Standeslosen* the epistemological position requisite for customs actually deemed rational and truly universal. While the rich and the propertied classes – the privileged - are chained to self-interests and the material property they possesses, the property-less poor “who own nothing except themselves” have their interests only in “universal interests” like life, freedom, and humanity. Theirs is a “cosmic rightness” or instinctive sense of right – one not clouded by artificial values and false conceptions, i.e., for the poor there was no fetishism of the fallen wood, which is no more a property of the living tree than is the skin caste off a snake. This ontological and epistemological significance of the poor carries on into the significance afforded to the proletariat – the *miserable* class created and dominated by capital.

Yet despite his difference from Hegel on this point, in his maturing conception of the poor, Marx would further utilize Hegelian philosophy in strengthening his own analyses concerning the elemental role of the universal class, coming to frame the proletariat as the contradiction [*der Widerspruch*]<sup>215</sup> of the existing capitalist mode of production. And this, specifically by consequence of its oppositional relation to wealth, where in inverse proportion to the “wretchedness of the worker” is the growing power and magnitude of the wealth that they produce.

We had initially described in some detail above the second great discovery by Marx – relevant to the constructing of a scientific socialism – which is the theory concerning surplus value, as the “secret of capitalist production”. There we defined it as the value generated through the

---

<sup>215</sup> See footnote #166 for breakdown of the definition and essential role of the notion of contradiction in Hegelian philosophy.

appropriation of “gratis labour” or unpaid labour by the capitalist, over and above the value paid in wages. Thus, demonstrating both the essentiality of the wage-labour relation for capitalism as well as its essentially exploitative nature. This, we are apt to keep in mind in the foregoing discussion.

According to Marx and Engels, this exploitation of the wage labourer is not only essential but also gradually intensified through the dictates of the capitalist mode of production which is geared toward the continuous maximization of surplus value<sup>216</sup>. In one sense, the intensification of the exploitation of the worker can be evidenced through their increasing powerlessness in the face of capital, even in the – hypothesized- event of favourable conditions of capital accumulation that may lead to increasing the number of crumbs that fall to the worker. In relation to this Marx (1978, pg.211-212) explains:

Even the most favourable conditions for the working class, the most rapid possible growth of capital, however much it may improve the material existence of the workers, does not remove the antagonism between his interests and the interests of the bourgeoisie, the interests of the capitalists. Profit and wages remain as before in inverse proportion. If capital is growing rapidly, wages may rise; the profit of capital rises incomparably more rapidly. The material position of the worker has improved, but at the cost of his social position. The social gulf that divides him from the capitalist has widened.

As the working class toils to increase the wealth of others, the more does it increase and enlarge the power hostile to it “forging the golden chains by which the bourgeoisie drags it in its train” (Marx, 1978, pg.211), and the more do they call into existence the number of wage workers that can be employed, i.e. “the more can the mass of slaves dependent on capital be increased” (Marx, 1978, pg.211);

This point made by Marx is however more conceptual – a clever play on the presumptions of the political economists concerning the benefits of capital accumulation – rather than reflective

---

<sup>216</sup> “...capital has one single life impulse, the tendency to create value and surplus-value, to make its constant factor, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus-labour” (Marx, 1990)

of what he held to be the actual machinations of capitalism, wherein the growth of productive capital can only lead to the greater misery [*Elend*] of the worker.

To better understand this it is important to note the close connection for Marx between the accumulation of capital and the archaic phenomenon of competition. Like the wage workers, the capitalists – the owners of the means of production; the employers; the personifications of capital; the consumers of labour power – are in constant competition with one another. Marx and Engels continually characterize the era of capitalism and the terrain of the production of commodities for exchange in particular, as a “battleground”; a site of war and anarchy. As previously noted, one of the characteristic features of capitalism was its presumed negation of antiquated feudal relations that were emerging as fetters on the demands of increased consumption and production. Coupled with the particularities associated with the rise of the merchant class in Feudal Europe, and the interconnections between the towns, the prevailing feature was a general breaking down of barriers: “The old bonds were loosened, the old exclusive limits broken through, the producers were more and more turned into independent, isolated producers of commodities” (Engels, 1978, pg.706). Where previously, production – even if for purposes of exchange – was relatively stable and restricted through local exclusiveness, through narrow bonds and privileged relations conferred upon entire social ranks and local corporations, with Capitalism and the rise of the bourgeoisie, there comes the reign of the “kingdom of free competition, of personal liberty, of the equality, before the law, of all commodity owners...” (Engels, 1978, pg.701).

The immediate consequence of this novel feature of capitalism, as put succinctly by Engels (1978, pg.706), is the absence of a plan in the production of society at large, and the reign of the condition of anarchy, akin to “...the Darwinian struggle of the individual for existence” where “he

that falls is remorselessly caste aside”. It is “the condition of existence natural to the animal” now appearing “as the final term of human development” (Engels, 1978, pg.706).

Further, in *Capital, Volume 1* Marx (1990) writes that “Free competition brings out the inherent laws of capitalist production, in the shape of external coercive laws having power over every individual capitalist”. Competition – as one of the “compulsory laws” of capitalist production - thus compels<sup>217</sup> [*gezwungen*] the individual capitalist to act in a manner informed by this struggle for survival; to overcome, to destroy, and to emerge victorious over those competitors that would have them for a meal. The capitalist themselves is at first unaware of the degree of competition relative to their particular form of production – or even of the actual demand of their product - which is only realized through experience; through once stepping out into the terrain of battle that is the production-for-exchange of commodities (Engels, 1880). Once discovered however, the law of competition forces the capitalist into a frenzy of accumulation of capital – whose express fund is the surplus value extracted through the gratis labour of the workers.

Thus under conditions of capitalist production, surplus value is more than simply a fund for profit or revenue for the individual capitalist – for their own individual consumption – but is given impetus for the re-investment of a portion of that surplus into further production, i.e. as capital. To better understand the imperative behind this drive to accumulate capital – in the face of competition – it is important to understand that “the battle of competition” is foremost fought by the cheapening of commodities (Marx, 1978, pg. 211). In simple terms, in order to outdo the

---

<sup>217</sup> Marx and Engels both describe the laws associated with the capitalist mode of production – its determining logic – as “compelling”, translated as *gezwungen*, the actions and choices of the individual capitalists. *Gezwungen* also translates as “forced” or “strained” in action. This is why Marx also writes in *Capital* that the choices made by the capitalist to disregard the livelihood of the workers does not depend on “good or ill will of the individual capitalist”. They are, in order to save their own skins, compelled to behave in a way that validates only the accumulation of capital, and subsequently the degradation of the worker. More on this will be explained as we proceed.

competition, the capitalist needs to figure out how to sell the same product at a cheaper cost. Subsequently, the cheapening of commodities is made possible through the raising the productive power of labour:

One capitalist can drive another from the field and capture his capital only by selling more cheaply. In order to be able to sell more cheaply without ruining himself, he must produce more cheaply, that is, raise the productive power of labour as much as possible (Marx, 1978, pg.211).

Raising the productive power of labour can be thought of as increasing efficiency in the sense that a lesser value – measured in labour time – is required for the production of a commodity, and hence, the ability to sell more dearly. This does not mean that the market price of commodities is a parallel reflection of the value accrued in a commodity during the process of production, but that the value of a commodity nonetheless determines -in part- the magnitude of that selling price<sup>218</sup>.

This raising of the productive power of labour - Marx (1978, pg.211-212) tells us in his essay *Wage Labour and Capital*<sup>219</sup> - in order to produce more cheaply and sell more cheaply, is accomplished through “a greater division of labour” and “by a more universal introduction and continual improvement of machinery”. Both elements, relate to each other since the “greater the labor army among whom labour is divided, the more gigantic the scale of machinery is introduced”, and so “the more the cost of production proportionately decreases, the more fruitful is labour” (Marx, 1978, pg.211); i.e., an increased parceling of labour corresponding to and

---

<sup>218</sup> It is significant to note that Marx’s value theory tells us almost nothing about the market price of commodities, nor was this ever his intention. Instead, Marx was more concerned with unravelling the mystery of the commodity– the fetishistic performance through which reality presents itself under conditions of capitalist production; conditions which accompany a very real and ongoing system of domination and exploitation. His disinterest in determining the magnitude of value was precisely what separated him from bourgeois economists like Smith.

<sup>219</sup> Published originally as a series of articles in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1849, and widely considered as the embryo to his later *Capital*.

enabling a more widespread use of machinery in production helps decrease production costs through minimizing the amount of labour time translated into a product. And so in order to produce more cheaply there is now rivalry among the capitalists “to increase the division of labour and machinery and to exploit them on the greatest possible scale”. It is capital accumulation that allows a capitalist to reinvest for the sake of increasing the productivity of labour, whether through allowing the employment of more labour or through technological innovation. Subsequently, the innovations achieved by an individual capitalist that have allowed them to produce more cheaply are short lived, as capital accumulation on behalf of other capitalists has allowed them to introduce the same machines, the same division of labour, on the same scale (Marx, 1978, pg. 213). Thus, the imperative to accumulate intensifies, so as to develop more division of labour and newer more improved machinery in order to outdo the competition. This is why in describing the inner law of the capitalist mode of production Marx exclaims: “Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the Prophets!” (Marx, 1990).

Competition thus compels the capitalist to intensify the productive forces of labour on an ever increasing scale, as a law never allowing capital to rest, “whisper[ing] in its ear: Go on! Go on!” (Marx, 1978, pg.213). And as a consequence, we are told by Marx (1990, pg.799) in *Capital* that in addition to facilitating the greater appropriation of surplus labour from the worker<sup>220</sup>, the intensification of the productivity of labour is always at the cost of the individual worker:

...that all means for the development of production undergo a dialectical inversion so that they become means of domination and exploitation of the producers; they distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him to the level of an appendage of a

---

<sup>220</sup> “The prolongation of the working day beyond the point at which the worker would have produced an exact equivalent for the value of his labour-power, and the appropriation of that surplus labour by capital – this is the process which constitutes the production of absolute surplus-value. It forms the general foundation of the capitalist system, and the starting-point for the production of relative surplus value. The latter presupposes that the working day is already divided into two parts, necessary labour and surplus labour. In order to prolong the surplus labour, the necessary labour is shortened by methods for producing the equivalent of the wage of labour in a shorter time” (Marx, 1976, pg.645).

machine, they destroy the actual content of his labour by turning it into a torment; they alienate [*entfremden*] from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they deform the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness... .

With the increase in the productivity of labour –as the fruit of capital accumulation, which in its turn is the consequence of increased competition – the worker, and subsequently, their labour power sinks to the level of an even cheaper and more disposable commodity. We noted earlier that under conditions of capitalism the worker exists as a free wage labourer who owns nothing but their labour power which they in turn sell to the capitalist – piecemeal – for a wage. With the increased division of labour and efficiency introduced through the use of machinery, one worker is able to do the work of five, thus increasing competition among workers who now compete “by one selling himself cheaper than another” (Marx, 1978, pg.214). Additionally, as the division of labour increases, and the worker develops into only “an appendage of the machine” (Marx, & Engels, 1978, pg.479), there is an increased simplification of labour where special skill becomes worthless. The worker increasingly becomes “transformed into a simple, monotonous productive force” and his labour becomes one that anyone can perform<sup>221</sup>.

Like all other commodities, the labour power demanded of the worker is assumed relative to its cost of production, and so the immediate consequence of the deskilling of work is not only the increased disposability of the worker, and so their relative powerlessness, but the decrease or stagnation of their wages down to the level required for their bare maintenance and propagation of their race (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.479). With increased productivity of labour there is thus the

---

<sup>221</sup> More detail on the effects of machinery on the worker, as observed by Marx (1976, pg.517) can be found in Chapter 15 of Capital, Volume 1, particularly the sub-section “The Most Immediate effects of Machine Production on the Worker”. There we also read how simplification of work through the introduction of machinery contributed to the employment of labour without distinction of age or sex: “The labour of women and children was therefore the first result of the capitalist application of machinery”.

contradictory phenomenon wherein the worker is producing more and yet their work becomes “more unsatisfying, more repulsive, competition increases and wages decrease” (Marx, 1978, pg.215). This situation, according to Marx (1978, pg.215-216) is made worse still through the complete discharging of workers whose labour has been made superfluous through the use of machinery – the 4 who are now replaced by 1 – and who now either crowd the existing worker as a simple replacement, or who are destined for reemployment in work that is even lower, worse paid<sup>222</sup>. Further, since capital accumulation “if left to follow its natural course” (Marx, 1844) can only lead to the greater concentration of capital in a few hands - as other, smaller, capitalists are defeated in the arena of competition- it can only mean the swelling of the ranks of the workers who now swallow “a mass of petty industrialists and small rentiers”: “Thus the forest of uplifted arms demanding work becomes ever thicker, while the arms themselves become ever thinner” (Marx, 1978, pg.216).

In addition to the immiseration of the workers through methods continuously employed to increase the productivity of labour, capitalism, through its drive to accumulate, makes itself prone to periodical crises – “industrial earthquakes” – that repeat themselves on ever higher scales, and that with each passing, sacrifice a portion “of wealth, of products and even of productive forces to the gods of the nether world” (Marx, 1978, pg.217). Following these crises, where the market has been unable to expand or keep pace with the rapid expansion of production – Engels (pg.302) references Fourier, describing it as when “abundance becomes the source of distress and want” – there develops further concentration of capitals as many - both big and small capitalists - are ruined or bankrupted, and the lot of the workers is made worse through both the elimination of

---

<sup>222</sup> Marx’s (1978, pg. 215) explanation for this lower condition of re-employment rests on the maintained position that modern industry only always progresses toward the substitution of more simple and subordinate forms of occupation for the more complex and higher ones.



employment and the swelling of the ranks of the “industrial reserve army” of labour (Engels, pg.300). Marx (1978, pg.217) describes the situation of capital in crisis as thus: “A lord, at once aristocratic and barbarous, it drags with it into the grave the corpses of its slaves, whole hecatombs of workers who perish in the crises”.

For these reasons Marx (1990, pg.799) wrote that “accumulation of misery” is a necessary condition “corresponding to the accumulation of wealth”; that:

Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product as capital.

This antagonistic feature central to capitalism was ill conceived by the utopian socialists in both their critiques and programs for social reform. In their appeals to “reason” and “humanity” they remained within the realm of abstraction, unable to appreciate the concrete conditions that made such appeals to reform impractical in relation to the overriding logic of capital that ensured the continued exploitation and growing misery of the workers. In the context of the capitalist mode of production, experiments such as Robert Owen’s were “doomed to failure” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.498) and appeals to the humaneness of the ruling classes only fell on deaf ears<sup>223</sup>.

---

<sup>223</sup> In *Capital, Volume One*, Marx (1976 footnotes an example on how the coercive laws of competition limit what reform individual capitalists are able, or willing, to make – and in this with regard to either implementing legislation on child labour or the shortening of the workday: “We, therefore, find, e.g., that in the beginning of 1863, 26 firms owning extensive potteries in Staffordshire, amongst others, Josiah Wedgwood, & Sons, petition in a memorial for “some legislative enactment.” Competition with other capitalists permits them no voluntary limitation of working-time for children, &c. “Much as we deplore the evils before mentioned, it would not be possible to prevent them by any scheme of agreement between the manufacturers. ... Taking all these points into consideration, we have come to the conviction that some legislative enactment is wanted.” (“Children’s Employment Comm.” Rep. I, 1863, p. 322.) Most recently a much more striking example offers. The rise in the price of cotton during a period of feverish activity, had induced the manufacturers in Blackburn to shorten, by mutual consent, the working-time in their mills during a certain fixed period. This period terminated about the end of November, 1871. Meanwhile, the wealthier manufacturers, who combined spinning with weaving, used the diminution of production resulting from this agreement, to extend their own business and thus to make great profits at the expense of the small employers.”

And though the identification of the inherent and increasing misery of the workers under capitalism signaled a blow to the utopian projects, in this logic of capital Marx and Engels found progress and possibility. For them, the “wretchedness of the worker” in relation to the growing wealth they produced was conceived of as part of the contradiction of capitalism; a contradiction which when conceived dialectically necessitated rupture and evolution.

As noted earlier with reference to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, for Hegel (1977) contradiction was something of an inherence to phenomenal reality, and to life itself, since any one “thing” always existed for thought in a determinate relation; having its “*absolute character*” in/as this opposition to “other” things. Thought thus seeks to overcome this contradiction – is impelled to – through moving to a “higher concept” or resolution to the contradiction. The resolution is the negation of the existing contradiction – the negation of the negation – but as an equally determinate concept, it comes in contradiction itself and so undergoes the experience of contradiction-negation-evolution once more. Thus is the logical movement of the dialectic until there is emergence into the infinite, Absolute Idea where there is freedom from contradiction.

For Marx and Engels, the material or objective dialectic as we have described earlier, broke past the bonds of thought or consciousness, and instead contradiction was made something apparent in material reality itself, more particularly, in reality understood as “sensuous human activity”. As a result, the contradictions and collisions that developed in reality- dialectically taken as the motivating forces through human history – were to be identified with reference to the existing mode of production and intercourse. Thus, mode of production must be taken as more than simply a determining force in human history from which to develop an epistemology of social reality - but rather as the definite form of human activity within which contradictions/collisions develop, and which then lead to some kind of change or resolution.

Above we also described this definite form of activity – this mode of production - as “conscious life activity”, as “civil society”, but also as a matrix of determinative relations comprising the existing productive forces and the existing forms of human intercourse. It is the collision or contradictions as developed *within* the frame of the mode of production and intercourse, more specifically between the existing productive forces and forms of intercourse, that behaves as the vehicle of history – not abstractly as if by its own logic, but always as expressions of human activity. In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels (1978, pg.196) conclusively write: “Thus all collisions in history have their origin, according to our view, in the contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse.”

The play of these contradictions has already been evidenced above as we noted the progressions made through various stages of human history, as existing forms of intercourse came into conflict with the productive forces, and vice versa, and so precipitated – not fatalistically, but as potentialities in the hands of humans - social change or evolution. The negation of guild relations and feudal rights, which began to behave as fetters in the face of increased trade and manufacture, are but one example of this movement. Consequently, though the emergence of the free-wage labourer was a progressively developed form conducive to the demands of the now existing form of productive activity, by logic of the increased immiseration of the abstracted worker – coupled with the majoritarian nature of this phenomena – there was subsequently developing a further contradiction, one that Marx and Engels believed paved the way toward a further or higher resolution:

...wage labour enters into the same relation towards the development of social wealth and of the forces of production as the guild system, serfdom, slavery, and is necessarily stripped off as a fetter. The last form of servitude assumed by human activity, that of wage labour on one side, capital on the other, is thereby cast off like a skin, and this casting off itself is the result of the mode of production corresponding to capital (Marx, 1978, pg.291).

It is through its existence as this “abstraction of all humanity” - both in terms of its generalized condition of existence, and of the particularly inhuman conditions of that existence- that the proletariat is positioned as the negation of the existing mode of production; a mode of production that brought the “proletariat as proletariat” into being, and that both rests upon and increasingly intensifies its misery. In a passage from *The Holy Family*, Marx and Engels (1978, pg. 134), write of the proletariat as: “this poverty conscious of its own spiritual and physical poverty, this dehumanization which is conscious of itself as a dehumanization and hence abolishes itself”. In the same piece we are told that the world historical role of negating capitalism is attributed to the proletariat by socialists not because they believe them to be gods, but because in the proletariat “man has lost himself, although at the same time he has both acquired a theoretical consciousness of this loss and has been directly forced into indignation against this inhumanity by virtue of an inexorable, utterly unembellishable, absolutely imperious *need*, that practical expression of *necessity* – because of all this the proletariat can and must liberate itself”.

As the abject expression – not conceptually but factually – of life under capitalism, the proletariat stands pitted against the world it finds itself in, by no less a compulsion than that of need and necessity; it is forced to revolt against its conditions of life by no less a penalty than its own destruction (Engels, pg.302). “Not in vain” we are told does the proletariat proceed through the “harsh but hardening school of *labour*” as this state of its *being* is what informs what it is historically compelled to do: “Its goal and its historical action are prefigured in the most clear and ineluctable way in its own life-situation as well as in the whole organization of contemporary bourgeois society” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.135).

The historical action of the proletariat – its “act of universal emancipation” (Engels, 1978, pg.717) and its role in the negation of capitalism - is pre-figured in *both* its life-situation and in the

conditions brought into existence by bourgeois society. The latter have already been discussed above with reference to the broader connotations surrounding the creation of a class of “abstract individuals” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.190); individuals separated from the objective conditions of labour whose exploitation is no longer veiled by religious or political mystifications, and who stand in a simplified and antagonistic position with regard to the ever-shrinking class of the owners of the means of production. And as the demands of capital accumulation force capital to spread and nestle everywhere, these conditions of naked, brutal and direct exploitation are equally spread, becoming the conditions of life of a majority of the population: “big industry created a class, which in all nations has the same interest and with which nationality is already dead; a class which is really rid of all the old world and at the same time pitted against it”.

Its abstract conditions of life – both in misery and form of exploitation – and the sheer quantitative number of the proletariat, are characteristics that succinctly combine themselves in a description used by Tucker (1964, pg.117): “a rebellious propertyless mass”. And as the rebellious and poverty-stricken majority, what truly grants the proletariat its mantle as “universal class” – as a class which in his initial critiques of Hegel Marx described as a one that has the capability “to be *really* universal, i.e., to be the class of every citizen”, and which can arouse “in itself and in the masses a moment of enthusiasm, a moment in which it associates, fuses, and identifies itself with society in general, and is felt and recognized to be society’s general representative”; a class “whose demands and rights are truly those of society itself, of which it is the head and heart” – what grants the proletariat this mantle are the deduced consequences of its movement, i.e., of the dissolution

of all class distinctions, and of the complete dissolution of the antagonistic conditions of existence which have characterized all society up to the present<sup>224</sup> (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.200).

As the “lowest stratum” – a miserable mass now trained, organized and disciplined by the machinations of capital and whose conditions of exploitation are intrinsic to the logic of the existing -now universalized – mode of production – the proletariat cannot liberate itself without abolishing the whole existing structure of society:

The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole super incumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.482).

Whereas all preceding revolutions resulted in the supremacy of the rebelling class who “sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation”, the proletarians are unable to do so – they “cannot become masters of the productive forces of society” – since their very liberation from their conditions of wage slavery necessitate the abolition of the existing mode of production from which it necessitated: “They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities or, and insurances, of individual property”<sup>225</sup>.

---

<sup>224</sup> It is worth noting here that nothing in Marx and Engels is given as an inevitability. Though classes such as the capitalists and the workers are often described as “forced” or “compelled” to do something, there is still a very practical and human dimension to those actions. For example, in Engels’ 1895 “Introduction” to Marx’s *The Class Struggles in France*, he notes the lack of clarity in the uprisings of 1848 on the part of the masses who did not clearly understand the ideas which were nonetheless rational expressions of their needs and reflections of their economic conditions. Some indication on how clarity among the proletariat is to be cultivated – aside from the continuing education received through their living conditions itself – is noted in the *Manifesto*, section II on “Proletarians and Communists” where we are told that the Communists have over the “great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.484). The “theoretical conclusions’ of the Communists, they continue, “are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented or discovered by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes”.

<sup>225</sup> There is a “complete revolution” – a revolution against “the very production of life” rather than a revolt “against separate conditions of society up till then” (Marx, & Engels, 1978, pg.165). This kind of “total activity” is only possible given the existence of a “revolutionary mass” and the development of the productive forces to a

Thus, for Marx, the negation of capitalism – as the historical mission of the proletariat, by virtue of its very being - signified not simply the negation of *a* mode of production, but the negation of *estranged* [*entfremdete*]<sup>226</sup> human activity altogether; estranged activity that was evidenced in the antagonistic character of human society hitherto<sup>227</sup>. The proletariat thus arrive on the historical scene as the agents of – to use the term from Marx’s *On the Jewish Question* – “real human emancipation”<sup>228</sup>.

Through their materialist conception of history Marx and Engels had thus demonstrated how despite conditions of capitalist production constituting the epitome of human self-estrangement, it is this very logic of the capitalist mode of production that spells its own downfall in as much as it creates its own “grave-diggers”. In doing so, they were able to elevate the stature of socialism – their socialism – as “no longer an accidental discovery of this or that ingenious brain, but the necessary outcome of the struggle between two historically developed classes – the proletariat and the bourgeoisie” (Engels, 1978, pg.700). In presenting, (1.) the inevitableness of

---

degree that allows for such a mass and that also allows for the kinds of universal intercourse that can sustain such a revolution. This latter point will be elaborated upon more as we proceed.

<sup>226</sup> Earlier we footnoted the translation/definition of alienation in the work of Hegel, referencing Michael Inwood (1992, pg.36) who distinguished between *Entfremdung* (to make alien or “estrangement”) and *Entäusserung* (“to make OUTER or external”). With reference to Marx, both Tucker (1978, pg.xli) and Wood (2004, pg.1) also distinguish between the two terms, but note that translations of “alienation” and “estrangement” can interchangeably apply to both. There thus seems to be no systematic distinction made between the use of the two terms in Marx.

<sup>227</sup> “The history of all hitherto existing society. Is the history of class struggle”

<sup>228</sup> In this piece Marx contrasts “real human emancipation” from “*Political* emancipation”, the latter which seeks forms of emancipation within the prevailing social order. The frame of the contrast rests on the distinction between the demand for “religious emancipation” – religious and political rights for Jews within the existing political framework – as opposed to the demand – the act- of emancipating “real man from religion”, of emancipating man from “religiosity”. In his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, Marx (1978, pg.53) we find a clearer definition of what Marx means when he says religion or religiosity: “Religion is indeed man’s self-consciousness and self-awareness so long as he has not found himself or has lost himself again”. On the next page (1978, pg.54) he adds: “Religion is only the illusory sun about which man revolves so long as he does not revolve about himself”. What Marx means by religion and religiosity is “alienated human self-consciousness” (Marx, 1978, pg.119), and real human emancipation involves an emancipation from man’s alienated condition – from “egoistic man” – after which “in his relationships, he has become a *species-being*” (Marx, 1978, pg.46).

capitalism in a given historical period and its “inevitable downfall”<sup>229</sup> (Engels, 1978, pg.700) and (2.) the secret of surplus value as the law governing capitalist production – Marx and Engels<sup>230</sup> believed themselves to have gained mastery over the capitalist mode of production and its consequences- consequences which “earlier socialism” could only ineffectively denounce or criticize ideationally or moralistically. Thus, in demonstrating that “liberation is an historical and not a mental act”, Marx and Engels had successfully costumed their socialism into a form of science; science, as Robinson (2019, pg.154) notes, being “the intellectual currency of the 19<sup>th</sup> century”. Marx and Engels socialism was thus afforded authority through its stature as Scientific; authorized as such by the materialist conception of history – as more than simply a methodology, but an accounting of man’s self-genesis – which had located this project of liberation as the necessary outcome and solution to the contradictions inherent in the very apex of human civilization. There was no utopianism here, but only something rational; relative to an actuality.

---

<sup>229</sup> The term “inevitable” is used in the authorized English edition of Engels’ *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, both with reference to the inevitableness of capitalism in a historical period and of its inevitable downfall. The term inevitable, however, can carry many connotations, if not a kind of determinism. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the French edition of this text- *Socialisme utopique et Socialisme scientifique* – which is the first version in which it was published, uses the term *nécessité [necessity]*, in the sense of the necessity of its downfall. The original German – in which Engels wrote the text – uses the term *notwendigkeit*, also translated in English in the sense of ‘by necessity’ or ‘necessarily’.

<sup>230</sup> I included Marx’s name along with Engels’ here carefully because the discoveries are echoed by Marx in a letter to Joseph Weydemeyer in 1852: “What I did that was new was to prove: 1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with *particular historical phases in the development of production*, 2.) that the class struggle necessarily leads to *the dictatorship of the proletariat*, 3.) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes* and to *a classless society*.” I am indebted to Robinson (2019, pg.159) for pointing out this note from Marx, though he does so to contrast the contributions noted by Engels - “revelations of a conceptual nature” – from those of Marx. However, if we frame the materialist conception of history as more than simply a methodological device – a tool for study – but rather, as an account of man’s self-genesis, we are able to better appreciate the overlaps between identified contributions listed by both authors, with especial regard to the requisite conditions necessary for the abolition of class society. If anything, the discoveries listed by Marx only strengthen one of the key concerns of this dissertation which is to highlighting the signification afforded to not only the capitalist mode of production in particular, but to the world historical agency of the proletariat.



#### ***6.4: Communism as the Riddle of History Solved***

In closing the above section, we noted that for Marx the proletariat emerges as the world historical agents of “real human emancipation”, whose victory signified the negation of estranged human activity – of humankind’s hitherto estranged mode of being. The specific nature of human estrangement and the conditions reflective of its overcoming thus warrant further articulation.

For Marx, the notion of alienated or estranged human activity was more than simply conceptual or descriptive – in the sense of a heuristic term meant to indict or criticize existing social conditions; foremost because such would lapse into a kind of moralism. Instead, much like Hegel – from whom the concept is appropriated<sup>231</sup> -alienation, and its overcoming, was intrinsically tied to the narrative concerning “the self-genesis of man as process” – what we previously noted as Marx’s identification of the “outstanding” development in Hegelian philosophy.

In Hegel, this process of man’s self-genesis - of humanity’s evolution into its true species being - was a product of man’s activity – man’s labour; but as Marx would criticize, this was only abstract “mental labour”. In Hegel it was within the realm of consciousness that self-estranged Spirit progressed by way of negation, overcoming the contradictions experienced in the phenomenal world, ultimately arriving at a reconciliation in the disparity between subject and object; between self-estranged self-consciousness and the “external world” which confronted it as an other-than- itself, but which was always only self-consciousnesses externalization of itself. This

---

<sup>231</sup> Though this point may seem evident, it is not always accepted. For example, I.I. Rubin (2010, pg.55) in his *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value*, responds to criticism that Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism – his theory of human alienation – is of “metaphysical origins” as handed down from Hegel and then Feuerbach, and so consequently – as argues Hammacher – is limited as an economic theory of value. In response, Rubin (2010, pg. 56) attempts to locate the embryo of Marx’s theory of fetishism – discussed interchangeably as the theory of alienation – among the Utopian socialists, particularly Proudhon. Rubin (2010, pg.57) subsequently argues that Marx transformed the Proudhonian theory of the alienation of human relations into a more scientific theory of the reification of social relations, i.e. into a theory of commodity fetishism.

self-externalization is the reason it is described in Hegel as self-estrangement, and also why there is a utilization of the terms alienation and estrangement - *Entfremdung* and *Entäusserung* – which are terms that suggest separation, or literally, to make “outer” or “external”.

But if in Hegel, alienation – and its expression through forms of estrangement – was the condition of Spirits disunion or externalization/objectification of/from itself, what role does it- as a concept, a notion, a condition? - play in Marx’s materialist rendering of the Hegelian “machinery of History” and the self-admittedly real account of the self-genesis of man?

There are competing positions concerning the definition, role and place of alienation within the Marxian theory of liberation; some partly owing to both Marx’s evolving utilization of the term, as well as its at-times obscureness or absence in his continually developing critiques of political economy and capitalist society. For example, Allen Wood (2004) proceeds with the suggestion of an absence of any coherent theory of alienation altogether in Marx’s work that is worth explicating – a consequence of both to the broad use of the term in Marx’s works as well as its undeveloped articulation. Althusser (1970) on the other hand argued that after 1845 Marx abandoned his earlier works, considering them “Hegelian” and “Idealist”, and making none or limited use of concepts such as “alienation”, “the negation of the negation” or *Aufhebung* in his “mature” works such as *Capital*. More proof for this latter argument, concerning either the abandonment or limited role played by a notion such as alienation can be further drawn from a reading of Engels, who rarely if never makes reference to the term and condition of alienation in his works<sup>232</sup>. Alternatively, authors such as Shlomo Avineri (2012), Istvan Meszaros (1970) and Bertell Ollman hold the contrary position that the concept of alienation holds firm throughout Marx’s work, dismissing any notion of an abandonment or break with concepts developed in his

---

<sup>232</sup> I have in mind his *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*; *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*; and his essay “Theoretical” from *Anti-Duhring*.

earlier works (Thompson, 1979). For Meszaros (1970) – who holds alienation to be the core of Marxist theory - even if Marx does not make frequent or explicit reference to the terms *Entfremdung* and *Entäusserung* in his later works, the underlying theme concerning the “divorce of man from his objective being” remains a characteristic feature in his later analysis of capitalistic society. Similar to Meszaros, Robert Tucker (1964, pg.174) maintains the centrality of the theory of alienation in Marx’s works – early and late- but also notes the evolution of the concept; an evolution that can mistakenly lead to the presumption of the disappearance of the theory of alienation altogether from his mature works, thus creating the impression that one is dealing with two distinct complexes of thought.

According to Tucker (1964), “Mature Marxism” - rather than abandon - translates the narrative on human self-alienation with “added embellishments” and articulates it in terms of the “division of labour”. Division of labour – specifically as relates to a class based division of labour - thus comes to stand in as the expression of human estrangement; foremost as the site of the deprivation of man’s freedom (Tucker, 1964, pg. 187). For Marx, according to Tucker (1964), division of labour instituted along class lines – from primitive slave labour right up to modern capitalist wage labour - results in essentially “unfree” and non-voluntary conditions of labouring activity that are coercive and dominating in nature. They are coercive on two primary accounts: 1.) because they involve a subservient relation between producers and those who appropriate the products of labour as private property; and 2.) because division of labour understood in the ordinary sense of the term as “occupational specialization” results in “the enslavement of the human being to a partial and limited sphere of activity”. Tucker (1964, pg.189) cites Marx and Engels from *The German Ideology* to support his point here:

For as soon as labour is distributed, each man has a particular exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a

shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood.

Conversely, we are told by Marx and Engels (1978, pg. 160), 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... .

The Division of labour in society - the social division of labour - subjects the individual “under a definite activity forced upon him”; it is a “fixation of social activity” that not only ensures and institutes division – and so conflict - of interests, but more importantly stunts the self-realization and self-activity of man, who in the Manuscripts of 1844 was defined as a “free conscious producer in need of a ‘totality of human life-activities’” (Tucker, 1964, pg.190). On this score, Tucker (1964, pg.189) aptly references Engels from the Anti-Duhring:

In the division of labour, man is also divided. All other physical and mental faculties are sacrificed to the development of one single activity. This stunting of man’s faculties grows in the same measure as the division of labour, which attains its highest development in manufacture.

For Tucker (1964), the stunting and unfreedom that Marx and Engels associate with the division of labour is a position that reflects not a digression or unique development in Marxian literature, but is one that directly presupposes the philosophical conception of the human as outlined by Marx in the Manuscripts of 1844, and consequently the there developed theory concerning man’s estrangement from himself and his productive activity, i.e. from his species-essence.

Marx’s (1978) conception of the human as outlined in the Manuscripts of 1844 has already been outlined above in Chapter Four “Marx’s Critique of Hegel’s Abstraction”. There we noted the essential features of the human as both a corporeal, objective, being and so a productive being; corporeal and so productive because corporeal man is a being who exists in an objective relation

with objects external and yet intrinsic to himself – to his very life; objects which through this relation are in essence established by man and which in turn establish him. So much was made clear through Marx's use of the analogy of the sun and plant which establish and confirm themselves in the other.

This basic "act of establishing" between man and the objects external constitutes the bare element concerning man's character as a productive being since in this basic objective and dialectic relation man is essentially a "world-creator" (Tucker, 196, pg.131), i.e. the objective world bears the character of man's conscious and active relation to it. Just as for Hegel, Spirit was a world creating force, giving rise to successive cultures and civilizations which were always only objectifications of its own creative activity (Tucker, 196, pg.131). The significant difference here, as already noted, is that in Marx the relation to external objects is something productive – it is a relation that confirms man's being - rather than a symptom of a non-objective being's self-estrangement.

The implications behind this objective dialectical relation however are more than conceptual in the sense that they imply more than simply a passive relation of "establishing" between the human and nature – an establishing simply by virtue of their encounter. The human is after all a "living natural being" (Marx, 1978, pg.115 ), "furnished with the *natural powers of life*" (Marx, 1978, pg.115) and does not simply have her objectivity confirmed in relation to the objects of nature, and vice versa, but as a living – "active" - being she necessarily depends on and relies on an objective relation to the sensuous external world in order to survive, i.e. the human must live on nature – feed, nourish, produce if they are not to die (Marx, 1978, pg.75). Nature thus emerges as the direct means of life and consequently the object and the instrument of man's life-activity – of man's labour. We already noted that passage from *Capital* where Marx (1990, pg.283) writes

that “man opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces”, utilizing the “natural forces of his body” – arms, legs, head – in order to appropriate Nature to his own wants and needs. This basic labouring activity- this life activity- constitutes the essential nature of the human as a productive being; a being whose essential character as a natural living being is that of a labouring being.

But though our productive activity in relation to nature - as the instrument of our life-activity – constitutes in essence the “universality of man”, it cannot yet be defined as our species-essence, i.e. as what quintessentially makes us human. In that same passage from *Capital* that we just mentioned, Marx (1990, pg.284) also wrote that what he has in mind is not “that state when human labour was still in its first instinctive stage”, i.e. “primitive instinctive forms of labour that remind us of the mere animal”. Rather, man’s “species-being”, his species essence involves a form of labour “exclusively human”, distinguished from the animal whose life activity is motivated solely by the imperative of “immediate physical need”. The human – as opposed to the animal - “makes his life-activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life-activity” (Marx, 1978, pg.76). What this immediately implies, in a most basic sense, is that whereas the animal exists in a kind of “negative determination” – to use the Hegelian description of animal life – where they are identical with their life activity – where they are life-activity itself - , the condition of man’s life-activity as “conscious life activity” means that “It is not a determination with which he directly merges”, i.e. he is able to make it the object of his will and consciousness. Marx (1978, pg.76) adds that it is only because of this condition of man’s life activity as *conscious life activity* “that his activity is free activity”. It is worth turning to the following excerpt for greater clarification on what this free activity entails in distinction from the activity of the animal:

Admittedly animals also produce. They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, whilst man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from

physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom. An animal produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature. An animal's product belongs immediately to its physical body, whilst man freely confronts his product.

Conscious, free, spontaneous activity is what distinguishes the human from the animal – it is the human's "spiritual species property", and it is through this activity that the human is able to work up the *objective world* by his practical activity, i.e. as truly a "world creator" where "nature appears as *his* work and his reality" (Marx, 1978, pg.76). Man thus duplicates himself in the objects of labour, as the "*objectifications of man's species life*". Tucker (196, pg.130) reminds us that this is why for Marx, the history of industry is "the open book of human essential powers, human psychology, sensuously considered".

Given the outline of Marx's conception of the human, and of man's species essence, it is clear how Tucker (1964) is able to make the case for a parallel relation between the notions of alienation and division of labour between the early and late Marx. Division of labour, in subjecting the individual under a definite activity forced upon him reflects not only a deprivation of freedom but a restriction of man's species essence as a free conscious producer. It limits man to the condition of a "specialized animal" (Tucker, 1964, pg.190), denied the opportunity to "cultivate his manifold creative capacities in every possible direction". In a simple sense, division of labour can be thought of as a kind of enslavement of man and of all of man's potentialities; an enslavement that both restricts the essential attributes of our voluntary and free conscious activity, and which in that restriction does not fulfill man but mortifies him, turning him only into an appendage in the production process. Tucker (1964, pg.191) cites Marx from *Capital*, where he outlines the ever-increasing division of labour and occupational specialization beginning with the primitive community, up to its most brutal development in modern manufacture:

It [division of labour] transforms the worker into a cripple, a monster, by forcing him to develop some specialized dexterity at the cost of a world of productive impulses and

faculties...Having been rendered incapable of following his natural bent to make something independently, the manufacturing worker can only develop productive activity as an appurtenance of the capitalist workshop. Just as it was written upon the brow of the chosen people that they were Jehovah's property, so does the division of labour brand the manufacturing worker as the property of capital.

We in a sense come back to the above referenced position of Meszaros (1970), who maintained that an underlying theme of concern in Marx's mature works, and of his critique of capitalist society remained the "divorce of man from his objective being" – even if not continually utilizing the exact terms *Entfremdung* and *Entäusserung*. But division of labour was not an entirely novel or later feature of alienation, and we read of its indictment within the pages of the *Manuscripts of 1844* itself. There Marx (1959) writes:

The division of labour is the political-economic expression of the sociality of labour within alienation. Or since labour is only an expression of human activity within externalization, an expression of life as externalization of life, the division of labour is nothing other than the alienated, externalized positing of human activity as a real species-activity or activity of man as a species-being.

This excerpt helps draw an additional guiding thread between the mature and earlier articulations of alienation as spelled out in the famous chapter of the *Manuscripts of 1844* "estranged labour" ["Die Entfremdete Arbeit"]. The additional connecting thread is Marx's ultimate treatment of alienation - in the "estranged labour" chapter of the *Manuscripts of 1844* – as a practical "social relation", one between the working man and the man outside him, i.e. the appropriator of labour power.

In the "estranged labour" chapter where Marx most explicitly sets out his formula concerning man's self-estrangement, he attests to begin his deduction with "an actual economic fact". Rather than try to premise man's alienated condition through recourse to a "fictitious primordial condition" or the "fall of man" as with theology, Marx (1978, pg.71) begins with an



observation: the estrangement of the worker from the products of his labour; objects which confront the worker as a “power independent”, as “something alien”:

The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power of its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien (Marx, 1978, pg.72).

Later in the “estranged labour” chapter it is clarified for us that what Marx has in mind in this initial observation is the “movement of private property” (Marx, 1978, pg.79); the basic relation wherein the worker produces products – objects of congealed labour – that are not their own but which belong to another. Thus labour’s “realization” is only its objectification- not in a fulfilling sense for the worker – but as loss of the object; a “loss of reality” (Marx, 1978, pg.72). The estranged objective world that the worker builds up around him now confronts him, as a “power independent”, contributing to the literal impoverishment and disempowering of the worker:

For on this premise it is clear that the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful the alien objective world becomes which he creates over-against himself, the poorer he himself – his inner world – becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. It is the same in religion. The more man puts into god, the less he retains in himself. The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object (Marx, 1978, pg.72).

From the fact of the private property relation, Marx deduces the condition of human self-estrangement; a condition which is a consequence of human activity itself. From this first aspect of alienation, Marx proceeds with another deduction, arguing that estrangement in the relationship between the worker and the products of his labour – as the result - necessarily implies estrangement manifested in the act of production itself – within the producing activity itself (Marx, 1978, pg.73):

How would 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 the summary of the activity of production. If then the product of labour is

alienation, production itself must be active alienation, alienation of activity, the activity of alienation (Marx, 1978, pg.73).

For Marx (1978, pg.74) alienation of activity – of labour – reflected a condition of non-voluntary, forced labour; labour in which the worker does not affirm himself but denies himself; does not feel content but unhappy. It is a labour of self-sacrifice and mortification where the worker's labour belongs not to himself but to someone else, and that in that labouring activity he belongs to another.

From these first two aspects of alienation Marx (1978, pg.75) proceeds by deduction into a third aspect of alienation: the estrangement of the species from man. Above we already noted the constituent elements concerning humankind's species essence: our relation to nature as the instrument of our conscious, free, life-activity. Thus through estranging nature from man – via the congealing of labour in alien objects- and estranging from him his own life activity – his labouring activity – there thus results the “estrangement of the species from man”. In other words, in “tearing away from man the object of his production” – i.e., from nature on which he lives and through which he exercises his free, spontaneous activity, i.e. his “spiritual species property” – estranged labour estranges from man “his human being” (Marx, 1978, pg.77); his essential character and features as a human; his species essence, or that in which the “universality of man is in practice manifested”. Marx (1978, pg.77) then explains that this estrangement turns the life of the species — into a means of individual life: “The consciousness which man has of his species is thus transformed by estrangement in such a way that the species life becomes for him a means”.

Though the above three aspects of alienation can each be described as having being expressed as social relations, it is only at the deduction of the fourth aspect of alienation that Marx makes this treatment explicit; not as something distinct or novel, but in the sense of tying the social relation back into the above listed aspects. Marx (1978, pg.77) deduces the fourth aspect through

the third by stating that the "...the proposition that man's species nature is estranged from him means that one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man's essential nature". Thus the fourth aspect of alienation is the estrangement of man from man; a consequence both of the essential estrangement of the human condition and of the proposition forwarded by Marx (1978, pg.78) that "man's relation to himself only becomes objective and real for him through his relation to other man". In other words, an essential feature of our consciousness of reality – of actuality – is always as something mediated vis a vis our relation with other human beings. Marx (1978, pg.77) writes: "...every relationship in which man stands to himself, is first realized and expressed in the relationship in which a man stands to other men". Though a significant proposition to make, it is not explored in depth by Marx here and so can lead to some ambiguity or confusion. For clarification on what Marx might mean by this it is worth turning to his and Engels' (1978, pg.158) *The Germany Ideology*, where they wrote of the essential social character of something like human consciousness. They begin their explanation with reference to language – "agitated layers of air, sounds":

Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness. That exists also for other men, and for that reason it alone really exists for me personally as well; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men. Where there exists a relationship, it exists for me: the animal does not enter into "relations" with anything, it does not enter into any relation at all. For the animal, its relation to others does not exist as a relation. Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all.

Going back to the *Manuscripts of 1844* and the discussion concerning the fourth aspect of alienation – the estrangement of man from man - we see how Marx develops this proposition concerning the essentially social dimensions of the human experience- estranged or otherwise – in order to practically ground the discussion of alienation in actually existing human social

relations<sup>233</sup>. Having established that man is (1) alienated from the products of their labour, and so (2) consequently their labouring activity – of which the product is only a summary, and (3) alienated from their species being, and so (4) alienated from other men, Marx revisits these various aspects with a developed attention to man's social relations. Marx (1978, pg.77-78) writes:

Let us now see, further, how in real life the concept of estranged, alienated labour must express and present itself. If the product of labour is alien to me, if it confronts me as an alien power, to whom, then does it belong? If my own activity does not belong to me, if it is an alien, a coerced activity, to whom then, does it belong? To a being other than me. Who is this being? The gods?...[...]...If the product of labour does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, this can only be because it belongs to some other man than the worker. If the worker's activity is a torment to him, to another it must be delight and his life's joy. Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over man.

Marx (1978, pg.78-79) identifies this “alien being” – this other to the worker whose experience of alienation is here analyzed<sup>234</sup>; this other who is the master of the object – the product of man's labour that now confronts him; this other for whom the worker's labouring activity is robbed of freedom and performed as service – as the capitalist, “or whatever one chooses to call the master of labour”.

Immediately then we see how even in the Manuscripts of 1844, division of labour – between producer and appropriator – comes signify the “sociality” of self-alienation; it is the “political-economic expression of the sociality of labour within alienation”. The concept of alienation in the early Marx of the Manuscripts of 1844 and the later Marx then does not necessarily undergo a transformation or metamorphosis –to the extent suggested by Tucker (1964) – but essentially proceeds along the lines of the same concept. It is clear from Marx's deductive exercise and ultimate proposition when he comes to the fourth aspect of alienation that the practical

---

<sup>233</sup> “In the real practical world self-estrangement can only become manifest through the real practical relationship to other men. The medium through which estrangement takes place is itself *practical*” (Marx, 1978, pg.78).

<sup>234</sup> “Till now we have only considered this relationship from the standpoint of the worker and later we shall be considering it also from the standpoint of the non-worker” (Marx, 1978, pg.79)

and social dimensions of self-alienation – expressed through a division of labour, between the worker and capitalist – is a social relation that comes to be implied in all the preceding aspects of alienation, one to three, i.e., if the product does not belong to me, it must belong to another, and if my activity does not belong to me – it is a torment to me – then to another it is a delight and a service.<sup>235</sup>

Tucker (1964) however is correct in his assessment that “division of labour” emerges as the comprehensive category in mature Marxism corresponding to the concept of alienation in “original Marxism”. But, if division of labour as understood and utilized in Mature Marxism incorporates essentially the same essential attributes as the notion of alienation as expressed in Marx’s earlier works, why the change in terminology? One can surmise, perhaps that “division of labour” was always the intended category corresponding to alienation with which Marx sought to proceed. This interpretation would require the kind of point made in the paragraph above about how division of labour as elaborated in aspect four becomes implied in all the other aspects of alienation, and as the practical expression of alienation in human life. Division of labour – and its correspondence with alienation - is then a category arrived at through Marx’s deductive exercise in the chapter “estranged labour”, and is one which centres the practical and social dimensions of class antagonism in a theory of alienation<sup>236</sup>.

---

<sup>235</sup> Think of Marx’s Thesis No. IX in his *Theses on Feuerbach*: “Social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which mislead theory into mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice”.

<sup>236</sup> This position becomes especially meaningful if we revisit the section above on “scientific socialism” where we there also noted the centrality of the category “division of labour” for Marx and Engels in their history of human development: division of labour “as one of the chief forces of history up till now”. I find greater clarity when trying to situate the concept of division of labour by mirroring it to Hegel’s “reflection”. With Hegel there was an original simple unity from which humankind became alienated through reflection – proceeding as self-estranged Spirit through so many forms of reflection, and ultimately arriving at a place beyond reflection; into reconciliation. With Marx/Engels, they noted a similar simple unity, followed by a rudimentary division of labour. Their materialist history progressed through so many forms ownership corresponding to divisions of labour, ultimately reaching its pinnacle in conditions of bourgeois private property and its corresponding class divisions; and ultimately to be followed by a

Nor need the focus on or utilization of the category division of labour take away from Marx's signification afforded to private property in the Manuscripts of 1844 and of its identified relation to alienation. After proceeding through the four aspects of alienation, Marx (1978, pg.79) writes: "Private property thus results by analysis from the concept of alienated labour – i.e., of alienated man, of estranged labour, of estranged life, of estranged man". However, as Marx (1978, pg.79) clarifies, though it may seem that we initially obtained the concept of "alienated labour (of alienated life)" by proceeding from the fact of private property – i.e. of the antagonism existing between man and the product of his labour (a product appropriated by an other) – "...it becomes clear that though private property appears to be the source, the cause of alienated labour, it is really its consequence, just as the gods in the beginning are not the cause but the effect of man's intellectual confusion. Later this relationship becomes reciprocal".

For Marx (1978, pg.79) this secret of private property - revealed only "at the very culmination of the development of private property" - is that it is both the product of alienated labour, and also the means through which labour alienates itself. This reciprocal relation between private property and alienation is not one distinct from division of labour, as we noted above, since division of labour is in essence the social expression of alienation. In other words it is the social expression of the existing form of private property – private property being "the material, summary expression of alienated labour" (Marx, 1978, pg.81) . On this note it is worth turning to a point we referenced much earlier by Marx and Engels (1978, pg.160) in *The German Ideology* concerning the relation between private property and division of labour: "...division of labour and private

---

reconciliation of class antagonisms into a classless society; a society without an imposed and restricting division of labour, i.e. into a Hegelian abode of reconciliation.

property are, more over identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of activity”.

The weight of this reciprocating relation between division of labour and private property becomes more meaningful when we turn to the obvious burning question: If it is true that alienation presupposes the private property relation, we – as does Marx (1978, pg.80) – ask “How...does man come to alienate, to estrange, his labour? How is this estrangement rooted in the nature of human development?” Unfortunately, Marx never answers this question in this section of the existing Manuscripts of 1844 which breaks off unfinished after only a few paragraphs. However, an attention to private property understood in relation to division of labour, as expressions of essentially the same thing (one being with reference the product of activity, the other with reference to activity) allows us to trace the ways in which Marx and Engels tried to answer this question in their developing work, particularly with reference to their studies of pre-capitalist societies and their proposed outline of human history. Marx himself hints at this when just following his raising of the above questions, he writes that great lengths have been made to finding a solution to this problem by “transforming the question as to the origin of private property into the question as to the relation of alienated labour to the course of humanity’s development”. In the section above on “scientific socialism” we saw how Marx and Engels propose an outline of human historical development – a history of human estrangement - corresponding to so many forms of the division of labour – i.e. forms of ownership<sup>237</sup> leading up to modern bourgeois class and ownership relations<sup>238</sup>.

---

<sup>237</sup> See Figure 1. for more details

<sup>238</sup> In this way the history of human development is the history of estranged labour, as expressed through so many forms in the division of labour. It is important to note this in order to avoid the mistake made by writers such as Asher Horowitz (2011) who limit Marx’s take on estranged labour to only capitalist society. Though it is true that Marx deduces the estrangement of labour “as a fact” (Marx, 1978, pg.80) from beginning with conditions of

Nonetheless, in the *Manuscripts of 1844*, having established the reciprocating relationship between estranged labour and private property (private property being the incarnation of the division of labour<sup>239</sup>) Marx (1978, pg.79) concludes two “unsolved conflicts”, one of which is:

From the relationship of estranged labour to private property it further follows that the emancipation of society from private property, etc., from servitude, is expressed in the political form of the emancipation of the workers; not that their emancipation alone was at stake but because the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation – and it contains this, because the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and every relation of servitude is but a modification and consequence of this relation.

For Marx, as has already been made clear above, when he references private property, he is not so much concerned with a thing “external to man”, but a social relation that is expressed through the existing division of labour. He writes:

...labour, the subjective essence of private property as exclusion of property, and capital, objective labour as exclusion of labour, constitute private property as its developed state of contradiction – hence a dynamic relationship moving inexorably to its resolution.

From the above referenced sentence, we get a sense of private property as something developing, in motion. More so, it is described as having a developed state of contradiction, between propertylessness (labour) and property (capital); an antithesis that is nonetheless moving toward its own resolution, if not simply because of the continued immiseration and swelling ranks of the workers. For Marx (1978) as clarified in the section on “scientific socialism” it was only under conditions of capitalist production that this contradiction is not only comprehended, but exists in a way that paves the path to its resolution. Only under bourgeois conditions of production were the workers – the proletariat- created and conditioned as such; as a mass of abstract

---

capitalist production and ownership, he nonetheless establishes that alienation precedes private property – at least in the form he begins his deduction with, or in other words, its developed form in capitalist society wherein this secret of private property is first made discoverable.

<sup>239</sup> I am borrowing this description from Craig A. Conly’s (1978) “Alienation, Sociality, and the Division of Labour: Contradictions in Marx’s Ideal of ‘Social Man’”



individuals who are compelled by necessity to unite and abolish both themselves as a class and the conditioning opposite which makes it the proletariat- which makes it propertyless. It is thus the abolition of the private property relation – the existing division of labour between workers and capitalists - that is involved in the emancipation of the workers, and through this emancipation from private property, the universal emancipation of humanity from conditions of servitude. This was the envisioned “historical task” of the proletariat: the abolition of human estranged labour – of division of labour and class distinctions – of private property.

The “transcendence of self-estrangement” (Marx, 1978, pg.84) – as the express task of the proletariat – was to be realized through communism; communism being the “positive transcendence of private property”; the complete annulment of private property. But this communism is not so much the simple absence of class distinctions (equality), or the absence of individual private property. As the transcendence of human self-estrangement, we are dealing with communism 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 become conscious, and accomplished within 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 (Marx, 1978, pg.84).

This communism, as the transcendence of human self-estrangement is distinct from the primitive forms of communism discussed earlier– reflective of that “original unity” identified by Marx and Engels at the precipice of human pre-history. For Marx (1978, pg.84) his communism is not a harkening back, or reference to this primordial human condition as proof or justification for an alternative social, political and economic arrangement; a flaw he associates with what he

calls the “immature communism” of utopians such as Etienne Cabet or Francois Villegardelle – utopians who sought proof “amongst disconnected historical phenomena”. The immediate limitation of their projects – according to Marx (1978, pg.84)- lay in the very fact that their examples were stationed only in the past – only to what had once been - and thus by consequence refuting any claim to being essential features of our human condition.

Conversely, Marx’s communism is not something historical – in the sense of an appeal to a historical alternative – but is in its very essence the outcome of the movement of history: “The entire movement of history is, therefore, both its [communism’s] actual act of genesis (the birth act of its empirical existence) and also for its thinking consciousness the comprehended and known process of its coming-to-be” (Marx, 1978, pg.84). This is also why Marx’s describes his communism as:

...not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence (Marx & Engels, 1932)<sup>240</sup>.

It is a state of affairs nonetheless, but one which does not exist as an ideal to be established; a utopia. It is not an existing or pre-existing ought to which we must aspire as a species. It’s reality – and it’s conscious realization – has been made possible only through the progressively developing antagonisms through human history, which culminated in a contradictory form conducive to the complete negation of self-estrangement as materialized and expressed in its present form – that is, through universalized bourgeois private property and its corresponding division of labour.

---

<sup>240</sup> This excerpt from Marx and Engels is often employed misleadingly; used to critique any notion of finality – associated with teleology- in orthodox Marxism. Yet, when we read and utilize it in its correct context, we understand what Marx and Engels really meant by this description.

An additional and related distinguishing feature between primitive communism and the communism of Marx is the sense of finality associated with the latter. It is true that the suggestion of finality in Marx's materialist conception of history is a debated topic, and Sean Sayers (2019) is correct when he says that nowhere in Marx's canon does he make any reference to an "end of history". We even read criticism of such a presumption from Engels' (1946) in his chapter on "Hegel" when he ridicules the Hegelian "absolute truth"; a point where truth

...can proceed no further, where it would have nothing more to do than to fold its hands and gaze with wonder at the absolute truth to which it [Truth] had attained...[...]. Just as knowledge is unable to reach a complete conclusion in a perfect, ideal condition of humanity, so is history unable to do so; a perfect society, a perfect "state", are things which can only exist in imagination<sup>241</sup>.

For Sayers (2019) there is no end of history for Marx, and the clarification on this question lies in Marx's specification of an end of "pre-history" instead. Thus, by Sayers' (2019) argument, there is no end of history as such – and so ipso facto no teleological dimension to Marxist thought<sup>242</sup> – but only an end to "the era of development governed by the clash of blind forces". Thus, communism is not the teleological end of history, but is instead the beginning of a new era (Sayers, 2019, pg.16).

Despite the reservations raised by Sayers (2015) it is not untenable to assign to Marxism – just as with Hegelianism – a sense of finality, even if only a finality on the cusp of a new beginning. Communism may not be the end of history, but it is nonetheless the end of human suffering – of human estrangement. For Marx, bourgeois relations of production were "the last antagonistic form

---

<sup>241</sup> The reading of an end of history in Hegel himself are disputed, and the nuances concerning this position, although valid, will not be discussed here. Instead, I am simply reproducing the position understood and articulated by Engels in his criticism of Hegel's historical schema.

<sup>242</sup> In distancing Marx from any presumption of teleology, especially if assumed to be an inheritance from Hegel, Sayers (2019) makes the additional observation that Marxist accounts of history construe the progressive pattern of development and the emergence of the fully developed human as the outcome of "blind forces" rather than a predetermined teleological goal of the whole process.

of the social process of production<sup>243</sup>” (Marx, 1978, pg.5), and it was in the womb of this pinnacle of antagonism and contradiction that the material conditions were created which allowed for the solution – for the bringing of “the prehistory of human society to a close”. Prehistory being the temporalized domain and characteristic of all human history hitherto, beginning with primitive communism. On this, Tucker (1964, pg.23) aptly summarizes the Marxian “drama of mankind’s historical existence”, as “communism lost and communism regained”; and as we have also noted with parallel reference to Hegel, it was history as the odyssey of Spirit’s unity lost, and unity regained.

Thus Marx’s communism distinguishes itself from primitive communism in initiating the finality of human pre-history and the beginning of human history -the beginning of “the complete return of man to himself” (Marx, 1978, pg. 84). There are more than one reasons that allow for Marx’s communism to achieve this stature of the final transcendence of human self-estrangement; all of which are contained within the material conditions associated with the capitalist mode of production – conditions that were absent for primitive communism and so which necessitated the downfall – the eventual deterioration - of the former. As we noted earlier, primitive communism – the condition of humanity before class divisions arose – was “doomed to extinction” because it was a condition of existence that relied partly on geographic isolation. Through “the movement of history or migration” this isolation is broken and so the blood relations and kinship bonds on which these communities rested – these “strong yet narrow” ties – become obsolete. Developments in production through migration, changing climactic conditions, and contact with “strangers” and

---

<sup>243</sup> In the *Manifesto*, this is more clearly spelled out the following way: “...modern bourgeois private property is the final and most complete expression of the system of producing and appropriating products, that is base on class antagonisms, and on the exploitation of the many by the few” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.484).

“others” consequently results in processes of individuation [*Vereinzelung*] and division of labour – so initiating the reign of social antagonism.

Marx’s communism on the other hand is the successor of capitalism, the latter which has consequently allowed for the “universal development of productive forces” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.161). As noted earlier in the section of “Scientific Socialism” capitalism was an exalted mode of production for Marx and Engels because of the conditions of/for concrete universality it brings into existence: both the expansion of its particular mode of production on a global scale, establishing relations of interdependence through the world market; and through the consequent and related universalizing of the “‘propertyless’ mass” that is to eventually be found in all “civilized” nations, i.e. the wage workers. Through this universality of the development of productive forces humanity – in its estranged and dehumanized form - now exists in its “world-historical” being, absent of isolation and where “empirically universal individuals” have now emerged in place of “local ones”. These conditions ensure for communism a “world-historical” existence, without which communism could “could only exist as a local event” (Marx, & Engels, 1978, pg.161), leaving it susceptible to antagonistic modes of production, i.e. “the old filthy business” would simply become reproduced and lead to all sorts of *regressions*. This is also why Marx and Engels (1978, pg.161) write that “Empirically, communism is only possible as the act of the dominant peoples ‘all at once’ and simultaneously...”. Thus, the transcendence of self-estrangement could only successfully come about universally; totally.

An additional signification concerning the universal and immense development of productive forces in lending itself to the truly transcendent nature of Marx’s post-capitalism communism – as the transcendence of self-estrangement and of human pre-history - is the “mastery of nature” which it initiates (Robinson, 2019, pg.109). We already noted the ways in which the

human of primitive communism was confronted by nature “as a completely alien, all-powerful and unassailable force”. This fits with Marx and Engels (1978, pg.158) general account of humankind’s primitive existence which in its initiate stages is marked by a restricted or undeveloped relation between man and nature wherein nature is “as yet hardly modified historically”; a relation which is dialectically related to the undeveloped or restricted relation that humans at this stage have with one another. Thus in their primitive state, of an undeveloped division of labour and relatedly undeveloped forms of industry and production, the human exists in a subservient relation to the natural existing/given instruments of production: the field, water, etc.

For Marx and Engels, this relation with nature is altered as humanity progresses, initiated through further developments in the division of labour and in corresponding forms of productive activity, and ultimately reaches a point – through the emergence of the capitalist mode of production – where for the first time nature’s forces are wholly subject to the productive activity of man<sup>244</sup>. And yet though capitalism creates the conditions requisite for humankind’s subjugation of nature – through the “immense development of the productive powers of labour” (Chattopadhyay, pg.80), i.e. through the subjugation of nature’s forces to human productive activity via large scale

---

<sup>244</sup> It is imperative to remember that this relation between man and nature is always dialectical, and that the shifting relation of subjugation between man and nature never alters this basic dialectic character. On this it is worth turning to this excerpt from Marx’s (1978, pg.344) *Capital*: “Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature’s productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature/ He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway”.

industry, machinery, improved technologies, etc.<sup>245</sup>, humankind is as yet not “lord over Nature” (Engels, 1978, pg.717).

Capitalism has created the requisite conditions for this lordship or mastery through its world historical dominion over the sensuous world – where the kind of nature envisioned by a materialist such as Feuerbach – that is, nature absent of human productive activity, i.e. nature preceding human history – is all but extinct<sup>246</sup> – though it is not capable of granting domination due to its archaic mode of production and social organization. Archaic because the laws governing it in a sense replicate and reproduce man’s subjugated relation to nature through working up conditions of existence that confront man- dominatingly, irrationally, antagonistically, etc.

It is however only following the negation of capitalist relations of production (relations nonetheless necessary in their historical role)– via revolution and into communism– that man attains *real* mastery over nature. And since by Nature we do not necessarily mean something external to human productive activity, this mastery implies a mastery of human productive activity

---

<sup>245</sup> See this description from *The Communist Manifesto*: “Subjection of Nature’s forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground – what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour?” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.477)

<sup>246</sup> The notion of humankind’s all embracing reach over “nature” is hard to conceive of, even if under the global reach of the capitalist mode of production. Are there not large tracts of land in the Amazon that remain untouched by modern industry? Can we ever claim to have effect over all life, flora and fauna, thousands of species of which still exist unknown? This excerpt from Neil Smith and Philip O’Keefe’s “Geography, Marx and the Concept of Nature” (1980, pg.36) attempts an explanation to these questions: “To say that nature is produced does not imply that every atom of some tree, mountain or desert is humanly created, any more than that every atom of the Empire State Building is humanly created; matter is neither created nor destroyed. It does mean that human activity is responsible to a greater or lesser extent for the form of matter; the size and shape of the buildings, the hybrid or location of the tree, the physiognomy of the mountain, the spatial extent of the desert”. Or perhaps Marx and Engels had in mind only all that existed within the purview of human sensibility and practical activity? Or perhaps what they imagined was not nature so much in terms of quantity, but of control of the forces of nature and of the reversal of their dominative relation over humankind. For example, I am thinking of the title of the Netflix film *The Boy who [Harnessed] the Wind*.

itself. The conditions of which are explained succinctly by Engels (1939, pg. 309) in his chapter “Theoretical”:

The conditions of existence forming man’s environment, which up to now have dominated man, at this point [communism] pass under the dominion and control of man, who now for the first time becomes the real conscious master of Nature, because and in so far as he has become master of his own social organization. The laws of his own social activity, which have hitherto confronted him as something external, dominating laws of nature, will then be applied by man with complete understanding, and hence will be dominated by man.<sup>247</sup>

With this domination of nature by man, humanity truly marks itself off “from the rest of the animal kingdom” (Engels, 1978, pg.715). For the first time, man – the human – exists as a human – and in accordance with humanity’s species essence as free and conscious producers; that is, man as a conscious producer whose activity is voluntary and not dictated by need or by greed<sup>248</sup>. It is the “ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom” (Engels, 1978, pg.715). It is the return of the human to herself- a “return become conscious and accomplished with the entire wealth of previous development”.

But for Marx and Engels, this domination of nature by man signifies more of a kind of reconciliation, not simply between man and nature, but between nature *as man*<sup>249</sup>. For Marx (1978,

---

<sup>247</sup> This is anticipated by Marx and Engels similar statement in *The German Ideology* where they wrote that communism differs from all previous movements in that it “for the first time consciously treats all natural premises as the creatures of hitherto existing men, strips them of their natural character and subjugates them to the power of united individuals”.

<sup>248</sup> In *Capital Volume 3*, Marx (1999\*, pg.593) describes this as the “realm of freedom” which only begins when “labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases”. Marx here also distinguishes between the “savage” who “must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants” and “socialised man” or the “associated producers” who would be in a position to rationally regulate their interchange with Nature “bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it...”

<sup>249</sup> On the surface reconciliation and mastery seem to imply two distinct relations. However, as will be made clear - and has been made clear - reconciliation – just as with Hegel – was never a relapse into the “wilderness of the nearly animal consciousness” (Hegel, 1997, pg.319). The reconciliation arrived at was one achieved through the labour and progress of human history. It was a “conscious” unity; and it is precisely in this element of being “conscious” that translates into the attribute of mastery, i.e. a reconciliation within and yet under the domain of humanity. Of course, in Marx this was all practical rather than conceptual, but a parallel articulation nonetheless.



pg.92) “nature” and “man” are not abstractions, but man is both man and nature and nature is both nature and man. It is only under conditions of communism that this “real existence” of man and nature becomes something practical, sensuous and perceptible – something real – and where “...man has become for man as the being of nature, and nature for man as the being of man...” (Marx, 1978, pg.92). This is also why Marx (1978, pg.92) here describes history not only as “the begetting of man through human labour...the coming-to-be of nature for man”, but also as “nature’s coming to be man” (Marx, 1978, pg.91).

In Marx’s communism nature no longer confronts man as a dominating and opposing force, nor does it confront man as an objectified external world of commodities – the *objectification* of man’s *essential powers* in the form of sensuous, alien, useful objects (Marx, 1978, pg.90). Through the conscious mastery and organization of human productive activity on a universal and world-historical scale, humanity reconciles itself with itself and with its own nature – its species essence. It is in a sense in unity with itself – in as much as by unity we here mean the absence of contradiction or antagonism, just as for Hegel Spirit reconciled itself with itself -absent of antagonism - in the Absolute. Only, in Hegel it was a matter of thought, or thinking – i.e., Spirit’s knowledge of its essential nature that signified this – whereas in Marx the reconciliation takes the form of something practical -something corporeal, i.e. objectively real. There is a succinct way in which Marx (1978, pg. 88) articulates this in the chapter “private property and communism”: “...it is only when the objective world becomes everywhere for man in society the world of man’s essential powers – human reality, and for that reason the reality of his own essential powers – that all objects become for him the objectification of himself, become his objects: that is, man himself becomes the object” (Marx, 1978, pg.88).

For Hegel, Spirit's reconciliation with itself – to be realized in the form of the rational state – spelled the positive supersession of the individual, where particularity gives way to “universal purpose”; it is the realization of the Idea of Freedom in as much as freedom is in contrast to dependence (external), compulsion, necessity. For Hegel reconciliation resolved the kinds of disharmony that characterizes our fallen or estranged condition – between subject and object, intuition and concept, individual will and universal will; it is, as Marcuse aptly termed it, the “reality of the Kingdom of Heaven”. For Marx, it is communism and not the Absolute that enabled such human freedom; it was Marx's communism, that was

...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 (Marx, 1978, pg.84).

And herein lies the clarity concerning Marx's ability to articulate the potentialities of a “higher society” without harbouring any latent form of *Moralität*. Of his, and Engels, – presumed-development of a scientific system of ethics that does not rely on abstract ideals – on any moral ideals; the very abstractions that Hegel had so powerfully exposed and critiqued, and the kind that continued to plague the idealistic proposals of the utopians; proposals that only forwarded ideals that “ought” to be realized<sup>250</sup>. For Hegel, “Ethical life” – which was supposed to carry an objective and rational validity – was realized in the form of the rational state; for Marx, taking the position

---

<sup>250</sup> Contra to utopian and bourgeois thought, as early as 1843 Marx (1978, pg.13) stated in a published letter to Arnold Ruge that he was “...not in favour of setting up any dogmatic flag”, of “the designing of the future and the proclamation of ready-made solutions for all time”. This sentiment is shared in his and Engels' *Manifesto* where they note the bourgeois objections to communism, that it abolishes all religion, all morality and all eternal truths instead of constituting them on a new basis. In response, Marx and Engels do not justify their communism by appeals to actual or real eternal truths such as Freedom or Justice – as opposed to the caricatured truths of societies and civilizations riddled with class antagonism. In stead, they proceed from these objections by stating “But let us have done with the bourgeois objections to communism”. In a sense, for Marx and Engels, it is the very presumption of eternal truths, of morality itself, that constitutes the abstract and bourgeois outlook of society and of the world.

of materiality – of objective actuality – such reconciliation could only be realized once certain concrete conditions had come about in reality; conditions that precipitated their negation – the negation of capitalism – and resolved in the stateless society – in the absence of society – in communism<sup>251</sup>.

For Hegel it was not capitalism that behaved as a necessary prerequisite on the historical path, but was instead the consummate religion – Christianity – which he believed conceptually initiated a degree of freedom for man from imposed Natural limitations. The achievement of this freedom of/for man could thus help bring Spirit closer to realizing its true essence – its self-contained unity; or the unity of God and man – even if initially only as a potentiality. For Marx, it was capitalism that supplied the negation of natural limitations – not conceptually or in thought, but practically, actually. Through the construction of a mass of free wage workers, capitalism had in a sense liberated man, allowing him to move closer to practically realizing his true species being. For Marx, no previous mode of production could have allowed – nor did allow – for the development of such conducive material conditions, and for Hegel, no hitherto form of religious or philosophical consciousness was capable of grasping such freedom.

It is through the very machinery of history, and of the signification of a particular stage of history; of a particular people; of a particular moment and its corresponding – and conducive – conditions, that both Hegel and Marx are able to rationalize – or to make objective in the sense of

---

<sup>251</sup> It is for these reasons that I am in agreement with Tucker (1978, pg. xx) and Robinson (2019) when they point out the ways in which Marx and Engels' Scientific Socialism was not in a direct line of descent from the classical teachings of the utopians (Simon, Fourier, Owen), but was rather a programme that had its intellectual source in Hegelian philosophy. This is of course in contrast to the schematic 3 sources and 3 component parts thesis propounded by Lenin who divided the intellectual sources of Marxism into the domains of English political economy; French Socialism; and German Philosophy. The true depth of the Marxist debt to both Hegelian philosophy and otherwise ignored intellectual – and religious – traditions see Robinson's (2019) *Anthropology*.

universal as opposed to simply relativistic— their respective philosophical sketches and programs. So much has been demonstrated in the pages of Section Two of this dissertation.

Thus, having established the centrality of capitalism and of its progressive role in enabling the kind of communism that Marx and Engels envisioned, we once again turn back to the question of Marx's Eurocentrism, and of his unilinear notion of progress through human history.

### **Section Three: Marx *from* the Margins: Multilinear Misconceptions on Marx**

In section 2 of this dissertation, we have attempted a clarification of Marxist philosophy in order to demonstrate the centrality to Marxism of what Anderson (2010) described as a “unilinear concept of social progress”. A description which he nonetheless uses to characterize the described “problematic” earlier writings of Marx, as distinct from the later multilinear, or more particularly, “multicultural, multilinear social dialectic” which would come to frame Marx’s mature works. The parameters of what I describe as the “multilinear argument” are taken up in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, as a response to the criticism that Marxism presents a Eurocentric philosophy of history and liberation.

This latter position is supported in the broader work of Cedric J. Robinson where he describes Marxism in one instance as a philosophy constricted by a “Eurocentrism and secular messianism”; ideological elements that were implicated in a presumed “scientific” account of liberation. Consequently, these “ideological elements” worked to: (i) validate European colonialism while implying the stagnation and isolation of non-Western societies; (ii) privilege the world historical role of the industrial working class in the West, while recessing slaves, peasants, indentured workers, farmers, sharecroppers and peons from discourse on human freedom and struggles for liberation, and so having “disqualified them from historical and political agency in the modern world”; (iii) by virtue of its proposition of simplified class relations, it relegated to the dustbin of history (or at least the distinguished abyss of pre-capitalist social and economic relations) analysis of race, gender, culture and slavery; and (iv) consequently, these ideological elements limited the internationalism which Marxism espoused to since in its analysis it behaved as an insufficient explanator of the cultural and social forces that continued to inform freedom

struggles outside of the metropolises of Western Europe. As much has already been articulated in Chapter One.

In the multilinear position however there is evidence provided suggesting that Marx moved away from such initially supported positions, and instead began to develop an analysis and critique of capitalism that was: (a) disillusioned with the progressive nature of capitalism itself; (b) that supported the revolutionary potential of anti-colonial movements and of liberation struggles outside of the frame of the Industrial nations; (c) that validated national emancipation and abolition struggles through a politics that was not reducible to class relations; and (d) that came to deny the construction of a “supra-historical” theory of development, applicable to all peoples and all places.

In his criticism – or rather dismissal – of Cedric Robinson’s (2000) work, Meyerson draws our attention to the multilinear position, as part of his insistence that “properly interpreted” historical materialism is able to meet and respond to the challenges forwarded by Robinson regarding Marxism’s historical and continued relevance as a theory or paradigm for thinking about social change. Ironically, it is a call for a corrected reading that draws on the dialectical and humanistic elements of Marxism – the Hegelian elements. But as we have already shown, properly read in relation to Hegel, Marx confirms his Eurocentric limitations even more fully.

This section of the dissertation will – in light of the attempted clarification of Marxist theory provided in Section two – engage critically with the multilinear position, demonstrating the misconceptions that it both adopts and employs in order to redeem Marxism from the kinds of charges made by Robinson. This section will thus engage systematically across 3 Chapters with primary source evidence of multilinearity that was summarily provided in Chapter 2 in order to both defend the charge of Marx’s Eurocentricity – and all the limitations that come with it – and

subsequently, as part of a larger project, support the intervention into Marxist theory made by Cedric Robinson.

Chapter 7, “Tragedy in Marx: Capitalism, Colonialism and the Dialectic of Negativity” will address the notion that Marx grew disillusioned with the progressive nature of capitalism, which is presumed to be evidenced in his shifting writings on colonialism, anti-colonial movements and renewed valuation of pre-capitalist social formations. Chapter 8, “Marx and Engels’ Instrumentalist Politics: On War, Abolition and National Emancipation” will address the presumption that Marx was turning toward a non-class reductive position on revolution and liberation, as evidenced through his increased support for national liberation movements, his positions on abolition in the U.S., and on his identified revolutionary role of Ireland. The latter two examples indicating a more nuanced, or “dialectic” approach to questions of race/ethnicity alongside class. Chapter 9, “Marx on Russia: Indications of a Non-Suprahistorical yet Unilinear Theory of History” will address Marx’s position and writings on the fate of Russia, and of the Russian commune, which are often held to be the pinnacle of Marx’s multilinearism, particularly concerning the suggestion that a pre-capitalist society could transition directly to socialism without having to proceed through capitalism, and by consequence the clarification of a non-suprahistorical theory of history. This chapter will also attempt a clarification of the notions of “unilinearity” or “unilinear” as opposed to “multilinear” as employed in this dissertation’s depiction of Marxist theory.

## Chapter 7: Tragedy in Marx: Capitalism, Colonialism and the Dialectic of Negativity

As noted above, this chapter will deal with that aspect of the multilinear position - taken up not only by Anderson (2010) but also Michael Lowy (2000) and Kolja Lindner (2010) - that suggests in Marx a growing disillusionment with capitalism and its presumed progressive aspects. All three authors, Anderson (2010) being our primary interlocutor, associate the affirmative position on capitalism-as-progress with the early or young Marx – the pre-1848 Marx of the *Manifesto* – who was either under a strong Hegelian influence at that time (Anderson, 2010) or was victim of his own ignorance; owing to gap in his world-view concerning the actual character and realities of non-Western societies (Anderson, 2010; Lindner, 2010). A more exposed Marx, later in his life, is said to have blurred an earlier ethnocentric distinction drawn between inferior (colonized) and superior (colonial) civilizations.

These authors rest their argument concerning Marx's shifting position on capitalism's progressive potential through evidence of: the adoption of a more careful and nuanced analysis of colonial expansion; a growing support for anti-colonial movements; and a growing sympathy toward pre-capitalist, non-western communal forms.

This chapter will engage with these re-readings of Marx and will proceed as follows: 1.) We will begin with a general critique of the suggestion that Marx reversed his position on capitalism as a progressive stage in human history, or that he departed from a linear notion of progress. Framing this discussion will be a clarification of Marx's *dialectical* and so antagonistic or contradictory notion of progress; what in the *Manuscripts of 1844* he describes – with reference to Hegel- as the “dialectic of negativity”, as the moving and generating principle; 2.) In light of our clarification of the notion of progress in Marx, we will clarify the evidence relied upon by Anderson (2010) et al. to suggest a shift in Marx's position on both the progressive nature of



capitalism and subsequently on colonization and anti-colonialism; 3.) Drawing on the above subsections of Section of this dissertation - “Scientific Socialism” and “Communism as the Riddle of History Solved” - we will clarify Marx – and Engels’- subsidiary positioning of pre-capitalist *communal* forms which Anderson (2010) mistakenly interprets as indications of sympathy or valuations over and above capitalism.

### **7.1: The Dialectic of Negativity**

*“Sollte these Qual uns quälen  
Da sie unsre Lust vermehrt,  
Hat nicht myriaden Seelen  
Timur’s Herrschaft aufgezehrt?”*

[“Should this torture then torment us  
Since it brings us greater pleasure?  
Were not through the rule of Timur  
Souls devoured without measure?”]  
[From Goethe’s “An Suleika”, *Westöstlicher Diwan*]

Karl Marx (1853).

In his contextualization of Marx’s philosophy, Allen Wood (2004) pinpoints the role played by Jean Jacques Rousseau in setting a precedent for a critical – at best, ambivalent- position on “civilization”. According to Wood (2004, pg. xvi) by the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans began to think of themselves as civilized in contrast to the rest of the world- the rest who were presumed to have remained in a condition of primitive savagery or arrested development. Wood (2004) describes this as a “complacent self-conception” which rationalized colonial exploitation; a complacency which would come to be challenged by Rousseau who argued that civilization in fact makes humans less fulfilled and happy; that it corrupts us morally – making us evil -, even though it perfects our capacities for reason and domination over the natural world.

For Wood (2004, pg. xvi) the tradition of German classical philosophy, initiated by Kant, can be framed partly as a reaction to “Rousseau’s challenge”; a reaction that validated both

civilization and the critique of civilization through shifting attention to what civilization might offer, i.e. “what it might enable the human species to become in the future” (Wood, 2004, pg.xvi). A succinct statement by Kant says it best: “Rousseau was not so wrong when he preferred to [civilization] the condition of savages, as long, namely, as one leaves out the last stage [of human history] to which our species has yet to ascend”<sup>252</sup>. Though Rousseau was right in his indictment of the perversity and travails of civilization, this was to be a judgement based on what lies in the present or the now. For someone like Kant, civilization, its greater justification, lay in what it makes *possible* for humanity<sup>253</sup>. Wood (2004, pg.xvii) includes in this way of response the German Philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, who equally shifted the discourse on civilization to what it could make possible, and this through dividing human history into 5 ages: (i) an early primitive age of innocence; (ii) the age of authority (despotism and slavery); (iii) the age of liberation in which shackles were being cast off and all was submitted to the judgement of autonomous reason<sup>254</sup>; (iv) the age to come – the age of reason and knowledge where truth rather than power or comforts will be the object of human endeavour; (v) a fifth and final age – where it was believed that “rational beings will finally build a world worthy of the dignity of its creators” (Wood, 2004, pg.xvii).

A shared view was also emergent in post-revolutionary France, among philosophers and utopian social theorists such as Auguste Comte, Saint-Simon – who viewed the current age of civilization as one of estrangement which will be followed by an “organic age in which humanity is to be reintegrated into a community based on a common rational worldview” (Wood, 2004, pg.

---

<sup>252</sup> Immanuel Kant cited in Wood (2004, pg.xvii)

<sup>253</sup> Even if, as we have earlier noted with reference to Kant, this higher future may in its finality be unattainable.

<sup>254</sup> Of Fichte’s ages, Wood (2004, pg.xvi) describes age iii (Fichte’s contemporary) – which according to Fichte was the age which humanity had just entered into and which was uniquely “simultaneously the most hopeful and the most morally degenerate, because at the start, liberation from authority opens the way to skepticism, indifference, greed and selfishness”.

xvii) -, and Charles Fourier, who's four stage division of history, as we already noted in Section Two, was praised by Engels<sup>255</sup>.

Of course, most relevant to our discussion here has been the work of Hegel, and of his machinery of history through which the "modern historical predicament" (Wood, 2004, pg.xix) is offered an historically imminent resolution- a rescue of civilization without sacrificing the criticisms of its evils; a response, to Rousseau's ambivalence concerning the modern world. Wood (2004) intentionally outlines this context in order to make sense of the Marxian project and of its duality of praise and criticism concerning bourgeois civilization. For Marx, as we have noted in detail already in Section Two, capitalism provides unprecedented means and possibilities, while simultaneously engendering the most stringent forms of exploitation and misery: it has "rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life" but also subjected an increasing majority of the population to naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation (Marx & Engels, 1978).

A similar contextualization is offered in Robinson's (2019) *Anthropology*, throughout the text really, but for our interest here, as particularly offered in the sub-section "The Natural History of 'Marxian' Economics". There, Robinson (2019, pg.135-137), in addition to his own intervention, draws on both Foucault's genealogy of Marxism and Hayden White's (1975) *Metahistory*, the latter which reduces all exercises in historical writing to narratives, as romance, tragedy, comedy, satire, etc.<sup>256</sup> (Robinson, 2019, pg.136). For White, as Robinson (2019) notes,

---

<sup>255</sup> For sake of the discussion here we will repeat some revealing points such as Engels' commending Fourier for pointing out the contradictory nature of civilization – which he reads as identical with the "so-called civil, or bourgeois, society of today" – which "moves in vicious circles" and which "raises every vice practiced by barbarism in a simple fashion into a form of existence, complex, ambiguous, equivocal, hypocritical". Civilization, he writes is something that arrives at the very opposite of that which it wants to attain, so that "under civilization poverty is born of superabundance itself" (Engels, 1978, pg.690).

<sup>256</sup> Robinson (2019, pg.137) cites White's point, writing: "...the work of every master historian usually arises from an effort to wed a mode of emplotment with a mode of argument or of ideological implication which is inconsistent with it".

Marxist historiography is no different, and along with Marxian political economy, it develops within the genre of Tragedy, and comedy, or more accurately, the tragicomic where the increased misery and class conflict as a result of the transformation of production processes reflects tragedy, and the resolution provided by the revolutionary activity of the proletariat reflects an “unconsciously instantiated Comedy (conflicts dissolved into a harmony)”. It is argued that these narrative strategies were employed by Marx in order to create a historical vision that spoke to the reality of “a civil order which claimed a superior historical, moral and cultural position while simultaneously exposing masses of humanity to numbing material degradation and spiritual repression...” (Robinson, 2019, pg.137).

Robinson (2019, pg.137) extends the contextualization of Marx’s philosophic and historical vision, beyond Foucault and White (1975), also citing the influence of mythic, poetic and dramatic discourses from antiquity such as the notion of the “redeeming role of the Just” from Homer, or the “myth of the Golden Age” from Hesiod. For Robinson (2019, pg.131), as a student of Greek philosophy, drama and poetry “Marx could hardly escape these recurring emplotments and their influence on his poetics of agency and the writing of history”. Additionally, as is relevant throughout his *Anthropology*, Robinson (2019) further cites the influence of Christian heretical movements on Western socialist discourse all together, and with continued reference to Marx, the influence of secular dramatists - such as Dantes, Shakespeare and Goethe – and pre-Christian literature – Sophocles, Thucydides, Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle – on his economic works.

However, in his piece “Passage to Socialism: The Dialectic of Progress in Marx”, Paresh Chattopadhyay (2006) criticizes the attribution of a theme of “tragedy” to Marx, stating that there is no evidence of textual proof that Marx considered the process of capital accumulation or the development of productive forces as a “tragedy”, defined by Chattopadhyay as “a drama with an

*unhappy ending*”<sup>257</sup>. For Chattopadhyay (2006, pg.76) it is not a tragedy since for Marx the development of productive forces at the cost of the majority is seen not as a fatal law to govern humanity forever, but only as a *transitory* phase, after which human beings “begin their own real ‘history’ in the ‘union of free individuals’”.

The disputation offered by Chattopadhyay (2006) does not necessarily contradict the characterization offered by White (1975) and Robinson (2019) when they place Marx within the tradition of Tragedy, since the disputation seems to stem more from a definition of the tragic/tragedy itself. For Chattopadhyay (2006) tragedy implies an unhappy ending – something absent in Marx via the possibility offered of redemption, whereas for White (1975) or Robinson (2019) there is invoked the wedding of tragedy and comedy – the tragicomic - that incorporates the two: tragedy per se and its resolution. For clarity’s sake, regarding the conceptualization of tragedy in Marx – at least for the purposes of lending insight to the seemingly contradictory articulation of capitalism by Marx (as simultaneously beneficial/progressive and detrimental) – it is worth turning to the notion of Tragedy with specific association to the philosophy of Hegel – the predecessor of Marx to whom we have here been continually turning.

In Terry Pinkard’s (2015) chapter “Tragedy with and without Religion: Hegelian Thoughts” he provides us with insight into Hegel’s theory and employment of tragedy that involves both elements of what Robinson (2019) and White (1975) referenced as the tragic and the comic, combining suffering and destruction with restoration and harmony. Pinkard (2015) writes: “...tragedy as a form of art shows us both how we have fallen out of harmony with the world and the shape that the restoration of that harmony would have to assume and why the restoration is reconciliatory”.

---

<sup>257</sup> In this piece, Chattopadhyay (2006) is directly critiquing Jeffrey Vogel’s (1996) “The Tragedy of History”.

Joshua Billings (2014) in his *Genealogy of the Tragic: Greek Tragedy and German Philosophy*, also centres tragedy within the very mechanics of the Hegelian dialectic – described by him as “Hegel’s tragic dialectic” – which he argues, reflects the “process of opposition, negation and reconstruction” altogether. For Billings (2014, pg. 161) Tragedy in and for Hegel, as the emergence of union beyond contradiction, is the “process through which loss becomes constructive”. The positive or progressive element therefore not only emerges from the suffering and the sorrow but comes to outweigh it. A telling example comes from Hegel’s (1988) *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* where he notes the progressive role – historically speaking – played by the corruption of the Catholic Church. It was through that corruption that the impetus for progress through the consequent Reformation was made possible; and thus the truer essence of Christianity allowed to come to light.

The inheritance of this tragic form in Hegel - of the tragic dialectic - is attributed by Billings (2014) to the influence of the form of theater known as Greek tragedy, which Hegel nonetheless relegated to a subservient stage of consciousness - as the manifestation of a primitive form of ethical and religious thought – which was to be overcome by a progressively developed form of consciousness (Billings, 2014, pg.169).

However, earlier in this dissertation, we drew on secondary literature and our own analysis of primary works to centre the influence of Christian messianism - via Hegel’s own engagement with biblical narrative and through reference to the teachings of the Christian mystic Jacob Boheme’s – in order to better frame the Hegelian dialectic and the narrative of human self-genesis to which it is so intimately wed. More so, if we are to extend this question of inheritance – speculatively at least – to not only Hegel but also Marx, we must find a place for the contextualization’s raised by Wood (2004) concerning the broader cultural and philosophic

response to Rousseau, as well as the singular engagements with Marx by authors such as White (1975), Robinson (2019), or Tucker (1964) who infuse a sensibility of tragedy in Marx – not necessarily via Hegel – but through Marx’s own exposure, reading and engagements with Shakespearian or Greek tragic drama.

And so we ask: Was the Hegelian dialectic influenced by Christian Messianism or Greek Tragedy, or an undefinable situating of both? Was Marx influenced by Hegel on this account, and by association Christian messianism/Greek Tragedy? Was Marx influenced by a multiplicity of influences through an ambiguous and undefinable combination of Hegel, Christian messianism, Greek tragedy, medieval heretics, French utopian socialism, Shakespearean drama, etc.?<sup>258</sup>

What is useful in bypassing this impasse – if it in fact presents one as such – is the Billings (2004) reading of Tragedy in Hegel in association with the very movement or form of the dialectic: of union or reconciliation emerging out of contradiction or negation. It is here that some clarity can be afforded concerning the contradictory attribution maintained in Marx concerning Capitalism’s brutal though nonetheless progressive dimensions.

In essence, the Hegelian dialectic affords to reality a tragic nature, for in its finite determinateness, all that exists for consciousness has as its fate negation, and through this negation/contradiction there follows a union or reconciliation (negation of the negation). The negation of the negation is itself negated due to its determinate character, leading to a series of infinite progressions until the perceiving subject no longer exists in a state of alienation relative to

---

<sup>258</sup> At the juncture of such questions we are reminded more than ever of the tempting utility of the materialist conception of history-as-a-method. As materialists, and in accounting for their own positions, Marx and Engels believed the impulse behind their own conceptions to be the form and development reached by the productive forces and the corresponding forms of intercourse. Their understanding of reality, their (presumed) departure from idealism, their clarification of class antagonisms as the history of all hitherto existing society, and their conclusion that the proletariat were the identical subject-object of history, were all insights owed to the developments of their time.

the object. As already noted earlier, this triadic movement of the dialectic, of existence-negation-reconciliation, is superimposed onto the very meta-presentation of human history for Hegel, to be read as: simple unity (innocence) – reflection (the fall; negation)– Absolute (union with God; negation of the negation). And so, just as with the movement of the dialectic itself, humankind departs from an initial existence, through to rupture and division, and emergent into a higher union or harmony. However, in its superimposed form, the higher union at a certain point resolves the tragic movement of the dialectic; synchronizing our consciousness with our existence in “ethical life”, when “the eyes of the spirit and the eyes of the body completely coincide” (Hegel, 1979)

In similarly employing a dialectic method – albeit materially grounded- and one self-admittedly inherited from Hegel, Marx and Engels were able to forward an account of human progress and evolution that centred – and relied upon - contradiction as the generating and moving principle. For better or for worse, the essence of this appropriation is captured well by Engels (1978, pg.697) in an excerpt we already cited above but which we will repeat here:

In this system [the Hegelian system] -and herein is its great merit-for the first time the whole world, natural, historical, intellectual, is represented as a process, i.e., as in constant motion, change, transformation, development; and the attempt is made to trace out the internal connection that makes a continuous whole of all this movement and development. From this point of view the history of mankind no longer appeared as a wild whirl of senseless deeds of violence, all equally condemnable at the judgement-seat of mature philosophic reason and which are best forgotten as quickly as possible, but as the process of evolution of man himself.

The commendation of the basic form or movement of the dialectic is shared by Marx (1976, pg. 103) in the 1873 “postface to the second edition” of *Capital* where he wrote: “The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel’s hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general forms of motion in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell”.



As already clarified in the sub-section “Scientific Socialism”, this does not imply that Marx and Engels held the view that, taken dialectically, human history and society in itself progressed forward through its own agency, and by virtue of some inherency in its movement. Rather, what is meaningful is the inherited account of contradiction, and the overcoming of contradiction – i.e. the “dialectic of negativity” - as the generating and motivating principle. This generative movement of course, meant that history was not reflective of a steady or undifferentiated progress. Engels made their view clear in an 1882 correspondence with Marx, where he critiqued the historian Goerg Ludwig Von Maurer who believed there to be “a steady progress to better things” since the “dark Middle Ages”. Maurer, of course, failed to see “not only the *antagonistic* character of real progress, but also the individual retrogressions<sup>259</sup>” [emphasis added].

Materially grounded, for Marx and Engels this antagonistic movement of contradiction and the overcoming of contradiction – as the vehicle of human history - was expressed through the antagonism between the existing productive forces and the existing form of intercourse. The resolution to the antagonism, motivated through a contextualized human activity, allowed for evolution onto the next stage, just as for example the contradictions that arose within the Western European feudal era allowed for the generation of capitalism – a progressed stage in which the antagonism between the then existing forms of intercourse and productive forces was tangentially resolved or overcome.

Remaining on antagonism, we repeat this noteworthy 1859 excerpt from Marx (1978, pg.5):

The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production – antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism but of an antagonism that emanates from the individuals' social conditions of existence – but the productive forces developing within bourgeois society create also the material conditions for a solution

---

<sup>259</sup> The identification of retrogressions is significant for a number of reasons, and will be clarified in Chapter 9.

of this antagonism. The prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation.

As the “last form of servitude”, Capitalism enveloped within itself contradiction/antagonism that precipitated its own demise. What is significant of course, or unique if anything is the attribution to capitalism as “the last” stage as opposed to simply another mode of production – another matrix of productive forces and social relations – in the evolution of humanity. As a stage potentially to be resolved, like every other stage, it contained within it the germs of contradiction; though as the presumed last stage in the “antagonistic form of the social process of production”, it contained within it the requisite development of productive forces and corresponding form of intercourse that spelled the departure of antagonism altogether; of the resolution to human servitude, toil, and involuntary productive activity that was based on need and greed. Hence, capitalism is simultaneously lauded by Marx and Engels for enabling the development of the productive forces to a degree requisite for this resolution to social antagonism, and also continually exposed for the contradictions within it; the cyclical crises, and primarily, the continued immiseration of a growing majority of the human population. It is progressive – if not revolutionary - in its destruction of all fixed, patriarchal and idyllic relations that bound man to their natural superiors; but it is contradictory in subjecting those now “general men” to intensified(ying) forms of servitude; it is praised for bringing even the most barbarian nations into the fold of civilization, thus creating a potential universality and cosmopolitanism unheard of; but it is contradictory in universalizing class conflict. For further illustration, see for example Marx’s January 9<sup>th</sup> 1848 Speech before the Democratic Association of Brussels where he spoke on “Free trade”. Recognizing free trade as the freedom of capital, and also noting the exploitation of workers by the industrial capitalists, he nonetheless concludes his speech by saying:

But, in general, the protective systems of our day is conservative, while the free trade system is destructive. It breaks up old nationalities and pushes the antagonism of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to the extreme point. In a word, the free trade system hastens the social revolution. It is in this revolutionary sense alone, gentlemen, that I vote in favour of free trade.

Chattopadhyay (2006) makes a similar argument in his response to Michael Lowy (2000) the latter who argued that Marx inevitably departed from a more linear idea of progress and instead developed – later in life -an “open dialectic of progress” that was critical and fundamentally open rather than teleological or *progressive*. For Chattopadhyay (2006), Lowy (2000) is mistaken, taking Marx’s critical iterations of capitalism as indication of a denial or dismissal of the progressive stage of the capitalist mode of production. In his rebuttal, Chattopadhyay (2006) not only cites primary source examples from the “early” Marx that highlight his dual vindication and criticism of capitalism, but also references the “dialectic of negativity” and the way in which progress for Marx involved a contradictory movement, incorporating both the positive and the negative. On this point, Chattopadhyay (2006) writes:

Many have stressed unilaterally the regressive or negative progress under capital just as many have stressed equally unilaterally its positive side. Marx ‘rethought’ progress more profoundly and more clearly than perhaps anyone else by underlining the non-separability of these contradictory aspects belonging to the same process of capitalist development. You cannot simply have only the ‘good’ side and not the ‘bad’ side of progress under this tremendously antagonistic social formation.

For Chattopadhyay (2006, pg.64) the “tendency of capital towards the universal development of the productive powers of labour” in comparison with the localism of precapitalist modes of production, reflects the ‘positive’ side for Marx. The ‘negative’ side of capitalism for Marx, is identified with its indifference and opposition to the producers, i.e. of production of material wealth at the cost of the human individual (Chattopadhyay, 2006, pg.67). As much has already been articulated in Section Two above.

However, Chattopadhyay's (2006) articulation – through the language of positive and negative - of the duality reflected in the antagonistic nature of capitalism and of human historical progress altogether, risks: (i) lapsing into a kind of *Moralität* on behalf of Marx, where a preconceived judgement is made regarding what is positive (good) and so indicative of 'progress' and what is negative (bad), beyond the context of any one particular mode of production; (ii) Though one can certainly find reference in Marx describing certain attributes of capitalism as 'positive'<sup>260</sup> – or simply through our own inference based on his exaltation of a particular development ascribed to capitalism– centering the duality of positive and negative erroneously ascribes to them a generative nature when it comes to progress<sup>261</sup>. Hence, if we are to articulate this more consistently, rather than a 'negative', something like the immiseration of the majority of the population under conditions of capitalism, is a developing contradiction. In Marx and Engels, it is contradiction-as-antagonism rather than positive/negative-as-antagonism that it the vehicle of history. Consequently, the antagonism existent in capitalism just so happens to be what through an ethical judgement we can describe as a 'negative'; though we would be remiss to centre such a judgement in a scientific theory.

Like other contradictions – contradictions which emerged not out of some inherency in human historical evolution but only by virtue of the existing course of development<sup>262</sup> - the existing

---

<sup>260</sup> For example, Chattopadhyay (2006, pg.47) cites Marx on capitalism, saying: "This is a production which is not bound either by limited needs no by needs which limit it. This is one side, positive side if you like, as distinguished from the earlier modes of production". He also notes Marx's reference to the "positive acquisitions of the capitalist system"; "the fruits with which capitalist production has enriched humanity" (Chattopadhyay, 2006, pg.52)

<sup>261</sup> The closest Marx (1978, pg.133) get's to opposing 'positive' from 'negative' is in his *The Holy Family*, where as concerns the antagonism between private property (wealth) and the proletariat, he writes that private property – being compelled to preserve itself- signifies the *positive* side of the antagonism, and the proletariat being compelled to abolish itself and private property (it's conditioning opposite) signifies the *negative* side of the antagonism. There are no moralistic tones in this use of positive/negative, and in fact, the term "negative" is here associated with the liberating *activity* of the proletariat rather than with its miserable condition.

<sup>262</sup> In feudalism, as an example, an antagonism which developed there– which precipitated part of the evolution to the capitalist mode of production – was between the demands of expansive industry and existing patriarchal/idyllic

forms of intercourse that now behave as a contradiction have become “fettters” on the course of development:

These various conditions, which appear first as conditions of self-activity, later as fetters upon it, form in the whole evolution of history a coherent series of forms of intercourse, the coherence of which consists in this: in the place of an earlier form of intercourse, which has become a fetter, a new one is put, corresponding to the more developed productive forces and, hence, to the advanced mode of the self-activity of individuals – a form which in its turn becomes a fetter and is then replaced by another (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.194-195).

In the sub-section on “Scientific Socialism” we already noted the fate of the condition of free-wage labour with reference to the following excerpt from *The Grundrisse*, where with such poetry Marx (1978, pg.291) notes how just as with previous conditions which evolved into contradictions – into fetters – wage-labour – the *sine qua non* of capitalism - is equally destined – due to the immiseration of the worker and the majoritarian nature of this phenomenon - to be cast-off:

...wage labour enters into the same relation towards the development of social wealth and of the forces of production as the guild system, serfdom, slavery, and is necessarily stripped off as a fetter. The last form of servitude assumed by human activity, that of wage labour on one side, capital on the other, is thereby cast off like a skin, and this casting off itself is the result of the mode of production corresponding to capital (Marx, 1978, pg.291).

In his chapter “Theoretical”, Engels (1939, pg.308) is more programmatic than poetic – though nonetheless consistent with Marx - in his analysis concerning the fate of the universalizing condition of wage labour; of the free wage worker. Here, noting the anachronism of class division in the face of the full development of the modern productive forces, he writes:

If...the division into classes has a certain historical justification, it has this only for a given period of time, for given social conditions. It was based on the insufficiency of production;

---

labour relations: “We see then: the means of production and exchange, on whose foundation the bourgeoisie built itself up, were generated in feudal society. At a certain stage in the development of these means of production and of exchange, the condition under which feudal society produced and exchanged, the feudal organisation of agriculture and manufacturing industry, in one word, the feudal relations of property became no longer compatible with the already developed productive forces; they became so many fetters. They had to be burst asunder; they were burst asunder” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.477-478).

it will be swept away by the full development of the modern productive forces. And in fact the abolition of social classes has as its presupposition a stage of historical development at which the existence not merely of some particular ruling class or other but of any ruling class at all, that is to say, of class difference itself, has become an anachronism, is out of date. It therefore presupposes that the development of production has reached a level at which the appropriation of means of production and of products, and with these, of political supremacy, the monopoly of education and intellectual leadership by a special class of society, has become not only superfluous but also economically, politically, and intellectually a hindrance to development.

Thus capitalism is not ‘bad’ because it deforms the working human, nor can it be described as *bad* because it reduces all human relations to monetary ones. Capitalism is contradictory – it is archaic – because it does so<sup>263</sup>, and through this contradictory nature, it spells its own downfall through the very agency of the wretched who rebel against these terms of exploitation – not by virtue of justice, or equality, or the language of innate ‘rights’, but by no less an impulse than necessity. Marx frequently tells us that the proletariat “is *compelled*, by the force of circumstances, to organise itself as a class” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.491); that it is “compelled [*gezwungen*] to abolish [*aufheben*] itself and thereby its conditioning opposite – private property – which makes it the proletariat” (Marx, 1978, pg.133); and that “It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of what the proletariat is, and what, in accordance with this being, it will historically be compelled to do” (Marx, 1978, pg. 134)

---

<sup>263</sup> In “Theoretical” Engels (1939, pg.299) identifies the contradiction between socialized production and capitalist (individual) appropriation as not only what gives the present mode of production its capitalist character, but as the *fundamental* contradiction in capitalism, which subsequently gives rise to two other contradictions (all of which necessitate the demise of the capitalist arrangement of production: (i) the contradiction “between the organization of production in the individual factory and the anarchy of production in society as a whole”; (ii) “The mode of production rebels against the mode of exchange; the productive forces rebel against the mode of production which they have outgrown” (i.e. crises).

To be clear, for Marx and Engels this does not imply a blind determinism on behalf of the workers who must inevitably and inherently revolt, but instead captures the motivating factors behind that impulse to revolt, as well as the clarity of their mission.

It is thus here that we are in a position to revisit the infamous stanza from Goethe - referenced at the start of this sub-section - with which Marx closes his 1853 *Tribune* article “The British Rule in India”. After noting the crimes of the British in causing a social revolution in Hindoostan – what Cesaire (2000) would describe as “Europeanization”<sup>264</sup> – Marx asks: “should this torture then torment us, since it brings us greater pleasure?”

As Anderson (2010, pg.18) notes, Marx was quite fond of this stanza, referencing it on more than a few occasions, including in relation to the dehumanization of the industrial worker in England<sup>265</sup>. Thus, along with the immiseration of the existing wage workers, the proletarianization – and utter destruction of the Indian people and their civilization – was the means for a greater pleasure, i.e. for further paving the way toward realizing the abolition of social antagonism *tout court* through the creation of a generalized misery that was conscious of itself as such.

## ***7.2: Dialectics as Science, as Emplotment***

The passing reference to “scientific theory” made in the paragraphs above is not without intention, because it recenters our perspective concerning one of the core aspirations of Marx and Engels’ critique of capitalism and their articulation of socialism: i.e. that in contrast to the utopian

---

<sup>264</sup> And what for Marx more clearly meant the creation of bourgeois civilization; if only the germs of bourgeois civilization...

<sup>265</sup> Anderson (2010, pg.18) raises this point as a means of dismissing Edward Said’s identification of the Goethe stanza as an indication of Marx’s Eurocentrism. One of his rebuttals is that Marx employs it with reference to European workers, hence the implication that “there is nothing specifically Orientalist at work” here. Anderson (2010) however glosses over the essence of why Said identified the Stanza as indicative of Marx’s Eurocentrism as such, i.e. in the sense that European colonialism was being justified – in “regenerating a fundamentally lifeless Asia”, and under the presumption that it was bringing with it the means for – ultimately – universal human salvation.

or idealistic socialisms which they claimed to directly precede them – as expressions of a yet undeveloped capitalism – their system established socialism on the basis of a real science. Absent were the moralistic or idealistic principles that had historically failed to grapple with actually existing concrete conditions; principles which were presumed to be above or beyond the determinative play of those very conditions, and so presumably worthy of the moniker “insight”. Any judgements then, or theories – understood as expressions of human consciousness- were only ever partial, one-sided, and generally class determined conceptions. Theoretically speaking, they would thus be limited in: (1) truly moving beyond the conditions they found themselves in and would simply reproduce the reflections of a particularly determined consciousness; and (2) in effectively motivating other partial consciousnesses of their agenda.

Through the appropriation of the Hegelian dialectical method however- and with it the ‘machinery of history’ and the odyssey that accompanies it – Marx and Engels were able to rationalize their account of liberation; to justify the significance of their critique of capitalism and their account of socialism, without the limitations that come with context or relativism.

To be clear, relativism and context was never something they sought to depart from- such would be to leap back into the realm of abstraction. Instead, employing the dialectical method allowed them to utilize an account of historical progress that eventuated into a concrete universality – a kind of rationality – that sprung from the very ground of context. It was an appropriation of the Hegelian bridging of the subject-object divide as the solution to the dichotomies that plagued a predecessor such as Kant. For Marx and Engels, capitalism, by virtue of its expansive logic, by virtue of its domination of the natural world, by virtue of its negation of all antiquity, and by virtue of its creation of abstract individuals, thus conveniently supplies the means necessary to identify a historical moment in which reconciliation between people, and between nature is at least latently



made possible. The task of realizing it of course, is the express vocation of these “general men”; the proletariat.

Thus, capitalism, as a progressed stage in the dialectical evolution of human history is *made account of*, and this with reference to the very antagonistic movement of the dialectic itself -i.e. of progression made via a resolution to an existing antagonism. Capitalism is thus identified – *conveniently* if you will – as the outcome of a long historical process, which develops within it the - *conveniently* developing - contradiction that will resolve social antagonism all together. This is further supported by virtue of the empirical evidence supplied by both Marx and Engels concerning either the – *conveniently* construed - stunted and limited character of *other* (largely non-Western, read as pre-capitalist) people and civilizations.

This may all sound very deterministic, but what I am trying to highlight here is that even if Marx and Engels’ populated their account of human history and progress with reference to the centrality of the human themselves, or of the role of labouring activity in allowing – or not allowing- for evolution, or even of acknowledging individual retrogressions, it does not undo the very visible – and I stick to my description of *convenient* – inherited paradigm that in a sense undergirds the whole system and supplies it with the mechanisms necessary to forward an account that was ‘scientific’ or ‘rational’ or ‘universal’, or – and I hesitate to use this description with reference to Marx and Engels – ‘objective’.<sup>266</sup>

Thus, despite the slew of influences that may be referenced to account for the character and shape of Marx and Engels conception of progress, the dialectic of negativity (as a paradigm;

---

<sup>266</sup> Joseph Dietzgen (1917), a contemporary of Marx and Engels, wrote in his essay “Scientific Socialism” that unlike the past socialists and communists who proceeded in analysis and critique from “mental speculations”, Scientific socialists “apply the inductive method”, i.e. they arrive at generalizations through observation of the phenomenal and material world. Nonetheless, through my suggestive use of the term “convenient” I am here arguing that Marx and Engels (and Dietzgen) for that matter were plotting onto the phenomenal world an existing paradigm – the tragic dialectic- through which they sought to both legitimize and construct a viable philosophy of liberation.

a method), if I have argued successfully, plays a *framing* role in determining what that account of progress looks and behaves like. But, what supplied the influence for the logic, shape and character of the dialectic itself? We already listed some of these questions earlier: Was it closely modelled on narrative forms drawn from Greek philosophy and tragic drama? Was it Christian messianism with its triadic account of innocence, fall, and redemption? Was it Rousseau's critique of civilization? Was it the Enlightenment preoccupation with 'science'? Was it a Eurocentrism and latent idea of the intellectual currency of the European race on the global stage? Or was it an undefinable combination of all of the above and more, including individual and personal experiences, such as Robinson's (2019, pg.87) note on the influence played by Hegel's upbringing in the state of Old Wurttemberg on his aspiration for a collectivist realization of moral perfection?

Nevertheless, in an attempt to provide some clarity concerning the character of Marx and Engels account of progress, this sub-section of the dissertation has forwarded the position that the clearest answer can be found through an examination of the form of the dialectic itself – the tragic dialectic, or the dialectic of negativity- which behaves as a form of emplotment or narrative that is able to supply a non-moralistic and scientific account of human progress and ultimate liberation.

### ***7.3: Colonialism and the Progress of Capital***

One of the pillars of the multilinear argument attests to Marx's later-in-life growing disillusionment with the progressive nature of capitalism. As direct evidence of this shift, the multilinear argument points to Marx's shifting positions on colonialism, which in his earlier writings – up until 1857 for Anderson (2010) and 1860 for Lindner (2010) – reflected classical Eurocentric tropes concerning the role of Europe as a higher or beneficiary civilization that was bringing progress to a lower one(s). Consequently, in Marx's earlier works there is read a justification of European colonialism, seen as a kind of necessary – and progressive- civilizing

force. By contrast, as the multilinear argument holds, post 1857 or post 1860, there is evidence drawn from Marx's continued engagement with the subject of non-western societies; with colonialism and colonial policies - through articles and correspondences which reflect a growing criticism of capitalism – of its barbarism and crimes; and a growing support for the revolutionary potential of anti-colonial movements. All indications of which point to an evolved (critical) position on the merits of capitalism as a progressive force, and a general abandonment of an ethnocentric notion of progress.

As clarified above however, in the first two sub-sections of Chapter 7, the valuation and criticism of capitalism need not be indication of a shifting position on behalf of Marx, but instead reflects his and Engels antagonistic and contradictory notion of progress. For them, it was the very destructive or tragic forces of the capitalist mode of production that lent to its exaltation through in essence enabling its own downfall as *the* downfall. There is thus meaning to Marx's (1978, pg.134) line from *The Holy Family* "Not in vain does it [the proletariat] go through the stern but steeling school of labour."

Thus, from the outset, when the multilinear argument points to incidences where Marx reflects on capitalism's crimes – its destructive nature – they are mistaken in taking it as indication of a denial of capitalism's progressive stature in the prehistory of humanity. As much has been clarified above. Nonetheless, there is referenced evidence to attend to; primary evidence suggesting a denial of capitalism's – and Europe's –burden of colonization. Through our clarified reading of Marx's contradictory notion of progress, as well as the broader theoretical clarification supplied in Chapter's 3-6, we will here attempt to unearth the misreading's and misconceptions drawn from the assumed examples of multilinearity in Marx.

What has already been briefly stated with reference to this particular angle of the multilinear argument is that the false charge of Eurocentrism and of an Ethnocentric notion of progress as attributable to Marx is a consequence of focusing on just earlier – rather polemical – writings such as the *Manifesto*, or the early (1853) *Tribune* articles on India where British colonization is outright vindicated.

There is argued to be a more “carefully drawn” or “finely shaded” account of colonialism and non-Western societies in articles and letters post 1857/1860 – absent of the earlier Orientalism, where the distinction between higher and lower civilizations was more clearly made. For Anderson (2010), aside from the more evident shift post-1857, even in the conclusion of the 1853 articles on India – in “The Future Results of British Rule in India” which was written in July of that year (only one month after his first – and ‘early’ - article), Marx is said to begin changing his tone “becoming more dialectical” and noting: the need for social revolution in Britain to change colonial policy; the possibility for an Indian national liberation movement<sup>267</sup>; and also “the inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization”<sup>268</sup> (Anderson, 2010, pg.23), the latter especially indicating “..the first sign of a shift from the position of *The Communist Manifesto*”<sup>269</sup>, (Anderson, 2010, pg.23).

As time progresses further however, for Anderson (2010, pg.35) there is a more dramatic shift to an anti-colonial “tone” in Marx, beginning with the January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1857<sup>270</sup> *Tribune* article on China and the second Opium war – “The Case of the Lorch Arrow”. In that article, according to

---

<sup>267</sup> Excerpt from the article referenced by Anderson (2010, pg.23): “The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain itself the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindoos themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether.”

<sup>268</sup> Direct quote by Marx from the article in question

<sup>269</sup> Anderson (2010, pg.22) nonetheless acknowledges that in the same article Marx writes that “Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history” and that it is an “unresisting and unchanging society”; as well as that the British were the first conquerors of India that were “superior” and thus not susceptible to be shaped by the civilization of their subjects

<sup>270</sup> Anderson (2010, pg.31) notes the publication date of this article as January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1857, but it was actually published on January 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Anderson (2010, pg.31), Marx details “Britain’s extremely aggressive moves in Canton (Guangzhou) Harbor after Chinese authorities had dared in October 1856 to arrest several Chinese nationals who were smuggling opium for the British. In doing so the Chinese may have taken down a British flag from the smugglers’ small harbor vessel”. In response, the British unnecessarily bombarded the city to avenge the taking down of their flag<sup>271</sup>. In an article published that same year, March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1857, Anderson (2010, pg.33) notes a “degree of condescension” with reference to the activities of the British in China, as well the American press and British Government Journals who continue to heap “wholesale denunciations upon the Chinese”<sup>272</sup>.

Moving forward, 1858, Anderson (2010, pg.34) notes, Marx would pen additional articles rife with reports of British brutality, and along with other articles in this period, there is “little reference to colonialism as beneficial”. In September 1858 Marx would write two articles on the opium trade, and in one of them “he concludes with a poetic evocation of the contradictory character of the type of modernization forced upon China by Britain’s Opium Wars”<sup>273</sup> (Anderson,

---

<sup>271</sup> The excerpt from the article that Anderson (2010, pg.31) cites: “Impatient of argument, the British Admiral hereupon forces his way into the City of Canton to the residence of the Governor, at the same time destroying the Imperial fleet in the river....[...]It is, perhaps, a question whether the civilized nations of the world will approve this mode of invading a peaceful country, without previous declaration of war, for an alleged infringement of the fanciful code of diplomatic etiquette.

<sup>272</sup> Referenced excerpt from this article: “The unoffending citizens and peaceful tradesmen of Canton have been slaughtered, their habitations battered to the ground, and the claims of humanity violated, on the flimsy pretence that ‘English life and property are endangered by the aggressive acts of the Chinese!’ The British Government and the British people – at least, those who have chosen to examine the question – know how false and hollow are such charges... These sweeping assertions are baseless. The Chinese have at least ninety nine injuries to complain of to one on the part of the English. How silent is the press of England upon the outrageous violations of the treaty daily practiced by foreigners living in China under British protection! We hear nothing of the illicit opium trade, which yearly feeds the British treasury at the expense of human life and morality. We hear nothing of the constant bribery of sub-officials, by means of which the Chinese Government is defrauded of its rightful revenue on incoming and outgoing merchandise. We hear nothing of the wrongs inflicted ‘even unto death’ upon misguided and bonded emigrants sold to worse than Slavery on the coast of Peru and into Cuban bondage. We hear nothing of the bullying spirit often exercised against the timid nature of the Chinese, or of the vice introduced by foreigners at the ports open to their trade. (MECW 1, 234-225)” (Anderson, 2010, pg.32).

<sup>273</sup> Referenced excerpt by Anderson (2010, pg.34) from this article: “That a giant empire, containing almost one-third of the human race, vegetating in the teeth of time, insulated by the forced exclusion of general intercourse, and thus contriving to dupe itself with delusions of Celestial perfection-that such an empire should at last be

2010, pg.34). In 1859 as the Second Opium War intensified again, Anderson (2010, pg.35) notes Marx published several more *Tribune* articles on China where the British and French are reported as “aggressors” as well as criticisms of British editorialists who declare themselves as “superior” to the Chinese, “and for averring that the British ‘ought to be their masters’ (MECW, 16, 509)”. The reports of British atrocities in this late 1850’s period of Marx’s writing can also be found in his 1857 article on the Sepoy uprisings in India where reports of atrocities committed by Indian rebels is contextualized in relation to the atrocities committed by the British<sup>274</sup>. Anderson (2010, pg. 259) extends this evolution of sympathies in 1857 to Engels, who he argues to have also “gradually altered his views” as evidenced in his writing that year on Algeria, where the resistance leader Abd-el-Kaber is admirably described as “that restless and intrepid chieftain”.

For Anderson (2010, pg.35) these articles published between 1857-59 reflect a shift in thinking, where Marx no longer “lauds the supposed progressive effects of colonialism”; a shift owing -apparently- to his growing disillusionment with capitalism and of its supposed progressive effects. On this note, Anderson (2010, pg.36) references an 1856 speech given by Marx where the “tone” on capitalism’s progress is “more sombre, far less sanguine” than it was earlier:

On the one hand, there have started into life industrial and scientific forces, which no epoch of the former human history had ever suspected. On the other hand, there exist symptoms of decay, far surpassing the horrors recorded of the latter times of the Roman Empire. In

---

overtaken by fate on occasion of a deadly duel, in which the representative of the antiquated world appears prompted by ethical motives, while the representative of overwhelming modern society fights for the privilege of buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest markets-this, indeed, is a sort of tragical couplet stranger than any poet would ever have dared to fancy.” Note: the choice of excerpt, in order to indicate a shift in Marx, is a bizarre choice on the part of Anderson (2010) especially given the descriptions of Chinese civilization as “vegetating in the teeth of time” and as “insulated”.

<sup>274</sup> Referenced excerpt noted by Anderson (2010, pg.34): “To find parallels to the Sepoy atrocities, we need not, as some London papers pretend, fall back on the middle ages, nor even wander beyond the history of contemporary England. All we want is to study the first Chinese war, an event, so to say, of yesterday. The English soldiery then committed abominations for the mere fun of it; their passion being neither sanctified by religious fanaticism nor exacerbated by hatred against an overbearing and conquering race, nor provoked by the stern resistance of a heroic enemy. The violations of women, the spittings of children, the roastings of whole villages, were then mere wanton sports, not recorded by Mandarins, but by British officers themselves. (MEXC 15, 353-54)”.

our days, everything seems pregnant with its contrary: Machinery, gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labour, we behold starving and overworking it. The newfangled sources of wealth, by some strange, weird spell, are turned into sources of want; The victories of art seem bought by the loss of character. At the same pace that mankind masters nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men or to his own infamy. Even the pure light of science seems unable to shine but on the dark background of ignorance. All our invention and progress seem to result in endowing material forces with intellectual life, and in stultifying human life into a material force.

When reading the above excerpt, our first inclination - given the outline of progress we attributed to Marx in the start of this chapter – is neither pause nor revelation. Rather than a later development of a less sanguine tone, we read a consistent understanding of capitalism and of progress on behalf of Marx, that is captured through his very reflection that “everything seems pregnant with its contrary”.

However, when taken in isolation from a basic contextualization of the Marxist project itself, the evidence supplied by Anderson (2010) from the select journalistic articles may seem to suggest otherwise; that Marx really was revising his initial positions concerning the non-European. Anderson (2010, pg.5) in fact argues that it is within these very sources that a greater theoretical analysis of non-Western societies, race, ethnicity and nationalism can be found; in greater detail than in works such as *Capital* or Marx’s writings on political economy. And so, we ask, is there a discrepancy between the theoretical works and the journalistic writings?

At this juncture we will note how upon closer examination of the articles referenced by Anderson (2010), as well as additional analysis of articles and letters across the same time periods that Anderson (2010) notes, we develop a clearer understanding of the evidence presented, and a reading of Marx’s journalistic writings that is rather consistent with the Eurocentrism that we have thus far demonstrated as part and parcel of his and Engels’ theory of liberation.

As we have noted above, Anderson (2010) identifies the period between 1857-59 as reflecting a significant shift in Marx’s thinking; of his growing disillusionment concerning the

progressive nature of capitalism – evidenced so succinctly in his 1856 speech where he noted its contradictory nature – and his consequent disillusionment with colonialism (the expansion of capitalism). The writing in this period is meant to demonstrate a marked shift from the position held by Marx when writing the 1848 *Manifesto*, as well as the earlier -initial – 1853 article on India.

Our first point of contention however would be to note the same recognition of contradiction – read by Anderson (2010) and Lowy (2000) as articulation of a ‘negative’ or regressive feature in works preceding the late 1850’s. As Anderson (2010, pg.162) himself later briefly acknowledges<sup>275</sup>, the supposed hostility toward capitalism is evidenced within the very pages of the *Manifesto* itself - a text which he continually refers to as the quintessential marker of the earlier Marx. Anderson fails however to reference the extent of these damning characterizations in the *Manifesto* of Capitalism, and of the bourgeoisie, who have reduced human relations to relations of “naked self-interest”; who have instituted “naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation”; and capitalism as a system which has “resolved personal worth into exchange value” and that has reduced a -growing - class of labourers to the level of a commodity “...who live only so long as they find work. And who find work only so long as their labour increases capital”. The *Manifesto* further notes that due to the logic of capital the toil of the workers increases while wages

---

<sup>275</sup> There are subtle inconsistencies throughout Anderson’s (2010) text. For example, in another incident, while criticizing Edward Said’s “postmodern kind of anti-colonialism” which generalizes the critique of progressiveness via British colonialism, Anderson (2010, pg. 20) points to Aijaz Ahmed in noting how issues such as such as Caste oppression needed transformation, as well as abolishing the practice of *Satee*. Does this mean that there were progressive aspects to British colonialism after all? Then why the exercise a contriving of Marx as in opposition to the progressive consequences of European colonialism? Another slight of hand can be found in his (Anderson, 2010, pg.23) referenced excerpt from Marx’s 1853 “The Future Results of British Rule in India” where a paragraph meant to capture Marx’s shifting tone is reproduced in Anderson’s text, excluding the Orientalist description of the Indian’s “natural langor”. Langor defined in the Oxford dictionary as: “the state or feeling, often pleasant, of tiredness or inertia” and “an oppressive stillness of the air”. What Anderson (2010) did not exclude from that same paragraph was Marx’s description of “gentle natives” which I suppose could be read as sympathetic, but which nonetheless reproduces a kind of Orientalist discourse concerning the generalized constitution of the non-Western *other*.



decrease; the working hours are prolonged while the modern worker “instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class”.

Given our clarification of Marxist theory however, we read these not as negatives, but as contradictions within an existing stage of development that precipitate Capitalism’s downfall: the stripping of all that is sentimental and idyllic between human relations, or the creation of an ever-growing impoverished mass, all lend to the requisite conditions necessary for a higher pleasure. Nonetheless, in speaking the same language as Anderson (2010) it is worth noting that even here we can read ‘criticism’.

This dualism in Marx’s characterization of Capitalism, misconstrued by Anderson (2010), can also be found in the last of the 1853 articles – “The Future Results of British Rule in India” – which Anderson (2010) had signified as a – if not *the* indicative- turning point from the *Manifesto* Marx, particularly the ending or latter part of the article. There, in addition to the criticism of bourgeois civilization which Anderson (2010, pg.23) draws our attention to – where Marx describes the “profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization” – the very article itself concludes with this reflection:

Bourgeois industry and commerce create these material conditions of a new world in the same way as geological revolutions have created the surface of the earth. When a great social revolution shall have mastered the results of the bourgeois epoch, the market of the world and the modern powers of production, then only will human progress cease to resemble that hideous, pagan idol, who would not drink the nectar but from the skulls of the slain (Marx, 1853)

And even in the first of the 1853 articles – “The British Rule in India” - , we read the same dualism where despite the laudatory praise of British colonialism that Anderson (2010) drew our attention to, Marx (1853) still writes that “There cannot, however, remain any doubt but that the misery inflicted by the British on Hindostan is of an essentially different and infinitely more intensive kind than all Hindostan had to suffer before”.

However, despite the dualism, there is still the point made by Anderson (2010) concerning a change of “tone” in later articles from the initial 1853 article, and thus the argument still made for some form of revision on behalf of Marx. On this point we will respond by referencing a letter written by Marx to Engels on June 14<sup>th</sup> 1853, just 4 days after “The British Rule in India” where he reveals part of the context surrounding the article in question – a context that perhaps speaks to the unique tone, if one can in fact identify a unique tone at all: “Your [ Engels] article on Switzerland was, of course, a direct swipe at the *Tribune*’s ‘leaders’ (anti-centralization, etc.) and their man Carey<sup>276</sup>. I continued this clandestine campaign in my first article on India, in which England’s destruction of native industries is described as revolutionary. This they will find very shocking” (Marx, 1853). And it is not without significance that Marx ends this very section of the letter by telling Engels: “Incidentally, the whole administration of India by the British was detestable and remains so today”.

And yet despite his critical characterization of capitalism - of its expansion across the globe - Marx never abandoned a commitment to the significance that capitalism held as the pinnacle stage of human prehistory. In the same 1856 speech cited by Anderson (2010, pg.36) which we

---

<sup>276</sup> Marx is referring to Henry C. Carey who was an American economist that was known for denigrating the “British system” of laissez faire capitalism in comparison to the American system of developmental capitalism that encourages tariff protection and government intervention in order to encourage production and national self-sufficiency. Marx provides a summary description of Carey’s position in the letter cited in text: “I told you before that in his previously published works this man described the ‘harmony’ of the economic foundations of the bourgeois system and attributed all the mischief to superfluous interference by the state. The state was his bogey. Now he is singing another tune. The root of all evil is the centralising of modern industry. But this centralising effect is England’s fault, because she has become the workshop of the world and forces all other countries back to crude agriculture, divorced from manufacture”. Marx (1853) describes this position as indicative of a “Sisimondian-philanthropic-socialist anti-industrialism”. The tactical nature of Marx and Engels’ publications can owe to misreading’s of their work, especially if tone and form of speech is taken as affording any insight read in isolation from their broader project. For example, in 1864 in a letter to Engels Marx would write of his recent address to the general committee: “It was very difficult to frame the thing so that our view should appear in a form acceptable from the present standpoint of the workers’ movement...It will take time before the re-awakened movement allows the old boldness of speech. It will be necessary to be *fortier in re, suaviter in modo* [bold in matter, mild in manner].” In another incident, Marx (pg.512) would write of the use of revolutionary rhetoric: “Given the disparate character of the various national contingents of the new association, some less radical than others, there was a tactical reason for restraining on revolutionary rhetoric”.

noted above, where the tone on capitalism's progress is said to become more sombre and less sanguine, Marx (1856) in fact concluded that very same speech with a maintained praise and special signification of both modern industry (capitalism) of the modern working class – a class conditioned by Capital:

The English working men are the firstborn sons of modern industry. They will then, certainly, not be the last in aiding the social revolution produced by that industry, a revolution, which means the emancipation of their own class all over the world, which is as universal as capital-rule and wages-slavery...To revenge the misdeeds of the ruling class, there existed in the middle ages, in Germany, a secret tribunal, called the '*Vehmgericht*'. If a red cross was seen marked on a house, people knew that its owner was doomed by the '*Vehm*'. All the houses of Europe are now marked with the mysterious red cross. History is the judge – its executioner, the proletarian.

When read in their entirety, we have noted how in all the referenced sources assumed to indicate either a unilinear position of either the 'negative' aspects of capitalism – and capitalist expansion - or the 'positive' aspects of capitalism, there is instead always a straddling of the contradictions. And even if not within the same piece, we read an inconsistent compartmentalization on behalf of the multilinear argument of the time periods concerning either Marx or Engels' presumed shift or alteration. As an example, Anderson (2010, pg.259) as we noted above, points us to an alteration of views on behalf of Engels based on a reading of his 1857 entry titled "Algeria" where he praised the anti-colonial resistance leader Abd-el-Kaber. That same year, Engels would write a *Tribune* article – published under the name of Marx- titled "Persia-China" where he would describe China as a "rotting semicivilization" as well as lament the inherent "jealousy, the intrigues, the cupidity and corruption of the Orientals" which despite all efforts on behalf of British, French and Russian European officers, could not be overcome for the sake of organizing an army along the European system of military organization. Additionally in this same article, through its struggle against foreign domination the demise of the "old China" is celebrated as "the opening day of a new era for all Asia".

In the same article, that we note as rife with ethnocentric overtones, Engels (1857) nonetheless mirrors what Anderson (2010) noted as Marx's 1857-59 reports on colonial brutality, aggression, and contextualization of violence committed by the Chinese against the occupying force— references that are misread as a suggestion that colonialism was of little benefit:

Civilization mongers who throw hot shells on a defenceless city and add rape to murder, may call the system cowardly, barbarous, atrocious; but what matters it to the Chinese if it be only successful? Since the British treat them as barbarians, they cannot deny to them the full benefit of their barbarism. If their kidnappings, surprises, midnight massacres are what we call cowardly, the civilization-mongers [British] should not forget that according to their own showing they could not stand against European means of destruction with their ordinary means of warfare.

Other than the inconsistencies that one comes up against when attempting to sketch a one-track picture of valuation or condemnation of capitalism/colonialism on behalf of Marx and Engels, what is also left to contend with is the maintenance of either or position in works succeeding the *Tribune* articles of the late 1850's. For example, the *Manifesto* itself, as a piece argued to naively praise capitalism, the expansion of capitalism, and subsequently colonialism, was never – on these specific positions at least -revised post 1950's, even though Marx and Engels (1978, pg.470) would note the need for a revision in their jointly signed 1872 preface to the German edition of the *Manifesto*. There, in the wake of the “practical experience” of the Paris Commune they noted “no special stress” to be laid on “the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of Section ii”. The experience had made it clear to Marx and Engels that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery and wield it for its own purposes”. Nonetheless, as part of the revision noted in the preface, they state: “However much the state of things may have altered during the last twenty-five years, the general principles laid down in this Manifesto are, on the whole, as correct today as ever” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.470). Not revised, from that same section of the *Manifesto* is the following note:

National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world-market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto. The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster. United action, of the leading civilized countries at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.488).

Later works, let alone Marx's magnum opus *Capital*<sup>277</sup>, also suggest a continued adherence to the progressive aspects of capitalism for the fate of humanity. For example, despite the multilinear arguments commitment to a (later)Marx that was disillusioned with the progressive role of capitalism, as late as 1874-75 – 8 years before his death -in a conspectus of Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy*, Marx would ridicule Bakunin's lack of attention to very specific material conditions that are requisite for social revolution:

Schoolboy drive! A radical social revolution is connected with certain historical conditions of economic development; the latter are its presupposition. Therefore it is possible only where the industrial proletariat, together with capitalist production, occupies at least a substantial place in the mass of the people... But here appears the innermost thought of Herr Bakunin. He understands absolutely nothing about social revolution; all he knows are its political phrases. For him its economic requisites do not exist. Since all hitherto existing economic formations, developed or undeveloped, have included the enslavement of the working person (whether in the form of the wage worker, the peasant, etc.) he thinks that a 'radical revolution' is possible under all these formations.

Thus despite Marx's contradictory articulation of capitalism, there is no evidence suggesting a shift or moment in his writing when he wholly committed himself to either lauding its progressive nature – read in isolation from the contradictions with it – or vice versa. Instead, utilizing the dialectic of negativity, the progressive aspects of capitalism were exemplified not with reference to any isolated feature, but was contained within the very form of the contradictions that it gave life to. In the July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1853 article “The Future Results of British Rule in India” Marx

---

<sup>277</sup> Remaining on the topic of the *Manifesto*, it is noteworthy that included as a footnote in *Capital* (1990, pg.930) is a lengthy excerpt from the *Manifesto* noting the revolutionary role of modern industry in replacing the isolation of workers and thus advancing its own demise through creating its own gravediggers.

would parallel the stanza from Goethe, writing: “Has it [the bourgeoisie] ever effected a progress without dragging individuals and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?”<sup>278</sup>

Though before we conclude this discussion of primary source evidence utilized by the multilinear argument, it is important to assess those sources referenced by Anderson et al. that go beyond suggesting a disillusionment with capitalism, and instead reflect an advocacy – and validation on behalf of Marx and Engels- of anti-colonial movements as such. Would such a position not contradict the supposition that non-Western societies were in a sense being improved upon through the imposition of a progressive and so higher mode of civilization? If Marx and Engels believed in the potentialities created by the capitalist mode of production – globally – how could they justify supporting resistance to its expansion? Let alone resistance from societies and people considered semicivilized or barbarian?

Above, we already noted some examples referenced by Anderson (2010) where Marx takes on a more “anticolonial tone” during the late 1853 and 1857 years his articles on China and India are argued to be more critical of Britain’s aggressive policies in the colonies, as well as detailing reports of atrocities committed by the British and French, and providing contextualization of the violence exhibited by the rebels against the colonial powers. However, one could speculate that these articles were premised more on a response to the jingoist reporting in the British and

---

<sup>278</sup> There are other areas that are indicative of Marx and Engels’ position of colonialism that exemplify a more latent approval of colonial expansion (or rather, an absence of an anti-colonialism), which are nonetheless just as powerful/insightful as either of their statements on India or China. For example, their support of the National Reform Association in the U.S. which they regarded as progressive because freely opening land to settlers from the public domain meant an expanding market, which consequently also meant a more rapid industrial development in the U.S. (rapid industrial development being a key ingredient for enabling proletarian revolution) (Morais, 1948, pg.7). Though noting it as progressive, Marx stills recognized the limitations of what they regarded as a form of petty bourgeois agrarian reformism (Morais, 1948, pg.8). Of course, never did it occur to them to critique the reform association by consequence of its uncritical position on what settlers in North America are more willingly able to identify and name in our day as colonial expansion.

American press<sup>279</sup>, as well as argue that cataloguing of colonial violence does not necessarily equal an advocacy of anti-colonialism. Nonetheless we are presented with additional examples from Anderson (2010, pg.37), particularly Marx's writings on the Sepoy uprising<sup>280</sup> in India that are meant to reflect the heights of Marx's anti-colonial turn. For Anderson (2010, pg.38) Marx's reporting of the Sepoy uprising for the *Tribune* constitutes not only "one of the most sustained treatments of a non-European society by Marx anywhere in his writings", but also reflect "a major theoretical shift, away from the qualified support for British colonialism...". Anderson (2010, pg.39) points to Marx's article "The Indian Revolt" where he describes the atrocities committed by the rebels as "only a reflex, in concentrated form, of England's own conduct in India"; and in the September 1857 article "Investigation of Tortures in India" Anderson (2010, pg.40) cites Marx asking "whether a people are not justified in attempting to expel the foreign conquerors who have so abused their subjects"<sup>281</sup>.

More significantly however, in a letter from Marx to Engels, written on January 16<sup>th</sup> 1858, "Marx declares tellingly with respect to the Sepoy Uprising: 'India is now our best ally' (MECW 40, 249)" (Anderson, 2010, pg.41). The evocation that 'India is now our best ally' suggested, according to Anderson, that for Marx the struggles in India were not totally separate from those of

---

<sup>279</sup> See for example Marx's (September 1857) "The Indian Revolt" which is singled out for its coverage of British atrocities – and contextualization of violence on behalf of the Indian rebels – but which also concludes with a criticism of the panic induced and biased coverage carried out by *The London Times*. Also, in Engels' (1857) article "Persia-China" – which we have engaged with above – following his contextualization of violence committed by Chinese rebels in the face of British brutality, he writes: "In short, instead of moralizing on the horrible atrocities of the Chinese, as the chivalrous English press does, we had better recognize that this is a war *pro aris et focis*, a popular war for the maintenance of Chinese nationality, with all its overbearing prejudice, stupidity, learned ignorance and pedantic barbarism if you like, but yet a popular war".

<sup>280</sup> An 1857 revolt carried out by Indian colonial soldiers against the British colonizers. Ultimately unsuccessful, the rebellion lasted only 2 years

<sup>281</sup> The full excerpt reads: "We have here given but a brief and mildly-colored chapter from the real history of British rule in India. In view of such facts, dispassionate and thoughtful men may perhaps be led to ask whether a people are not justified in attempting to expel the foreign conquerors who have so abused their subjects. And if the English could do these things in cold blood, is it surprising that the insurgent Hindoos should be guilty, in the fury of revolt and conflict, of the crimes and cruelties alleged against them?" (Marx, September 1857).

the European workers or the “revolutionary movement in the West”. Not only would this suggest a validation of the significance of anti-colonial movements, but also expand the purview of revolutionary activity – on behalf of Marx – outside the confines of Western Europe and the European working class.

However, Kolja Lindner (2010) - in his similar attempt to construct a multilinear Marx – questions the notion that the adoption of an anti-colonial position or a challenge to Eurocentrism can be drawn from Marx’s 1857-58 writings on the Sepoy uprising<sup>282</sup>. For Lindner (2010) the writings on the Indian revolt – in the whole – are geared more toward conveying information – Britain’s military logistics, battle plans, etc. – rather than conveying any theorization or “pointed political analysis”. He nonetheless cites Reinhard Kobler who he notes “has rightly pointed out that, in Marx’s estimation, the rebellion was made possible in the first place by Britain’s creation of an Indigenous army. Thus resistance to colonization is supposed to have become possible only as a result of innovations set in motion by the colonization process, not as a prolongation of class struggles in the colonized countries themselves or thanks to specific structures forged by traditional social conditions...” (Lindner, 2010)<sup>283</sup>.

We find evidence of this argument noted by both Lindner (2010) and Kobler in Marx’s July 15<sup>th</sup> 1857 article “The Revolt in the Indian Army” where he describes both the consolidation of the “Indian empire” through the expanse of British colonialism, as well as the novel creation of a “general center of resistance” of which the Indian people never before possessed:

With the conquest of Scinde and the Punjaub, the Anglo-Indian empire had not only reached its natural limits, but it had trampled out the last vestiges of independent Indian States. All warlike native tribes were subdued, all serious internal conflicts were at an end,

---

<sup>282</sup> On this point, Lindner (2010) is engaging with Pranav Jani (2002) who makes a similar argument to Anderson (2010), with respect to the significance of the Sepoy articles.

<sup>283</sup> For Lindner, Marx’s non-Eurocentrism is more greatly evidenced in his writings on Russia and the charting of a non-Eurocentric orientation for a classless society. The merits of this particular argument however, will be analyzed further in Chapter 9 of this dissertation.



and the late incorporation of Oude proved satisfactorily that the remnants of the so-called independent Indian principalities exist on sufferance only. Hence a great change in the position of the East Indian Company. It no longer attacked one part of India by the help of another part, but found itself placed at the head, and the whole of India at its feet. No longer conquering, it had become the conqueror. The armies at its disposition no longer had to extend its dominion, but only to maintain it. From soldiers they were converted into policemen, 200,000,000 natives being curbed by a native army of 200,000 men, officered by Englishmen, and that native army, in its turn, being kept in check by an English army numbering 40,000 only. On first view, it is evident that the allegiance of the Indian people rests on the fidelity of the native army, in creating which the British rule simultaneously organized the first general center of resistance which the Indian people was ever possessed of (Marx, 1857).

In the same article, Marx (1857) also notes how in resistance to a common master, it is the first time that “Mussulmans and Hindoos” renounced their “mutual antipathies”. Thus, it may be suggested, as Anderson (2010, pg.40) himself notes, that for Marx British colonialism was forging something akin to the European working class, so far as one can read within Marx’s descriptions a sort of negation-through-colonialism of both the independent states and principalities that had historically divided the Indian sub-continent (and people), as well as the generalization of a section of the population into the ranks of the “sepoys” – comprising both Muslims and Hindus against a common enemy. Nevertheless, this would confirm that for Marx, these were developments made possible, for the first time, through the workings of British colonialism rather than by the Natives themselves through ‘traditional social conditions’.

However, Anderson’s passing acknowledgement to the British furnishing something in India that was parallel to the European working class risks overstatement since for Marx the revolting sepoys – who he believed were “very likely to succumb without any prolonged resistance” (Marx, July 1857) – more closely paralleled the French nobility that revolted against the Monarchy rather than an immiserated majority of the population who had nothing to lose but their chains: “The first blow dealt to the French monarchy proceeded from the nobility, not from the peasants. The Indian revolt does not commence with the Ryots, tortured, dishonored and

stripped naked by the British, but with the Sepoys, clad, fed, petted, fatted and pampered by them” (Marx, September 1857).

And yet, what about the more direct line from Marx’s letter to Engels’ which describes India as “our best ally”? Is this not a more direct indication on behalf of Marx of theorizing “the self-activity and struggle of colonized Indians” (Anderson, 2010, pg.37)<sup>284</sup> as well as a shifting of the revolutionary locus outside of Europe and contra to capitalist expansion? Upon further research, we find that there was more than one instance when Marx and Engels threw their support behind an anti-colonial movement. For example, in an August 9<sup>th</sup> 1882 letter to Eduard Bernstein, Engels advocates cautious support for the nationalist movement in Egypt – what came to be known as the “Urabi revolt” – that recently deposed the Anglo-French puppet government of Khedive Tewfik. On this, Engels wrote: “As I see it we can perfectly well enter the arena on behalf of the oppressed felaheen without sharing their current illusions (for a peasant population has to be fleeced for centuries before it learns from experience), and against the brutality of the English without, for all that, espousing the cause of those who are currently their military opponents”<sup>285</sup>.

This conditional support however, is more clearly understood not out of a stance of solidarity or the harboring of anti-colonial sympathies, but as a tactical or practical position. For Marx and Engels the task of setting the Western Proletariat free remained their top priority with all else being subordinate to that aim, including anti-colonial revolutionary movements. Thus any movement was assessed or recognized not on its own merits – out of a moralistic or sympathetic stance – but based on its historical setting and on the way it impacted movements in the West.

---

<sup>284</sup> Anderson is here quoting Pranav Jani (2002)

<sup>285</sup> The authors of the “introduction” to the MECW volume 1 (?), note how Marx too had commended meetings organized by the French followers of Jules Guesde in defence of the popular movement in Egypt, while along with Engels, warning against indiscriminate acceptance of these national movements and leaders.

To better understand this position, it is worth turning to a June 14<sup>th</sup> 1853 *Tribune* article by Marx titled “Revolution in China and Europe” where despite being written only 4 days after the disparaged initial India article, here we see a supposedly ‘Eurocentric’ early 1853 Marx acknowledging the significant implications of a revolution in China for revolution in Europe. Before we get into the article it is noteworthy to point out that around July-December 1850, Marx began a systematic study of economic conditions, prices, and crises over the previous 10 years, only to concluded that the current economic crisis had ended and there was no immediate prospect for revolution within the current conditions of prosperity and rapid expansion (Kamenka, 1983). This role of crisis in fostering revolutionary activity – particularly with regard to the movements in Europe<sup>286</sup> - was to play an important theme in framing Marx’s position in this 1853 article on revolutions in China and Europe. In this article, he would reflect that: “Since the commencement of the eighteenth century there has been no serious revolution in Europe which had not been preceded by a commercial and financial crisis”<sup>287</sup>.

For Marx, it was this very element of economic crisis that suggested the potential impacts of a revolution in China for the movements in Europe, i.e. in potentially helping foster conditions that lent to precipitating revolutionary activity. Due to British colonial activity, the isolation of the “Celestial Empire” was broken and the expansion of trade and the intermingling of markets meant

---

<sup>286</sup> See for example the following note by Marx from a July 1<sup>st</sup> 1853 *Tribune* article titled “Russian Policy Against Turkey – Chartism”: “Without the great alternative phases of dullness, prosperity, over-excitement, crisis and distress, which modern industry traverses in periodically recurring cycles, with the up and down of wages resulting from them, as with the constant warfare between masters and men closely corresponding with those variations in wages and profits, the working-classes of Great Britain, and of all Europe, would be a heart-broken, a weak-minded, a worn-out, unresisting mass, whose self-emancipation would prove as impossible as that of the slaves of Ancient Greece and Rome”.

<sup>287</sup> Another note worthy excerpt from the article reads: “Neither wars nor revolutions are likely to put Europe by the ears, unless in consequence of a general commercial and industrial crisis...” (Marx, June 14 1853).

that a Chinese revolution would in turn have an impact on England and through England, on Europe:

Under these circumstances, as the greater part of the regular commercial circle has already been run through by British trade, it may safely be augured that the Chinese revolution will throw the spark into the overloaded mine of the present industrial system and cause the explosion of the long-prepared general crisis, which, spreading abroad, will be closely followed by political revolutions on the Continent. It would be a curious spectacle, that of China sending disorder into the Western World while the Western Powers, by English, French and American war-steamers, are conveying “order” to Shanghai, Nanking and the mouths of the Great Canal (Marx, June 14 1853).

A more concrete explanation of the potential crisis that a Chinese revolution – and of the consequent contraction of the Chinese market - would bring is provided in the same article when Marx notes the potential impact of rising tea prices on Western Europe:

It must not be forgotten that the rise in the price of so indispensable an article as tea, and the contraction of so important a market as China, will coincide with a deficient harvest in Western Europe, and, therefore, with rising prices of meat, corn, and all other agricultural produce. Hence contracted markets for manufacturers, because every rise in the prices of the first necessities of life is counterbalanced, at home and abroad, by a corresponding reduction in the demand for manufactures.

In addition, Marx notes that England and English industry could expect – in the conditions of a Chinese revolution – “a contraction of an important market for her cotton and woolen goods”. In such conditions, it would not be unsurprising to note such interest on behalf of Marx and Engels of revolutionary activity in China, if at least it meant the lighting, and throwing of a spark into the overloaded mine of the present industrial system; and by consequence, allowing for conditions adequate for revolutionary activity in “the civilized world”:

It may seem a very strange, and a very paradoxical assertion that the next uprising of the people of Europe, and their next movement for republican freedom and economy of Government, may depend more probably on what is now passing in the Celestial Empire — the very opposite of Europe — than on any other political cause that now exists — more even than on the menaces of Russia and the consequent likelihood of a general European war. But yet it is no paradox, as all may understand by attentively considering the circumstances of the case (Marx, June 14<sup>th</sup> 1853)

If tactical and conditional support for anti-colonial movements was based on the repercussions they had on movements in Western Europe, what then, was the clear “anti-colonial” position – if one at all – that Marx and Engels had on the fate of colonized lands and people? Some clarification on this question comes from Engels’ 1882 letter to Karl Kautsky where he wrote:

In my opinion the colonies proper, i.e., the countries occupied by a European population – Canada, the Cape, Australia – will all become independent; on the other hand, the countries inhabited by a native population, which are simply subjugated – India, Algeria, the Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish possessions – must be taken over for the time being by the proletariat and led as rapidly as possible towards independence. How this process will develop is difficult to say...[...]...Once Europe is reorganized, and North America, that will furnish such colossal power and such an example that the semi-civilized countries will follow in their wake of their own accord. Economic needs alone will be responsible for this.

This relation of tutelage between the Western nations and the colonies is not an aberration found only in this letter but can also be read within the pages of the *Manifesto* itself, where Marx & Engels (1978, pg. 477) wrote:

The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.

This relation of tutelage is expressed by Engels, as we see from the Kautsky letter from above, not solely with regard to the relation of dependence created under conditions of capitalism, but following the proletarian revolution itself. On the fate of the colonies following proletarian revolution in Europe, he believed that the colonial countries would “have to be temporarily taken over by the proletariat and guided as rapidly as possible towards independence” (Engels, ?). Thus, if at that historical and political juncture, India was taken to be their “best ally”, one can only surmise – since it is not explicitly explained by Marx nor Engels in that specific account – that they had in mind an instrumental allyship; one that best suited the revolutionary movement of the

workers in Europe. This being opposed to the assumption that their comment on “best ally” indicated either the expression of a stance against colonialism per se, or as some kind of mutual recognition in terms of drawing parallels between anti-colonial resistance movements and the movement of workers in Europe. The anti-colonial resistance movements in themselves would be believed to be occurring in a context absent of the material conditions, the degree of industry, and the corresponding potential universal consciousness – via the socialization of labour and the creation of “general men” - to carry out a truly revolutionary overturning of the capitalist system.

#### ***7.4: Primitive Communal Forms as Primitive Communal Forms***

Before concluding this chapter of the dissertation, it is important to address an additional point made by the multilinear argument, one which rests on the opinion that Marx was making a sympathetic turn toward pre-capitalist, non-Western societies in his later works, evidenced through his departure from describing them as despotic and instead – sympathetically- highlighting their communal aspects (Anderson, 2010; Lowy, 2000) . For Anderson (2010, pg.154) these sorts of descriptive turns are found in Marx’s critiques of political economy, thus adding more weight to the centrality of a shifting stance on Non-Western societies in his thinking as a whole.

For example<sup>288</sup>, Anderson (2010, pg.155) notes how in the *Grundrisse* – written between 1857-58 – Marx had shifted from his description of the Indian village as a source of “Oriental despotism” and instead described these “Asian forms”, “neutrally, or even a bit sympathetically”; where “individuals related to each other as ‘members of a community’ and ‘as proprietors’ of land. Moreover, the purpose of their labour was ‘not the creation of value’ (*Grundrisse*, 471)”. In these examples, which Marx extended to examples outside of Asia such as in Mexico and Peru, there is, according to Anderson (2010, pg.157), a more “even handed position” that points more to the

---

<sup>288</sup> The additional argument raised by Anderson (2010, pg.155) in this section and with relevance to multilinear paths of development will be taken up in Chapter 9.

democratic rather than despotic form of these particular communal systems. Suggestively, Anderson (2010, pg.160) ends this revelation with noting how on the last page of the *Grundrisse*, Marx returns to the subject of communal property – found at the earliest stages of all societies but preserved in India – and describes it as “naturally arisen [*naturwüchsigen*] communism”.

A cursory reader may be lead to flattery due to the word association of communism, but it is precisely on this particular note that we are able to expose the continued disparagement of non-Western societies by Marx, relative to the position of Europe, whether they be described as despotic or communal. The very characterization of the Asian form of communal property as *naturwüchsigen* [naturally arisen; primitive] communism provides a clear indication of the distinction Marx was drawing between it and the fully developed communism of the future socialist society. In Chapter 6, sub-section “scientific socialism”, as part of our clarification of Marx and Engels’ exaltation of capitalism we noted the limiting characteristics they associated with what can be described as “primitive communism”; i.e. the stage of humanity before the rise of class divisions – something akin to the Hegelian “original unity” that precedes the fall into self-estrangement. Marx uses the term “original unity” in the *Grundrisse* itself, to denote an initiate condition reflected through both relations between individuals and their relation to nature. And despite Engels sympathetic descriptions in his *Origin* of the “gentile constitution” of the savages where “everything runs smoothly without soldiers, gendarmes or police; without nobles, kinds, governors, prefects or judges” and where in very democratic form “all quarrels and disputes are settled by the whole body of those concerned” – he nonetheless maintained that they reflect a limited sphere of human activity. One, as Marx described to Vera Zasulich in his first and third draft letters, resting on “a strong yet narrow tie”, usually kin or blood relations, which were easily and eventually disrupted as geographic and climactic changes, migration, and contact with others

all contributed to that historic process of *Vereinzelung* [individuation] that resulted in and was expressed through new conditions of labour and new class informed hierarchies.

For Marx and Engels, the attribution of a communal essence to what they described as the “Asian form” in fact reflected a situating of a people further into the recesses of man’s pre-history; at a stage bearing only a cursory resemblance to what they envisioned as the potential communism of their time. In his “On Social Relations in Russia”, written in 1874 as an open letter the Russian populist Pyotr Tkachev, Engels (1875) anticipated the temptation to parallel pre-capitalist communal forms with the socialist society of the future, writing:

All forms of gentile community which arose before commodity production and individual exchange have one thing in common with the future socialist society: that certain things, means of production, are subject to common ownership and the common use of certain groups. This one shared feature does not, however, enable the lower form of society to engender out of itself the future socialist society, this final and most intrinsic product of capitalism. Any given economic formation has its own problems to solve, problems arising out of itself; to seek to solve those of another, utterly alien formation would be absolutely absurd. And this applies to the Russian commune no less than to the South slav *zadruga*, the Indian gentile economy or any other savage or barbaric form of society characterized by the common ownership of the means of production.

Marx too, briefly, in his last great political pamphlet, “The Civil war in France” shared a similar reflection when he wrote of the mistake made when comparing the new communes (the Paris commune) with the old medieval communes: “It is generally the fate of completely new historical creations to be mistaken for the counterpart of older and even defunct forms of social life, to which they may bear a certain likeness”. This excerpt from Marx risks being a bit vague for our purposes here, but what is meaningful and connects it with the lengthy Engels’ excerpt is that there is a note of caution and a note of distinction despite the bearing of a certain likeness or similarity of certain forms. Thus, despite an assumed “sympathetic” description of the communal aspects of pre-capitalist societies by Marx and Engels, or even of their democratic nature, there



should be no presumption of them drawing a similarity or parallel with the proposed communism of the future, whether in substance or of possibility.

The deeper distinction between the two of course, lies in the fact that the communism of the future reflects more than simply communal ownership. If one left the definition of communism at simply that, then it would make sense that Marx and Engels would lament an antiquated form of ownership that was now either destroyed or in the process of being destroyed by capitalist society. In the *Manuscripts of 1844* however, Marx (1978, pg.82-85) makes clear that when they say communism, they have in mind not the generalization of labour and property, nor even the annulment of the state, but “the *positive* transcendence of *private property*, or *human self-estrangement*, and therefore as *the real appropriation of the human essence* by and for man; communism... as the complete return of man to himself and as a *social* (i.e., human) being – a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development”. This communism, as a return become conscious, was a feat only made possible through the material developments initiated under the capitalist mode of production.

These were not simply the naïve speculations of an earlier – Hegelian – Marx, but were reflected in Marx’s critiques of political economy, and within the *Grundrisse* itself to which Anderson (2010) pointed us to as an exemplary text where Marx can be read sympathizing with pre-capitalist societies. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx never abandons his position on the signification and revolutionary role of capitalism in human prehistory, as exemplified in this excerpt on “the great civilizing influence of capital”:

Its production of a stage of society in comparison to which all earlier ones appear as mere local developments of humanity and as nature idolatry. For the first time, nature becomes purely an object for humankind, purely a matter of utility; ceases to be recognized as a power for itself; and the theoretical discovery of its autonomous laws appears merely as a ruse so as to subjugate it under human needs, whether as an object of consumption or as a means of production. In accord with this tendency, capital drives beyond national barriers

and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as all traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life. It is destructive towards all of this, and constantly revolutionizes it, tearing down all the barriers which hem in the development of the forces of production, the expansion of needs, the all-sided development of production, and the exploitations and exchange of natural and mental forces.

And in *Capital Volume I*, a text written and published 10 years after the *Grundrisse* period, Marx (1990, pg. 172-173) summed up much of what we have tried to clarify above:

Those ancient social organisms of production are much more simple and transparent than those of bourgeois society. But they are founded either on the immaturity of man as an individual, when he has not yet torn himself loose from the umbilical cord of his natural species-connection with other men, or on direct relations of dominance and servitude. They are conditioned by a low stage of development of the productive powers of labour and of creating and reproducing their material life, hence also limited relations between man and nature. These real limitations are reflected in the ancient worship of nature, and in other elements of tribal religions. The religious reflections of the real world can, in any case, vanish only when the practical relations of everyday life between man and man, and man and nature, generally present themselves in a transparent and rational form. The veil is not removed from the countenance of the social life-process, i.e. the process of material production, until it becomes production by freely associated men, and stands under the conscious and planned control. This, however, requires that society possess a material foundation, or a series of material conditions of existence, which in their turn are the natural and spontaneous product of a long and tormented historical development.

## **Chapter 8: Marx and Engels' Instrumentalist Politics: On War, Abolition and National Emancipation**

As already noted in the introduction to Section 3 of this dissertation, Chapter 8 will focus on that aspect of the multilinear argument that draws on primary evidence to suggest that later in life Marx was adopting a more nuanced or “dialectic” approach that indicated a shift away from a class reductive politics that only focused on the activity of the European working class; more precisely, on the revolutionary and world-historical activity- or of its potentials - of the European working class. Anderson (2010) for example, cites Marx’s stated support for national liberation movements – particularly concerning agrarian Poland-, his position on abolition and the U.S. Civil war, and his identification of the revolutionary role of Ireland, all as evidence of his shifting focus away from the centers of industrial capitalism and instead finding revolutionary potential in movements otherwise considered non-workingclass movements. Such a position challenges the narrative that Marx privileged the experience of (Western)European workers to the exclusion of everyone else who did not fit within the paradigm of class conflict between bourgeoisie vs. proletariat. Instead, Polish independence is outright supported and described as “a core principle for the labour and socialist movements”; and in 1869 agrarian Ireland -not industrial England - is described as the “lever” of the revolution; and the “movement among the slaves” in America is described by Marx in 1860 as “the most momentous thing happening in the world today”.

This chapter will engage with this multilinear reading of Marx – and of the evidence provided – and will proceed as follows: 1.) The first section will begin with a clarification of what both Robinson (2000) and Shlomo Avineri (1991) identify in Marx and Engels as an *instrumentalist* approach to questions of self-determination and nationalism; an approach that avoided moral approaches or ethical considerations and was instead premised on strategic or practical considerations *viz* the development of capitalism and the revolutionary activity of the

proletariat. Some indication of what this instrumental approach looked like has been shared in the previous chapter with regard to Marx and Engels' strategic position on anti-colonial movements; a position which best suited the revolutionary movement in Europe. In this chapter however their instrumentalist politics will be elaborated upon further, and additional clarification will be supplied through Marx and Engels' writing and correspondence on the topic of "War", which exemplifies the strategic or instrumental as opposed to moral and ethical considerations that went into defining their political decisions; 2.) Following the clarification offered in sub-section 1, this second sub-section of the Chapter 8 will clarify evidence provided by Anderson (2010) concerning Marx's position on abolition and the U.S. Civil War, reading it as strategic to the emancipation of the workers of Europe as opposed to a shifting of attention or ascribing of revolutionary agency toward slaves in the U.S.; 3.) Continuing in the exercise of clarification, this sub-section will engage with that evidence presented which suggests a shift in Marx due to his positions on national emancipation and revolutionary activity, particularly with respect to Poland and Ireland. Again, it will be demonstrated how in these considerations Marx and Engels were behaving strategically or instrumentally with reference back to the movement of workers in the industrial centres, as opposed to indications of them revising their previously held positions.

### ***8.1: Instrumentalism and the Politics of War***

*"We Reject any morality based on extra-human and extra-class concepts. We say that this is deception, dupery, stultification of the workers and peasants in the interests of the landowners and capitalists. We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the proletariat's class struggle. Our morality stems from the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat"*

-Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin), October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1920.

Though one can identify a distinct form of Marxism as developed and articulated by Lenin, there is both a parallel and poetry captured in the above excerpt from his 1920 speech which speaks to the instrumental – as opposed to the principled or ethical – nature of the political positions held

by Marx and Engels<sup>289</sup>. This characterization of their political positions as instrumentalist<sup>290</sup> gains justification on 2 primary accounts: 1.) Marx and Engels criticized politics and analyses that was grounded in morality. For example, in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme*, written in 1875, Marx describes it as “a crime” to impose on the Party<sup>291</sup> dogmas, “verbal rubbish”, and “ideological nonsense about right and other trash so common among the democrats and French socialists”. Thus principles such as “equal right” or something like a universal right to self-determination were examples of abstract moral positions – *Moralität* – which were both (i) ineffective in allowing for concrete change, and (ii) given the relational nature of human consciousness, were deceptive in their presumption of universality. They were in effect, “ideological nonsense”.

The scope of this critique is captured in section 2 of this dissertation, and particularly in chapter 6 “Marx’s Critique of Morality” where we noted the substitution made by Marx and Engels of idealistic or utopian (ethically and morally informed) socialisms for a scientific socialism that instead rested on the mantle of Science.

---

<sup>289</sup> In the context of his speech at the “The Third All-Russia Congress of The Russian Young Communist League”, Lenin is addressing the charge made against the communists that they have no morality; that they reject all morality. He replies by saying yes we reject all morality based on “extra-human and extra-class concepts”, though we have a morality nonetheless; one subordinated to the interests of the proletariat’s class struggle. Here Lenin is both critiquing the notion that there exist universally abstract principles and at the same time suggesting what we have thus far described as the instrumentalism where any moral question, whether war, or a people’s movement for self-determination, are debated not an *inherent* right, but as something to be evaluated with regard to that which is most imperative, i.e. the class struggle of the proletariat: “Our communist morality is also subordinated to that task. We say: morality is what serves to destroy the old exploiting society and to unite all the working people around the proletariat, which is building up a new, communist society”.

<sup>290</sup> “Instrumentalist”, as characteristic of “Instrumentalism” which is defined in *Oxford Languages* as “a pragmatic approach which regards an activity (such as science, law, or education) chiefly as an instrument or tool for some practical purpose, rather than in more absolute or ideal term”.

<sup>291</sup> The *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* [Social Democratic Worker’s Party of Germany] (SDAP). The document itself, Critique of the Gotha Programme is a “critique of the draft programme of the United Worker’s Party of Germany

2.) The second account for justifying the characterization of their political positions as instrumental comes from a careful reading of primary source material – articles, letters, correspondences - on ongoing political events which evidently suggests to us so. For example, the instrumentalism of the politics of Marx and Engels can be found in no less an ethical issue than in the phenomenon of war. I must digress for a moment here with a reflection on what exactly counts as a moral or ethical issue, if not everything. War – as a state of conflict between two or more opposing parties, and usually implicating the taking of life – can more conventionally be thought of as a clear moral issue. Is it ever justified to kill? Is war always a bad thing? And, should we act only through non-violence as opposed to violence? But what about the speed of my typing, or the decision to stand facing the sun? What about the question of whether to eat with my left or my right hand? The last example may be considered a moral question of significance in some societies but thought of as obsolete in others. Nonetheless, we will utilize an articulation of war as a moral question here, if only to highlight the instrumental or amoral way in which it is engaged with by both Marx and Engels.

The signification of war as an ethical or moral issue in order to draw opposition to the way Marx and Engels approached the subject is not without precedent and can be found in Marx's own critical position toward the pacifist movement and the League of Peace and Freedom<sup>292</sup> in particular. Following invitation made by the *League* to the International Working Men's Association to attend their 1867 Inaugural Congress in Geneva, Marx would voice a number of proposals to help frame the possible joint action between workers and what he considered to be the members of a bourgeois-pacifist movement. No record of the speech is given except for a

---

<sup>292</sup> The *Ligue Internationale de la paix* was a pacifist organization created in 1867 and involved the active participation of democrats such as Victor Hugo, and Giuseppe Garibaldi. It was created in response to the looming threat of war in Europe between the Second French Empire (under the reign of Napoleon III) and the Kingdom of Prussia (Carr, the league of peace and freedom: an episode in the quest for collective security, 1935)

record of minutes<sup>293</sup> made at the August 13 1867 general council meeting where Marx spoke (MECW, Vol. 20, pg.426). In the notes we are told of how Marx distinguished his position from those – i.e. the leaders of the British trade unions - who advocated unconditional support for the league’s activities, and how in opposition to the bourgeois-pacifist illusions he advocated for a proletarian approach to the problems of war and peace (MECW Vol 20. Pg.512). A proletarian approach implied moving beyond an abstract approach to the topic of war, both in understanding and opposition. In the record of the speech, we read that Marx noted how those who “declined putting their shoulders to the wheel to bring about a transformation in the relations of labour and capital ignored the very conditions of universal peace”. In other words, there was a failure to recognize the role of the existing capitalist system - of the relations of labour and capital – in both contributing to war, and with particular relevance to post 1848 Europe, the formation of large standing armies. Additionally, in the notes we are told of Marx’s criticism of the “peace-at-any-price-party” of the IWA, which though would fair well at such a Congress, “would fain leave Russia alone in the possession of the means to make war upon the rest of Europe, while the very existence of such as power as Russia was enough for all the other countries to keep their arms intact”.

The last sentence concerning Russia is significant because it exemplifies a position in the discussion of war and peace that moves from the realm of principle – as in a principled position against war as held by the pacifist “peace-at-any-price” position – to one that is more tactical and cognizant of a looming military threat that would need to be confronted: Russia. This position is made clearer from a reading of Marx’s address to the German Workers’ Educational Association

---

<sup>293</sup> These minutes were published in *The Bee-Hive* Newspaper on August 17 1867. In footnote 329 of the MECW Vol 20. We are told that Marx would write a letter to Engels in September 1867 where he noted the extremely concise record of his speeches published in *The Bee-Hive Newspaper*, though which he noted only gave an approximate idea of his speech with lasted a half hour (MECW, Vol 20., pg. 512).

in London earlier in that same year (1867) where he advocated for war against Russia as a way of forcing the workers' party in Germany into a revolutionary stance<sup>294</sup> (Kamenka, 1983, pg.lxxxviii).

Two years later, in an 1869 address to the National Labour Union of the United States (LUU), which was written by Marx and adopted by the General Council of the International, Marx called on the NLUU to oppose the then existing threat of war between the United States and England: "Your turn has now come to stop a war, the clearest result of which would be, for an indefinite period, to hurl back the ascendant movement of the working classes on both sides of the Atlantic" (Marx, 18969, pg.319). In the address Marx further cautioned at the ways in which "our common oppressors" can turn "our fast-growing international co-operation into an internecine war" and of the consequence of such a war for crushing the young independent working-class movement in the U.S., divorcing it "from its bold and just aspirations by the soulless sword of a standing army" (Marx, council of the first international 1868-70: minutes, 1869, pg. 319-320).

One year later, in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, though Marx would make a July 23 address condemning the "fratricidal feud" between the two countries and calling on the alliance of the working classes to "kill the war", in a September 1<sup>st</sup> 1870 letter to the Brunswick Committee of the Social-Democratic Workers' Party of Germany, he and Engels would throw their support behind Prussia, noting the utility of a Prussian victory in the war toward enabling Germany's unification and thus the securing of conditions for peaceful development in the Western Europe; free from "Muscovite dictatorship". Consequently, this would also provide an external impulse that would presumably encourage the break out of a social revolution in Russia. In his

---

<sup>294</sup> In the report of the speech (MECW, Vol. 20, pg.115) we are told of how Marx viewed the German proletariat as being in the best position to effect a "radical cure" due to the fact that they "had to a greater extent freed themselves of all religious nonsense" and because "their geographical position would compel them to declare war on Eastern barbarism, as it was from there, from Asia, that all reaction hostile to the West issued".



piece “Marxism and Nationalism” Shlomo Avineri (1991), reflects on this position taken up by Marx and Engels:

....as one could imagine, such a view, overlooking the immediate causes of war, did not always sit well with others within the radical movement, with its emphasis on ethical considerations and opposition to the kind of regime epitomized by Bismark. Yet Marx never wavered from this instrumentalist approach, eschewing merely *moral* approaches.

Not wavering from their instrumental rather than principled or ethical position on war, in an 1888 letter to Friedrich Adolph Sorge, Engels would seemingly reverse Marx’s 1867 position on war between Germany and Russia, owing to the existing political and economic circumstances of his time. In the letter, and with regard to the possibility of war between the two countries, Engels (1888) would write: “We can only hope that the gathering war clouds will disperse – everything is already going as nicely as we could wish and we can very well dispense with the interruption through a general war...”. And on the event of a war he further adds “A war, on the other hand would throw us back years. Chauvinism would swamp everything” and that a protracted conflict in Europe would give room for the ascendancy of American industry which could lead to retrogression in Europe “to nothing but agriculture for *home consumption*” (Engels, 1888).

One may read the above examples as indications of inconsistency on the question of war, however, when understood in relation to that which was imperative for Marx and Engels – the movement of workers in Europe – we see the shifting positions as tactical or strategic shifts made according to context and with respect to the impact any given event would have on the development of capitalism and on weakening or strengthening the working class. This “worker’s attitude to wars” (MECW, Vol 20. Pg.321) which they so tried to instill in the political positions of the IWA sought to avoid the dogmatic and moralistic positions of the pacifist movement which in its abstraction failed to comprehend the actual requirements necessary for peace, and thus failed to center that goal, i.e. a “transformation in the relations of labour and capital”. For Marx and

Engels this transformation alone held the key to enabling the end of the era of human prehistory that was marked by social antagonism and its related consequences. Thus, it is not so shocking when we remind ourselves of the instrumentalism rooted in the excerpt from Lenin with which we started this section: “We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the proletariat’s class struggle. Our morality stems from the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat”.

### ***8.2: Abolition and the Emancipation of Labour***

Like war, abolition carries with it the weight of a moral issue; one rooted within the very concept of “equal right” which in *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* Marx had described as “verbal rubbish”; “ideological nonsense”. Nevertheless, as part of the thesis concerning Marx’s evolving politics, Anderson (2010) directs us to more of the late(r) Marx for insight into his avid support for the “antislavery cause” and what Anderson (2010, pg. 85) also signifies as the development of an “abolitionist perspective”

If the multilinear argument read Marx’s support for anti-colonial movements and critical remarks on colonial policy as both a critique of the progressive nature of capitalism and a shifting of focus beyond the industrial societies of Western Europe – England in particular-, it extends this broadening of Marx’s purview through a reading of his “Civil war writings” (Anderson, 2010, pg.79), written in the early-mid 1860’s, and in response to the American Civil war that took place between 1861-65. According to Anderson (2010), despite exemplifying a significant turn in Marx’s thinking these writings have received little attention in subsequent theoretical literature.

For Anderson (2010) the civil war writings and Marx’s developed “abolitionist perspective” disqualify the argument that Marx was occupied solely with the capital-class relation and that he limited his focus to only the industrial working class of Europe. And as Robinson

(2019) would put it, thus subsequently excluding slaves, peasants, indentured workers, women, etc. from historical and political agency in the modern world. Instead, in these writings we evidently retrieve a Marx that is sensitive to the dialectic relation between race and class, as well as nationalism and ethnicity; that is conscious of and recognizes the revolutionary agency of Black slaves in America- of people other than the European proletariat; and that is supportive of an internationalism that relates the movements of workers in Europe to those struggles outside the formal definition of working-class struggle.

The latter point, concerning Marx's developed internationalism and the recognition of mutual struggle is immediately evidenced, according to Anderson (2010) , by the very fact that Marx not only took on, but continually advocated, a pro-abolitionist position; or what in the words of Dunayevskaya, he signifies as Marx's "radical abolitionism". A position, as Anderson (2010, pg.84) points out, which was not shared by all socialists, such as the German-American socialist Hermann Kriege – who opposed the abolitionists-, and the German émigré and communist Wilhelm Weitling who remained silent on the issue. Marx's own frustrations with either the ambivalence or lack of support for the union cause is captured in his 1862 letter where he criticizes the dismissive and uninterested position of the German socialist Ferdinand Lasalle with respect to the ongoing events in America (Anderson, 2010, pg.98). Ironically, as part of his tirade against Lasalle in this letter, which is in part an expression of frustration with the general character of the man, Marx (1862) writes:

It is now quite plain to me – as the shape of his head and the way his hair grows also testify – that he is descended from the negroes who accompanied Moses' flight from Egypt (unless his mother or paternal grandmother interbred with a nigger). Now, this blend of Jewishness and Germanness, on the one hand, and basic negroid stock, on the other, must inevitably give rise to a peculiar product. The fellow's importunity is also nigger like<sup>295</sup>.

---

<sup>295</sup> In referencing this letter in his text, Anderson (2010, pg. 266) includes an explanatory footnote to explain the racist language used by Marx therein, evidenced through the use of terms such as "the Jewish nigger Lasalle" and

Additionally, as part of the *Tribune* articles in support of the Northern cause, Marx would write a November 7 1861 article indicating the strong support for the Union among the working people of Europe. Anderson (2010, pg.93) supplies a telling excerpt from the article which partly reads:

The true people of England, of France, of Germany, of Europe, consider the cause of the United States as their own cause, as the cause of liberty, and... despite all paid sophistry, they consider the soil of the United States as the free soil of the landless millions of Europe, as their land of promise, now to be defended sword in hand, from the sordid grasp of the slaveholder...In this contest the highest form of popular self-government till now realized is giving battle to the meanest and most shameless form of man's enslaving recorded in the annals of history....

For Anderson (2010, pg.93) what this article foremost reflected was the linking of the Union cause in the American civil war “to the international struggle for democracy and revolution”. This support among the working classes of Europe was not shared by all members of society, and contradicted the pro-South position held by, for example, “Britain’s dominant classes”. Anderson (2010, pg.86) further cites an 1861 letter from Marx to none other than Lasalle, where he explains the economic factors behind this British upper-class support for the South: “The whole of the official press in England is, of course, in favour of the slaveholders. They are the selfsame fellows who have wearied the world with the anti slave-trade philanthropy. But cotton, cotton”<sup>296</sup>. Marx was aware of the impacts of the Civil war on Britain, and of the economic interests

---

“the impertinence of the fellow is also niggerlike”. For Anderson (2010. Pg.266) Marx’s use of racist remarks “in private” should not “obscure the fact that a major part of what made him so angry with Lasalle was the latter’s indifference to the Civil War and the issues of slavery and racism in America”. The explanatory note provided by Anderson is a bit of a stretch with respect to the idea that Lasalle’s indifference to the civil war cause played a “major part” in Marx’s criticism of Lassalle – of “what made him so angry” - in this particular letter. Instead, throughout the letter we read a slew of *ad hominem* attacks with respect to Lasalle’s imposing manners as a guest; his selfish behaviour and squandering of money; his lack of modesty and flawed sense of self-importance; the “incessant chatter” of his “high, falesitto voice”, the “unaesthetic, histrionic gestures, the dogmatic tone!” etc. Additionally, though Marx points out with disdain Lasalle’s indifferent position on what was going on in America, he does not– in this letter- mention the absence of a position on “racism” or the institution of slavery itself.

<sup>296</sup> Marx (MECW 41,291) cited in Anderson (2010, pg.86).

held by the “British Establishment” which were reflected in their attacks on the North, and as Anderson (2010, pg.91) notes, went so far as calls for intervention on the side of the slaveholding South. In his October 1861 *Tribune* article “The British Cotton Trade” Marx further elaborates on the way in which the Manchester textile industry was suffering due to the Lincoln’s blockade of Southern shipping of cotton, as well as the role of “slave-grown cotton” as one of the “pivots” of English modern industry<sup>297</sup>. According to Anderson (2010, pg.92) this article not only contextualizes the British establishment’s support for the slave-holding South, in opposition to “labour and the intellectual public” but is significant as an account of locating the institution of slavery and modern industry within a single economic system. This theme is anticipated in Marx’s 1846 letter to Pavel V. Annenkov where Marx writes “Direct slavery is as much the pivot upon which our present-day industrialism turns as are machinery and credit, etc. Without slavery there would be no cotton, without cotton there would be no modern industry...”<sup>298</sup>.

Other evidence highlighting Marx’s “radical abolitionism” is noted by Anderson (2010, pg.87) in instances where: (i) Marx criticizes the “pusillanimity of the North in the face of Southern fanaticism over slavery”, i.e. the lack of effective action on behalf of the North<sup>299</sup>; (ii) Marx and Engels praise of the military leadership of the commanding general Ulysses S. Grant – who led the Union armies during the Civil War; (iii) Marx’s praise of the Emancipation Proclamation – which he described as “the most significant document in American history” – and which declared

---

<sup>297</sup> Marx (MECW 19, 18) cited in Anderson (2010, pg.92).

<sup>298</sup> Marx (MECW 38,101) cited in Anderson (2010, pg.83).

<sup>299</sup> With reference to a July 1<sup>st</sup> 1861 letter from Marx to Engels

the release and freedom of all slaves held in rebel states<sup>300</sup>; and (iv) Marx's continued optimism with regard to the North's cause, even in the face of incidences of defeat<sup>301</sup>.

But what are we to make of this support of abolition and of a shift of focus to events encompassing people outside the frame and experience of the European working class? As part of his contextualization of literature on the topic of Marx, the American Civil War, and slavery, Anderson (2010, Pg.82) cites the Marxist historian of Southern Slavery Eugene Genovese who with respect to Marx/Engels' position on the civil war, wrote of "the retreat of Marx, Engels, and too many Marxists into liberalism" and of how Marx's "burning hatred of slavery and commitment to the Union cause interfered with his judgement"<sup>302</sup>. This critique is dismissed by Anderson (2010, pg.82; pg.264) as an account of Genovese's reductionist view of Marxism, his "fundamental Stalinism", and of his later revealed sympathy for Southern planter culture and move from the Far Left to neoconservatism. Yet, if we read the "Civil War writings" as indication of not only an internationalism that moves beyond the world-historic agency of the European proletariat, but as indications of ethically informed abolitionist and anti-racist politics, do we not find ourselves in agreement with Genovese? i.e. of a retreat from a scientific theory of liberation into the domain of an abstract, liberal and otherwise bourgeois struggle for humanity and "equal right"?

Clarification on this question, that avoids both a dismissal of Marx – *a la* Genovese – and a multilinear reading that risks abandoning some of the fundamental tenets of Marxist philosophy, can be unearthed through deeper engagement with some of the evidence that Anderson (2010) himself provides when further framing Marx's abolitionist perspective; a deeper engagement that

---

<sup>300</sup> With reference to Marx's October 18<sup>th</sup> article "On Events in North America"

<sup>301</sup> This latter point is noted by Anderson (2010) as one of the major points of disagreement between Marx and Engels on the Civil war. Whereas Marx maintained a kind of faithful optimism, Engels wavered between notes of compromise, setback, and optimism.

<sup>302</sup> Genovese ([1968] 1971, 327) cited in Anderson (2010, pg.82).

in actuality demonstrates and clarifies Marx and Engels instrumentalist politics on abolition. It is consequently through demonstrating an instrumentalist politics that we are able to highlight the maintenance of a Eurocentrism that continues to privilege both the development of capitalism, and the signified revolutionary agency of the European workers.

For example, Anderson (2010, pg.89-90) references Marx's initial articles on the civil war that were written for *Die Presse*, namely "The North American Civil War" and "The Civil War in the United States". In the Former, which was the first to be published (October 25<sup>th</sup>), Anderson (2010, pg.89) points out Marx's identification of slavery as the root cause of the war, rather than the tariff issues which were referenced by the "British establishment" as a reason for denying support to the Union. Instead, in this article Marx argues that not only did the South initiate the war, but that Southern slavery was exhausting its existing soil and so required the acquisition of new territory as a necessity (Anderson, 2010, pg.89). The goal of the South then, was not simply secession, but the opening up of the entire U.S. to the institution of slavery. This point was also expressed in Marx's *Tribune* article written a few days earlier where he wrote of the South as not only fighting for the liberty of enslaving other people but of instituting it as a "right": as "a thing good in itself, a bulwark of civilization, and a divine institution"<sup>303</sup> (Anderson, 2010, pg.92).

In his second article for *Die Presse*, "The Civil War in the United States", Marx would again emphasize the expansive rather than secessionist - the offensive rather than defensive - goal of the South. According to Anderson (2010, pg.90) in this latter article Marx concentrated on two main points: 1.) that the war of the Southern confederacy was one of conquest and not defensive; and 2.) a state-by-state survey of the social and political conditions of the Southern and border states. While both points are true, there is a third theme in the article that is under appreciated by

---

<sup>303</sup> Marx (MECW 19, 8) cited in Anderson (2010, pg.92).

Anderson (2010) and which helps frame Marx's broader – instrumental – concerns with the potential outcome of the American Civil War. Though Anderson notes and recognizes some of Marx's concerns with how a Southern victory would reshape the American economic system<sup>304</sup>, he tends to emphasize Marx's clarification of the expansive and conquering ambitions of the South as an act of critique or refutation made by Marx of the positions held by the British opponents of the Union (Anderson, 2010. Pg. 88- 91). What does not receive fuller appreciation in this understanding of the goal of the South – and perhaps as a third (and major) point of concentration – is Marx's concern with a battle for mastery being waged between two fundamentally different social systems. In the same article Marx writes:

The present struggle between the South and the North is, therefore, nothing but a struggle between two social systems, the system of slavery and the system of free labour. The struggle has broken out because the two systems can no longer live peacefully side by side on the North American continent. It can only be ended by the victory of one system or the other (Marx, 1861).

Marx understood that a Southern victory or right of secession - whether by peaceful means or by force - would result in the North not only giving up three quarters of the entire territory of the United States, but also giving up control over the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and essentially all remaining states, with the possible exception of New England, which would nevertheless eventually be compelled by economic interests to secede from the North to the

---

<sup>304</sup> In his engagement with this piece he notes the two following excerpts from Marx: "Thus in fact there would take place, not a dissolution of the Union, but a reorganization on the basis of slavery, under the recognized control of the slaveholding oligarchy"<sup>304</sup> (Anderson, 2010, pg.90). And in terms of some broader impacts of a potential pro-slavery South take over of the American economic system, Anderson (2010, pg.90) further cites Marx when he says: "The slave system would infect the whole Union. In the northern states where Negro slavery is unworkable in practice, the white working class would be gradually depressed to the level of helotry. This would be in accord with the loudly proclaimed principle that only certain races are capable of freedom, and that as in the South the real labour is the lot of the Negro, so in the North it is the lot of the German and the Irishman, or their direct descendants".



Southern Confederacy<sup>305</sup> (Marx, 1861). What would ensue for North America would be its complete reorganization under the basis of slavery and the recognized control of a “slaveholding oligarchy” (Marx, 1861).

For Marx, the battle in America between North and South, waged most pointedly in those Southern border states, was one “between slavery and freedom”; between slavery and free labour. Hence also why in his 1865 letter to then President Andrew Johnson – written on behalf of the IWA following the North’s victory over the South and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln - he would write that the American people devolved upon both men the responsibility of initiating “the new era of the emancipation of labour”. This new era of emancipation of labour implied two primary elements, beyond the immediately obvious emancipation of previously held slaves from the institution of slavery. The first element was the furthered development of the American working-class movement and of the greater emancipatory potential of the American free wage worker. Though in the above referenced 1846 letter to Pavel Vasilyevich Annenkov Marx described slavery as “an economic category of paramount importance”; one which is a pivot – as much as machinery – upon which present-day industry turns; one which supplies cotton, without which “there would be no modern industry”; one which brought value to the colonies, “colonies which have created world trade, and world trade is the necessary condition for large-scale machine industry”; and one which, without which, “North America, the most progressive nation, would be transformed into a patriarchal country” and consequently “Only wipe North America off the map and you will get anarchy, the complete decay of trade and modern civilization”; though Marx would describe to Pavel Annenkov this intrinsic role of Southern slavery in not only buttressing

---

<sup>305</sup> In his article “Marx and Engels on America” Herbert M. Morais (1948, pg.9) extends what was the ambitious reach of the slave-holding South, beyond simply North America. Of the decade of the 1850’s he notes a resurgence of Southern extremism that sought to “extend the area of slavery to Cuba, Northern Mexico and Central America”.

North America but world trade itself, by the time of the Civil War - and owing to the developed conditions of that time, i.e. of the further centralization of capital in America, of its rapid industrialization, and of the mass migration of European labour there - Marx and Engels began to recognize the role of slavery in effect retarding both American industry and the development of an independent American working class movement (MEGA, Vol. 19). The institution of slavery, beside the threat of its expanse over the Americas, already served as a foundation for the intensified exploitation of the existing free wage workers of the North, as well as acting as a threat to their constitutional rights (MEGA, Vol. 19, pg. xx.). In a sense, the base conditions of slavery could only serve to weigh the free worker down with it. And given a slave-holding Southern victory, as noted in Marx's second article for *Die Presse* "the white working class would be gradually depressed to the level of helotry". This matrix of downward influences as a consequence of slavery on not only the form and potential of the American working class but on the development of American industry is captured well by Morais (1948, pg. 11):

The wholehearted support that Marx and Engels gave to the North during the Civil War grew out of their conviction that the destruction of Negro slavery was necessary to the development of an independent working-class movement in America. 'Labour cannot emancipate itself in a white skin' wrote Marx in *Capital*, 'where in the black skin it is branded'<sup>306</sup>. So long as slavery 'disfigured a part of the [American] republic', industry in the North as well as in the South could not flourish. Under such conditions the development of a vigorous labor movement was bound to be retarded.

Though at one time pivotal for Marx in the development of modern capitalism and industry, "new world slavery" – as an antiquating institution and form of the division of labour – was increasingly exposing itself as a fetter; a barrier to further progress and to the further development

---

<sup>306</sup> The fuller excerpt reads: "In the United States of America, every independent workers' movement was paralyzed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. Labor in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin. However, a new life immediately arose from the death of slavery. The first fruit of the American Civil war was the eight hours agitation, which ran from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California, with the seven-league boots of a locomotive" (Marx, 1990, pg. ?)

of the existing capitalist mode of production in America and its corresponding relations of labour. The victory of slavery over the union threatened to turn this wheel back – to retrogress- subsuming both American politics and industry “under the recognized control of a slave holding oligarchy”<sup>307</sup>.

2.) The second element with regard to “the new era of the emancipation of labour” following the abolition of slavery in America relates to a strengthening of the international working-class movement. In his 1865 letter to Abraham Lincoln – written on behalf of the IWA – Marx wrote:

While the workingmen, the true political powers of the North, allowed slavery to defile their own republic, while before the Negro, mastered and sold without his concurrence, they boasted it the highest prerogative of the white-skinned laborer to sell himself and choose his own master, they were unable to attain the true freedom of labor, or to support their European brethren in their struggle for emancipation; but this barrier to progress has been swept off by the red sea of civil war.

One of the primary reasons why Marx saw importance in the American Civil War was because Northern victory and the abolition of slavery would presumably create conditions that were not only helpful to the development of the American working-class, but subsequently and by relation the strengthening of the international working-class movement itself.

In the same letter to Lincoln, Marx (1865) notes how despite the “hardships imposed upon them by the cotton crisis” the “working classes of Europe” understood that “the slaveholders’

---

<sup>307</sup> We again turn to the American Historian Herbert Morais (1948, pg.14) for a note on the years following the abolition of slavery and the rapid development of American industry that would ensue: “The ensuing years saw American industry advance rapidly. From 1860 to 1894 the United States jumped from fourth to first place in the production of industrial goods, in the latter year accounting for one-third of the world’s output, or more than twice as much as Great Britain. This rise of the United States to a position of industrial pre-eminence was frequently noted by Marx and Engels. In 1879 Marx observed that America was overtaking England “in the rapidity of [its] economic progress...”. In 1886 Engels predicted that the United States would smash England’s industrial monopoly. Two years later he again commented on the growing industrial ascendancy of the United States.” Morais includes another, perhaps more telling excerpt directly from Marx on the relation between the rapid development of American industry and the civil war: “As Marx put it in a letter to Danielson dated April 10, 1879, ‘the concentration of capital [in the united states] and the gradual expropriation of the masses is not only the vehicle but also the natural offspring (though artificially accelerated by the Civil War) of an unprecedented rapid industrial development’”.

rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy crusade of property against labor”; that “their hopes for the future, even their past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic”. But the workers support of the North was based on more than a perceived threat from proslavery forces who sought to codify “property in man” in the face of principles of liberty and democracy that had up to now been realized. The events across the Atlantic had a direct bearing on the political and revolutionary activity of the “workingmen” of Europe.

We already noted in Chapter 7, both the significance and support that Marx and Engels afforded to revolutionary movements outside of Europe, such as with the Sepoy uprising in India , the anti-colonial “Urabi revolt” in Egypt, and the uprising in China. We noted there that Marx and Engels’ support for these movements – and basic recognition of their revolutionary potential – was based on instrumental considerations rather than reflective of them recognizing the “self-activity and struggle” of colonized peoples as Anderson (2010, pg.37) claimed. For Marx and Engels movements were afforded support or attention depending on how they were presumed to impact the political activity of workers in Europe. With respect to China as an example, the rebellions there were discussed in terms of the ways in which the consequent impact on world trade and the import/export of goods would precipitate an economic crisis: “...the Chinese revolution will throw the park into the overloaded mine of the present industrial system and cause the explosion of the long-prepared general crisis, which, spreading abroad, will be closely followed by political revolutions on the Continent” (Marx, June 14 1853). For Marx, economic crisis played a pivotal role in allowing for conditions conducive to revolutionary activity: “Since the commencement of the eighteenth century there has been no serious revolution in Europe which had not been preceded by a commercial and financial crisis”.

Like the uprising in China, the American Civil War was linking itself to the threat of - if not already fermenting - conditions of economic crisis; such was the basic condition of an increasingly international system of world trade. In a November 1861 article for *Die Presse*, titled “The Crisis in England”, Marx (1861) notes the threat that the American Civil War poses for the cotton industry – and cotton being “the dominant branch of Great Britain’s industry”. The slave-owning states of the American South held a monopoly on the world’s cotton production, and during the war, the Union blockade of the South had created a situation where “all England trembles at the approach of the greatest economic catastrophe that has yet threatened her”. The economic threat posed by the Union blockade is meant to explain the British establishment’s consequent support of the South, even up to the threat of military intervention as for example following the “Trent Affair”<sup>308</sup> (Anderson, 2010, pg. 92-96).

But, if one is to read Marx abstractly, one could reduce his interest in the Civil War and his support for abolition as related to the consequent economic crisis it would ensue for England, and the world, through the disruption of slave produced cotton in the South. And crisis, as we noted, was requisite for creating conditions in Europe that were conducive to the revolutionary activity of the working classes. But such a reading would ignore the very concrete, and subsequently strategic or instrumental analysis and politics that was practiced by Marx and Engels. If the American Civil War and the abolition of slavery held importance for Marx – with respect to the international working-class movement -, in this particular global and historical context, part of the reason was because of the significance that America itself had on the political and economic global stage.

---

<sup>308</sup> The Trent Affair: “On November 8, 1861, Charles Wilkes, a U.S. Navy Officer, captured two Confederate envoys aboard the British mail ship, the *Trent*. Great Britain accused the United States of violating British neutrality, and the incident created a diplomatic crisis between the United States and Great Britain during the Civil War.” (<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1861-1865/trent-affair>)

Unlike China, or India, or Egypt, America was understood by Marx and Engels as an industrial society on par with a nation such as England. As early as the *Manifesto*, he and Engels already noted how the United States' ability to exploit its "tremendous industrial resources" with an energy and scale unmatched was sure to soon break the industrial monopoly of Western Europe – especially England (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.471). Additionally, as Morais (1948, pg.5) notes, for them, America, unlike the countries of Europe, was the bourgeois country *par excellence*<sup>309</sup> – "a country rich, vast, expanding, with purely bourgeois institutions, unleavened by feudal remnants or monarchical traditions and without a permanent or hereditary proletariat"<sup>310</sup>. In *The German Ideology*, they reflect on the rapid development of those countries such as in North America which "begin in an already advanced historical epoch" and "with the most advanced individuals of the old countries, and, therefore, with the correspondingly most advanced form of intercourse, before this form of intercourse has been able to establish itself in the old countries" (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.195).

The struggle of the American working class was viewed as a struggle taking place in a rapidly industrializing nation which was increasingly placing itself on the precipice of modern capitalist civilization. Their struggle was viewed as on par and as a part of the proletarian struggle proper. This is not necessarily a shift in perspective from what we identified earlier as Marx and Engels' privileging of the European workers, since as early as 1847 Marx (? ) wrote: Socialism and communism did not originate in Germany, but in England, France and North America". From

---

<sup>309</sup> This perspective may be seen as contradictory given the integral existence of an antiquated institution such as slavery within the U.S. How could it then be considered a bourgeois country *par excellence*? For some clarification it is worth turning to *The Grundrisse* where Marx (1978, pg.255) writes that though the suspension of relations of slavery and serfdom – objective conditions of labour – constitutes one of the conditions required to make possible the development of capitalism, "The fact that slavery is possible at individual points within the bourgeois system does not contradict this. However, slavery is then possible there only because it does not exist at other points; and appears as an anomaly opposite the bourgeois system itself".

<sup>310</sup> From Engels' June 3 1886 letter to Florence Kelley, as cited in Morais (1948, pg.5).

the start there was a locating of America – existing on a continent outside of Europe – as on the same footing as the industrial centres of Western Europe. Nonetheless, we remain committed to the descriptor of “European workers” since even though a society outside of Europe, America was like the colonies Canada and Australia, which were clarified by Engels in his 1882 letter to Kautsky as nations “occupied by a European population” and not like the “semi-civilized” India, Algeria, and the Dutch and Spanish possessions where one was dealing with a “native population”<sup>311</sup>.

Thus America and consequently the American working-class movement held a prominent position in the world-historic act of abolishing private property, and it is noteworthy to point out that following the failure of the Paris Commune, at the 1872 Hague Congress of the IWA, Marx proposed the move of the headquarters of the General Council to New York: “Many, even among our friends, seem to have wondered at such a decision. Do they then forget that America will be the worker’s continent par excellence, that half a million men – workers – emigrate there yearly, and that on such soil, where the worker dominates, the International is bound to strike strong roots?”<sup>312</sup> (Marx, 1978, pg.523).

The abolition of slavery through “the red sea of civil war” and the freeing up of the American working class – i.e., the furthering of conditions adequate to its further development; absent of both the threat and retarding role played by the institution of slavery- thus spelled greater progress for the workers’ movement altogether. Thus in the 1867 “Preface” to *Capital*, Marx (1978,

---

<sup>311</sup> The distinction of the United States is also spelled out in a footnote to Chapter 33 “The Modern Theory of Colonization” in *Capital*, Volume 1. There Marx writes: “We are dealing here with true colonies, i.e. virgin soil colonized by free immigrants. The United States is, economically speaking, still a colony of Europe. Apart from this, old plantations where the abolition of slavery has completely revolutionized earlier relationships also belong here”.

<sup>312</sup> According to Tucker (1978, pg.xxxiv) the proposal for the move to New York was a decision made out of Marx’s fear of the influence of Bakunin and the Anarchists over the IWA. Though one may accept this as partly true, given their positioning of America on the global stage, it is credible to also emphasize Marx’s own explanation to the Congress which is excerpted here.

pg. ) would write that just as the American war of independence sounded the tocsin for the European middle class in the 18<sup>th</sup> century “so that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the American Civil War sounded it for the European working class”. In the same “Preface” he would also, in prophetic nature, make parallel the “radical” changes in the existing relations between capital and labour taking place in “the civilized states of the European continent” and the “radical change of the relations of capital and of property in land” to take place in the United States following the abolition of slavery. These, he would write “are signs of the times, not to be hidden by purple mantles or black cassocks. They do not signify that tomorrow a miracle will happen. They show that, within the ruling-classes themselves, a foreboding is dawning, that the present society is no solid crystal, but an organism capable of change, and is constantly changing” (Marx, 1978, pg.298).

The victory of wage slavery over chattel slavery in the United States unleashed the potential for greater progress on behalf of the international workers movement. Support through an affirmative stand on abolition – with regard to the U.S. in particular<sup>313</sup> - was instrumental on the part of the workers movement at this time, and significant for Marx and Engels in their road toward socialism – a road to be driven by the international brotherhood of the proletariat. The victory of chattel slavery would have led only to a retrogression. In this vein, though Marx and Engels may have implicitly harbored a morally informed opposition toward the enslavement of other human beings - evidenced through the very emancipatory and universal character of their project of liberation in general – it is telling that in none of their writings on slavery or the Civil War in America do we read the articulation of a *principled* position on either abolition or the

---

<sup>313</sup> There is for example no evidence – at least that I know of - of Marx/Engels or the IWA advocating for abolition of slavery in a nation such as Brazil – a nation which comprised 40% of all importation of enslaved people from Africa, and where as an institution it was not legally abolished until 1888



humanity of enslaved Black people in America<sup>314</sup>. The aspired science and very mechanics of said project of liberation would not allow so.

An additional component of the multilinear argument with respect to the civil war writings still needs to be taken up, particularly the referenced evidence suggesting that Marx had shifted from solely privileging the revolutionary agency of European workers, and that “By the 1860s, in addition to his abolitionist perspective...had developed an appreciation of African Americans as revolutionary subjects” (Anderson, 2010, pg.85). In supporting this argument, Anderson (2010, pg.85) points us to a January 11<sup>th</sup> 1860 letter from Marx to Engels, where “in the aftermath of John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry” Marx writes:

In my view, the most momentous thing happening in the world today is, on the one hand, the movement among the slaves [*Sklavenbewegung*] in America, started by the death of Brown, and the movement among the slave in Russia, on the other...I have just seen in the *Tribune* that there was a new slave uprising in Missouri, naturally suppressed. But the signal has now been given.

Additionally, Anderson (2010, pg.86) draws our attention to a May 6<sup>th</sup> 1861 letter from Marx to his uncle Lion Philips where he “alludes to the possibility of a ‘slave revolution’ [*Sklavenrevolution*]”, and then later in that same year he would write to Engels assessing that the civil war in America needed to be fought in a “revolutionary way” rather than “constitutionally”;

---

<sup>314</sup> The closest statement in relation to Marx that expresses such principled sentiment can be found in an address from the London Congress of the IWA titled “To the People of the United States of America”, and dated September 1865. The relation to Marx exists in so far as it was an address approved of in an organization that he was a part of, and in which he played a critical role. The address itself was not written by Marx, but by William Randal Cremer, then elected Secretary of the IWA, and later Liberal Member of Parliament. A telling excerpt from the Address – which ironically demonstrates greater distance from Marx when contextualized alongside his own instrumentalist writing on the Civil War and abolition- read: “Slavery is no more, that dark spot upon your otherwise fair escutcheon is blotted out for ever. No more shall the salesman’s hammer barter human flesh and blood in your marketplaces, causing humanity to shudder at its cold barbarity” (IWA, 1865).

and by adopting “revolutionary methods” which included the arming of slaves: “A single nigger-regiment<sup>315</sup> would have a remarkable effect on Southern nerves”<sup>316</sup>.

In responding to the above, what is significant to immediately note is that the period of the early 1860’s was not the first time that Marx shared his thoughts on the revolutionary or emancipatory potential of Black slaves in North America. As early as June 14<sup>th</sup> 1853, Marx would write to Engels, sharing his reflections on a recent book – *Slavery at Home and Abroad*<sup>317</sup> – which was sent to him by its author, the American political economist Henry C. Carey. To Engels, Marx writes:

The only thing of definite interest in the book is the comparison between Negro slavery as formerly practiced by the English in Jamaica and elsewhere, and Negro slavery in the United States. He [Carey] demonstrates how the main stock of Negroes in Jamaica always consisted of freshly imported barbarians, since their treatment by the English meant not only that the Negro population was not maintained, but also that 2/3 of the yearly imports always went to waste, whereas the present generation of Negroes in America is a native product, more or less Yankeeified, English speaking, etc., and hence *capable of being emancipated* (Marx, June 14 1853).

In this telling excerpt we get a sense of the distinction Marx made toward the “Negroes in America” who unlike the “freshly imported barbarians”, were a native product: “Yankeeified” and English speaking, hence capable of being emancipated – note, “capable of being emancipated” and not self-emancipating themselves. In this sense we also surmise that recognition of the revolutionary potential of African slaves during the Civil War was not necessarily a general extension of revolutionary subjectivity to African slaves in general. What we are reminded of is Marx’s 1857 articles on the Sepoy uprising, where the potential assigned to the Sepoys on behalf

---

<sup>315</sup> Anderson (2010, pg.98) explains the use of this terminology as follows: “This is an instance of Marx using what today would be considered a very racist phrase to make an equally strong anti-racist point”, i.e. the arming of Black troops.

<sup>316</sup> Marx to Engels (MECW 41,400) cited in Anderson (2010, pg.98).

<sup>317</sup> This is the title given by Marx in this letter, though the actual title of the publication by Carey is *The Slave Trade, Domestic and Foreign*.

of Marx was explained in relation to, and by consequence of, the modernizing role of the colonial power. The Sepoys were trained, organized, and disciplined by the British, presenting “the first general center of resistance which the Indian people was ever possessed of”. Likewise, it is not the traditional social and political consciousness of enslaved Africans but their Yankeeization – read as their modernization/Europeanization – “English speaking” – that is read as affording them the capability or potential of emancipation.

As an additional point of clarification, it is important to note the specificity of the kind of revolutionary agency that Marx afforded to the European workers. What does it mean to endow or appreciate revolutionary subjectivity in the Marxian sense? Marx certainly did not deny or obscure the very historical and empirical fact that a people could rebel. As noted above, Marx even wrote lengthy articles on anti-colonial rebellions taking place across the globe. What was at question however, was the revolutionary nature of these revolts, i.e. whether in their particularness they held both the ability and the clarity to transcend the existing relations between capital and labour – of “the last of the antagonistic form of the social process of production”. For Marx, only “The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.482). As the lowest stratum of bourgeois society, the European proletariat was seen as uniquely disciplined, organized, abstracted and immiserated – the requisite of conditions that implicated into its uprising the “whole superincumbent strata of official society”. It was the only group of people on Earth whose movement carried the potential of reflecting a concrete universality, since both their majoritarian nature and totalizing movement against the capitalist mode of production encompassed the means for universal human emancipation. Any other struggle, ones which sought equality, inclusion, or human dignity – like freedom from chattel slavery or colonization - reflected the kind of partial

“political emancipation” that Marx already distinguished in his *On the Jewish Question* from “real human emancipation” -i.e. complete emancipation from the prevailing - and estranging - social, political and economic order.

Even in Marx’s above cited “most momentous thing happening in the world today” note to Engels, which Anderson signifies as indication of Marx’s appreciation of African Americans as revolutionary subjects, there remains in that piece a primacy of focus on developments in Europe. In his text, Anderson (2010, pg.85) does not include the full(er) excerpt which when read as a whole, indicates an instrumental valuation of the slave revolts in both America and Russia:

In my view, the most momentous thing happening in the world today is the slave movement—on the one hand, in America, started by the death of Brown, and in Russia, on the other... Thus, a 'social' movement has been started both in the West and in the East. Together with the impending downbreak in Central Europe, this promises great things. I have just seen in the *Tribune* that there's been another slave revolt in Missouri, which was put down, needless to say. But the signal has now been given. Should the affair grow serious by and by, what will become of Manchester? (MECW, Vol. 41, pg. 4).

In this excerpt, we see that Marx recognizes the significance of the slave revolts in both America and Russia – as social movements in both East and West. Concerning these he writes that “this promises great things” and ends with reflecting on “what will become of Manchester?”. Fifteen days later, Engels would write to Marx with a reflection that further clarifies the almost game or chess-like fashion with which they assessed political events across the globe. The goal of the game, of course, being sparking the revolutionary European workers movement against capital:

Your opinion of the importance of the slave movement in America and Russia is already being confirmed. The Harpers-Ferry affair<sup>318</sup>, with its sequel in Missouri, is bearing fruit. Everywhere the free niggers in the South are being hounded out of the states, and I have just seen from the first New York cotton report (W. P. Wright & Co of 10 January 1860) that the planters ‘hurried their cotton on to the ports in order to guard against any probable consequences arising out of the Harpers-Ferry Affair’. In Russia, too, the confusion is

---

<sup>318</sup> “In October 1859, the Abolitionist John Brown, at the head of a band of eighteen (including five Blacks), seized a government arsenal of Harper’s Ferry, Virginia in an attempt to provoke an insurrection of slaves in the Southern states. The band was surrounded by regular troops and almost wholly destroyed... The brown uprising started a mass anti-slavery movement” (MECW, Vol 41, pg. 594).

growing admirably; the Augsburg *Allgemeine Zeitung's* St. Petersburg correspondent is very good on this subject, though he pays more attention to the constitutional movement among the aristocracy,' which, however, also provides a certain impetus for the peasants, of course. In India we have the makings of a tremendous crisis. As far as the views of the local philistines on the subject are concerned, confer the enclosed market reports (MECW, Vol 41, pg.7)<sup>319</sup>.

Like their instrumental position on anti-colonial movements, Marx and Engels assessed with interest instances of rebellion and revolt given their consequent impacts on the workers' movement in the West. With reference to this specific example of the Harpers-Ferry Affair -and its resultant instigation of a mass anti-slavery movement- we have already noted above the progressive consequences that abolition in the U.S. would spell. Thus, describing these events as the most momentous things happening in the world today – even if recognizing how they would have an impact across the world<sup>320</sup> - did not suggest on behalf of Marx a kind of general valuation of revolutionary subjectivity or agency of the slaves themselves<sup>321</sup>, but was a conclusion drawn with reference to the (potential) impact of these movements on the more privileged revolutionary movement to be carried out by the European workers in the U.S. and (Western) Europe.

The condition of the European worker – as a free wage worker existing alongside conditions of modern industry – was one that fitted it with a historical role that Marx never

---

<sup>319</sup> Another letter from Engels to Marx, written on January 7<sup>th</sup> 1861 reads in a similar fashion: "In North America things are also heating up. With the slaves the situation must be pretty awful if the Southerners are playing such a risky game....At all events, one way or another, slavery would appear to be rapidly nearing its end and hence also cotton production. What repercussions this will have on England we shall soon see" (MECW, Vol 41, pg.242)

<sup>320</sup> In Marx October 29<sup>th</sup> 1862 letter to Engels he writes: "Nevertheless, events over there [ the U.S.] are such as to transform the world..."

<sup>321</sup> In Anderson's (2010, pg. 85) excerpt he includes the translation from Marx's letter as "movement among the slaves [Sklavenbewegung]" whereas in the MECW (Vol 41. Pg. 4) the translation is "the slave movement". It is important to point this out because both descriptions carry a different implication. "Movement among the slaves" suggests activity among the slaves themselves where as "slave movement" is more general and can suggest the abolition movement in a broad sense. Despite the numerous slave revolts that occurred throughout the era of slavery in the U.S., which as Robinson (2000) has demonstrated were largely ignored in the Marxist purview, it is more likely that what Marx had in mind in this letter was reference to the abolition movement generally conceived, i.e. to "the slave movement" rather than referencing a mass uprising among enslaved Africans in the U.S. following the death of Brown, which also historically speaking, did not occur.

extended to the slave. In his *Capital*, published 7 years after these letters and 2 years following the conclusion of the American Civil War, despite his attributed “abolitionist perspective”, Marx maintained his occupation with the capital-class relation, excluding slaves, peasants, and indentured labourers from historical and political agency in the modern world:

The slave is the property of a particular *master*; the worker must indeed sell himself to capital, but not a particular capitalist, and so within certain limitations he may choose to sell himself to whomever he wishes; and he may also change his master. The effect of all these differences is to make the free worker’s work more intensive, more continuous, more flexible, more skilled than that of the slave, quite apart from the fact that they fit him for quite a different historical role (Marx, 1990, pg.1032).

### ***8.3: The Strategic Support for National Emancipation***

Just as with Marx’s writings on abolition, the multilinear argument turns to his positions on national emancipation and nationalism as indication of: 1.) A shifting politics that departed from centering only working-class movements in the industrial centres of capitalism; 2.) the suggestion that a movement for national emancipation could – or rather did – behave as a “tocsin” of the socialist revolution; and 3.) the mature development of a dialectic politics that interwove questions of class, nationalism, race and ethnicity, that thus also signified a shift away from class reductionism. The primary examples drawn attention to by Anderson (2010), and that will be engaged with here, include (a) Marx’s support for Polish emancipation and the 1863 uprising in an otherwise agrarian Poland; and (b) his position on Ireland, which by 1869-70, began to centre the cause of Irish national independence. The latter, according to Anderson (2010, pg.243), signifying the culmination of Marx’s theorization of nationalism, ethnicity, and class.

The topic of Poland and Polish emancipation will be dealt with first, but not before providing some historical context that will help us frame the debate as Marx saw it. Poland, a nation rifted by a sordid history of partition and occupation, would essentially disappear from the

European map in 1795 when it would be divided and parceled up by Russia, Austria and Prussia<sup>322</sup>. What was previously the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, would only find a temporal restoration in 1807 during the Napoleonic wars, where it would be instituted as the “Duchy of Warsaw” – a puppet state of Napoleon, under the rule of Fryderyk August I. In 1815, through the decisive role of Russian troops, Napoleon would be defeated in this region and “Poland” would once again experience partition and occupation by Russia and Prussia. During much if not all of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Poland remained under this relative non-existence as a state until its restoration in 1916 – as a Kingdom under German control during WW1 – and then in 1918 as an independent state.

In his lifetime (1818-1883) Marx would never see an independent Poland, though as Anderson (2010, pg.56) notes “the Polish cause was one of the great political passions of his life”. Being an agrarian society outside the centres of industrial capitalism, this support for the Polish cause is marked by Anderson (2010) as indicative of Marx’s support for more than just working-class movements, as well as his recognition of the role and significance of nationalism and national liberation in the world capitalist system.

Though Marx would arguably come to adopt such a position with regard to his support for the Polish cause, this was not always the case. As Anderson (2010, Pg.58) notes, in 1847 – the early years - and right around the time of writing and publication of the *Manifesto*, Marx would make a speech at an anniversary meeting of the 1830<sup>323</sup> uprising in Poland where he would centre the role of England – a nation “where the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is most

---

<sup>322</sup> This 1795 partition was the final of three partitions – the first in 1772 and the second in 1793. The first two partitions resulted in the gradual take over of territory belonging to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The 3<sup>rd</sup> partition, initiated following the failed Polish uprising of 1794 which sought to liberate the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was the final and complete take over of what territory remained.

<sup>323</sup> “Poland” would experience significant uprisings against either of the occupying powers in 1806, 1830, 1846, 1848, 1863 and 1905. None however, would succeed in the securing Polish independence.

highly developed” – in the liberation of Poland: “The victory of the English proletarians over the English bourgeoisie is, therefore, decisive for the victory of all the oppressed over their oppressors. Hence Poland must be liberated not in Poland but in England”<sup>324</sup>. Though in this period of 1847-48<sup>325</sup> Marx “saw the liberation of Poland as a consequence of the proletarian revolution”, later in life, by the 1860s, Polish liberation was increasingly positioned as “a condition for the development of the workers movement”<sup>326</sup> itself and not the reverse. This evolved position, and depth of his passion for the Polish cause are signified by Anderson (2010, pg.57) along two examples: 1.) From an 1856 letter to Engels where Marx wrote that “the intensity and viability of all revolutions since 1789 may be gauged with fair accuracy by their attitude towards Poland. Poland is their ‘external thermometer’”<sup>327</sup>; and 2.) the extent to which Marx’s opponents viewed him as a partisan of the Polish cause.

With respect to the latter point, Anderson (2010, pg.57) references a German newspaper which reported that Dr. Marx was chosen to tour the continent in order spread propaganda for the next Polish “insurrection”. Though, also included by Anderson is the response by Marx to the accusation, saying that such a report was a “fabrication hatched by the police”. Nonetheless, the point is not without some warrant. As Anderson (2010) demonstrates, both Marx and Engels frequently, and publicly, took a supportive position on Poland as well as criticized those that failed to do so. In the evidence provided by Anderson (2010), we read that: In 1848 Marx and Engels would “strongly protest” a vote by the German national assembly to ratify the Prussian annexations in Poland which took place after the Poles rose up earlier that year (Anderson, 2010, pg.60); that

---

<sup>324</sup> Marx (MECWW 6, 389) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.58)

<sup>325</sup> Anderson (2010, pg.58) implicitly connects this position on Poland to those positions in the 1848 *Manifesto* that are read as minimizing the significance of national movements: “the working men have no country” and “national differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing”.

<sup>326</sup> Anderson (2010, pg.71) quoting French political theorist Maurice Barbier.

<sup>327</sup> Marx (MECW 40, 85) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.57).



the following year in 1849, Marx would write an expose for the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* where he would write of the “rape of Poland” which “remains a permanent blot on German history”<sup>328</sup>; in 1853 Marx would devote part of his pamphlet “Lord Palmerston” to critiquing Palmerston’s lack of tangible support for the Polish people, despite his expressing of public sympathy for Poland (Anderson, 2010, pg.62); in 1858 Marx and Engels would co-author a “laudatory” article for the *New American Cyclopedia* on the legendary Polish military leader Jozef Bem (Anderson, 2010, pg.64); in 1865, following the death of Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Marx would pen a lengthy critique of Proudhon’s views, including “a stinging attack” on his pro-Russia -against-Poland stance; and in the year just previous, 1864, at his “Inaugural Address” of the IWA, Marx emphasized a working class foreign policy – one not indifferent to, or approving of events such as the falling of the Caucasus or the assassination of Poland to Russia - as “part of the general struggle for the emancipation of the working classes”. What was clear in all these examples, according to Anderson (2010) was that for Marx and Engels the Polish cause was not simply a movement to support, but one which played an integral role in the emancipation of the working class.

This element finds fuller expression when we turn back to the first point noted above, concerning the suggestion made by Marx in 1856 that the issue of Poland behaved as the “external thermometer” of revolutions in Europe; that “the intensity and viability of all revolutions since 1789 may be gauged with fair accuracy by their attitude towards Poland”. The parameters drawn by Anderson (2010) of what falls within this consideration of Poland as the “external thermometer” of revolutions in Europe can be divided into two main points: 1.) The Polish cause was the “harbinger of a wider European revolution” (Anderson, 2010, pg.64); and 2.) the Polish cause had historically and contemporarily played a crucial role in defining the scope and success of

---

<sup>328</sup> Marx (MECW 9, 418-419) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.61).

revolutionary movements in Europe. With respect to the first point, Anderson (2010, pg.65) points to developments corresponding to the uprising that broke out in Poland in January 1863. Following the uprising, in February 1863 Marx would write a letter to Engels, stating: “What do you think of the Polish business? This much is certain; the era of revolution has now fairly opened in Europe once more... This time, let us hope, the lava will flow from East to West”<sup>329</sup>. The insurrection would eventually fail, but Marx would nonetheless comment the next year in an 1864 letter to Engels that the uprising marked a major historical turning point<sup>330</sup>. Anderson (2010, pg.66-67) also draws attention to the role of the 1863 Polish uprising in the formation of the IWA itself, through the development of networks among workers who had come together to support the Polish cause. The developing network and meetings would help forge closer links with workers from England with those on the European continent, thus setting the stage for the founding of the IWA in September 1864 (Anderson, 2010, pg.67).

In addition to the above, Anderson (2010) also notes to the revolutionary character that both Marx and Engels afforded to the Polish fight for liberation, with particular reference to their understanding of the 1846 Krakow uprising. As early as 1848, when speaking in Brussels, Marx had characterized the Krakow uprising as a “radical democratic movement”; an “agrarian revolution that would transform the dependent peasantry into free proprietors, modern proprietors” and an uprising which had “given a glorious example to the whole of Europe, by identifying the national cause with the democratic cause and the emancipation of the oppressed class”<sup>331</sup>. That

---

<sup>329</sup> Marx (MECW 41,453) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.65).

<sup>330</sup> The phrase of “major historical turning point” is Anderson’s (2010, pg.66) not Marx’s. The excerpt it is referenced to reads as follows: “The outrageous step the Russians have now taken in the Caucasus, watched by the rest of Europe with idiotic indifference, virtually compels them – and indeed makes it easier for them – to turn a blind eye to what is happening elsewhere. These 2 affairs, the suppression of the Polish insurrection and the annexation of the Caucasus, I regard as the two most important events to have taken place in Europe since 1815” (MECW 41,538)

<sup>331</sup> Marx (MECW 6, 546) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.59).

same year, Engels would write a series of articles on Poland, identifying “agrarian revolution” as being something fundamental to the Polish struggle for independence as early as 1791, and which would have broad implications for the whole of Eastern Europe<sup>332</sup>. Additionally, Anderson (2010, pg.77) points to two instances in 1875 and 1880 where this characterization of the revolutionary nature of the Krakow uprising is made more generous by both Marx and Engels. In his 1848 speech in Brussels, Marx had made effort to distinguish the Krakow uprising – which wanted to give equal rights to different classes – from communism which proposes instead the abolition of all classes. However, in a November 1880 address to a Geneva meeting Marx and Engels, according to Anderson (2010, pg.77), characterize the Krakow uprising, along with the Chartist movement in Britain as “a harbinger of the socialist revolution”. The referenced excerpt reads:

From 1840 onwards the propertied classes of England were already forced to call out the army to resist the Chartist party, this first militant organization of the working class. Then in 1846, in the last refuge of independent Poland, Cracow, the first political revolution to proclaim socialist demands broke out<sup>333</sup>.

Five years earlier, in 1875, Marx and Engels had stressed the “cosmopolitan” character of the Polish revolutionaries, as well as describe the Krakow uprising as “the first in Europe to plant the banner of social revolution”<sup>334</sup>. For Anderson (2010, pg.77-78) this shift in the characterization

---

<sup>332</sup> The referenced excerpt reads: “The constitution of 1791 shows that already then the Poles clearly understood that their independence in foreign affairs was inseparable from the overthrow of the aristocracy and from the agrarian reform within the country. The big agrarian countries between the Baltic and the Black seas can free themselves from patriarchal feudal barbarism only by an agrarian revolution, which turns the peasants who are serfs or liable to compulsory labour into free landowners, a revolution which would be similar to the French revolution of 1789 in the countryside. It is to the credit of the Polish nation that it was the first of all its agricultural neighbours to proclaim this...The struggle for the independence of Poland, particularly the Cracow uprising of 1846, is at the same time a struggle of *agrarian democracy* – the only form of democracy possible in Eastern Europe – against *patriarchal feudal absolutism*” (MECW 7, 351). As cited in Anderson (2010, pg.61).

<sup>333</sup> Marx and Engels (MECW 24, 344) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.77).

<sup>334</sup> “Poland...Is the only European people that has fought and is fighting as the *cosmopolitan soldier of the revolution*. Poland shed its blood during the American War of Independence; its legions fought under the banner of the first French Republic; by its revolution of 1830 it prevented the invasion of France that had been decided by the partitioners of Poland; in 1846 in Cracow it was the first in Europe to plant the banner of social revolution; in 1848 it played an outstanding part in the revolutionary struggle in Hungary, Germany, and Italy; finally, in 1871 it

of the Krakow uprising – as the “first” to “plant the banner of social revolution” and the “first” to “proclaim socialist demands” is likely owed to developments related to Marx’s late writings on Russia where, according to Anderson, he began to consider that “a communist revolution in Russia could serve as the starting point for a wider European socialist transformation”<sup>335</sup>.

There is yet the second point concerning Poland as the external thermometer of revolution, which refers to the role of the Polish cause – historically and contemporarily for Marx and Engels – in defining the relative scope and success of revolutionary movements in Europe. Both Marx and Engels would assess the role of Poland in its potentiality and actuality in safeguarding movements in Western Europe, with specific reference to the examples of France and Prussia. In 1848 Engels published a series of articles on Poland where he in part argued that the consequent partition of Poland by its neighbouring states had wedded Prussia (Germany) to Russia and thus subsequently strengthened the conservative Prussian landowning class who sought to dominate Germany, thus weakening its democratic movement (Anderson, 2010, pg.60). For these reasons, Engels would also call on German democrats, due to implications for their own cause, to declare war on Russia and to ally themselves with Poland (Anderson, 2010, pg.61). Later in 1852, Engels would continue with this theme, and argue that the German liberals’ betrayal of the Poles in the early days of the 1848 revolution only strengthened Russia and the Prussian army, the latter which effectively crushed the liberal party and the movement (Anderson, 2010. Pg.61).

With respect to France, Marx takes the lead here, and in 1864 and 1865, as noted by Anderson (2010, pg.66), he prepared notes and made several presentations to the IWA on the

---

supplied the Paris Commune with its best generals and most heroic soldiers” (MECW 24, 57-58). As cited in Anderson (2010, pg.76).

<sup>335</sup> These are of course Anderson’s own words, not Marx’s, and this particular element of the multilinear argument will be taken up in Chapter 9 “Marx on Russia: Indications of a Non-Suprahistorical yet Unilinear Theory of History”.

relation between France and Poland. Marx argued that the 1830 uprisings in Poland saved the French revolution that same year by keeping Russia at bay and preventing its military intervention (Anderson, 2010, pg.70). Marx would repeat his argument in 1867 where he again traced the crucial role played by Poland in safeguarding the 1830 French Revolution- “The insurrection in Warsaw saved Europe from a second Anti-Jacobin War”- and also noted the role of the 1848 Polish insurrection in essentially keeping busy the Russians, thus safeguarding the movement in Germany from foreign interference (Anderson, 2010, pg.75).

A major component concerning the role of the Polish cause in defining the scope and success of revolutionary activity in Western Europe had to do with the understanding that Marx and Engels had of Russia. As Anderson (2010, pg.42-56) demonstrates, Marx and Engels – along with most progressive circles in Europe at that time - viewed Russia as not only Europe’s most conservative power, but as *the* counter revolutionary force on the continent. An authoritarian regime that was seemingly immune to revolutionary progress, Tsarist Russia was viewed as an omnipresent force that was ready to intervene at anytime a European movement sought to reassert itself. Though Anderson (2010, pg.50) limits this “one-dimensional” and condescending view of Russia and the Russian people by Marx to just the period of the early 1850’s, as late as 1859 Marx would, according to Anderson’s (2010, pg.56) own words, view the “Russian government as the most reactionary force in world politics”; that he believed “Russia stood threateningly at the gates of Germany, ready to expand westward and to suppress any revolutionary outbreak”. And as a spoke in Anderson’s wheel I will add reference to a speech made by Marx as late as 1867 to the IWA on “Poland’s European Mission” where he expresses a maintained antipathy for Russia, here expressed even more beratingly:

Thus Europe faces only one alternative: Either Asian barbarism, under the leadership of the Muscovites, will come down on Europe like an avalanche, or Europe must restore

Poland and thereby protect itself against Asia with a wall of 20 million heroes, to win time for the consummation of its social transformation (Marx, 1867).

In the same speech Marx would re-emphasize the important role of Poland that could be either an instrument wielded by Russia – whose foreign policy he describes as “world domination” – or it could stand as “an invincible obstacle to them [Russia]” (Marx, January 22 1867). Only the independence of Poland, its re-establishment, could solidify its place as an obstacle; not the “whip in the hand of the Muscovite” but the “wall of 20 million heroes”.

Despite the very instrumental approach regarding this support for the Polish cause – as a wall between Russia and Western Europe- Anderson (2010) avoids characterizing or reading it as such. The most pointed analysis he offers follows his account of Marx’s presentations to the IWA on the relation between the 1830 movements in France and Poland, which focuses less on Marx’s account of the role of Poland in keeping Russia at bay – thus protecting the French -, and instead emphasises Marx’s criticism of the lack of support offered to the Poles on behalf of the French following the revolution. On this, Anderson (2010, pg.71-72) writes that Marx was doing two things: 1.) He was engaged in debate within the international Left, contra to those who viewed France as a consistently revolutionary country; 2.) He was making a broader point aimed at future revolutionary movements in Europe, which sought to demonstrate how:

...in betraying Poland, the French revolutionaries constricted or even destroyed themselves, leading to defeat by external enemies or a too-limited revolution at home, one that did not really uproot the old system<sup>336</sup>. This latter point concerned those junctures when revolutionaries in a large and powerful country such as France failed to take seriously enough the struggle of a militarily weaker, oppressed nation like Poland, and how that deficiency doomed the revolution inside the more powerful country as well as the oppressed nation. In short, he seemed to be arguing that unless democratic and class struggles could link up with those of oppressed nationalities, both would fail to realize fully their aims, if not go down to defeat. Elsewhere, he would make similar points with regard to white workers in the United States and the Black struggle, or British workers and the Irish struggle.

---

<sup>336</sup> The 1830 revolution in France – the “July Revolution” – led to the overthrow of one monarch - Charles X – and the institution of another (constitutional monarch)- Louis Philippe.

Anderson (2010) offers here quite a tall order, despite offering no primary evidence referencing where Marx makes this point with regard to the outcome of the 1830 French revolution. In fact, in his *The Class Struggles in France 1848-1850*, Marx – as is typical of his analysis – partly accounts for the outcome of the revolution in 1830 – the “July Revolution” – not to the lack of solidarity between struggles in France and those of an oppressed nationality (such as Poland), but with the restrictive role played by the “big bourgeoisie” aka the “*financial aristocracy*” which had played an instrumental role from the start:

Owing to its financial straits, the July Monarchy was dependent from the beginning on the big bourgeoisie, and its dependence on the big bourgeoisie was the inexhaustible source of increasing financial straits<sup>337</sup> (MECW Vol. 10, pg.48).

Where addressed in the Marx and Engels corpus, the July revolution is frequently explained with reference to both the scheming and the rise of the financial bourgeoisie in France: “After the July Revolution, when the liberal banker Laffitte led his *compere*, the Duke of Orleans, in triumph to the *Hotel de Ville*, he let fall the words: “*From now on the bankers will rule*” (Marx, MECW Vol. 10, pg.48). Marx was not the first to point out this character of the July revolution. Shirly Gruner (1968) in their “The Revolution of July 1830 and the Expression ‘Bourgeoisie’” points out the popularization of the term ‘bourgeoisie’ by the “Saint-Simonists” during the later 1830’s as they were characterizing the July events as a “‘bourgeois’ revolution”; a revolution whose benefits were reaped by the bourgeoisie. Gruner (1968, pg.469) also points to how the Saint-Simonists nonetheless viewed the revolution as a progressive stage in history which – despite

---

<sup>337</sup> Noting the stifling role played by the bourgeois elements of society, in the same piece Marx describes how by contrast, the workers in 1848 were not willing to put up with the “bamboozlement” of July 1830: “Up to noon of February 25 [1848] the republic had not yet been proclaimed; on the other hand, all the ministries had already been divided among the bourgeois elements of the Provisional Government and among the generals, bankers, and lawyers of the National. But the workers were determined this time not to put up with any bamboozlement like that of July, 1830. They were ready to take up the fight anew and get a republic by force of arms”.

failing to overturn the existing social conditions – had spelt the fall of the *Ancien Regime* and the establishment of the “new France” that was now under the rule of the bourgeois owners of the means of production. She quotes the French politician and Saint-Simonian Emile Barrault (1799-1869): “Or, la noblesse, vauncue partout en Europe comme en France, commence la guere entre la bourgeoisie et le peuple”<sup>338</sup>.

In his *The Civil War in France*, Marx (1978, pg.630) would write that the July revolution resulted in the “transfer of government from the landlords to the capitalists”<sup>339</sup>; and in an 1850 article for the *Neue Rhenische Zeitung*, Marx (MECW vol. 10, pg.316) would write that after the July Revolution “the republican bourgeoisie took their place”. Yet for Marx this transfer of power to the Big Bourgeoisie (the financial aristocracy) in 1830 was not yet a complete transfer of power to the bourgeoisie. It would only be in the 1848 revolution that the fight of the workers would “complete the rule of the bourgeoisie” (Marx, 1969, pg.18):

Just as the workers in the July days had fought for and won the *bourgeois monarchy*, so in the February days they fought for and won the bourgeois republic. Just as the July Monarchy had to proclaim itself a *monarchy surrounded by republican institutions*, so the

---

<sup>338</sup> “Now the nobility defeated everywhere in Europe as in France, the war begins between the bourgeoisie and the people”

<sup>339</sup> For further example, in his 1895 “Introduction”, with reflection on 1848, Engels writes: “History has proved us wrong, and all who thought like us. It has made it clear that the state of economic development on the Continent at that time was not, by a long way, ripe for the elimination of capitalist production; it has proved this by the economic revolution which, since 1848, has seized the whole of the Continent, and has caused big industry to take real root in France, Austria, Hungary, Poland, and recently, in Russia, while it has made Germany positively an industrial country of the first rank – all on a capitalist basis, which in the year 1848, therefore, still had a great capacity for expansion. But it is precisely this industrial revolution which has everywhere produced clarity in class relations has removed a number of intermediate forms handed down from the period of manufacture and in Eastern Europe even from guild handicraft, has created a genuine bourgeois and a genuine large-scale industrial proletariat and has pushed them into the foreground of social development. However, owing to this, the struggle between these two great classes, a struggle which, outside England, existed in 1848 only in Paris and, at the most in a few big industrial centres, has spread over the whole of Europe and has reached an intensity still inconceivable in 1848. At that time the many obscure gospels of the sects, with their panaceas; today the single generally recognized, crystal-clear theory of Marx, sharply formulating the ultimate aims of the struggle. At that time the masses, sundered and differing according to locality and nationality, linked only by the feeling of common suffering, undeveloped, helplessly tossed to and fro from enthusiasm to despair; today the single great international army of socialists, marching irresistibly on and growing daily in number, organization, discipline, insight and certainty of victory” (Engels, pg. 4-5). If these were the conditions of the present and the absence of them in 1848, then what of 1830?



February Republic was forced to proclaim itself a *republic surrounded by social institutions*. The Paris proletariat compelled this concession, too.

What is significant in this short excerpt is the noted limitation of each respective revolution, though nonetheless progressive character of both with respect to the rise and positioning of the bourgeoisie. Marx (pg.18) also writes that “The first thing the February Republic had to do was, rather, to complete the rule of the bourgeoisie by allowing, besides the finance aristocracy, all the propertied classes to enter the orbit of political power”. Prior to February 1848, the bourgeoisie was not yet in complete rule in France; not until in 1848 when it had “struck off the crown behind which capital had kept itself concealed” (Marx, 1969, pg.18). From this we get a sense of what context may have allowed as the successive outcome of both revolutions, neither of which were discussed as carrying the (material) potential of completely uprooting the old system.

Nowhere is there reference ever made to the demise of the revolution – its failure “to fully realize” its aims; to “uproot the old system” – explained by consequence of its failure to link with the struggle of an oppressed, and weaker nation<sup>340</sup>. And even though neither Marx nor Engels committed to writing any extant analysis of what went wrong with the 1830 revolution, we are able – through their reflections on its imminent nature and outcome, and through their reference to the material conditions of the time (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.491), surmise the material interests

---

<sup>340</sup> The closest statement I could find is made by Engels in 1863, and this with specific reference to Poland and here with an attention to its strategic position viz Russia: “Citizens! The role of Poland in the history of Europe’s revolutions is a role that stands apart. Any revolution in the West which does not succeed in involving Poland and ensuring its independence and liberty is doomed to defeat. Let us take the revolution of 1848 as an example. It covered an area more extensive than any previous revolution; it swept along in its current Austria, Hungary, Prussia. But it came to a halt at the borders of Poland occupied by the armies of Russia. When Tsar Nicholas received the news of the February Revolution, he said to his entourage: Gentlemen, we shall mount our horses! At this he promptly mobilized his troops and concentrated them in Poland, in order to let them overrun rebellious Europe at the opportune moment. For their part, the revolutionaries knew perfectly well that the ground where the decisive battle would be fought was Poland” (Engels, MECW Vol 24, pg.107).

fermented before, within and after the revolution that secured the character and outcome of what transpired in July 1830<sup>341</sup>.

Perhaps the conclusion offered by Anderson (2010, pg.72) is meant to emphasize the central aim of the multilinear argument with respect to the example of Poland and the question of national emancipation, which is the suggestion that Marx did not reduce all politics to class and economic questions<sup>342</sup> (Anderson, 2010, pg.66). However, leaving the analysis at such a broad and rather abstract conclusion - one made without reference to any primary source evidence - on behalf of Marx and Engels, i.e., that democratic and class struggles cannot fully realize their aims if they do not link with the struggles of other oppressed nationalities, leads to a number of issues: it risks underemphasizing the meaning and significance that Marx and Engels afforded to the struggle of workers in the centers of capitalism, as well as overemphasizing – for Marx and Engels - the revolutionary role and consciousness of peasants in agrarian societies; it risks abstracting what a movement’s fully realized aims are or could be, especially with respect to the definition held by Marx and Engels of what they believed constituted a “fully realized” revolution; and it consequently abstracts from the specific political conditions which defined Marx and Engels’ position on Poland, thus aside from obscuring the details of history also affords to Marx and Engels

---

<sup>341</sup> “The July Monarchy was nothing other than a joint stock company for the exploitation of France’s national wealth, whose dividends were divided among ministers, Chambers, 240,000 voters, and their adherents. Louis Philippe was the director of this company – Robert Macaire on the throne. Trade, industry, agriculture, shipping, the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie, were bound to be continually endangered and prejudiced under this system. Cheap government, *government a bon marche*, was what it had inscribed on its banner in the July days. Since the finance aristocracy made the laws, was at the head of the administration of the state, had command of all the organized public authorities, dominated public opinion through the actual state of affairs and through the press, the same prostitution, the same shameless cheating, the same mania to get rich was repeated in every sphere, from the court to the *Café Borgne* to get rich not by production, but by pocketing the already available wealth of others...” etc.

<sup>342</sup> It should be clarified that here the notion of “class” and “economic questions” are presumed by Anderson (2010)– within the Marxian utilization of such concepts – to reference only class-as-working class and economic questions-as-industrial capitalism or questions concerning capitalist production. Rather, class has a much broader use in Marx and Engels, as does economy or economic. The clarification of this is the basis of another paper entirely.

an abstract (idealistic) politics – one which sought to apply a generalized position to all questions and considerations regardless of time, place and context. This latter point is evidenced through Anderson’s very association of the topic of Polish emancipation with that of the relation between white workers in the U.S. and the “Black struggle”, and the British workers and the Irish struggle. As clarified in the previous sub-section, the positions which Marx and Engels had with respect to the American working class and the struggle for emancipation in the U.S. were informed by a very concrete set of circumstances and considerations<sup>343</sup> that were relative to the larger – envisioned - struggle between (European) workers and capital.

With respect to Poland, just as with the topic of abolition, the greatest clarity, which avoids the above listed abstractions, comes from a reading of their position on the Polish cause through the lens of strategy and instrumentality; an instrumentality that was always in the specific service of the impending – though never teleologically guaranteed- proletarian led socialist revolution. Anderson (2010, pg. 62) does not address the instrumentalist position aside from a dismissive footnote he makes that follows an account of Engels’ flip flop position on the Polish cause. In 1851 Engels had written to Marx expressing dismay with the Polish struggle. There he wrote:

The more I think about it, the more obvious it becomes to me that the Poles are *une nation foutue* [ a nation that is finished] who can only continue to serve a purpose until such time as Russia herself becomes caught up into the agrarian revolution. From that moment Poland will have absolutely no *raison d’etre* any more. The Pole’s sole contribution to history has been to indulge in foolish pranks at once valiant and proactive<sup>344</sup>.

Though Anderson (2010, pg.62) notes that in subsequent writings on Poland, Engels would return to his position of strong support for the Polish cause, he footnotes that this “momentary

---

<sup>343</sup> i.e., the then position of the U.S. in the world market, its character as a rapidly industrial and capitalist nation, and the consequential retarding effects of chattel slavery that threatened to dominate the Americas. Abolition thus meant a strengthened U.S. working class and subsequently a strengthened international working-class movement.

<sup>344</sup> Engels (MECW 36,363) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.62).

lapse” is unduly focused on in order to suggest that Marx and Engels’ support for Poland had been “tactical”, “aimed at securing allies against conservative Russia for a communist movement”. As part of the footnote, Anderson (2010, pg.263) cites a 1941 article by Malcolm MacDonald that is meant to be indicative of this type of tactical argument. MacDonald’s (1941, pg.327) article “Marx, Engels and the Polish National Movement” does in fact reference this momentary “abandonment of Poland”, but only as one piece of a much larger characterization of the tactical or instrumental position that Marx and Engels held toward the “Polish question”; a larger characterization that is built on a significant set of considerations that are not taken up by Anderson (2010). It is worth engaging with some of these since they will complement and contribute to what we are attempting to clarify here with regard to the Polish question.

MacDonald (1941, pg.321) makes an important move when he begins his argument with clarifying the “liberal democratic theories” with which 19<sup>th</sup> century radicals in Europe afforded “both a moral justification and a theoretical foundation for the restless national aspirations of the Polish people”. Such support for the Polish –framed through a form of “liberal nationalism” – was premised on the belief that nations, like individuals, “were entitled to their liberty” (MacDonald, 1941, pg.322). The question then for Marx and Engels, notes MacDonald (1941, pg.322), was what their position – or the workers position – should be on Poland? When MacDonald (1941) positions this question as an alternative to the liberal democratic approach he is conscious of the basic tenets of Marxian theory that rejects a politics premised on moral justifications - of talk of rights, liberty, equality, etc.- let alone a moral justification for nationhood<sup>345</sup>. For MacDonald, unlike the European radicals who espoused a liberal nationalism, Marx and Engels’ support for the Polish cause is instead better understood as opportunistic or strategic, primarily as a means for advancing

---

<sup>345</sup> The discussion concerning the role and place of morality in Marx and Engels’ philosophical system has been clarified – hopefully – in section 2 of this dissertation.

the (general) revolutionary cause in Europe and at the same time the for the creation of a buffer state which would protect the more revolutionary Germany from a reactionary Tsarist Russia.

The point of distinction drawn with liberal democratic theories is significant to raise because clarification concerning the instrumental vs. multilinear argument does not necessarily come from drawing on evidence wholly different from what Anderson (2010) already references, but partly comes from a clarification of our reading of those sources. Clarifying the instrumentalist as opposed to moralistic considerations that informed Marx and Engels' political positions helps frame an analysis and interpretation of those utilized sources that is consistent with Marx and Engels' aspired scientific rigour, which – as demonstrated in section two of this dissertation – was one centred around (and dependent upon) both the presumed organizational logic of capital and class as it existed in the modern or industrial period, and the related (scientifically – as opposed to moralistically - framed) account of human emancipation. To ignore these conditions, say for example through supposing that Marx (and Engels) became disillusioned with the progressive aspects of capitalism, would be to undermine what in essence allowed them to justify the scientific nature of their theory of liberation, thus implicating their political program to the very criticism's they waged against the idealistic or utopian thinkers before them.

Nevertheless, even though Anderson (2010) does not necessarily interpret the evidence as a means for advocating a reading of Marx or Engels that explicitly proclaims them to be idealistic, utopian or moralistic; in constructing his account of a “multicultural, multilinear social dialectic” he nonetheless implicitly does so given his consequent abandonment of the very parameters that Marx and Engels employed in order to frame their uniquely scientific discovery. The multilinear argument thus wavers into the idealistic realm where revolutionary subjectivity lives unrestricted by time, or by any specific social, political and economic arrangement. The peasants, the slaves

and the colonial subjects are read as just as revolutionary as the trained, disciplined and abstracted working classes of Europe that Marx and Engels believed to hold – even if only as a potentiality – a unique form of consciousness that reflected a never before attained universality. Thus, in responding to the multilinear argument, clarity comes from pointing out the ways and means through which Marx and Engels consistently engaged with and interpreted political developments both through and in the service of the paradigm to which they were bound. Doing so – through highlighting the instrumentalist approach - also lends clarification through helping account for the variations in Marx and Engels’ political positions through the years in a way that does not necessarily suggest larger shifts in the basic logic of their philosophy; something that we can see is necessitated by the multilinear argument.

Going back to the specific example of national emancipation however, as Shlomo Avineri (1991) states in his “Marxism and Nationalism”, “Nowhere in Marx’s writings is there any mention of a right to self-determination or support for ‘national liberation’ as such”. Instead, Avineri (1991) accounts for Marx and Engels’ support for nationalist movements to a shift in perspective following the 1848-49 revolutions that swept across Europe “during which nationalism appeared as a major force for the first time on a massive scale”. Pre-1848 Avineri (1991) notes an overemphasis on behalf of Marx with the universalizing power of Capitalism in effectively doing away with national differences, as with other pre-modern traits. Post-1848, owing to the evidence of the assertive role of nationalism within conditions of capitalist Europe, Avineri (1991) writes that Marx began to take a more cautionary position that did not see nationalism as simply a relic of the pre-industrial age but as a modern “superstructural expression of the bourgeois need for larger markets and territorial consolidation”, aka the creation of “large economic entities” which capitalism required to function effectively. For these reasons, explains Avineri (1991), Marx began

to hold instrumental support for national unification for states such as Germany or Italy: the former for example comprising a territory of “thirty-seven states, mini-states and city states, each with its own laws, customs arrangements, political structures and currency”. National and territorial consolidation – the unification of Germany -, it was believed, would create conditions more adequate to capitalist development; and “whatever helped develop capitalism was, of course, ultimately hastening its demise”<sup>346</sup> (Avineri, 1991). Furthermore, it was believed that only through the creation of “unified entities” could the “proletariat develop an adequate class consciousness and not be sidetracked by secondary efforts” (Avineri, 1991). This instrumental consideration with regard to the national question – premised on what furthered the development of capitalism and the related formation of the international working class- is further evidenced by Avineri (1991) in those instances where Marx continued his opposition to national movements, such as those:

...in Central and Eastern Europe of those people who tried to seceded from the Austro-Hungarian Empire or achieve autonomy within it, mainly the Czechs and the Croatsians. They, and the other Slavonic groups, by trying to ‘Balkanize’ the Habsburg Empire were ‘reactionary’ in the sense that should they succeed, industrialization and economic development in Central and Eastern Europe would be slowed down, and hence the eventual victory of the proletariat would be hampered.

Elsewhere, Avineri (1991) notes that Marx argued – out of instrumental consideration – that Denmark should ultimately be absorbed by Germany, Mexico absorbed by the more developed United States, and other less developed populations – like the Czechs “who had no bourgeoisie”-

---

<sup>346</sup> Some of this is – despite the pre/post 1848 distinction made by Avineri - captured well in the *Manifesto* itself, where in the section “position of the Communists in Relation to the Various Existing Opposition Parties” Marx and Engels (1978, p.499-500) write: “The Communists fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement. In France they Communists ally themselves with the Social-Democrats, against the conservative and radical bourgeoisie, reserving, however, the right to take up a critical position in regard to phrases and illusions traditionally handed down from the great Revolution. In Switzerland they support the Radicals, without losing sight of the fact that this party consists of antagonistic elements, partly of Democratic Socialists, in the French sense, partly of radical bourgeois. In Poland they support the party that insists on an agrarian revolution as the prime condition for national emancipation, that party which fermented the insurrection of Cracow in 1846. In Germany they fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy, and the petty bourgeoisie”.

to be absorbed by the more developed ones like the German-Austrians. Though there was a marked recognition of the role of nationalism on the global capitalist stage post-1848 and post *Manifesto*, it was always a reconfiguration that remained within the basic parameters of the Marxist theory of liberation. CLR James, Raya Dunayevskaya and Grace Lee-Boggs (2013, pg.101) would echo this instrumental politics in their 1950 *State Capitalism and World Revolution* when, discussing strategic support for movements that lent to expanding workers internationalism, while opposing those nationalist movements that hindered it, such as in Yugoslavia and Easter Europe, they wrote: “All these are strategic orientations for an international movement. Practical politics consists of applying them in infinitely varied circumstances, but the variety is in the circumstances, not in what is to be applied”.

Nonetheless, it must be pointed out that despite Avineri’s (1991) claim that nowhere in Marx’s writing is there any mention of either a right to self-determination or support for national liberation as such, there is one place where Marx comes very close. In a March 24<sup>th</sup> 1875 speech, “For Poland”, Engels would report Marx’s words as such:

The workers’ party of Europe takes the most decisive interest in the emancipation of Poland and the original programme of the International Working Men’s Association expresses the reunification of Poland as a working-class political aim. What are the reasons for this special interest of the workers’ party in the fate of Poland? First of all, of course, sympathy for a subjugated people which, with its incessant and heroic struggle against its oppressors, has proven its historic right to national autonomy and self-determination. It is not in the least a contradiction that the *international* workers’ party strives for the creation of the Polish nation.

Other than expressing the clear support on behalf of Marx and the IWA for the emancipation of Poland, the language of “sympathy for a subjugated people” and “historic right to national autonomy and self-determination” expresses a moral approach to the question of national self-determination; something at odds with what we have identified with Marx and Engels so far. However, clarification returns through three ways: 1.) In the same speech, Marx would continue



in a way that confirms what Avineri (1991) identified as an element of the instrumentalist position on national unification, i.e. of its role in accelerating further development and the related national workers movement:

...Only when Poland has re-conquered its independence again, when it once again exercises control over itself as a free people, only then can its internal development recommence and will it be able to take part in its own right in the social transformation of Europe. As long as a viable people is fettered by a foreign conqueror, it must necessarily apply all its strength, all its efforts, all its energy against the enemy from without; for this length of time, then, its inner life remains paralysed, its remains unable to work for social emancipation. Ireland, Russia under Mongolian rule, etc., provide striking proof of this thesis (Marx & Engels, MECW Vol 24, pg.57).

This point concerning (specifically Polish, and additionally Irish) national unification as an important – first – step in the service of a larger internationalism that was associated with an impending socialist transformation is also expressed by Engels- who detested nationalism- though who nonetheless wrote to Karl Kautsky in 1882:

So long as Poland remains partitioned and subjugated, therefore, there can be no development either of a powerful socialist party within the country itself or of genuine international intercourse between Poles other than *émigrés* and the rest of the proletarian parties in Germany, etc. Every Polish peasant and workman who rouses himself out of his stupor to participate in the common interest is confronted first of all with the fact of national subjugation; that is the first obstacle he encounters everywhere. Its removal is the prime requirement for any free and healthy development. Polish socialists who fail to put the liberation of the country at the forefront of their programme remind me of those German socialists who were reluctant to demand the immediate repeal of the Anti-Socialist Law, and freedom of association, assembly and the press. To be able to fight, you must first have a terrain, light, air and elbow-room. Otherwise you never get further than chit-chat (Engels, 1932).

As well, see Engels' 1892 "Preface" to the Polish edition of the *Manifesto* where he writes:

And the restoration of an independent and strong Poland is a matter which concerns not only the Poles but all of us. A Sincere international collaboration of the European nations is possible only if each of these nations is fully autonomous in its own house...[...]... for the workers of all the rest of Europe need the independence of Poland just as much as the Polish workers themselves.

2.) Marx would also, in this same speech, make reference to the specific role of Polish national emancipation which MacDonald (1941) had suggested, i.e. the creation of a buffer state which would protect revolutionary Germany from Russia and the advancement of the revolutionary cause in Europe:

Another reason for the sympathy felt by the workers' party for the Polish uprising is its particular geographic, military and historical position. The partition of Poland is the cement which holds together the three great military despots: Russia, Prussia and Austria. Only the rebirth of Poland can tear these bonds apart and thereby remove the greatest obstacle in the way to the social emancipation of the European peoples<sup>347</sup> (Marx & Engels, 1875).

The weight of this special role of Poland is also captured well Engels' 1863 speech at a meeting held to commemorate the anniversary of the Polish uprising:

In truth, Poland is not like any other country. As far as revolution is concerned, it is the keystone to the European edifice; whichever is able to hold its ground in Poland, revolution or reaction, will end up by dominating the whole of Europe. And it is this quite special character which gives to Poland the importance which it has for all revolutionaries and which elicits from us, to this day, the cry: '*Long Live Poland!*'.

Poland was not just any other oppressed nation, but -owing to its context- was seen as the keystone, the wall, and the safeguard to what could potentially transpire in Europe itself.

3.) When accounting for Marx's initial statement from this speech - regarding sympathy for a subjugated people and a historic right for autonomy and self-determination-, in avoiding a general overemphasis of this moralistic point it is worth noting that if such sympathy and conviction of *right* were staple for Marx and Engels – absent of tactical or instrumental considerations - then the support would have been extended to those movements which they

---

<sup>347</sup> This point is made by Avineri (1991) as well, and in highlighting the perceived threat of a reactionary Russia he notes Marx's support for British foreign policy in the 1860's and 70's with respect to propping up the Ottoman Empire: "...the mergence of Slavonic nation states in the Balkans would greatly strengthen Russia, and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire would also bring Russia to Constantinople and the shores of the Bosphorus. This would greatly enhance Russia's power to intervene and frustrate revolutionary developments in Europe...These views made marx into a strange ally of British conservative politicians who were basing their policies on the 'Eastern Question' in an attempt to curb Russian influence".

opposed such as among the slavic nations in Central and Eastern Europe (Avineri, 1991; MacDonald, 1941, pg.322). Or as Robinson (2000, pg.56) notes, to Engels' lack of support for Italian nationalism, as opposed to German; the latter which he subsequently supported because it was believed, unlike in Italy, to correlate with the logic of capitalist development. Robinson (2000, pg.60) also points out how even in their tactical guise, their support for national emancipation was still biased, not being extended to nations outside of Europe such as India or Mexico. MacDonald (1941) suggests something similar too when he concludes that in Marx and Engels' tactical position on Poland, they harboured a "pro-German bias" or what Robinson (2000) describes as a harbored "German chauvinism" that tended to overemphasize the need for German national defence and German interests in a way almost contra to their maintained transitory position on nationalism and national questions (transitory not because they were unimportant, but because they were important only insofar as they contributed to something progressive within their context).

Thus, the point to be made is that in their position on Poland – their support for Polish national emancipation from foreign occupiers – Marx and Engels were not at all departing from a politics that made central the working-class formations that corresponded to conditions of capitalist development. The Polish cause was supported in as much as it either safeguarded the revolutionary proletariat in the nations of Western Europe – where such conditions existed-, or that it aided in the industrialization, or basic unification, of Poland itself. The question of nationalism and national emancipation, though perhaps given more attention than in the pre-1848 period, was still one that was subservient to the dimensions drawn around the formal working-class vs. bourgeoisie struggle. Though it was no longer necessarily in England, as Marx stated in 1847, that Poland would be liberated, it was still within the context of conditions where there existed a contradiction between the proletariat and bourgeoisie that victory - real human

emancipation – was to be attained. Poland, then, and owing to the material and historical context that developed, played a crucial role in safeguarding that emancipatory movement from regression; particularly at the hands of the counter revolutionary force *tout court* Marx and Engels identified with Russia. It is in this latter sense that Poland can particularly be described as the “external thermometer” of revolutions in Europe since 1789, playing that role of a wall of heroes before “Asian barbarism”.

But what about the other dimension that was associated with Poland as the “external thermometer”, particularly as suggests its role as the “harbinger of a wider European revolution” (Anderson, 2010, pg.65). We listed some of the arguments associated with this point above, namely: (i) Marx’s letter to Engels following the 1863 uprising in Poland, where he would write that “the era of revolution has now fairly opened in Europe once more”; (ii) Marx’s 1848 reference to the Krakow uprising of 1846 as a “radical democratic movement” which had “given a glorious example to the whole of Europe, by identifying the national cause with the democratic cause and the emancipation of the oppressed classes”; and (iii) on the same 1846 uprising, in 1875 Marx would further describe it as “the first in Europe to plant the banner of social revolution” and in 1880 would write that it was “the first political revolution to proclaim socialist demands”.

When noting the suggestion made by Anderson (2010), that for Marx the uprisings in agrarian Poland in 1846 and 1863 were the harbingers of the socialist revolution or a wider European revolution, we are not immediately presented with something unique or out of step with what Marx was already willing to suggest, and this with particular regard to movements in those spaces distant and antiquated with respect to existing capitalist formations. For example, as we noted in Chapter 7, the act of supplying an impulse for revolutionary activity in Western Europe was reflected in Marx and Engels’ writings on movements in India, Egypt and China, where with

respect to the latter we noted Marx's attention to the potential role of the Chinese uprising in fermenting crisis in the world market, and thus subsequently creating conditions conducive to revolutionary activity in industrial England. In this sense the uprising in China could be described as being considered the harbinger – the forerunner or signal – for what was still more imperative: the revolutionary activity of the European workers. Likewise, if during the Sepoy uprising Marx wrote that India was now “our best ally” this did not necessarily indicate him coming to recognize the self-activity and struggle of a colonized population, or a shifting of the revolutionary locus outside of Europe and contra to capitalist expansion. Rather, India was the best ally in the sense of aiding revolutionary activity in Western Europe. The Sepoy movement was never parallel to the revolutionary movement of the workers, but at most could be considered the spark, just as war against Russia, as Marx suggested in 1867 to the German Workers' Education Association in London, could be the spark that forced the workers party in Germany into a revolutionary stance.

As well, as Anderson (2010, pg.83) pointed out, Marx would make this same suggestion in his 1867 “Preface” to *Capital* with respect to the Civil War in America. But as we have clarified, rather than premised on the self-activity of slaves, or a recognition of their revolutionary agency, the signification of the struggle for abolition – as a harbinger for the revolution – was a judgement made within a particular historical and material context that had implications for the international workers movement against capital; namely, the threat of chattel slavery in regressing what was emerging as one of the most rapidly industrializing nations on earth, and the consequent impact that abolition would have in strengthening the American working class and by relation the international workers' movement.

Nonetheless, when returning to the example of Poland, at some level we can only proceed with guess work; assuming that when Marx wrote to Engels in 1863 of the uprising in Poland, he

had in mind the same strategic or instrumental role of an event or a movement (whether anti-colonial, or nationalist, or reformist or abolitionist) in fermenting conditions to instigate something more imperative:

What do you think of the Polish business? This much is certain, the era of revolution has now fairly opened in Europe once more. And the general state of affairs is good. But the comfortable delusions and almost childish enthusiasm with which we welcomed the revolutionary era before February 1848, have gone by the board. Old comrades such as Weerth, etc., are no more, others have fallen by the wayside or gone to the bad and, if there is new stock, it is, at least, not yet in evidence. Moreover, we now know what role stupidity plays in revolutions, and how they are exploited by blackguards. Incidentally, the 'Prussian' enthusiasts for the 'Italian' and 'Hungarian' nationalities are already finding themselves in a fix. The 'Prussians' are not going to deny their Russian sympathies. This time, let us hope, the lava will flow from East to West and not in the opposite direction, so that we shall be spared the 'honour' of the French initiative.

This strategic note on revolutionary activity in Poland is echoed in Engels' 1874 "A Polish Proclamation", where given Poland's "historical development and present position" its revolutionary potential and independence is instead described with relation to revolutionary activity to its East; to Russia. Given Russia's present state of development, argued Engels (1953), it was only through Polish independence that a movement within Russia could become "powerful enough to overthrow the existing order of things": "Independence of Poland and revolution in Russia mutually determine each other". Consequently, independence of Poland and revolution in Russia would spell consequences to the West of the European continent; in the more developed Germany and for the German workers, primarily through the consequent undermining of the Russian backed German bourgeoisie: "As long as the Russians stand behind the bourgeoisie and governments of Austria and Germany the force of the whole German labour movement is dulled. Thus our first aim is to get the Russian reaction and the Russian army off our necks. And for this task we have only one reliable ally, but one who is reliable regardless of the circumstances – *the Polish people*" (Engels, 1953).

Nonetheless, we are directed to perhaps more pressing evidence from Anderson (2010, pg.77) suggesting the drawing of a direct link between the uprising in Poland – particularly the 1846 Krakow uprising – and socialist transformation. Marx’s 1875 and 1880 descriptions of the Krakow uprising as “the first in Europe to plant the banner of social revolution” and “the first political revolution to proclaim socialist demands” cannot but – at least on a surface level - immediately suggest that Marx was beginning to acknowledge the socialist and communist potential of peasant based and agrarian movements; a potential that is generally believed to have been signified as the express potential of only those movements existing within very specific conditions of capitalist development. In this way the Krakow uprising in agrarian Poland was not simply a harbinger of socialist revolution through having potentially aided or instigated more imperative movements external to it; but can be considered a radical movement in its own right that even as early as 1848 was recognized by Marx as giving “a glorious example to the whole of Europe, by identifying the national cause with the democratic cause and the emancipation of the oppressed classes”. Despite this latter recognition, as noted earlier, in the same 1848 speech Marx denied any socialist orientation to the Krakow uprising and made sure to distinguish it – despite his praise - from communism, which was not the granting of equality to all classes but the abolition of classes. But what do we make of the more direct statements in 1875 and 1880 where it is now described as the first to plant the banner of social revolution and the first to proclaim socialist demands?

More clarity comes from re-visiting the two sources, the 1875 Speech by Marx and Engels “For Poland” and the 1880 letter to the Polish Socialists which was signed by Marx, Engels, Paul Lafargue and F. Lessner. In the 1875 document, which is where Engels recounts what he and Marx said, the translation provided in the MECW (Marx & Engels, Vol 24, pg. 57) reads:

The main reason for the sympathy of the working class towards Poland is, however, this: Poland is not merely the only Slavonic tribe, it is the only European people that has fought and is fighting as the *cosmopolitan soldier of the revolution*. Poland shed its blood during the American War of Independence; its legions fought under the banner of the first French Republic; by its revolution of 1830 it prevented the invasion of France that had been decided by the partitioners of Poland; in 1846 in Cracow it was the first in Europe to plant the banner of social revolution; in 1848 it played an outstanding part in the revolutionary struggle in Hungary, Germany and Italy; finally, in 1871 it supplied the Paris Commune with its best generals and most heroic soldiers.

We already referenced this piece above, when citing the other reasons why the working class has sympathy for Poland, namely (1.) its historic, military and geographic position as the cement which hold together the military despots Russia, Prussia and Austria. These three existing as “the greatest obstacle in the way to the social emancipation of the European peoples”; and (2.) the significance of independence and national unification for further developing the Polish movement: “As long as a viable people is fettered by a foreign conqueror, it must necessarily apply all its strength, all its efforts, all its energy against the enemy from without; for this length of time, then, its inner life remains paralysed, its remains unable to work for social emancipation”. I reference these two points again to help draw some context to how we might read the reference to the Krakow uprising of 1846 as the “first to plant the banner of social revolution”. If the latter expression is meant to indicate an already existing socialistic character to the 1846 uprising, then it would not make sense for Marx to suggest that national independence is something to support because it helps further develop the clarity and the potential of both the Polish movement, and the social transformation of Europe: “...Only when Poland has re-conquered its independence again, when it once again exercises control over itself as a free people, only then can its internal development recommence and will it be able to take part in its own right in the social transformation of Europe” pg.57).



By Anderson's (2010, pg.77) own admission, the language in this 1875 speech regarding the "first in Europe to plant the banner of a social revolution" is ambiguous, "At one level" says Anderson (2010, pg.77), "it simply repeated the arguments from 1848 to the effect that the 1846 uprising was a deeply democratic movement that aimed at land reform and other pressing social questions"; characteristics about the uprising that Marx nonetheless found necessary to distinguish from communism. Anderson (2010, pg.77) nonetheless stays his point of emphasis, focusing on the significance of the word "first" and instead seeks to find greatly clarity as to what this meant through reading it in concert with the joint 1880 letter to the Polish Socialists where it is remarked that the Krakow uprising was "the first political revolution to proclaim socialist demands". The original 1880 letter -where this is purported to be written - is non existent, and was published for the first time in French and then in Polish (translated from French), and then in English for the first time in 1918 in *The Class Struggle* (MECW, Vol 24. Pg.639). The full excerpt from the letter reads:

Since 1830, when the bourgeoisie in France and England more or less took power in their hands, the proletarian movement began to grow. Since 1840 the propertied classes of England were already obliged to resort to force of arms to resist the Chartist Party, this first militant organisation of the working class. Then in 1846 in the last corner of independent Poland<sup>348</sup>, Cracow, the first political revolution to proclaim socialist demands broke out. From that time on, Poland forfeited all the ostensible sympathies of the whole of Europe (MECW Vol 24, pg.344).

For Anderson (2010, pg.78) the distinction of the Krakow uprising as the first to proclaim socialist demands indicates a turn in Marx where he is now making a direct link between an otherwise agrarian Poland and socialism. There is no doubt the "anti-feudal" Krakow uprising,

---

<sup>348</sup> Cracow, or the Republic of Cracow, was an independent territory that included the city of Krakow and the surrounding area. Though as R.F. Leslie (1954) noted, it was independent only in name and in essence was under the joint control of the three occupiers of Poland: Russia, Prussia and Austria. It was in this "last corner of independent Poland" that political agitation amongst the Poles existed, and in this case, the centre of the 1846 uprising.

though ultimately unsuccessful, exemplified radical and democratic demands on behalf of the oppressed classes (so much Marx had already recognized in 1848). The editors of the MECW Volume 24 (pg.639) footnote what some of these were:

The programme drawn during the Cracow uprising by Edward Dembowski and expressing the interests of the peasantry and the urban poor demanded that the landless be given land, and that the condition of the working class be drastically improved by establishing national or 'social' workshops.

Nonetheless, there is no easy way to respond to the suggestion made by Anderson - that Marx was here making a turn, evidenced through his drawing of a direct link between the Krakow uprising and socialism – other than to suggest that it may be unduly overemphasized<sup>349</sup>. Did this rather obscure moment in the Marx and Engels corpus signify a turning away from their signification of capitalist development and capitalist class relations in fermenting the possibility of socialist or communist transformation? Perhaps one way of responding is to draw a distinction between a political movement proclaiming socialist (or socialistic) demands, and a movement that is concretely able to achieve or realize those demands – let alone the question of whether the realization of class abolition was ever something that Marx and Engels believed was able to occur nationally or regionally.

Hence even if on this one occasion they collectively identified the Krakow uprising as the first political revolution to make socialist demands, there is no indication suggesting that Marx and Engels believed the Krakow movement contained the potential to realize a socialist revolution or was socialist/communist per se; the latter – as Marx clarified in 1848 - signifying the abolition of class distinctions all together, which was something that was never even a principle or part of the

---

<sup>349</sup> On the overemphasis placed by Anderson (2010) on the term “social revolution” it is worth turning to Engels (1974) “On Social Relations in Russia” where in responding to Mr. Tkachov’s characterization of a potential Russian revolution as a “social revolution”, he writes: “This is pure tautology. Every real revolution is a social one, in that it brings a new class to power and allows it to remodel society in its own image.” The description of ‘social revolution’ then does not necessarily implying socialist understood as the abolition of classes.

program of the Krakow uprising. In fact, along the lines of the Marxian logic of scientific socialism, the Krakow uprising stands as an example for how a socialist revolution cannot be realized in conditions that are not adequate for it. For example, when we look at the developments leading up to, during and following the Krakow uprising we see clearly the way in which existing – pre-capitalist - class relations undermined the scope and potential of the revolutionary uprising, leading to its ultimate demise and betrayal at the very hands of the peasantry that stood to benefit from the land reform that would accompany such an “agrarian revolution”.

As Peter Brock (1959) notes in his “Socialism and Nationalism in Poland, 1840-1846”, convinced that the failure of the 1830 uprising was a result of the indifference of the peasantry Polish nationalists came to appreciate land reform as a key ingredient in getting the peasants – who formed the overwhelming majority of the Polish population – invested in the movement for Polish restoration<sup>350</sup>. However, securing the support of the landowning gentry – who played an influential

---

<sup>350</sup> This point is echoed by R.F. Leslie (1954, pg.129-130) when he reflects on the position taken up by the Polish Democratic Society (TDP) -a radical organization that was strong influenced by French Utopian socialist thought and some of whose members participated in the Krakow uprising: “..On 4 December 1836 it [TDP] issued a Manifesto which in effect summarised the opinions of the left-wing *emigres* and set out a much more radical programme than ever Young Poland or the associations at home had drawn up. In its preamble it made the usual plea that Poland had long been a bulwark against the East, but had fallen on hard times because the democratic principle had degenerated into caste privilege, placing the mass of the people outside the pale of the constitution. If only the revolutionary authorities in 1830-1 had made amends and appealed to the masses 'the People would have risen as one man, have braced the gauntlet of war on their vigorous arm and have crushed the invaders without foreign aid; and Poland, from the Oder and the Carpathian mountains, to the Borysthenes and the Dwina; from the Baltic to the Black Sea, would have founded her independence on the general happiness of her sons.' In the next rising the first step had to be the appeal to the people at large. '... If our next revolution is not to be a sad repetition of the past, the first battle-cry must be the emancipation of the people, their restoration unconditionally to the ownership of the soil of which they had been plundered, the restitution of their rights, the admission of all, without distinction of birth or creed, to the enjoyment of the blessings of independence.' This was indeed a noble ideal, but it was also the rock on which the Democratic Society was in danger of foundering, for it promised nothing less than emancipation without compensation being paid by the peasants to the landlords and gave rise to the accusation that the Society was spreading communism in Poland. In fact, in the observations of the *Centralizacja* or Central Committee appended to the Polish edition of the Manifesto, it was stated that the Society would have nothing to do with communal property...”. Amy Linch’s (2009) in her “Poland, Revolutions, 1846-1863” also writes on how in the wake of the failure of the 1830 revolution, Polish democrats came to see the freeing of the serfs as a critical requisite, particularly regarding their support in the military aspect of the revolution.

role in agrarian Poland - also meant that the language of socialism<sup>351</sup>, socialization of agriculture, or land nationalization in any form would be off the table. Instead, part of the projected reforms included extending ownership to the peasantry who as Engels (1874) put it, could thus “acquire property in their own land”. It was “a broadening of the class of property owners to include peasant smallholders” (Brock, 1959, pg. 122), which is in part why in his 1848 speech in Brussels Marx distinguished the Krakow uprising from communism saying that in the former, the revolutionaries “wanted only to abolish political distinctions between the social classes; they wanted to give equal rights to the different classes”<sup>352</sup> rather than abolish social classes.

However, despite attempts to appeal to the peasantry through promises of full property rights in their holdings, the Polish radicals, and the 1846 uprising, would ultimately fail to bridge the existing animosities between the landlords and peasantry in the service of the national cause

---

<sup>351</sup> Brock (1959) does note the existence of proponents of socialism among a minority of the “Polish radicals” and revolutionary nationalists through the 1830’s and early 1840’s. Many of these, Brock (1959, pg.122) notes, were Polish *emigres* who had found their way to France and had come into contact with the – and found inspiration in – the French utopian sects of the Saint-Simonians, followers of Fourier, Cabet and Proudhon; as well as Christian socialist radicals associated with the schools of Lammennai and Buchez. In fact, according to Brock (1959, pg.126), the first concerted efforts to organize the peasantry along what can be considered “socialist ideas” was inspired by the Vicar of Wilkolaz – Piotr Sciegienny- who circulated among the peasants “inflammatory tracts” such as the infamous “Bull of Pope Gregory XVI” that was personally penned by the Vicar, but falsely attributed to the Pope. The Bull decried the oppression of the peasantry at the hands of the landlords, denounced rents and dues, the crimes of soldiers and conscription into war, etc. The Bull instead advocated to the peasants that “God did not create you for poverty and suffering. His will is that...you should abound in all things, and live together in joy and concord” and “The lord is a man like the peasant, owing legs and arms, health and strength to God. He can and indeed he should earn his own bread for himself. God, having created man, placed him upon the earth which he had set aside for him and all his kind, allowing him to make use of all the fruits of the earth which he should obtain by his labour” (cited in Brock, 1959, pg.127).

<sup>352</sup> This was not the first time that Marx and Engels recognized the progressive aspects of land reform, as a potential stepping-stone to communism, while distinguishing it from communism as such. Lewis S. Feuer (1963) in his “The North American Origin of Marx’s Socialism” notes Marx’s rejection of the U.S. based National Reform Movement as being equivalent to communism, which was a line blurred by one of the leaders of the New York local of the Communist League, Herman Kriege. In May 1846 Marx and his associates in Brussels drew up a document expelling Kriege from the Communist party, claiming that he “in both theory and practice joined with the bourgeoisie” (Feuer, 1963). National Reform, the parceling out of land to settlers as their own private property, may lead to promotion of industrialization and the market – thus paving the way for communism – but it was not communism: “Of what Europeans, asked Marx, are these dreams? Not the communist workers but rather the bankrupt tradesman and master craftsmen who yearn to become again petty-bourgeois and farmers in America. The wish ‘that all people shall be property owners’ can be as little realized as ‘the wish to make all people emperors, kings’” (Feuer, 1963).

(Brock, 1959). As R.F. Leslie (1954) notes, “love of the people gave way to fear of the people” and the propertied classes themselves also came to see nothing to gain through a revolution which threatened to take away part of their estates and their peasants. Subsequently, what would ensue would be the “Glacian slaughter” where Polish speaking peasants in neighbouring Galicia – the Austrian part of partitioned Poland- would carry out a revolt against serfdom, directed at the Polish nobility [*szlachta*] and the peasants who had initiated the 1846 uprising in the Republic of Krakow. Joined by Austrian troops, the Glacian peasants would strike down the *szlachta*/Krakow national uprising, killing over 1,000 nobles and sacking four to five hundred manors (Simons, 1971). In an act of irony, the Polish speaking peasants had turned their anger against the very revolutionaries whose ideals – whether tactical or genuine- included measures for the improvement of the peasant’s situation.

There were thus undoubtably “socialist ideas” proclaimed during the Krakow uprising in 1846 – such as the call for land reform and criticism of distinctions based on birth or creed; ideas which came to fore in a number of ways: the lessons learned from the failure of the 1830 uprising and the recognized need to appeal to the peasants via. the promise of land reform; the influence of French utopian socialism on the politics of a minority of Polish *emigres* in the 1830’s and 1840’s; and the Christian socialist propaganda circulated among the Polish speaking peasantry that taught that God had set aside for (all) man – not just the nobles – “the fruits of the earth which he should obtain by his labour”. Nonetheless, there is a reason why Marx and Engels distinguished themselves from utopian socialism and from Christian socialism; a distinction which can partly be accounted for through the above listed conditions that informed the demise of the Krakow uprising at the hands of the oppressed themselves. It is here, once more, that it is noteworthy to draw attention to Marx’s 1874-75 criticism of Bakunin where he -as always - draws attention to the

requisite historical and economic conditions that he believed were necessary for a ‘radical’ social revolution:

A radical social revolution is connected with certain historical conditions of economic development; the latter are its presupposition. Therefore it is possible only where the industrial proletariat, together with capitalist production, occupies at least a substantial place in the mass of the people... But here appears the innermost thought of Herr Bakunin. He understands absolutely nothing about social revolution; all he knows are its political phrases. For him its economic requisites do not exist. Since all hitherto existing economic formations, developed or undeveloped, have included the enslavement of the working person (whether in the form of the wage worker, the peasant, etc.) he thinks that a ‘radical revolution’ is possible under all these formations.

Another strategy we could employ with respect to the suggestion that in the 1875 & 1880 documents on Poland Marx was drastically changing his views, is to look at other sources within the same time period that may suggest otherwise. For example, the next year, in February 1881, Marx (MECW, Vol. 46, pg.65) would write to the Dutch Social-Democrat Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis reiterating what may otherwise be associated with the ‘early’ Marx, particularly his association of socialism with the impending proletarian revolution, and with a requisite progress resultant from capitalist development:

Scientific insight into the inevitable disintegration, now steadily taking place before our eyes, of the prevailing social order; the masses themselves, their fury mounting under the lash of the old governmental bogies; the gigantic and positive advances simultaneously taking place in the development of the means of production – all this is sufficient guarantee that the moment a truly proletarian revolution breaks out, the conditions for its immediate initial (if certainly not idyllic) *modus operandi* will also be there.

I am perhaps being tendentious here, though the reference is not without its significance given the multilinear arguments temporal emphasis. In the end however, the response may justifiably rest on the fact that the majority of evidence suggests that Marx and Engels held a largely instrumental interest and support of the Polish cause that was in the service – not of Polish emancipation in and for itself – but of the broader European workers movement against capital –

a movement that was deemed to harbor the requisite material conditions and so corresponding forms of clarity and consciousness that would allow for an end to human servitude.

And though the example of Poland is significant in shedding light on Marx and Engels' general account of questions of nationalism and national liberation, the very specific context of Poland -historically, geographically, and politically with respect to Europe – obscures what can be painted about that more general account. As Engels wrote in 1863: “In truth, Poland is not like any other country”.

Both Marx and Engels - at times emphatically - expressed the centrality of the Polish cause, but always at an arms reach and with reference to Poland as either gate keeper, or as potential provider of impulse for greater revolutionary activity in Europe; the latter element of impulse also largely consequent on the impact of a Polish uprising on Russia. Perhaps one of the most pointed statements expressing their position on Poland and Polish liberation is found within that very 1880 collective letter that here hangs with some ambiguity: “...the cry ‘*Long live Poland!*’ has really meant: Death to the Holy Alliance, death to the military despotism of Russia, Prussia and Austria, death to Mongol rule over modern society” (MECW, Vol 24, pg.344).

Aside from the example of Poland, Anderson (2010) also cites Marx's writings on agrarian Ireland and the cause of Irish national independence as indicative of a similar multilinear shift away from centering revolutionary activity along only the class lines of bourgeoisie vs. proletariat, and in only the advanced and industrial centres of capitalism. According to Anderson (2010, pg.240) whereas the early Marx had – “in modernist fashion” –situated the independence of agrarian Ireland as consequent to the rise to power of the British labour movement, around 1870 the later Marx began to recognize the progressive aspects of Irish nationalism in supporting the British labour movement itself and in the struggle against global capital.

Though, by Anderson's (2010, pg.118-120) own admission, the early Marx of the 1840's and early 1850's nonetheless expressed "overall support for Irish national liberation", evidenced through his criticisms of police suppression of the Irish national liberation movement (1849) (Anderson, 2010, pg.119); and his commentary on both the starving of Ireland (1849) and on the role of British (and Irish) landowning classes in opposing the tenant's rights movement (1853) (Anderson, 2010, pg.120). As well, Anderson (2010, pg.121) points us to a September 15<sup>th</sup> 1855 article where Marx eulogizes the Irish Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor, and in doing so Anderson writes that Marx "notes the presence of leftist slogans at the funeral". For Anderson (2010, pg.122) Marx's reporting that at the funeral there was a red flag with the inscription "Alliance des peuples"; a "red liberty cap swaying at the top of the main standard"; and that "the burial expenses were met by the working class of London", all indicate that he was focusing "attention on the connections of the wider democratic, labour, and socialist movement to Irish national liberation".

Further, in 1867, as Anderson (2010, pg.132) notes, Marx would also write on the English attempts to repeatedly conquer Ireland and eventually conclude that Irish independence and separation from England was the only means to ensure the survival of the Irish people: "Over 1,100,000 people have been replaced by 960,000 sheep. This is a thing unheard of in Europe....Only under Mongols in China was there once a discussion whether towns should be destroyed to make room for sheep. The Irish question is therefore not simply a question of nationality, but a question of land and existence. Ruin or revolution is the watchword..."<sup>353</sup>. For Anderson (2010, pg.132) in this excerpt, published as a report of what Marx said at a meeting, there is indication of Marx's criticism of the inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization, as

---

<sup>353</sup> Marx (MECW 12,221) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.132)



opposed to the notion that the expanse of bourgeois society through colonialism was a necessarily a progressive force<sup>354</sup>.

The crux of the multilinear argument, however, rests on the period of 1869-70 when as noted above, it is argued that Marx's thinking undertook a radical shift as he began to view agrarian Ireland as playing "a leading role in sparking a social revolution in Britain" (Anderson, 2010, pg.144). The referenced excerpt from a December 10<sup>th</sup> 1869 letter to Engels reads:

For a long time, I believed it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working-class ascendancy. I always took this viewpoint in the *New York Tribune*. Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will never accomplish anything before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. This is why the Irish question is so important for the social movement in general<sup>355</sup>.

Anderson (2010, pg.144), referencing August Nimtz, notes that the significance of this statement lies in the fact that Marx was demonstrating that the revolutionary 'lever' did not reside exclusively in the advanced and industrialized capitalist world. From highlighting this point, Anderson (2010, pg.145) moves into paralleling this letter to one that Marx sent two weeks earlier to German activist and social democratic Ludwig Kugelmann, where he wrote:

I have become more and more convinced – and the thing now is to drum this conviction into the English working class – that they will never do anything decisive here in England before they separate their attitude towards Ireland quite definitely from that of the ruling classes, and not only make common cause with the Irish, but even take the initiative in dissolving the Union established in 1801, and substituting a free federal relationship for it...Every movement in England itself is crippled by the dissension with the Irish, who form a very important section of the working class in England itself.

What Anderson (2010, Pg.144) excludes from this very excerpt is worth noting since it will add to the general point we will make as we proceed:

And this must be done not out of sympathy for Ireland, but as a demand based on the interests of the English proletariat. If not, the English people will remain bound to the leading-strings of the ruling classes, because they will be forced to make a common front with time against Ireland.

---

<sup>354</sup> We have responded to this larger point in Chapter 7.

<sup>355</sup> Marx (MECW 43,398) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.144)

Anderson (2010, pg.145) notes this – the part he references- as a realization by Marx that “English working-class consciousness was attenuated by anti-Irish prejudice”, unless until the working-class movement in England was willing to make common cause with the Irish who formed “a very important section of the working class in England itself”. Anderson (2010, pg.150) builds on this point further when he cites an April 9<sup>th</sup> 1870 letter from Marx to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt where he further elaborated on the relationship between Ireland and the English working class:

And most important of all! All industrial and commercial centres in England now have a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who forces down the standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker, he feels himself to be a member of the ruling nation and, therefore, makes himself a tool of his aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He harbours religious, social and national prejudices against him. His attitude towards him is roughly that of the poor whites to the niggers in the former slave states of the American Union. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of English rule in Ireland. This antagonism is kept artificially alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short by all the means at the disposal of the ruling class. This antagonism is the secret of the English working class's impotence, despite its organisation. It is the secret of the maintenance of power by the capitalist class. And the latter is fully aware of this<sup>356</sup>.

In addition to this “subjective factor” impacting the class consciousness of the English working class, there was also the objective factor whereby English consolidation of agriculture and land in Ireland was resulting in the steady supply of Irish immigrant labour into the English labour market. The surplus supply of cheap labour into the workforce was resulting in the forcing down of wages and “the material and moral position of the English working classes”.

As Anderson (2010, pg.150) notes, for Marx, the only way out of this situation where subjective and objective factors were constricting the development of class consciousness in England was to centre the national emancipation of Ireland as a condition for the emancipation of

---

<sup>356</sup> Marx (MECW 43, 474-75) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.149-150).

the working class of England; i.e., as a means for uniting British labour with Irish immigrant labour. As such, support for, and realization of, the Independence of Ireland would help in the development of “revolutionary consciousness among English workers” (Anderson, 2010, pg.152):

England, as the metropolis of capital, as the power that has hitherto ruled the world market, is for the present the most important country for the workers' revolution and, in addition, the only country where the material conditions for this revolution have developed to a certain state of maturity. Thus, to hasten the social revolution in England is the most important object of the International Working Men's Association. The sole means of doing so is to make Ireland independent. It is, therefore, the task of the 'International' to bring the conflict between England and Ireland to the forefront everywhere, and to side with Ireland publicly everywhere. The special task of the Central Council in London is to awaken the consciousness of the English working class that, for them, the national emancipation of Ireland is not a question of abstract justice or humanitarian sentiment, but the first condition of their own social emancipation<sup>357</sup>.

For Anderson (2010, pg.152) what is reflected here is a novel – on the part of Marx- “concretization of the dialectics of class and national liberation in the struggle to uproot capitalism...”. What is foremost reflected, like what was suggested with respect to Poland, was the role and impact of struggles in societies peripheral to capitalism toward instigating or initiating “a radical transcendence of the capitalist system itself” (Anderson, 2010, pg.151). Yet, Anderson’s (2010, pg.151) conclusion risks overstatement in the following ways. As he himself *attaché’s* to his conclusion in the discussion on Ireland, that regarding the potential of societies peripheral to capitalism, it was understood – by Marx- as *together*, with the worker’s revolution in the industrially developed societies, that the transcendence of the capitalist system could come about. Rather than suggesting with reference to Marx, as he did in the section on Poland, that movements in agrarian societies could potentially progress directly to communism, here we read a – not insignificant- note on the concert between the agrarian and the industrially developed; a note that was perhaps inescapable to acknowledge on this score given the direct statements made by Marx

---

<sup>357</sup> Marx (MECW 43, 475) as cited in Anderson (2010. Pg.150).

in the referenced excerpts above that suggest a maintained signification of the capitalist mode of production and its related forms of intercourse. To repeat:

England, as the metropolis of capital, as the power that has hitherto ruled the world market, is for the present the most important country for the workers' revolution and, in addition, the only country where the material conditions of this revolution have developed to a certain state of maturity. Thus to hasten the social revolution in England is the most important object of the International Working Men's Association.

Re-framed this way, we do not necessarily find anything novel - in the sense of transformative – on behalf of Marx, who here still privileges the industrially developed centres of capitalism, though -and with specific reference to Ireland - noting the rather instrumental politics that Irish independence would play for a social revolution in England: “the most important country”. Irish independence then, was not something to support through abstract considerations of “justice or humanitarian sentiment”, nor out of a sense of the revolutionary character and subjectivity of the Irish peasantry, but rather a political position that stood as a condition for the social emancipation of English workers: “The English working class will never accomplish anything before it has got rid of Ireland”. Like Polish nationalism and independence, which would break the “Holy Alliance”, hold back Asian barbarism, and at a later time – owing to historically developed conditions – possibly contribute to instigating social revolution in Russia, the Independence of Ireland served an instrumental purpose to the more imperative movement of workers in Western Europe, particularly in England “where the material conditions of this revolution have developed to a certain state of maturity”, and thus “to hasten the social revolution in England is the most important object of the International Working Men's Association. The sole means of doing so is making Ireland independent”.

We here note this instrumental politics with respect to the role that Irish independence would play toward removing the subjective and objective constrictions on English working class

consciousness; however, there is another instrumental element to Irish national independence that, which is only briefly taken up by Anderson (2010, pg.145), and thus underemphasized within his reflections. As Anderson does note, in the 1869 letter to Kugelmann, Marx mentions the role that Irish independence would play in overthrowing the British aristocratic landowning class, and hence another reason why the lever must be pulled in Ireland:

The primary condition for emancipation here—the overthrow of the English landed oligarchy—remains unattainable, since its positions cannot be stormed here as long as it holds its strongly-entrenched outposts in Ireland. But over there, once affairs have been laid in the hands of the Irish people themselves, as soon as they have made themselves their own legislators and rulers, as soon as they have become autonomous, it will be infinitely easier there than here to abolish the landed aristocracy (to a large extent the same persons as the English Landlords) since in Ireland it is not just merely an economic question, but also a national one, as the Landlords there are not, as they are in England, traditional dignitaries and representatives, but the mortally-hated oppressors of the nationality<sup>358</sup>.

Marx would echo this point in his April 9<sup>th</sup> 1870 letter to Meyer and Vogt – not cited in Anderson (2010), when he wrote:

...I would ask you to pay particular attention to the following: After studying the Irish question for years I have come to the conclusion that the decisive blow against the ruling classes in England (and this is decisive for the workers' movement all over the world) cannot be struck in England, but only in Ireland. On 1 January 1870 the General Council issued a secret circular, written by me in French...on the relationship of the Irish national struggle to the emancipation of the working class, and thus on the attitude the International Association must take towards the Irish question. Here I give you, quite shortly, the salient points. Ireland is the bulwark of the English landed aristocracy. The exploitation of this country is not simply one of the main sources of their material wealth; it is their greatest moral power. They represent, in fact, the domination of England over Ireland. Ireland is, thus, the grand moyen by which the English aristocracy maintains its domination in England itself. On the other hand: if the English army and police were withdrawn from Ireland tomorrow, you would immediately have an agrarian revolution in Ireland. But the overthrow of the English aristocracy in Ireland would entail, and would lead immediately to, its overthrow in England. This would bring about the prerequisites for the proletarian revolution in England (Marx, MECW vol 43, pg.474)

In Ireland, it was believed that the relation between the land question and the national question would allow for the “easier” overthrow of the former. The consequent agrarian revolution

---

<sup>358</sup> Marx (MECW, 43, 390-91) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.145-146).

that would ensue as a result of Irish national independence would thus strike a decisive blow to the English landed aristocracy who constituted the largest share of landholders in Ireland (Marx, Nov 4<sup>th</sup> 1880); a blow that Marx believed to be unattainable, if not infinitely harder, in England. Thus the Irish “Land Question” was seen as the “harbinger of the English ‘Land Question’ (Marx Nov 4<sup>th</sup> 1880), and “having once broken down in what is ironically called the ‘Sister’-island, the English landed system will no longer be tenable at home”. Consequently, it was believed by Marx that the overthrow of the English aristocracy and the settling of the land question in England would “bring about the prerequisites for the proletarian revolution in England”.

Unfortunately, in his conclusion, with respect to the topic of Ireland, Anderson (2010. Pg.240) writes only of Marx’s concern with the relation of nationalism and ethnicity to working class formation and consciousness. There is no mention of the significance that both Marx and Engels placed on the impact that Irish independence would have on the overthrow of the English landed oligarchy, which Marx noted as “the primary condition for emancipation”. It is an emphasis which when addressed, helps further contextualize their position on Irish nationalism in the service of the movement of workers in the industrial center of capitalism. Following the above excerpted paragraph in his 1869 letter to Kugelmann, Marx reemphasizes the important role to be played by the English working class and thus why the lever must be applied in the constricting relation with Ireland: “Since, however, the English working class undoubtably throws the greatest weight on the scales of social emancipation generally, this is the point where the lever must be applied”.

However, in step with their shifting political positions, owing to what was strategically viable at any given time and context with respect to the movement of the proletariat, both Marx and Engels would come to revise some of their positions on the Irish question, abandoning some of the optimism and discourse on revolutionary struggle with respect to both Irish independence

and the “Irish land problem”. In the MECW Volume 46 (pg.xxvi) the editors draw our attention to two letters that speak to the context and revisions of the time:

Numerous letters from 1880 to 1883 show Marx's and Engels' continual interest in Ireland. At the end of 1880 in a letter to John Swinton, Marx stressed the connection between the land questions in Ireland and England. Defeat of English landlordism in Ireland, he believed, would bring about the collapse of the land system in England (p. 40). But the Land League's peasant war against English landlordism and Gladstone's rule, and the heightened activity of Irish M.P.s under Charles Parnell, led Marx to conclude that Home Rule was the only possible solution of the Irish problem. This he wrote to Jenny Longuet at the end of April 1881 (see p. 90) and Eduard Bernstein in July 1882. 'In the absence of a foreign war or the threat thereof,' he wrote, 'an Irish uprising has not the remotest prospect of success' (p. 287) and amplified: 'The only recourse remaining to the Irish is the constitutional method of gradual conquest, whereby one position is taken after another' (pp. 287-88)<sup>359</sup>.

Thus through the closing example of Ireland we see a continuation of the same politics that was applied with respect to the struggle for polish emancipation, abolition and even the event of war. In neither of these instances was Marx or Engels adopting a generalized position, let alone

---

<sup>359</sup> The wording in the excerpt suggests that the letter to Bernstein was from Marx but it was in fact written by Engels. Nonetheless, the referenced points are significant in demonstrating the tactical politics which was employed with respect to the Irish question and the role, form and imperative concerning the struggle for Irish national liberation. When read fully, the excerpt proves revealing: “There can be no doubt that many Fenians have now come home again and have revived the former armed organisation. They provide an important impulse within the movement and compel the liberals to adopt a more resolute posture. But otherwise they achieve nothing unless it be to frighten John Bull. True, the latter is growing perceptibly weaker on the periphery of his empire, but as close to home as this he is still in a position to suppress with ease any kind of Irish rebellion... And in suppressing rebellion, John Bull's brutality is without equal. In the absence of a foreign war or the threat thereof, an Irish uprising has not the remotest prospect of success; and here only two powers might constitute a threat — France and, to a far greater degree, the United States. France is out of the question. In America the parties are coquetting with the Irish vote; they make many promises but abide by none. Nor have they any intention of involving themselves in a war on Ireland's behalf. It even serves their interests that conditions in Ireland should be such as to encourage massive Irish emigration to America. And it is understandable that a country which, in 20 years' time, will be the most populous, wealthy and powerful in the world, should feel small inclination to rush headlong into adventures which could and would upset its gigantic internal development. In 20 years' time it will have completely changed its tune. But should the danger of a war with America arise, England would give the Irish anything they asked, and with both hands — saving only complete independence which, in view of that country's geographical position, is not at all desirable. Accordingly the only recourse remaining to the Irish is the constitutional method of gradual conquest, whereby one position is taken after another; and here the lurking presence of armed Fenian conspiracy can still furnish a most effective element. But these very Fenians are being increasingly impelled into a kind of Bakuninism; the only purpose to be served by the assassination of Burke and Cavendish was the frustration of the compromise between the Land League and Gladstone. In the circumstances, however, that compromise would have been the best thing for Ireland” (Engels, MECW vol 6, pg. 287-288)

one at the expense of the imperative movement of the European workers. It was only the latter that they believed contained the potential to overthrow the existing state of affairs which were both a reflection of and a condition of human self-estrangement. Thus, whatever helped secure the adequate conditions for the workers movement – whether holding back a reactionary force, or encouraging further industrialization and economic development – was adopted as an integral concern of the international working class movement; at least as so long as it served this purpose.



## **Chapter 9: Marx on Russia: Indications of a Non-Suprahistorical, yet Unilinear and Theory of History**

Beginning with the supposition of an anti-colonial tone in the late 1850's, to a supportive position on abolition, to the marked support for national liberation as evidenced via Poland and Ireland, the multilinear argument locates Marx's late (1877-82) interest, study and writings on the internal economic and social relations of Russia as a kind of denouement to the multilinear turn. It is believed that it is here, with respect to the example of Russia, that in the later years of his life Marx would make some of the most pointed theoretical engagements and statements with regard to both: the possibility of socialist transformation in otherwise predominantly peasant and agrarian non-Western societies; as well as clarifications concerning his multilinear as opposed to unilinear conception of progress and of history. In the "late writings on Russia", according to Anderson (2010, pg.243-244), not only does Marx limit his previously sketched outline of historical development to Western Europe – thus correcting any supposition of a suprahistorical theory of history -, he also (for the first time) argues that a communist development was a real possibility in a non-capitalist society; given certain external conditions of course.

This chapter will thus engage with this multilinear reading of Marx – and of the evidence provided – proceeding as follows: 1.) The first section will provide a clarification of the characteristics of Marx and Engels' theory of historical development that is both unilinear – in the sense of abiding by a requisite path of development to socialism – while simultaneously non-suprahistorical and non-deterministic. Two characteristics that tend to be perceived as antithetical; an antithesis however, that was never suggested by Marx (nor Engels) in the first place. In a sense, this section will seek to justify the continued characterization of Marx and Engels' theory as unilinear while simultaneously avoiding the charge of being mechanistic, determinist, teleological, economistic, simplistic, etc.; 2.) Following the clarification offered in sub-section one concerning

the unilinear character of Marx and Engels' theory of history, this second section of chapter 9 will seek to clarify the evidence presented by Anderson (2010) - "the late writings on Russia" - which he argues to suggest both the appreciation of a multilinear path to development, and the related suggestion that a peasant society could transition directly to socialism without having to develop through the trials of capitalism. Collectively, both sub-sections will demonstrate how the late writings on Russia present no significant revision on the part of Marx and Engels, nor do they suggest any turning away from a privileging of capitalist productive and social relations and of the related historical activity and agency of the European workers.

### ***9.1: The Unilinear Dimensions of Marx and Engels' Theory of History***

*"The evolution from communal to private forms is unilinear in the abstract, multilinear in the concretely different ways".*

-Lawrence Krader (1974) "Introduction" to *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*

The association of unilinearity with Marx and Engels is contested terrain; a contestation however which it will be argued here, stems largely from a misconstruing. For example, when in Sean Sayers' (2020, pg.28) "Marx and Progress" he seeks to refute the notion that Marxism reflects a "unilinear theory of history", "unilinear" is read as a "grand narrative" based on the European model of development, which is then applied – presumably by Marx - to all human societies and histories with no attention to context or specificity. Unilinear, here, is recognized as a fixed evolutionary schema – Asiatic, to ancient slave-based, to feudal, to capitalist, to communist – that though specific to European history, is erroneously used and understood as a general outline or pattern of human history *tout court*. For Sayers' (2020) this simplistic unilinear model of progress is instead something developed during the Soviet period, or by "traditional Marxists", rather than

indicative of the “darker and more complex picture” of historical development that Marx put forward.

Like Sayers, Ellen Meiksins Wood (1984, pg.95) in her “Marxism and the Course of History”, distinguishes “unilinearism” as a mechanical and simplistic view of history that holds that all societies are predestined “to go through a single, inexorable sequence of stages from primitive communism to slavery to feudalism, and finally to capitalism which would inevitably give way to socialism”. For Wood (1984, pg.96), such a view of history has less to do with Marxist theory than with “Stalinist dogma”. Wood (1984, pg.96) adds that such a perspective or theory of history has been largely “disowned by Marxists” in both East and West; coming to be formally acknowledged as an aberration; one incompatible not only “with Marx’s own understanding of history but with the fundamental principles of historical materialism and its conception of class struggle”.

Anderson (2010; 2008 unilinearism and multilinearism in Marx’s thought) too, as part of his general argument for sketching a (later) multilinear Marx as opposed to a unilinear one, clarifies the “unilinear approach” - a naïve conception held by an early Eurocentric Marx, and a consequent simplification of Marxism at the hands of orthodox Soviet Marxists – as a theory of universal historical and economic development; one where all societies are fated to proceed through the same path from backwardness to modernity. What these three writers have in common with respect to their identification of a unilinear theory of history concerns foremost the attribution of a universal pattern of historical development across all societies and cultures, irrespective of context or difference. In short, unilinearism is the implication that the path of progress, universally – and mechanically and teleologically -proceeds along a specific course of development: from the primitive communal, to slave based, to feudal, to capitalist, to socialist.

These three writers, however, vary in degrees when it comes to their respective responses to the charge of unilinearism in Marx's theory of history. For Sayers' (2020), though acknowledging the analytic limitations that arise through imposing the unilinear model of historical development on all societies – something he does not entirely absolve Marx of - he concludes that the question is becoming increasingly irrelevant “in practice nowadays” given the far-reaching expanse of the capitalist mode of production across the globe.

For Ellen Wood (1984), the answer lies in clarifying or re-reading Marx, and in particular, emphasizing the phenomenological and humanistic dimensions of Marxist thought that centre “class struggle” in the determination of historical development. For Wood (1984), unilinearity implies a kind of law or mechanical determinism that ensures the universal and progressive unfolding of human history and industry along a set path. Instead, she (Wood, 1984) highlights how Marx was never unilinear in this way with respect to historical change, and though one can point to the conviction of a progressive and cumulative evolution in the forces of production over the course of human history, the process of class struggle – “intrinsic to the process of expropriation” and “whose specific outcome must, by definition, remain unpredictable” – makes it difficult to attribute to this evolutionary trend the mechanics of a universal law of historical development. For Wood (1984, pg.105), Marxism foremost shows how class struggle is the “operative principle of historical development”; it is class struggle – with all its unpredictability - that “generates historical movement”. Nevertheless, Wood (1984, pg.107) maintains that the capitalist mode of production represents the “highest [stage] of the development of productive forces to date” as well as “the highest development of exploitation” wherein the simplification and polarization of class struggle has created the requisite conditions for the “emancipation of all humanity from class”. In short, Wood (1984) critiques the notion that Marx developed a universal

and mechanical outline of historical development, but nonetheless maintains that the capitalist mode of production – which she argues to have developed relatively locally and specifically – contains the necessary prerequisites for the abolition of class altogether; of “freedom from exploitation”.

For Anderson (2010), as had been noted above, dismissing the charge of unilinearism comes through distinguishing between the admittedly earlier Eurocentric and unilinear positions of Marx and the later developed (and corrected) multilinear positions. In framing his intervention however, Anderson (2010) rightly expands the topics of teleology, determinism, and the notion of a universal course of human development, by naming the implicit Ethnocentric and Eurocentric biases that would: (a) imprint onto non-Western societies a model of historical development specific to the European experience; and (b) that would locate a mode of production specific to Western Europe as *the* mode of production containing the keys to human emancipation altogether. This second point has already been partially evidenced through Anderson’s (2010) arguments concerning how post-1958 Marx came to recognize the revolutionary potential of struggles - anticolonial, abolitionist, national liberation – taking place outside the centres of industrial capitalism and among populations other than the organized working class. This point, aside from how we have critiqued it already in Chapters 7 and 8, will be expanded in the sub-section 9.3 of this chapter and with respect to the ‘late writings on Russia’ where Anderson (2010) argues that Marx most forcefully makes his departure from signifying capitalist production and its corresponding forms of intercourse as the sole pre-requisites for human emancipation. For now, we will focus on point (a) concerning the Eurocentricity/Ethnocentricity involved in the unilinear act of imprinting onto non-Western societies a model of historical development specific to the

European experience. This question is not separate from the questions which Marx was addressing in the late writings on Russia, but it is being distinguished here for sake of analytic clarity.

For Anderson (2010, pg.156) there is no denying that the earlier Marx – for example, the Marx (and Engels) of the *Manifesto* and *The German Ideology*- held a simplistic account of historical development: “a unilinear model based on Western European history, which ran in a straight line from ‘clan or tribal’, to ‘ancient’ to ‘feudal’ and on to modern bourgeois forms of society”. However, this earlier unilinearity would be shifted by 1857-58 with the writing of the *Grundrisse* where Anderson (2010, pg.155-156) points out the enumeration of a “more complex account of historical development” through Marx’s insertion of the “Asian form” in his model of historical development; thus shifting the focus away from only Western European history. The chain of development would thus read: early stateless – Asian – ancient – Feudal – Bourgeois or Capitalist – socialist. With respect to the insertion of the Asian form, Anderson (2010) draws us to the more general suggestion that in doing so Marx was departing from any commitment to determinism or teleology:

On the whole, as the literary theorist F. San Juan Jr. writes, the notion of an Asiatic mode of production ‘functioned as a heuristic tool that Marx deployed to eliminate any teleological determinism or evolutionary monism in his speculative instruments of historical investigation’ (Anderson, 2010, pg.158)<sup>360</sup>.

The complexity in his outline of historical development, as Anderson (2010, pg.156) argues, would be further evidenced in additional points made in the *Grundrisse* where Marx makes “sharp differences” between “three early communal forms: Asiatic, Greco-Roman, and

---

<sup>360</sup> With respect to the development of a more complex outline of historical development, and with respect to this more general point critiquing determinism, Anderson (2010, pg.156) also references Ellen Wood: “As the political theorist Ellen Meiksins Wood suggests at a more general level, ‘If anything, Marx in the maturity of his critique of political economy, from the *Grundrisse* onwards, becomes less rather than more a ‘determinist’, if by that is meant a thinker who treat human agents as passive receptacles of external structures or playthings of eternal laws of motion’”.

Germanic”. As Anderson (2010, pg.157) notes, rather than suggest a blanket or generalized communal form (one based on the European model), Marx distinguished: the Asian form as marked by the communality of labour; the Greco-Roman as more urbanized, as the product of a more active historical life, and in the Roman case in particular, involving a greater degree of separation between individual and community; and the Germanic, which Marx goes less into detail about but which is signified as the basis of the Medieval feudal system (Anderson, 2010, pg158)<sup>361</sup>.

Anderson (2010, pg.164) also draws our attention to Volume three of *Capital* where Marx “further underlines the uniqueness of the Asian mode of production, as against Western feudalism, here with regard to the effects of usury”; particularly the ways in which usury in the Asiatic form did not have the same effect as in other precapitalist societies of helping open the way to modern capitalism (Anderson, 2010, pg.164-165). For Anderson (2010, pg.165), in making all of these distinctions, Marx’s “key point is the radical difference between Asian and Western European economic history”.

Another important source indicating Marx’s multilinearism is his *Capital*, Volume 1; a text which Anderson (2010, pg.172) argues has otherwise been highlighted as indicative of Marx’s commitment to a “grand narrative”, but which upon closer inspection, particularly of the revised French edition (1872-75), reveals to us otherwise. Given the historical outline in *Capital* of the emergence of Western Capitalism out of conditions of European feudalism, the question that arose, writes Anderson (2010, pg.172), concerned whether the pathway through which modern capitalism

---

<sup>361</sup> Despite noting that for Marx “the Asian one was structurally at furthest remove from modern capitalism” (Anderson, 2010, pg.159), Anderson avoids reading the attribution of greater communality to the Asian form in comparison to the greater individuality of the Greco-Roman and Germanic forms, as indication that the Asian form was at a lower stage. In fact, in Anderson’s (2010) writing at this point, he suggests that its communal character and relative stability and preservation— as opposed to the relative breakdown of the other two – was something positive. The primitive character of the communal forms however, as distinguished from what Marx and Engels associated with the kind of communality implied in socialism/communism, has been clarified in Chapter 7, sub-section 7.4.

emerged in Western Europe and North America was to be followed by all other societies – a grand narrative that Anderson (2010) argues to be implied in the *Manifesto*. In other words, need all other societies in the world proceed along the same lines of modernization as the West – through the negating and productive role of the capitalist mode of production – and consequently, thus harbouring the potential of socialist transformation?

For Anderson (2010, pg.174-175) the answer lies in the 1872-75 French edition of *Capital*, the last that Marx prepared for publication, and which he distinguished as both “superior to the German [edition]”<sup>362</sup> and as a version that “possesses a scientific value independent of the original”, one which “should be consulted even by reader familiar with German”<sup>363</sup>. In particular, there are two revealing alterations that suggest Marx departing from unilinearism or the suggestion of a “grand narrative”, already noted in Chapter 2, but which we will restate here: 1.) Marx’ alterations to the included “Preface” of the 1867 German edition. In the original – standard German and English editions – there is a sentence which reads: “The country that is more developed industrially only shows, *to the less developed*, the image of its own future”<sup>364</sup>. For Anderson (2010, pg.177) those that read Marxism as deterministic have pointed to this sentence as exemplary of a “blatant unilinearism”. By contrast, the sentence reads differently in the French edition, where it instead proceeds as follows: “The country that is more developed industrially only shows, *to those that follow it on the industrial path*, the image of its own future”<sup>365</sup>. The difference between the two is between in the (i) “to the less developed” and altered in (ii) “to those that follow it on the industrial path”. For Anderson (2010, pg.178) this alteration “explicitly bracketed out” those societies such as Russia and India which had not yet embarked on the “industrial path”, thus

---

<sup>362</sup> Marx (*Capital*, I) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.174)

<sup>363</sup> Marx (*MECW* 44, 541) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.175)

<sup>364</sup> Emphasis added by Anderson (2010, pg.177).

<sup>365</sup> Emphasis added by Anderson (2010. Pg.178)



“leaving open the notion of alternative possibilities for them”. More so, this alteration, according to Anderson (2010, pg.178) “is an example of the evolution of his [Marx’s] thought away from the implicit unilinearism of the *Manifesto*, a process that had been underway since the 1850s”. For Anderson (2010) by altering the sentence as such, Marx was departing from any suggestion of a grand narrative of historical development where the less developed necessarily proceed into the form held by the more developed. Instead, those countries more developed industrially were only a reflection to come of those societies which “follow it on the industrial path”. Thus in doing so, there was the allowance of “alternative possibilities” for the as yet non-industrialized, rather than a conviction of their impending capitalist industrialization.

Another important revision, according to Anderson (2010, pg.178), can be found in the French edition of *Capital* in the section on primitive accumulation where Marx discusses “the rise of capitalist forms...through the expropriation of the English peasantry” (Anderson, 2010, pg.178). In the “standard Engels-edited Editions” Marx concludes by stating:

The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil, is the basis of the whole process. The history of this expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs. *Only in England, which we therefore take as our example, has it the classical form*<sup>366</sup>.

For Anderson (2010, pg.179) this unilinear language/phrasing by Marx suggests “a global and unilinear process of capitalist development, with England exhibiting the ‘classical form’ of this process”; something resembling what can be found in the *Manifesto*. In the French edition however, the same discussion and conclusion is altered as follows:

But the basis of this whole development is the expropriation of the cultivators. *So far, it has been carried out in a radical manner only in England: therefore this country will necessarily play the leading role in our sketch. But all the countries of Western Europe are going through the same development*, although in accordance with the particular

---

<sup>366</sup> Marx (*Capital*, 1876; emphasis added) cited in Anderson (2010, pg.179)

environment it changes its local color, or confines itself to a narrower sphere, or shows a less pronounced character, or follows a different order of succession<sup>367</sup>.

The signification of England remains in the French edition; however, the main alteration points that Anderson (2010, pg.179) draws our attention to are between in (i) the generalized language of “different countries” being altered to (ii) the specification of “all the countries of Western Europe”. According to Anderson (2010, pg.179) “the altered text made clear, as far as Marx was concerned, that his narrative of primitive accumulation was meant as a description of Western European development, nothing more, and hardly a global grand narrative”. An alteration such as this, for Anderson (2010, pg.180), was significant for societies outside of Western Europe, such as Russia, where revolutionaries “wondered aloud whether Marx meant that their country had to pass through the same stages of development as had England”.

These two alterations made in the French edition of *Capital* can be summarized as: (1.) making clear that not all countries were destined to proceed on the path to industrialization; and (2.) that Marx’s “narrative” of the process of primitive accumulation - of the stripping of large masses of people of the means of production and their transformation into free wage workers – was meant as a description specific to developments in Western Europe. For Anderson (2010, pg.180) these alterations reflect theoretical shifts; changes in Marx’s thinking that are parallel to other shifts such as his position on Irish independence as the revolutionary “lever” or his attention to the specificity of historical stages in works such as the *Grundrisse* where the history of Asian societies such as India was distinguished from European history. Taken together, the signification of these two alterations, as signified by Anderson (2010), fit within the multilinear argument’s basic premise that Marx began drastically altering both his valuation of the capitalist mode of

---

<sup>367</sup> Marx ([1872-75] 1985b, 169; emphasis added) cited in Anderson (2010, pg.179)

production – as the precondition stage for human emancipation – and his general (and related) extrapolation of European history and development as an account of (universal) human history and development.

However, is this really what Marx is doing here? In 1877 Marx would write a letter to the Editor of the *Otecestvenniye Zapisky*, also known as Marx's unpublished "A Letter on Russia", where he would respond to an article written by the Russian sociologist and *Narodniki*<sup>368</sup> leader N.K. Mikhailovsky. Written in the context of debates within Russia - as to whether as a peasant-based society Russia would follow in the example of England and thus experience the destruction of their village commune – Mikhailovsky had attributed to Marx, and *Capital*, a general philosophical-historical theory that sketched a specific path of development for all societies irrespective of context. In response, Marx would write of Mikhailovsky that:

He absolutely must needs metamorphose my outline of the genesis of capitalism in western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of the general course, fatally imposed upon all peoples, regardless of the historical circumstances in which they find themselves placed, in order to arrive finally at that economic formation which insures with the greatest amount of productive power of social labor the most complete development of man. But I beg his pardon. He does me too much honor and too much shame at the same time (Marx, 1934).

As an example of the lack of such a "supra-historical" theory in his work, Marx in this letter draws attention to his allusion in *Capital* Volume 1 of the fate which overtook the plebians of ancient Rome:

Originally, they were free peasants tilling, every man for himself, their own piece of land. In the course of Roman history, they were expropriated. The same movement which separated them from their means of production and of subsistence, implied not only the formation of large landed properties but also the formation of large monetary capitals. Thus, one fine day, there were on the one hand free men stripped of everything save their labor power, and on the other, for exploiting this labor, the holders of all acquired wealth. What happened? The Roman proletarian became not a wage-earning worker, but an

---

<sup>368</sup> "The devoted *narodniki* were a small group of intellectuals who set themselves the task of 'going to the people' (*narod*). They aimed to bring about the destruction of the Tsarist autocracy and the liberation of the oppressed peasant masses. If they succeeded, they believed, Russia would never have to pass through the hell of capitalist development" (Smith, 1996, Marx at the Millenium)

indolent mob, more abject than the former “poor whites” in the southern lands of the United States; and by their side was unfolded not a capitalist but a slave mode of production. Hence, strikingly analogical events, occurring, however, in different historical environments, led to entirely dissimilar results (Marx, 1934).

The example is meant to illustrate the absence of the “master-key of a historico-philosophical theory”; of a generalized – and thus abstract - theory of historical development “fatally imposed upon all peoples, regardless of the historical circumstances in which they find themselves placed”. Thus, even though the plebians of ancient Rome underwent a similar dispossession as the feudal serfs in 17<sup>th</sup> century England, they did not, by virtue of a blind and fatalistic course of development, necessarily become transformed into free-wage workers; wagers being both the condition and pre-condition of capitalist development. There is no generalizable or fated blue print; no set path that necessarily led from one stage to another. Such would by definition be, as Marx concluded, “supra-historical”; i.e. above or beyond history and context. It would in a sense be immaterial.

This clarification, via the example of the experience of the plebians in ancient Rome, is included in what Anderson (2010, pg.178) had denigrated as the “standard Engels-edited Editions”, and as a footnote to the very same excerpt that Anderson (2010. Pg.179) would note as originally coloured by unilinear language/phrasing – resembling the *Manifesto* language – but later revised in the French edition. Following the assumed problematic sentence “Only in England, which we therefore take as our example, has it the classical form”, in the standard Engels-Edited editions, Marx immediately footnotes the following:

In Italy, where capitalist production developed earliest, the dissolution of serfdom also took place earlier than elsewhere. There the serf was emancipated before he had acquired any prescriptive right to the soil. His emancipation at once transformed him into a ‘free’ proletarian, without any legal rights, and he found a master ready and waiting for him in the towns, which had been for the most part handed down from Roman times. When the revolution which took place in the world market at about the end of the fifteenth century had annihilated northern Italy’s commercial supremacy, a movement in the reverse

direction set in. The urban workers were driven en masse into the countryside, and gave a previously unheard of impulse to small-scale cultivation, carried on in the form of market gardening (Marx, 1990, pg.876).

From Marx's 1877 letter we see that inclusion of such an example at the end of chapter 26 of *Capital* -regardless of which edition -was meant to dispel or rectify any suggestion of a fatalistic and supra-historical reading of what it was that Marx was explaining. For Anderson (2010, pg.228) however, the existence of the footnote in the original editions of *Capital* is not acknowledged, and instead he argues that what is expressed by Marx in the 1877 letter, and the revised French edition of *Capital*, are novel positions against the creation of a unilinear theory of history that was both deterministic and general as a model of development.

Such examples of regression, however, as well as the unpredictability of development (i.e. its messiness) are evidenced numerous times in Marx's corpus, and not limited to only later developed insights or revisions. The unrevised excerpt from the original English and German editions of *Capital* itself proves an attention to this complexity of historical development by virtue of the specificity attached to the sentence "the history of this expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs". Again in *Capital*, in Chapter 33 "The Modern Theory of Colonization", Marx (1990, pg.940) points out the peculiarity of development, and this time with regard to the United States where the centralization of capital proceeded rapidly – "with gigantic strides" - by consequence of the Civil War and its consequent rise of the finance aristocracy, to vast land-grabbing by speculative companies for the exploitation of resources, as well as the "continuous flood of humanity, driven year in, year out, onto the shores of America". By contrast, in the originally intended Part Seven of Volume 1 of *Capital*, "*Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses*" [Results of the Immediate Process of Production], which would be

included in later editions (post 1933) as an Appendix, Marx (1990, pg.1078) writes of the retardation of industry and manufacturing in France as compared to England, as well as the lower degree of capital accumulation and concentration in the former by consequence of “historical and other circumstances”<sup>369</sup>. And not to forget, as already noted in Chapter 6, sub-section 6.3, as early as in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels in fact already note the specification of their historical sketch leading to the emergence of capitalist to only “those nations which grew out of the middle ages”.

Such details may seem only incidental, and nit-picky, but they nonetheless tell us a great deal about the concrete nature of development as envisioned by Marx and Engels; development which did not proceed abstractly or teleologically as if following a set blueprint, but one which was very much conditioned in any given state or region, or colony, by “historical and other circumstances”. Above all, Marx and Engels were concrete thinkers and analysts who refrained - at least presumably - from abstract principles or recipes. As a brief aside, see as an example Marx’s September 8<sup>th</sup> 1872 speech in Amsterdam where he spoke on the topic of socialist revolution by “peaceful means”. On the goal of achieving socialism, Marx (1872) said:

But we have not asserted that the ways to achieve that goal are everywhere the same. You know that the institutions, mores, and traditions of various countries must be taken into consideration, and we do not deny that there are countries- such as America, England, and if I were more familiar with your institutions, I would perhaps add Holland – where the workers can attain their goal by peaceful means.

What was important to take into account at any given time, whether surmising the transition from peasant based to capitalist (the expropriation of the peasant from the soil), or capitalist to socialist, or occupied to nationally independent, was the existing context and conditions. And

---

<sup>369</sup> Some suggested circumstances include the fact that capitalist production on the Continent continues to function on the foundations of an agricultural economy, as well as the relative absence or more limited access to resources such as coal and iron (Marx, 1990, 1078-1080).

though Anderson (2010, pg.156) points to *The German Ideology* as absent of such complexity when it comes to historical development – perhaps by virtue of the assumed absence of such detail, and due to it being written by a presumed simpler or naïve Marx (and Engels) – we nonetheless read in those pages a similar nuance, and again with reference to America. There Marx and Engels (1978, pg.195-196) describe the peculiarity of capitalist development in the United States which unlike the nations of Europe, benefits from having been established “in an already advanced historical epoch”, and which begins “with the most advanced individuals of the old countries, and therefore, with the correspondingly most advanced form of intercourse, before this form of intercourse has been able to establish itself in the old countries”. From here we again get a sense of how given conditions mean that societies progressed along multiple paths and degrees of development; never unilinearly in an abstract sense.

In this sense, we are in agreement with a reading that suggests Marx and Engels held no unilinear conception of historical development, if unilinearity is understood as indicative of a fatalistic and abstract unfolding of history. Progress and development, as Marx clarified to Engels in a letter in 1882, was always something antagonistic, that included the potential for great strides, but also for individual retrogressions. History was replete with such examples, and in this same letter Marx references the peculiarity resulting from the reintroduction of serfdom in Germany in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century and the consequent breaks that were put on the development of manufacture in that country<sup>370</sup>. What we are pointing to here is not entirely distinct from what Ellen Wood (1984) pointed out with reference to contingency and unpredictability born of “class struggle”. After all, Marx and Engels made this phenomenological aspect clear in 1884 in *The Holy Family* when they wrote “*History does nothing.... It is man, real, living man who does all*

---

<sup>370</sup> Only since 1848 would capitalist production begin to develop rapidly in Germany (Marx, 1990, pg.96).

that, who possesses and fights; ‘history’ is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve *its own* aims; history is *nothing but* the activity of man pursuing his aims.” But in addition to the relative unpredictability associated with human activity -an unpredictability which for Marx nevertheless exists within certain determined bounds – it is also this multiplicity of existing conditions that comes into play in determining the course or trajectory of development. We see this nuance expressed by Engels (2004) too, who as we cited above in Section Two of this dissertation, discussed for example the specific conditions such as the unavailability of animals for domestication which he believed lent to the stagnation of tribes in the Western Hemisphere in a state of savagery (up to Engels’ present day), as opposed to the advanced transition into Barbarism that began to take place in the East<sup>371</sup>.

Yet given this nuance and complexity of historical development, what are we to make of the laboriously constructed hierarchy of stages that Marx and Engels developed leading up from savagery, to barbarism to feudalism to capitalism and to a communist future? More so, what are we to make of these respective stages when their outline, at least in certain texts such as *Capital*, is specified by Marx (1934) as an outline of a path specific to Western Europe, and not a *marche generale*? Initially, it will be worth clarifying that wherever Marx specifies his historical sketch to Western Europe, he is talking not about that broader hierarchy of stages delineated from forms of

---

<sup>371</sup> See also Marx’s account in *Capital* of the peculiar stagnation of “Asiatic societies” due to “the simplicity of the organization of production”: “Those small and extremely ancient Indian communities, some of which have continued down to this day, are based on possession in common of the land, on the blending of agriculture and handicrafts, and on an unalterable division of labour, which serves, whenever a new community is started, as a plan and scheme ready cut and dried . \* \* \* The law that regulates the division of labour in the community acts with the irresistible authority of a law of Nature, at the same time that each individual artificer, the smith, the carpenter, and so on, conducts in his workshop all the operations of his handicraft in the traditional way, but independently, and without recognising any authority over him. The simplicity of the organisation for production in these self-sufficing communities that constantly reproduce themselves in the same form, and when accidentally destroyed, spring up again on the spot and with the same name-this simplicity supplies the key to the secret of the unchangeableness of Asiatic societies, an unchangeableness in such striking contrast with the constant dissolution and refounding of Asiatic States, and the never-ceasing changes of dynasty. The structure of the economic elements of society remains untouched by the storm-clouds of the political sky” (Marx, 1978, pg.396)



primitive communism or communal forms, to varying forms of the division of labour and to a higher (consciously) developed communism. Where Marx specifies his sketch, especially in these later correspondences with regard to the questions emanating out of Russia, he is speaking with respect to his account of the emergence of capitalism out of the womb of the feudal order through the dispossession of the producers from their means of production and their conversion into wage earners (Marx, 1934).

But even if we bracket this specification to Western Europe to only this particular moment in Marx's machinery of history, we are still left with questions concerning both the meaning and the intention behind the employment of this historical sketch; i.e. if Marx only meant to show how capitalism developed in Western Europe, what value does this historical account have for non-Western societies, and what does it mean about the signification of capitalism all together as the precedent to socialism? Additionally, does the specification to Western Europe absolve Marx of Ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism in that he was not trying to impose on other societies a trajectory or path of development leading up to human self-emancipation? And does it then open up alternative avenues for other societies who are not destined to follow England on the industrial path simply due to them existing at a lower stage?

In another sense, if in Marx's revision made in the French edition of *Capital*, he found it important to make this specification of the emergence of capitalism to Western Europe, what are we to make of his continued inclusion in that same edition of the descriptions in Chapter 32 "The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation" that signify the express role of the capitalist mode of production in bringing about the negation of private property and the related emphasis placed on the socialization of labour, the mastery over nature, the "entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market", and the economising of all means of production that form the

revolutionary characteristics of the bourgeois era?<sup>372</sup> Additionally, it is noteworthy to point out that at the same time he was preparing the 1872-75 French edition of *Capital*, Marx (1990, pg.98) would write the 1873 “Postface to the Second Edition” of *Capital*, in which he would maintain the world historic and revolutionary significance of the proletariat as “the class whose historical task is the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production *and the final abolition of all classes [Emphasis added]*”. This same Postface to the Second German edition would be included in the French edition, as specified by Marx in the 1875 “Postface to the French Edition”. Clearly, Marx was not departing from the signification that he and Engels afforded to the capitalist mode of production and of its consequent revolutionizing and negating tendencies.

---

<sup>372</sup> “Cette expropriation s’accomplit par le jeu des lois immanentes de la production capitaliste, lesquelles aboutissent à la concentration des capitaux. Corrélativement à cette centralisation, à l’expropriation du grand nombre des capitalistes par le petit, se développent sur une échelle toujours croissante l’application de la science à la technique, l’exploitation de la terre avec méthode et ensemble, la transformation de l’outil en instruments puissants seulement par l’usage commun, partant l’économie des moyens de production, l’entrelacement de tous les peuples dans le réseau du marché universel, d’où le caractère international imprimé au régime capitaliste. A mesure que diminue le nombre des potentats du capital qui usurpent et monopolisent tous les avantages de cette période d’évolution sociale, s’accroissent la misère, l’oppression, l’esclavage, la dégradation, l’exploitation, mais aussi la résistance de la classe ouvrière sans cesse grossissante et de plus en plus disciplinée, unie et organisée par le mécanisme même de la production capitaliste. Le monopole du capital devient une entrave pour le mode de production qui a grandi et prospéré avec lui et sous ses auspices. La socialisation du travail et la centralisation de ses ressorts matériels arrivent à un point où elles ne peuvent plus tenir dans leur enveloppe capitaliste. Cette enveloppe se brise en éclats. L’heure de la propriété capitaliste a sonné. Les expropriateurs sont à leur tour expropriés. L’appropriation capitaliste, conforme au mode de production capitaliste, constitue la première négation de cette propriété privée qui n’est que le corollaire du travail indépendant et individuel. Mais la production capitaliste engendre elle-même sa propre négation avec la fatalité qui préside aux métamorphoses de la nature. C’est la négation de la négation. Elle rétablit non la propriété privée du travailleur, mais sa propriété individuelle, fondée sur les acquêts de, l’ère capitaliste, sur la coopération et la possession commune de tous les moyens de production, y compris le sol.”

The same excerpt then, in the French edition, footnotes the following excerpt from none other than the Manifesto: “Le progrès de l’industrie, dont la bourgeoisie est l’agent sans volonté propre et sans résistance, substitue à l’isolement des ouvriers, résultant de leur concurrence, leur union révolutionnaire par l’association. Ainsi, le développement de la grande industrie sape, sous les pieds de la bourgeoisie, le terrain même sur lequel elle a établi son système de production et d’appropriation. Avant tout, la bourgeoisie produit ses propres fossoyeurs. Sa chute et la victoire du prolétariat sont également inévitables. De toutes les classes qui, à l’heure présente, s’opposent à la bourgeoisie, le prolétariat seul est une classe vraiment révolutionnaire. Les autres classes périclitent et périssent avec la grande industrie; le prolétariat, au contraire, en est le produit le plus authentique. Les classes moyennes, petits fabricants, détaillants, artisans, paysans, tous combattent la bourgeoisie parce qu’elle est une menace pour leur existence en tant que classes moyennes. Elles ne sont donc pas révolutionnaires, mais conservatrices; bien plus elles sont réactionnaires. elles cherchent à faire tourner à l’envers la roue de l’histoire. » (Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels : Manifeste du Parti communiste, Lond., 1847 p. 9, 11.)

There is thus something revealing in the specification of the development of such a significant mode of production out of the bosom of Western European feudalism that lends greater clarity to both the fate of non-Western societies and the role of Europe and European workers in Marx and Engels' historical account of man's self-genesis and ultimate salvation. If anything, it is through noting the specificity of Marx's account of the emergence of capitalism from conditions of European feudalism that we more clearly sense the depth of Marx and Engels' Eurocentricity; one where Europe possesses both a unique path of development in human history; a development which affords to it the role of vanguard of human salvation. Thus despite the dismissal of unilinearity in the sense of an abstract *marche generale*, there is still a latent unilinearity concerning the requisite trajectory or path of development leading to the potentiality of liberation from class and social antagonism. This last point will be made clearer in the next sub-section.

### ***9.2: The role of the 'Vanguard Peoples'***

In the "Preface to the Russian Edition of 1882" of the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels (1978, pg.471) wrote that Russia formed "the vanguard of revolutionary action in Europe". Just as Ireland in 1869, and its cause, was in a position to be the lever of revolution in England, so was Russia - owing to existing conditions - in a position to leverage revolutionary action in Europe. But this is not the sense of 'vanguard' of revolution that we use here. Though struggles in as remote and "semi-barbarian" places like China and India were thought to play an instigating or at best complementary role to the movement of workers in Europe, these were always only vanguards of "revolutionary action in Europe". They were not vanguards of *the* revolution; the revolution against capital that was the express destiny of the European workers. It is in this sense that we employ the term "Vanguard" and "Vanguard peoples" here.

The term “vanguard peoples” is borrowed from George Novak’s<sup>373</sup> (2002) *Understanding History*, Chapter 1 “The Uneven Course of History”. There, Novak (2002) notes the process of evolution into civilization, and of the “real course of history, the passage from one social system to another, or from one level of social organization to another” in a way reminiscent of the description by Lawrence Krader cited above “unilinear in the abstract, multilinear in the concretely different ways”. On this evolution, Novak (2002) writes:

The historical scheme of universal social structures – savagery, barbarism, civilisation, with their respective stages – is an abstraction. It is an indispensable and rational abstraction which corresponds to the essential realities of development and serves to guide investigation. But it cannot be directly substituted for the analysis of any concrete segment of society. A straight line may be the shortest distance between two points but we find that humanity frequently fails to take it....Both regularity and irregularity are mingled together in history. The regularity is fundamentally determined by the character and development of the productive forces and the mode of producing the means of life. However, this basic determinism does not manifest itself in the actual development of society in a simple, direct and uniform fashion but in extremely complex, devious and heterogeneous ways.

Nevertheless, despite his note on the devious and complex nature of historical development, something we have demonstrated that was both granted and explained by both Marx and Engels, Novak (2002) still accounts for the evolution – the “march of mankind” - in a telling way:

When we analyse the march of mankind through civilisation, we see that its advanced segments passed successively through slavery, feudalism and capitalism and is now on the way toward socialism. This does not mean that every part of humanity passed, or had to pass, through this invariable sequence of historical stages, any more than each of the

---

<sup>373</sup> George Novak (1905-1975) was an American Marxist theoretician and activist. His biography on the Marxist Internet Archive reads: “...Novack will be most remembered as an outstanding exponent and populariser of Marxist philosophy and theory. He produced a number of books on various aspects of this question: *An Introduction to the Logic of Marxism* (Pioneer Publishers: New York, 1942), *The Origins of Materialism* (Merit Publishers: New York, 1968), *Empiricism and Its Evolution* (Merit, 1968), *Democracy and Revolution* (Pathfinder, 1971), *Understanding History* (Pathfinder, 1972), *Humanism and Socialism* (Pathfinder, 1973), *Pragmatism Versus Marxism* (Pathfinder, 1975), *Polemics in Marxist Philosophy* (Pathfinder, 1978). Although ignored by bourgeois academia, Novack had an undoubted impact on generations of activists in the revolutionary socialist movement, not only in the United States but also in Australia (which he toured for the Democratic Socialist Party and Resistance in 1973, speaking to large campus and city meetings). The publishers hope that this selection of George Novack’s writings will help equip new generations of fighters for socialism with the Marxist education which is so essential for the struggle.”

barbarians passed through the same sequence of stages. In each instance, it was necessary for the vanguard peoples to work their way through each given stage. But then their very achievements enabled those who followed after to combine or compress entire historical stages.

I reference Novak (2002) because of two reasons: 1.) his account of historical evolution and development in a manner that straddles both unilinearity and multilinearity complements our own reading of Marx and Engels- a reading that refrains from positioning them into an either/or camp: either blindly(mechanically) and abstractly unilinear, or equally abstractly multilinear; and 2.) the account of ‘vanguard peoples’ working their way through each given stages supplies us with a language and description to comprehend the role and specification of Western-Europeans in Marx and Engels account of the development of capitalism and the subsequent potentiality created for salvation through communism.

Reading the role of Western-Europe (and its appendaged colonial offshoots such as America) in this light lends clarity to the place and relation between those societies not destined to tread the industrial path and those that have; clarity in a manner that does not minimize or ignore the signification of bourgeois society, and its revolutionizing nature which was a central ingredient in Marx and Engels’ account of a scientific theory of liberation. Examples suggesting the vanguardship of the people of Europe can be gleaned more explicitly from those very idealistic references to the decadence, the corruption and the idleness of the non-European vs for example the “democratic instinct” and freedom loving nature of the Germans that lent to the development of the kind of Feudalism in Europe, and its corresponding milder form of servitude (Engels, 2004, pg.146). But we also get a sense of the vanguardship of the European peoples when we revisit those points noted in Chapter 7 suggesting a kind of tutelar relation described by both Marx and Engels between Europe/North America and the semi-civilized countries of the world; between West and East. There we noted how in the *Manifesto* they wrote that bourgeois rule has made the

barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, “nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois”. We also pointed to Engels’ (1882) suggestion that economic needs will impel the semi-civilized countries to follow suit in the wake of proletarian revolutions in Europe and North America; and if they did not, they – at least those “inhabited by a native population”- were to be “temporarily taken over by the proletariat and guided as rapidly as possible towards independence”. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels (1978, pg.186) discuss this guiding hand of the proletariat both nationally and internationally:

It is evident that big industry does not reach the same level of development in all districts of a country. This does not, however, retard the class movement of the proletariat, because the proletarians created by big industry assume leadership of this movement and carry the whole mass along with them, and because the workers excluded from big industry are placed by it in a still worse situation than the workers in big industry itself. The countries in which big industry is developed act in a similar manner upon the more or less non-industrial countries, insofar as the latter are swept by universal commerce into the universal competitive struggle.

In the *Manifesto* we are informed that the first condition of the emancipation of the proletariat is the “united action, of the leading civilised countries” (Marx & Engels, 1978, pg.487) despite the closing declaration of “working men of all countries, unite!”. As noted earlier, the original phrasing of *Proletarier aller Länder vereinigt Euch* literally translates into “Proletarians of all lands, unite!” rather than the later English popularized “workers of the world, unite!”. And as late as May 1875 Marx took effort to specify modern bourgeois society to only a distinguished collection of “different civilized countries” which were only “more or less capitalistically developed”. We can only surmise, based on such descriptions, and given the centrality of capitalist development to the creation of conditions requisite for socialist transformation, that when Marx (and Engels) employed broad phrases such as “of all lands” or “all countries” (Marx, 1978, pg.524) when referencing the unity or solidarity of workers they did not mean all lands or all people or all workers of the world. See also for example Engels’ (1969) *The Principles of Communism* - the

blueprint for the *Manifesto* - where following the question posed “Will it be possible for this revolution to take place in one country alone?”, he describes a kind of conditional universality; one which has implications for all countries of the world yet is also specific with respect to only the civilized countries:

No. By creating the world market, big industry has already brought all the peoples of the Earth, and especially the civilized peoples, into such close relations with one another that none is independent of what happens to the others. Further, it has co-ordinated the social development of the civilized countries to such an extent that, in all of them, bourgeoisie and proletariat have become the decisive classes, and the struggle between them the great struggle of the day. It follows that the communist revolution will not merely be a national phenomenon but must take place simultaneously in all civilized countries – that is to say, at least in England, America, France, and Germany. It will develop in each of these countries more or less rapidly, according as one country or the other has a more developed industry, greater wealth, a more significant mass of productive forces. Hence, it will go slowest and will meet most obstacles in Germany, most rapidly and with fewest difficulties in England. It will have a powerful impact on the other countries of the world, and will radically alter the course of development which they have followed up to now, while greatly stepping up its pace. It is a universal revolution and will, accordingly, have a universal range.

Only among the different civilized countries had bourgeois society as yet developed, and it was only among them that there was developing an organized mass, trained and disciplined: an army of “general men” free from the prejudices of the old world. Other nations and other people may very well follow them in the path of industrialization and so develop the adequate conditions for socialist revolution. But this was not guaranteed. Other movements, such as anti-colonial or independence movements were welcomed, and supported, as a dimension of the more imperative international workers revolution, depending on whether they helped further capitalist development, and with it certain production conditions, the socialization of labour and the mastery over nature; or whether they could spark revolutionary action in Europe, i.e. among that collection of civilized countries that held the power and the means to set the world free from the clutches of the bourgeoisie and from the social antagonisms of human pre-history.

It is in their account of a “Europocentric World Revolution”<sup>374</sup>, as Tucker (1978, pg.676) termed it, and not in their extrapolation of the history of European development onto the world as a *marche generale* – something Marx and Engels never did- that we find the nucleus of Marx and Engels’ Eurocentrism. To be more clear, their Eurocentricity and Ethnocentricity are to be found not in a falsely attributed mechanical or abstract unilinear theory of history, but in a nevertheless unilinear theory of liberation that rests on the signification of European historical development and the historical role and value afforded to the quintessential European experience of development— of it having established the requisite conditions for a vanguard peoples to initiate progression beyond the final stage of the era of human alienation and social antagonism. Why this is still being described as ‘unilinear’ will be clarified as we proceed, but first an oppositional point that should be addressed.

Correctly recognizing the value that Marx and Engels placed on the capitalist mode of production, and of the risk this would imply in terms of the charge of Eurocentrism on their part, Paresh Chattopadhyay (2006) makes a different defence than the multilinear argument. He does not argue for a turn in Marx’s thinking, nor does he distinguish Eurocentricity as being reflected in the act of abstractly<sup>375</sup> universalizing European history and experience; instead, in defending Marx Chattopadhyay (2006, pg. 69-70) shifts the focus from Europe to Capital:

---

<sup>374</sup> Their position was not without its admitted quandries. Absent of Engels “more sanguine view” in his 1882 letter to Kautsky that we cited above, where he describes how the semi-civilized countries would either follow suit or be temporarily taken over once North America and Europe are reorganized by the proletarian revolution, Marx expresses a greater “uneasiness” (Tucker, 1978, pg.676) in a letter to Engels dated 1858. Here, he ponders the impact that the world would in turn have on a European revolution: “For us, the difficult question is this: on the Continent revolution is imminent and will, moreover, instantly assume a socialist character. Will it not necessarily be crushed in this little corner of the earth, since the movement of bourgeois society is still, in the ascendant over a far greater area?”.

<sup>375</sup> I am careful to always include the verb abstractly when talking about this because Marx and Engels nonetheless believed in the universalizing tendency of the capitalist mode of production, but not in the abstract of generalized (teleological) way in which it is assumed that he did. In a sense, it is through limiting Marx’s belief in the



Regarding the charge of ‘Eurocentrism’ in Marx’s ‘certain writings’, which Lowy shares with a number of leftists, it stems from a misreading of Marx’s texts. True, among all the regions of the world, Marx[’s] focuses mostly on Europe. The reason is simple. It is here that the capitalist mode of production first emerged and started its journey towards world domination. And it is the capitalist mode of production which was Marx’s increasing concern, starting with his ‘critique of political economy’ (1844), long before he formally declared his preoccupation with the ‘discovery of the law of motion of capital’ (1867). Needless to add, Marx saw capital as the most revolutionary mode of production so far, breaking down all narrowness and localism of earlier modes of production and having a universal character by the very logic of its nature. He saw the capitalist mode of production as the only mode of production so far which created – antagonistically – the necessary subjective and material conditions for building a ‘union of free individuals’ – the only ‘historical justification’ for its existence in Marx’s view. And the capitalist mode of production happened to originate in and spread from Europe. In fact, *geographically*, the reference point of Marx is not even Europe, but Western Europe, if not England, with France occupying a distant second place. The reason is obvious. It is capital, not Europe, that Marx[’s] is concerned with.

The regional or geographic point of reference is thus a case of happenstance; and capital – the primary concern – is something that simply, or rather coincidentally, happened to originate and spread from Europe, more precisely Western Europe, more precisely England. It may very well have originated elsewhere in the world, and thus, *there* would the geographic point of reference be. But how convincing is this ablution? For one, it underplays the implicit significance that is attached with locating the origins or emergence of a superior mode of production within Europe. One immediate direction that our critical mind goes to is, even if just by happenstance, why Europe? And why Western Europe? Why not India? Why not among the Indigenous peoples of North America? If we look back to what we outlined in Chapter 6, we see the specific conditions that were noted through history that either stunted or progressed certain societies and people. Geographic conditions, domestication of animals and even diet were all explanators for why some societies stagnated and why others progressed. We also note that there is a significance attached

---

universality attached to capitalism in such an abstract way that makes it easier to dismiss it. In Marx and Engels, we instead read a belief in a complex process of universalization made possible through capitalism, one not blind to the context and conditions of the material world; and one not unfolding as if absent of human activity and so contingency.

to the European experience of feudalism, which born of the “gentile constitution”- the barbarism- of the Germans, infused it with a certain “vitality” that allowed it to bear the very specific and requisite conditions for the emergence of capitalism. Thus, more than simply a question of the abstract emergence of capitalism – as if by chance or accident<sup>376</sup> -there is instead a larger trajectory of historical evolution here that lead to the vanguard position of Western Europe; one evidenced within Marx and Engels broader outline of historical development. It would thus be short to say that capitalism simply emerged in Europe without noting the reasons that went into explaining why it could not or did not develop elsewhere. But, one may ask, did not, in the end, capitalism develop in Europe - in Western Europe - in industrial England? Even if we ignore the rather ethnocentric explanators for why it only did or could have emerged in Europe, who can deny that it, in fact, did?

From this question it is noteworthy to turn to Robinson’s (2000, pg.30-31) critique of Marx and Engels’ account of the emergence of capitalism; an emergence that, rather than grounded in real or concretely existing conditions, was more indicative of an existing misreading among historians and analysts of the process of industrialization “to proceed along national (and much less frequently, subcontinental, i.e., western European) lines“. Rather than a sudden or revolutionary appearance that was locatable within the confines of Western Europe, and England more particularly, industrialization and the appearance of industrial production was “organically determined by the economic developments of previous centuries“ (Robinson, 2000, pg.30). Techniques of banking and finance, transportation methods, the physical and commercial apparatus of markets, and instruments of communication would all have to have already existed in order to account for the kinds of large scale technical and economic social changes associated with

---

<sup>376</sup> There are however noted influences of “accident” or “chance” which lent to the development of capitalism in Europe that Engels references such as the “discovery” of the Americas.

the ‘industrial revolution’. Robinson (2000, pg.30) includes a noteworthy excerpt from A.E. Musson dismissing both the revolutionary appearance of industrial production and the supposition of its uniquely British character:

From a technological point of view... it may be said that the eighteenth century witnessed little that was really revolutionary, and that the early Industrial Revolution was, in fact, based largely on... previous advances; even the steam engine was a product of sixteenth and seventeenth century scientific theory and experiment, while in other fields older techniques, such as water-powered machinery, were developed and extended. The majority of these technological developments from the late Middle Ages onwards appear to have been introduced into England from the Continent.

For Robinson (2000, pg.31) it is more accurate to envision several industrial revolutions, developing over centuries and outside the imagined confines of Europe, Western Europe or England. Likewise, the bourgeoisie, another characteristic feature of the capitalist mode of production, is according to Robinson (2000, pg.19) a class whose ascendance and maturity in concert with conditions of industrial capitalism is “largely unsupported by historical evidence”. Rather than the maturing representatives of an “immanent, rational, commercial order” – a narrative that is more an “historical impression, a phantom representation largely constructed from the late eighteenth century to the present by the notional activity of a bourgeoisie as dominant class” (Robinson, 2000, pg.19) – the “bourgeoisie” were “distant and separate classes of capitalists” who were “extensions of particular historical dynamics and cultures” that varied regionally and temporally. They were “not the ‘germ’ of a new order dialectically posited in an increasingly confining host – feudalism- but an opportunistic strata, willfully adaptive to the new conditions and possibilities offered by the times” (Robinson, 2000, pg.19).

Robinson (2000, pg.21) makes this argument - highlighting the rather particularistic nature of the bourgeoisie - in order to contribute to his general critique in *Black Marxism* against the supposition of a systemic structure or character to capitalism. However, this critique of both the

conventional Marxist account of the emergence of the industrial era (temporally and regionally) and of the ascendance of the bourgeois class through a kind of linear progression out of the Middle Ages and into political and economic maturity through and within conditions of industrial capitalism also extends itself in what Robinson (2019) outlined in his *Anthropology*; of the obscuring lenses through which Marx and Engels' privileged their historical period and so their unique brand of socialism. In other words, it was not simply that capitalist industrialism was the singular and unprecedented historical development of modern human society which alone could allow for the realization of socialism, but that it had emerged and matured within the reach and purview of their historical moment (geographically, temporally, etc.); to be realized and exposed by *them* for what it was; for what all of history was.

Thus, part of the justification behind the mantle of 'scientific' that they afforded themselves through their machinery of history involved not simply the privileging of an existing mode of production – capitalism – but the very construction of that mode of production in a way that best suited their immediate political interests and biases. This is not to say, nor does Robinson (2000; 2009) suggest, that “capitalism” is entirely discursive; but rather what is discursive is what is afforded it by Marx and Engels in terms of its character, its emergence, its reach, the nature of its constituents<sup>377</sup> etc. Thus, given the frames through which they outlined its emergence, we note how Marx and Engels were very much concerned with Europe and with European peoples, just as much as they were concerned with capital.

A second point however needs to be made with returning reference to the defending point made by Chattopadhyay (2006). There, the description of Eurocentrism is associated with Marx's focus on Europe, and so then the point being made being yes, he focuses on Europe, but this should

---

<sup>377</sup> This latter point is for example further explored by Robinson (2000) in his utilization of the concept of 'racial capitalism' and his criticisms of Marx and Engels' construction of the “working class”.

make logical sense since it is here - geographically - that capitalism emerged and spread. But there is something that is missing in Chattopadhyay's reduction of Eurocentrism here. To be clear, Eurocentricity or Eurocentrism are in themselves, if taken simply as regional descriptors, of no critical use. What is significant, what is critical, is what that locationality implies. In other words, when something is to be criticized because it is "Eurocentric", the essence of the critique lies not simply in that it involves only Europe or European people, but because it involves a kind of stricture; that it behaves as a limiting container to the exclusion of others – of other peoples, of other meanings, of other histories and cosmologies. It may very well be further described as Western-Eurocentric or Anglo-centric, but this does not change the central problematic that is the limiting nature of it. Nonetheless, through what has been demonstrated in both sections above, we read how Marx and Engels devised a scientific theory of liberation wherein Europe and those of European stock (i.e. North Americans) signified a people and a location of distinction in human pre-history. It was the site of salvation as well as of deprivation. It was to be the source of resolution; the pointed battle ground and the epicentre for the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. Only here - pending the progressive, and bloody force of global "Europeanization" (Cesaire, 2000) - had the requisite conditions been developed; only here, and among them, had the potentialities been created.

### ***9.3: The 'late writings on Russia'***

According to Anderson (2010, pg.224) the 'late writings on Russia', between 1877-1882 are where Marx's multilinearism reaches its culmination; where he moves furthest away from the unilinearism of the *Manifesto* and where he most explicitly states "the possibility that non capitalist societies might move directly to socialism on the basis of their indigenous communal forms, without first passing through the stage of capitalism" (Anderson, 2010, pg.224). In addition to

Marx's unpublished 1877 letter to the Editor of the *Otecestvenniye Zapisky*, which we have already noted above, other texts of significance that fall within this bracket of writings include the 1882 "Preface" to the Russian edition of the *Manifesto*, and the drafts of Marx's 1881 letter to Russian revolutionary Vera Zasulich. The letter – and its drafts- are noted for significance as an example of Marx suggesting a pathway of social development within the multilinear perspective; absent of the "procrustean theory of fixed evolutionary stages which masqueraded as 'Marxist materialism' for so many years"<sup>378</sup>. Anderson's (2010) treatment of the late writings on Russia<sup>379</sup> will be critically engaged with here, demonstrating once again the misreading of primary evidence in service of the multilinear argument.

As noted in the previous chapter, Marx and Engels held a very particular view of Russia: as Europe's most conservative power and as the counter revolutionary force on the continent. Tsarist Russia was the omnipresent force that not only threatened progressive movements in Europe, but as it was believed, had as its mission "world domination"<sup>380</sup>. Hence, in part why the cause of an independent Poland – that "wall of 20 million heroes" -was held up as a significant struggle for the workers movement. However, Marx would gradually come to include Russia in the bundle prospects for the European revolution, owing to developments it was beginning to experience internally. Anderson (2010, pg.52) points to a telling moment in an 1858 letter to

---

<sup>378</sup>David Smith (1995, 1143) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.229).

<sup>379</sup> Much of the gist of Anderson's (2010) framing of this topic is based on the work of Theodor Shanin (1983) particularly from his edited collection *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the 'Peripheries' of Capitalism*

<sup>380</sup> This is conspiracy not without some merit given Russia's progressive- and violent – expansion between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. What is often understudied is the colonial expansion of Russia far beyond the Ural Mountains, into the Caucasus, central Asia, Siberia and even up to North America. A striking example from Russia's history is the invasion of Circassia, which culminated in the systematic murder and exile in the late 1800's of 800,000-1,500,000 of its Muslim inhabitants. As early as 1853 – a year corresponding with Marx's supposed unilinear and naïve years- Marx would write "The Story of the Life of Lord Palmerston" where in one of its sections (Article 8) he would make critical remarks of Lord Palmerston's uncritical position on Russia's occupation of Circassia, and end the article with a remark on resistance of "the mountaineers, the clashing of whose arms proves to the world that the Caucasus does not 'now belong to Russia, as stated by Count Nesselrode' and as echoed by Lord Palmerston".

Engels where Marx writes: “the movement for the emancipation of serfs in Russia strikes me as important in so far as it indicates the beginning of an internal development that might run counter to the country’s traditional foreign policy”<sup>381</sup>. Though, as we have also noted in the previous chapter, as late as 1867 Marx still distinguished the “Asian barbarism” of the Muscovites that continued to threaten Europe.

According to Isaac Deutscher (1955) these shifts in attitude partially correspond to the nature of social and revolutionary movements in Russia which through the 1840s and 50s “had an almost exclusively intellectual and liberal character...based on no social class or popular force”. During this period Marx and Engels’ correspondence with revolutionaries in Russia take the form of explanations of their philosophy and economic ideas; absent of any discussion of revolution. In fact, as Deutscher (1955) notes, during this period, where Russia was still identified as identical with Tsardom, the main preoccupation of Marx and Engels was to rouse Europe against that *gendarme* “for they believed that a European war against Russia would hasten the progress of the West towards socialism”. By the 1860’s however, a new generation of revolutionaries would come to the fore in Russia – the *Narodniks* or “Agrarian socialists” – with whom Marx and Engels would develop close ties. Russia, with no industry, a limited bourgeois class, and no modern working class had at this time the intelligentsia and the mass of the peasantry as the only sworn enemies of the Tsar. Ironically however, despite these conditions absent of capitalist development, as Deutscher (1955) notes, the *Narodniks* in Russia and in exile eagerly engaged with and responded to the theories of Marx and Engels. In fact, the first translation of *Das Kapital*, into a language other than the original, was made in Russian, and published in 1872 a task undertaken by the *Narodnik* economist and intellectual Nikolai Frantsevich Danielson. Part of the success of *Das*

---

<sup>381</sup> Marx (MECW 40,310) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.52).

*Kapital's* circulation in Russia owed to its lack of censorship in Russia; a result of the Russian censor's believing it to be "too strictly scientific" and "too heavy reading to have any subversive influence"<sup>382</sup> (Deutscher, 1955; Reses, 1970). For Marx, one of his initial explanations for the success of his work among the Russians was the tendency of the Russian intelligentsia to seize upon whatever extremist ideas they could find in Europe:

It is one of the ironies of fate that the Russians whom I have fought continually for twenty-five years not only in the German language but in the French and English languages too have always been my 'well wishers'. In Paris the Russian aristocrats bore me on their shoulders...[...]...The Russian aristocracy in their salad days were schooled in German universities and at Paris. They always chase after the extremes found in the West. It is utter *gourmandise* such as that in which part of the French aristocracy engaged in the eighteenth century. 'This is not for tailors and cobblers', Voltaire once said about his Enlightenment ideas. This does not prevent the Russians from becoming scoundrels the instant they enter state service<sup>383</sup>.

As Albert Reses (1970) notes in his "Das Kapital Comes to Russia", what transpired was an historical anomaly where in backward Russia Marx's *Capital* would enjoy greater renown than in any other country. After its publication 1872 over 900 copies would be sold out in St. Petersburg within a few weeks; a large number given the time and the place (Deutscher, 1948). In Russia, *Capital* was taken up as a handbook on the miseries and horrors of Western European capitalism, and used to further the conviction in keeping Russia on a non capitalist path (Reses, 1970, pg. 227). Initially then, Marx's ideas – at least among its reviewers - were used to expose the plight of those who proceeded on the path of capitalism rather than apply Marx's theories to Russian social development (Reses, 1970, pg.228). This frame of focus would begin to change however, as Reses (1970) and Deutscher (1948) note, as the main issue that would continually

---

<sup>382</sup> The Russian censors would however, around this time – rather ironic as it is- censor Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Herbert Spencer's *Social Statistics* (Reses, 1970, pg.220), and the works of Adam Smith (Deutscher, 1948)

<sup>383</sup> Marx to L. Kugelmann in 1868, as cited in Reses, 1970, pg.225.



raise itself in correspondences between Marx and Russian revolutionaries would concern Russia's road to socialism:

In the West, capitalist industrialisation was, according to Marx and Engels, paving the way for socialism. The industrial working class was the main force interested in socialism. But what about Russia, where capitalist industry had not even begun to strike roots? The Narodniks argued that Russian socialism would be based on the primeval rural commune or the *obshchina*, which had existed alongside of feudalism. Even after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, the peasant land was still owned by the rural commune, in some respects the forerunner of the present Russian *kolkhoz*. Russia, said the Narodniks, need not go through the trials and tribulations of capitalist industrialism to attain socialism. She finds socialism in her native rural tradition, which she only needs to cleanse of feudal remnants. This then was to be Russia's road to socialism, very different from that by which Western Europe was expected to travel (Deutscher, 1948).

It is this question that would spur the Russian 'Marxist', revolutionary and "bitter" (Deutscher, 1948) opponent of the Narodniks - Vera Zasulich – to write to Marx in 1881, asking him whether "the rural commune, freed of exorbitant tax demands, payment to the nobility and arbitrary administration, is capable of developing in a socialist direction"; or, whether the commune was destined to perish and that the task of Russian socialists was to wait for capitalist development and the rise of the proletariat?<sup>384</sup> It is in his reply to Zasulich that Anderson (2010) finds one of the more pointed statements and examples reflecting a multilinear turn in Marx's thinking. After penning four separate – lengthy- drafts, Marx would, on March 8<sup>th</sup> 1881 send a 350 word response noting his intention to demonstrate how "my so-called theory has been misunderstood". Marx begins by citing the revised excerpt from the French edition of *Capital* where he specifies his account of primitive accumulation to only the countries of Western Europe.

---

<sup>384</sup> Zasulich as referenced in Anderson (2010, pg.229). In her letter, Zasulich (1881) continues with: "If, however, the commune is destined to perish, all that remains for the socialist, as such, is more or less ill-founded calculations as to how many decades it will take for the Russian peasant's land to pass into the hands of the bourgeoisie, and how many centuries it will take for capitalism in Russia to reach something like the level of development already attained in Western Europe. Their task will then be to conduct propaganda solely among the urban workers, while these workers will be continually drowned in the peasant mass which, following the dissolution of the commune, will be thrown on to the streets of the large towns in search of a wage".

Following the excerpt he writes: “The ‘historical inevitability’ of this course is therefore *expressly* restricted to the *countries of Western Europe*” (Marx, 1881). The second significant point made in his response is his conclusion which states:

The analysis in Capital therefore provides no reasons either for or against the vitality of the Russian commune. But the special study I have made of it, including a search for original source material, has convinced me that the commune is the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia. But in order that it might function as such, the harmful influences assailing it on all sides must first be eliminated, and it must then be assured the normal conditions for spontaneous development (Marx, 1881).

For Anderson (2010, pg.230) the key points to take from this letter are: 1.) Marx is arguing that alternate pathways of development might be possible for Russia, rather than that society necessarily having to tread the same path as those countries in Western Europe; and 2.) that the commune itself could behave as the “fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia”. Extending his analysis, Anderson (2010) leans on sections of the earlier drafts that lend greater clarity to what can be surmised from the final letter. For example, with respect to the commune acting as the fulcrum of social regeneration in Russia, Anderson (2010, pg.230) rightly draws attention to Marx’s note on the particularity of Russia’s situation as country on Europe’s edge; as a country that “does not live in isolation from the modern world; nor has she fallen prey, like the East Indies, to a foreign conqueror”<sup>385</sup>. Therefore, there existed the possibility “to combine Russia’s ancient communal forms with modern technology” and other benefits and achievements of capitalist modernity (Anderson, 2010. Pg.230). Anderson (2010, pg.230) includes a telling excerpt from Marx’s first draft of the Zasulich letter that speaks to some of what these benefits of capitalist modernity may entail. I am reproducing it here more fully:

From a historical point of view, only one serious argument has been given for the inevitable dissolution of the Russian peasant commune: If we go far back, it is said, a more or less archaic type of communal property may be found everywhere in Western Europe. But with

---

<sup>385</sup> Marx (Shanin 1983a, 106 as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.230)

the progress of society it has everywhere disappeared. Why should it escape the same fate only in Russia? My answer is that, thanks to the unique combination of circumstances in Russia, the rural commune, which is still established on a national scale, may gradually shake off its primitive characteristics and directly develop as an element of collective production on a national scale. Precisely because it is contemporaneous with capitalist production, the rural commune may appropriate all its positive achievements without undergoing its [terrible] frightful vicissitudes. Russia does not live in isolation from the modern world, and nor has it fallen prey, like the East Indies, to a conquering foreign power. Should the Russian admirers of the capitalist system deny that such a development is theoretically possible, then I would ask them the following question. Did Russia have to undergo a long Western-style incubation of mechanical industry before it could make use of machinery, steamships, railways, etc.? Let them also explain how they managed to introduce, in the twinkling of an eye, that whole machinery of exchange (banks, credit companies, etc.) which was the work of centuries in the West.

It was only due to the “unique combination of circumstances in Russia” -its contemporaneity with capitalist production and relation to the modern world (i.e. Western Europe) - that there the rural commune could “shake off its primitive characteristics” and “directly develop as an element of collective production on a national scale”. After all, modern technology, industrial machinery, tools for communication and transportation, large financial institutions all managed to find their way in backward Russia without it having already passed or underwent a “Western-style incubation”. For Anderson (2010) this point not only reflects a position absent of any notion of “unilinear determinism”, but is also one that highlights the uniqueness or vitality of the Russian commune. It is a uniqueness that stems not only from its contemporaneity – temporally and geographically – with capitalist modernity in the West and so the ability to reap its benefits and thus shed its “primitive characteristics”, but also a uniqueness that stems from its existence as a higher form of “rural commune” that contains within it an “important dualism” – of individual and communal ownership – that lent it a special “vitality and longevity”.

A final theme that Anderson (2010. Pg. 233) notes in reference to the points made by Marx in the Zaslulich drafts concerns the prospects for revolution in backward Russia; both the course of revolutionary action and the potential consequences of it. Both the course and the potentialities

were related since, as Anderson (2010, pg.233) noted, for Marx – nationally - there would need to be a “general uprising” to help break the relative isolation of the rural communes; and internationally, there would need to be, in addition to the condition of contemporaneity with capitalist modernity, a complementary movement among “the Western working classes” (Anderson, 2010, pg.234). This latter point is reflected in the “Preface” to the Russian edition of the *Manifesto*, drafted in German in 1882 by Engels<sup>386</sup> but signed by both himself and Marx:

Can the Russian *obshchina*, a form, albeit heavily eroded, of the primeval communal ownership of the land, pass directly into the higher, communist form of communal ownership? Or must it first go through the same process of dissolution that marks the West’s historical development? Today there is only one possible answer: If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that the two complement each other, then Russia’s peasant communal landownership may serve as the point of departure for a communist development<sup>387</sup>

Here was a clearer restatement of what Marx had initially suggested in his final letter to Zasulich concerning the possibility of the commune in acting as the fulcrum for social regeneration, given of course, conditions external to it. For one, the complementary movement of the “Western working classes” as Anderson (2010, pg.234) phrases it, could ensure the elimination of those “harmful influences” that would interfere with the conditions for the commune’s spontaneous development. This complementary relation however could also be one that was instigated by the Russian revolution, since in the excerpt from the “preface”, much like the attribution made to Ireland as the “lever” of revolution, a Russian revolution is described as possibly behaving as a “signal” for the proletarian revolution in the West<sup>388</sup>. A second point of importance to take from the excerpt is the note that the Russian revolution could lead to a

---

<sup>386</sup> Marx was approached to write the “preface” but was too ill and overcome with the recent death of his wife. Instead, Engels drafted it and it was signed by both. ( )

<sup>387</sup> Marx and Engels (Shanin 1983a, 139) as cited in Anderson (2010, pg.235).

<sup>388</sup> As noted in the last sub-section, the 1882 “preface” also wrote of Russia as “the vanguard of revolutionary action in Europe”.

“communist development”. For Anderson (2010, pg.236) - and at the risk of downplaying what he was initially implying with regard to Marx’s understanding of the “revolutionary” nature of other movements such in India, Ireland and Poland – this was the first time that Marx “was arguing that a modern communist transformation was possible in an agrarian, technologically backward land like Russia”; given of course, the important *proviso* of allyship with the revolution of the Western working classes.

In the end however, despite acknowledging those moments where Marx took effort in detailing the uniqueness of the Russian communal form, the unique circumstances of the Russian nation relative to a modern capitalist Europe, and the important *proviso* of a necessary linkage with the proletarian movement in the West, Anderson (2010, pg.236), still asks “Did Marx discern similar possibilities in places like India as well, whose communal forms he was also studying in this period?” His answer: “...I would argue, based on the preponderance of the evidence in the excerpt notebooks discussed in this chapter, that Marx did not intend to limit his new reflections about moving toward a communist revolution on the basis of indigenous communal forms to Russia alone”.

The “excerpts notebooks” referenced by Anderson (2010) in his explanation above are Marx’s *Ethnological Notebooks*; first published and transcribed by Lawrence Krader in 1972 as *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*. These notes by Marx are excerpts and commentary on a collection of anthropological works by Lewis Henry Morgan, Henry Sumner Maine, John Budd Phear, and John Lubbock<sup>389</sup> (Anderson, 2010, pg.198). These notes however have not been altogether ignored until Krader’s (1974) publication, since as we noted earlier in Section 2 of this dissertation, Engels had made use of Marx’s notes - specifically on the work of Lewis Henry

---

<sup>389</sup> Anderson (2010, pg.198) however points out that what has been translated and published by Krader is not the full extent of notes, which include a far more extensive collection.

Morgan<sup>390</sup> -in writing his *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. For Engels, the *Origin* was an attempt to complete a project that Marx had already set in motion: to use the main lines – “within certain limits” – of anthropological studies of human primitive history in order to confirm and present their own conclusions as developed through their materialist conception of history.

Morgan’s tripartite division of human history into 3 main epochs – (i) savagery- (ii) barbarism – (iii) civilization – was utilized by Engels and received further distinction; each stage incorporating their own tripartite hierarchy between lower -middle- and upper. The lower stage of savagery – “the childhood of the human race” -reflected what in *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels described as that stage of “tribal consciousness” that was marked by a minimal or relatively non-existent division of labour. Progressing forward human history moved through to barbarism, at whose upper stage we find the Greek and Roman civilizations, marked by the arts, the increasing division of town and country (mental and manual labour) and a process of greater individuation at the expense of community. From these conditions we arrive at that transitional moment where we enter the stage of civilization where there begins the era of European feudalism, followed by the pinnacle of ‘civilization’ which is the era of capitalism, as developed in Western-Europe. As much has already been outlined in Section 2 above: sub-section “Scientific Socialism”.

Krader (1974) however, in his “Introduction” to the *Notebooks* suggests a more critical theme beyond Marx and Engels’ utilization of existing empirical studies –within limits -as a means of confirming or providing weight to their own project. For Krader (1974) the *Notebooks* also reflect Marx’s critical engagement with general themes or trends within the field of ethnology that

---

<sup>390</sup> In his “Introduction” Krader (1974) notes how Marx was “generally favourable to Morgan’s work”, intruding little into the Morgan excerpts and for example accepting “Morgan’s authority on the ethnology of the American Indian and other contemporary primitive peoples”. Morgan’s work became for him “the basis for judgement of related matter in the writings of Niebuhr, Grote, and Mommsen in classical studies

in the notes Marx criticized as groundless or lacking in concrete evidence. These for example included utopian as well as teleological doctrines of evolutionary progress, as well as forms of biologism, such as in the work of Henry Maine, and the “doctrine of the social organism” where human society is conceived of as a unified living organism. According to Krader (1974, pg.2), whether positivist, utilitarian or utopian, in the *Notebooks* Marx had critiqued how these Victorian era ethnological studies were respectively deficient in a critical social and economic analysis which subsequently lent to their deficiency in informing a ground for social and political action.

This theme of a critical engagement with, and interest in, empirical and anthropological study is, according to Krader (1974, pg.4), not something to be relegated to only the later year’s of Marx’s life or to the *Notebooks* in particular, but is rather reflective of Marx’s ongoing anthropological study that began in the 1840’s, through to the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s, and which had always complemented his philosophical study rather than follow it. For Krader (1974) Marx’s philosophical treatment of anthropology – evidenced for example in his theory of human alienation from society and nature, or the doctrine of man producing himself by his labour – is closely related to his empirical treatment of anthropology. For example, for Krader (1974, pg.5) Marx’s earlier research into Slavic, German, Irish and South Asian history and peasant communities<sup>391</sup> - citations of which can be found in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* - all lent to Marx’s critiques of varying forms of historicism and historical fatalism as well as “providing a material base for the doctrine of impermanence of property in its particular form as private property”. The *Notebooks* then reflect an ongoing complementary dialogue as well as continuity between Marx’s philosophical work and his empirical writings, as opposed to indications of a turn or disenchantment with what are otherwise described -and isolated - as the more abstract or grandiose philosophical positions of his

---

<sup>391</sup> Krader (1974) nonetheless notes that these existing references to varying “primitive peoples”, and their specification, received fuller concretion in the notebooks.

youth. Krader (1974) also connects Marx's study of ethnology with his study of rural community and with the land and peasant questions: contemporary political issues that had implications for their proposed project of liberation.

For Anderson (2010, pg.198) however, the excerpt notebooks are neither a means/resource to confirm or support Marx and Engels' existing positions, nor are they reflective of some continuity in thought; but instead, they offer "a unique window into Marx's thinking at a time when he seemed to be moving in new directions". They in a sense reflect - if read parallel to the multilinear argument's suggestion of a change in the late Marx – the indication of a greater interest into non-Western and pre-capitalist societies; an interest that was informed by an increasing disillusion with the potential fruits of capitalist development and a related recognition of the potentialities located within pre-capitalist communal forms. All of which are meant to indicate a shifting away from an earlier Eurocentricity.

Anderson's (2010) reading and excerpting from the notebooks gravitates around the above themes, noting for example Marx's detailed excerpting from studies focusing on the Indian subcontinent. For Anderson (2010, pg.209) the excerpts on India reflect a shift from the position of the 1850's where Marx had described India as an unchanging society, passive, without history, and destined to fall before capitalist modernity. Instead, the excerpts he penned in his notebooks are ones from anthropologist's like Maxim Kovalevsky who in his text *Communal Landownership: The Causes, Course, and Consequences of its Decline*, had noted some of the broader changes – across three stages of evolution - of the Indian communal form throughout history. Thus, the inference being that, since Marx noted this particular aspect of the text, the supposition is that he had changed his mind about India being an unchanging society (Anderson, 2010, pg.209). Marx would also insert into his excerpts of Kovalevsky his own commentary and



notes suggesting parallels between Indian history and other societies, such as in the “Greco-Roman world”; thus evidence suggesting a departure from notions of Indian alterity<sup>392</sup> (Anderson, 2010, pg.210).

However, almost conversely, Anderson (2010, pg.210-211) also points to Marx’s notes of Kovalevsky that deal with the impact of Muslim rule on India where he makes critical notes against Kovalevsky’s suggestion that the *iqta*<sup>393</sup> introduced by the Muslim conquerors was something parallel to Western feudalism. For Anderson (2010, pg.211) Marx’s opposition to this suggestion by Kovalevsky reflects his position that precapitalist societies cannot be thought of as uniformly feudal, and that what was required when dealing with non-Western societies was a differentiated examination rather than the imposition of Western historical forms- a “grand narrative”- onto other people<sup>394</sup>.

The third theme from the Kovalevsky notes that Anderson (2010, pg.212) draws our attention to is also reflective of the multilinear argument that a more mature Marx began to adopt a more anticolonial “tone”, that was expressed either through sympathy for the plight experienced by the colonized, making contextual notes on the violence of colonial resistance, and making

---

<sup>392</sup> The referenced excerpt in Anderson (2010, Pg.210) is from Kovalevsky on the breakdown of communal property in India. Marx’s inserted notes are italicized: “The priestly *pack* thus plays a central *role* in the process of individualization of family property. (113), The chief sign of undivided family property is its inalienability. In order to get at this property, the legislation, which is developed under Brahmin influence, must attack this *bastion* more and more...[[*Alienation by gifts everywhere the priestly hobbyhorse!*]]...Among other peoples as well, for instance in the Germanic-Roman world (*vide Merovingians, Carolingians*) the same rank order is also found- gifts to the priest first, preceding every other mode of alienation of immovable property. (Marx [1879] 1975, 366-67). Later, Anderson (2010, pg.212) also notes Marx’s linking of the situation of the Indian ryot to the Irish peasant, when in describing the conditions of the British in India Marx would add the note: “England and Ireland combined. Beautiful!”.

<sup>393</sup> The definition supplied by Anderson (2010, pg.210) reads: “...*iqta*, a form of benefice in which military leaders received land, or the income from land in return for further military service”.

<sup>394</sup> To recall, Anderson (2010) had also located the germs of this shift away from the imposition a unilinear model of historical development – something he argues to be evidenced by Marx and Engels in the *Manifesto* and *German Ideology* – around 1857-58 and indicative of the identification of the differentiated “Asian form” in his model of historical development. For more see sub-section 9.1 above.

pejorative comments and statements in his notes about the colonizers, such as calling the British colonialists “dogs”, “asses” and “blockheads”. In these notes, according to Anderson (2010, Pg.211) Marx would further express such an anti-colonial tone through selectively incorporating excerpts from the historian Robert Sewell’s *Analytical History of India* that made note of the destruction of Indian customs and that emphasized “Hindu resistance”. Evidently, Anderson (2010, pg.214) points out, Marx had left out or avoided referencing those sections from Sewell’s text that described the Hindus as “humbled and spiritless”, or that praised the Muslim conquerors. For Anderson (2010, pg.215) the absence of such excerpts in Marx’s notes is telling of a disagreement.

Though perhaps most significant for our purposes here – when we think back to the topic of the vitality of the Russian commune - is Anderson’s (2010, pg.212) signification of an excerpt Marx made from Kovalevsky’s work where he discerned the continuation of communal forms in the villages even under the new colonial/capitalist structure. The excerpt and contextual text by Anderson (2010, pg.212) reads as follows:

Marx records the following on this issue, inserting the italicized passage about social ‘atoms’: ‘Under this system, the government has nothing to do with the totality of the communal possessors of a given village, but with hereditary users of individual parcels, whose rights cease by not paying tax punctually. Yet *between these atoms certain connections continue to exist*, distantly reminiscent of the earlier communal village landowning groups. (Marx [1879] 1975, 388; original emphasis)’. This extremely important passage suggests a link between Marx’s notes on India and his 1877-82 writings on Russia, discussed below. If these communal ‘connections’ endured in India, might they not also, as in Russia, serve as points of resistance to capital?

This note, and concern -as Anderson (2010, pg.224) describes it- about the relative persistence of communal forms despite the advent of capitalist colonialism is reflected again in another of Marx’s excerpts from Kovalevsky; this time on Latin America. Anderson (2010, pg.223) cites and interprets it as follows:

Marx ends his notes on Kovalevsky on Latin America with the following excerpt, into which he inserts a few words (italicized below): ‘The survival – *in large measure* – of the rural commune is due on one hand to the [Amer]indiands’ preference for this type of property in land, as the one best corresponding to their level of culture; on the other hand, the lack of colonial legislation [[*in contrast to the English East Indies*]] of regulations that would give the members of the clans the possibility of selling the allotments belonging to them. (Harstick 1977, 38)’. Marx’s qualifier ‘in large measure’ undercuts somewhat Kovalevsky’s stress on the dissolution of these communal forms. Marx’s bracketed insert about India suggests that communal forms remained stronger in Latin America than in India, probably because India had been colonized in a later period by an advanced capitalist power, Britain, which actively tried to create individual property in the villages (Anderson, 2010, pg.223-224).

In addition to the concern with the persistence of communal forms after more than three hundred years of colonial rule and even into Marx’s own century, Anderson (2010, 212-213) points to a passage in the notebooks that is meant to suggest Marx’s belief in the danger that older communal forms could pose to capitalist modernity. The context and analysis in Anderson (2010, 2010, pg.212) reads as follows:

Near the end of this discussion of the impact of British colonial rule on the communal village, Marx makes a swipe at Maine whom he accuses of bias: ‘The English Indian officials and the publicists supported upon these, as *Sir H. Maine*, etc., describe the decline of common property in the Punjab as the mere result, - in spite of the loving English treatment of the archaic form, - of *economic progress*, whereas they themselves are *chief bearers* (active) of the same – to their own danger. (Marx [1879] 1975, 394; original emphasis)’. In this very interesting passage, Marx certainly shows hostility to colonialism and capitalism, and a degree of sympathy for communal social forms. But with the phrase ‘to their own danger,’ he also suggests that it was not so much the preservation of these forms as their forceful breakup in the name of ‘economic progress’ that could unleash new social forces dangerous to British rule. The older communal forms may not have been revolutionary in and of themselves, but they could become a ‘danger’ to the social order as they collided with capitalist modernity.

I will admit that I am not exactly sure what is being described in this selected excerpt as it exists in Anderson’s text, nor am I exactly sure how and where in it Marx is describing the danger that the breakup of older communal forms would pose for capitalist modernity<sup>395</sup>. Nonetheless, I

---

<sup>395</sup> Even when one tries to break the excerpt down to just its key parts, it still feels unclear with respect to what Anderson (2010, pg.212) makes of it: “The English Indian officials and the publicists ~~supported upon these~~, as *Sir H.*

am including it here, as it is stated, as part of the supporting evidence on the side of the multilinear argument.

Evidence suggesting the relative threat that pre-capitalist social forms could pose to capitalist modernity, and the acknowledged persistence of communal forms even after more than 300 years of colonization is meant to frame the backdrop to Marx's analysis and "embrace" of Russia's rural commune of the 1880's; of the belief that it could potentially serve as a site of communist transformation without having that nation go through capitalist development. More so, it is through this evidence as selected from the notebooks that Anderson (2010, pg.236) surmises that Marx did not intend to limit his suggestion – of the ability of a pre-capitalist communal form to move directly to communist revolution- to only Russia. As Anderson (2010, pg.212) would pose the suggestion: "If these communal 'connections' endured in India, might they not also, as in Russia, serve as points of resistance to capital?".

In his "On the Misappropriation of Marx's Late Writings on Russia: A Critique of Marx at the Margins", Christopher Araujo (2018) criticizes Anderson's (2010) understating of the specific social and historical context - "what Marx had identified as the unique constellation of conditions and specific social relations" - that informed his suggestion that - maybe - the largely agrarian Russia could bypass capitalist development on the road to communism. For Araujo (2018) this kind of "multilinearity" unsubstantially universalizes the particular path of development that Marx imagined to be open to Russia to all precapitalist societies, thus overstating the open-endedness of Marx's conception of history. It is an overstatement that subsequently takes away from the

---

*Maine, etc.,* describe the decline of common property in the Punjab as the mere result – ~~in spite of the loving English treatment of the archaic form,~~ – of economic progress, whereas they [communal forms?] themselves are *chief bearers* (active) of the same [economic progress?] – to their own danger".

requisite material conditions – the material means and the revolutionary subject - that for Marx presupposed socialist transformation.

Further, Araujo (2018) maintains that in his multilinearity, Anderson (2010) “does not provide an adequate account of Marx’s understanding of the specific social form and historical context of the Russian commune, nor an accurate comparative analysis of the forms and contexts of other precapitalist societies that he analyzed during this same period”. As part of his conclusion on the matter, Araujo (2018) writes:

Marx at the Margins asks us to entertain the thesis that ‘Marx discern[ed] similar possibilities in places like India...whose communal forms he was also studying’. Even though Anderson accepts that Marx ‘never addressed this question explicitly,’ he nonetheless claims that the ‘preponderance of the evidence’ leads to such a reading (Anderson, 2010, pg.236). He offers no such evidence. He offers no such evidence. Instead, he writes that we should ‘surmise’ that Marx ‘intended’ to extend these ‘qualifications’ to all other precapitalist ‘societies that he was studying during this period’ (Anderson, 2010, pg.228).

However, as we have noted with respect to Anderson (2010) above, it should be clarified that he does in fact offer evidence, which is his reliance on the excerpt notebooks. The fuller sentence from Anderson (2010, pg.236) that Araujo (2018) referenced above reads the “preponderance of evidence in the excerpt notebooks discussed in this chapter”. I flag this not to undermine Araujo’s (2018) critique of Anderson (2010) of which I am in full agreement – and which in many ways was inspiring -, but to further spell out the buttresses of the multilinearity argument. Further, as we have noted above, Anderson (2010) is very much conscious of the uniqueness of the Russian example for Marx. He had for example noted those sections in the Zasulich drafts that spoke to the particularities of Russia as a country at Europe’s edge; as a country that does not live “in isolation from the modern world; nor has she fallen prey, like the East Indies, to a foreign conqueror”. This was the uniqueness that was supposed to allow Russia’s ancient communal form to “shake off its primitive characteristics” and combine with modern forms of

technology to “directly develop as an element of production on a national scale”. Anderson (2010) also makes note of how for Marx the Russian rural commune was one that existed at a higher form<sup>396</sup>; one which contained within it an “important dualism” – between private and communal property – which lent it its “vitality”<sup>397</sup>.

Yet despite these acknowledgements, for Anderson (2010) the evidence from the excerpt notebooks suggests that Marx intended to extend these reflections concerning the transition to communism on the basis of “indigenous communal forms” to more than just Russia<sup>398</sup>. As we read above, this was evidence primarily suggesting -a concern with - the relative persistence of communal forms, in places like India and Latin America, despite the encroachment of capitalist colonialism<sup>399</sup>. There is a kind of *impasse* in the argument here; one Anderson (2010, pg.229) self-admittedly leaves up to surmission<sup>400</sup>.

So, are we dealing with a “multicultural, multilinear social dialectic” after all that is absent of Eurocentricity? Perhaps greater clarity in informing our surmission comes from focusing more

---

<sup>396</sup> We would add that in Marx’s second draft letter to Zasulich he writes “I observe by the way, that the form of communist property in Russia is the most modern form of the archaic type, which in turn has passed through a number of evolutionary changes”.

<sup>397</sup> We get more clarity on what this looks like once again from the second draft letter: “The archaic or primary formation of our globe contains a number of strata of different ages, one superimposed on the other. Just so the archaic form of society reveals a number of different types, which characterize different successive epochs. The Russian village community belongs to the youngest type in this chain. Here the peasant cultivator already owns the house in which he lives and the garden belonging to it. Here we have the first dissolving element of the archaic formation, unknown to older types. On the other hand all these are based on blood relationships between the members of the community, while the type to which the Russian commune belongs, is already emancipated from these narrow bonds, and is thus capable of greater evolution”. This excerpt, clear and succinct as it is with regard to the uniqueness of the Russian commune is not referenced by Anderson (2010).

<sup>398</sup> Not heeded by Anderson (2010) is Marx’s comment in the 3<sup>rd</sup> draft of the Zasulich letter where he clearly expresses his view stating: “primitive communities are not all cut to a single pattern”.

<sup>399</sup> Mixed with the incidental anti-colonial tone, scanty references to commonalities in communal forms, and the rather vague excerpt suggesting the potential danger to capitalist modernity that the communal form posed.

<sup>400</sup> In such cases, it may be wise to turn to the words of Lenin (1975, pg.157) who emphasized an attention to the “historically concrete” in any theoretical investigation: “The categorical requirement of Marxist theory in investigating any social question is that it be examined within *definite* historical limits, and, if it refers to a particular country, that account be taken of the specific features distinguishing that country in the same historical epoch”. We would argue here that Marx was doing exactly that in these later writings on Russia.

on what Anderson (2010, pg.224) himself identified as the “important proviso” when it came to the possibility of non-capitalist societies moving directly to socialism, whether a possibility extended to nations other than Russia or not<sup>401</sup>. Though Anderson (2010) acknowledges the proviso, it is an element whose significance he fails to appreciate in his attempts at constructing a non-Eurocentric multilinear Marx. The proviso was something we discussed above with reference to both the final Zasulich letter and in the 1882 “Preface” to the Russian edition of the *Manifesto*. To recall, in the Zasulich letter Marx had written that the commune could act as the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia only if “the harmful influences assailing it on all sides were first eliminated”. And in the 1882 “Preface” he and Engels would write that the Russian *obshchina* could pass directly into a higher form of communal ownership only if a Russian revolution became a signal for a proletarian revolution in the West “so that the two complement each other”.

Anderson (2010) is conscious of these conditionalities, but relatively ignores the implications they continue to have in both the valuation of capitalist production relations and the world historic revolutionary agency of the European working classes. The implications of only (rather abstractly) highlighting that for Marx a non-capitalist nation could transition directly to socialism, is meant to suggest an extension on his behalf of revolutionary potential and agency to otherwise backward peoples. Anderson (2010) is able to leave the discussion there through undermining – as Araujo (2018) noted – the uniqueness of the Russian example (ex: its vitality; its ability to reap the benefits of capitalist modernity)<sup>402</sup> and as we would emphasize here, the

---

<sup>401</sup> We will leave this point open for now, though we have assuredly supplied enough primary evidence suggesting the very unique characteristics and circumstances of the Russian commune for Marx.

<sup>402</sup> As an example of undermining, it is noteworthy that Anderson (2010) does not include the following excerpt from Marx’s 2<sup>nd</sup> draft letter to Zasulich: “If Russia were isolated in the world, it would have to develop on its own account the economic conquests which Western Europe only acquired through a long series of evolutions from its primitive communities to the present situation. There would then be no doubt whatsoever, at least in my mind, that Russia’s communities are fated to perish with the development of Russian society. However, the situation of the Russian

specifications of the proviso (the necessary linkage with the working-class revolution in the Industrially developed West). Since these particular dimensions of Marx and Engels' take on the potential of the Russian commune in particular are not adequately taken up by Anderson (2010) we must turn elsewhere for clarification on their implications for a non-Eurocentric reading of Marx<sup>403</sup>.

In his chapter "Marx and Engels and the Russian Revolution" Daniel Norman (1955) recounts how Marx and Engels tried in vain to explain to Russian revolutionaries two key elements concerning the possibility of a direct passage to socialism in Russia: 1.) that such a transformation could be possible only if the primitive communal forms were able to survive to the present day, which Norman (1955) argues that they doubted would; and 2.) if "the Socialist revolution has succeeded in the West before or at least at the same time as in Russia". For Norman (1955) aside from these two considerations "at no moment did they envisage the possibility of a successful Socialist revolution in backward Russia showing the way to the civilised world". This sentiment is echoed by Isaac Deutscher (1948) who we have cited above. For Deutscher (1948) Marx, though sharing some of the hopes of the Narodnik's with respect to the potential of rural commune, he nonetheless furiously rejected the "Slavophilism" of some of the Narodnik's that envisaged a "socialist mission" for Russia in the world: "In his eyes Western Europe had the birthright of socialist revolution, while Russia's role could be secondary only". Deutscher (1948) is comfortable

---

commune is absolutely different from that of the primitive communities in the West [in Western Europe]. Russia is the only European country in which communal property has maintained itself on a vast, nationwide scale. But at the same time, Russia exists in a modern historical context: it is contemporaneous with a higher culture, and it is linked to a world market in which capitalist production is predominant. [It is therefore capitalist production which enables it to achieve results without having to pass through its. ... ]..."

<sup>403</sup> Additional material from Marx on this topic – beyond what we have already cited up to the 1881 correspondence and 1882 preface – is unfortunately not an option. And this for the simple fact that Marx died in March 1883; the last 15 months of his life being marked by a steady decline in his overall health. Instead, as will be clarified as we proceed, we thus turn to secondary sources, but also to primary source material via Engels – that bane of the multiline argument.



with this conclusion given the “important qualifications” that Marx attached to Russia’s potential short-cut to socialism: 1.) the rural commune would have to avoid disintegration if Russian society was to not miss its “finest chance” to escape capitalism; and 2.) “a stimulus from outside, the socialist transformation of Western Europe, was needed to enable Russia to build socialism on the rural commune”.

For Deutscher (1948), Marx believed that socialist transformation in Western Europe was first needed in order to build socialism out of the rural commune; And for Norman (1955) such a revolution would need to succeed in the West before or either at the same time. The temporal distinction made here – of before or simultaneously- is important to address, especially given the multilinear argument’s emphasis on incidences where – for example in Ireland – the “lever” of revolution is placed elsewhere; where revolutionary activity outside the centres of industrial capitalism become the harbingers of what would potential be a socialist revolution in an industrial nation such as England. With respect to Russia, we similarly noted above how in the 1882 “preface” to the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote of Russia as forming the “vanguard of revolutionary action in Europe”. Nonetheless, there is something more specific being addressed by both Deutscher and Norman which is more than simply an account of revolutionary activity; instead, the question surrounds the potential for *socialist* revolutionary activity; or even the realization of socialism. True, Ireland or Russia may provide the impetus for revolution in Europe, as potentially did revolutionary activity in China or India at one time. But what was this relation to look like in this very particular situation where the potential for a (revolutionary) socialist transformation was deemed possible in a backward, agrarian society? Could Russia experience socialist revolution – by its very own agency and social conditions- and thus lead the way for the West toward socialist revolution? Could they realize themselves at the same time? Did – according

to Marx and Engels - the socialist revolution in the West have to realize itself first before such a movement could be possible in Russia even if it was Russia that supplied the impetus? We have already, in a sense, answered these questions through referencing above that section from the 1882 “preface” where Marx and Engels had written:

Today there is only one possible answer: If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that the two complement each other, then Russia’s peasant communal landownership may serve as the point of departure for a communist development.

A movement in Russia<sup>404</sup> could provide the signal for revolution in the West, but only complementarily with a Western European proletarian revolution could Russia’s communal landownership serve as a point of departure for communist development. In other words, only a socialist revolution in the industrially developed countries – even in the case of it having been spurred by a revolutionary uprising in Russia – could offer the latter the opportunity of remoulding the archaic form of the rural commune along socialist lines.

As clear as this statement already is, it is worth turning to Engels’ pamphlet “On Social Relations in Russia” for a more detailed account for what this complementary relation would in essence look like. Written in 1875 as a response to an “open letter” by the Russian populist Pyotr Tkachov, “On Social Relations in Russia”<sup>405</sup> is rightly described by Tucker (1974, pg.665) as the “fullest statement” of Marx and Engels’ “appraisal of Russian society in the late nineteenth century and the prospects for revolution there”. Written two years before the bracketed period of Marx’s

---

<sup>404</sup> As clarified by the editors of the MECW Volume 24 in the “preface”, Marx and Engels believed the coming revolution in Russia would be a “bourgeois-democratic, mostly peasant, revolution”. This is echoed in Engels’ 1885 letter to Vera Zasulich where he states that Russia is approaching its “1789”. The revolutionary prospects for Russia along these lines was on the table given the peasant reform of 1861 when under the reign of Tsar Alexander II serfdom was effectively abolished throughout the Russian empire- both on private estates and in domestic households. For Marx and Engels the abolition of serfdom in 1861 was connected to mounting discontent among peasants and the growth of the peasant movement (MECW, Vol. 24, pg.xxvi)

<sup>405</sup> In his chapter, cited above, Daniel Norman notes that Engels wrote this response to Tkachov “at Marx’s express request”.

1877-1882 “late writings on Russia”, in this pamphlet Engels provides us with details concerning the populist position in Russia as illustrated through the words of Mr. Tkachov. Tkachov, notes Engels (1974, pg.665), believed that the transformation into socialism could be achieved in Russia with greater ease than compared with its Western European counterparts. This owing to a number of factors that Tkachov raises: (i) the absence of an established bourgeois class (who would presumably be more difficult to fight than the “political power” of the Tsarist state; (ii) the incessant and instinctive revolutionary nature of the Russian people (Engels, 1974, pg.673); and (iii) the supposition that the relative maintenance of communal forms in Russia was evidence of the communal nature of the Russian peasants – as “born Communists” who unlike the workers of Western Europe do not have to acquire socialism artificially<sup>406</sup> (Engels, 1974, pg.671). Engels (1894) repeats these in his “Afterword” to “On Social Relations in Russia” written in 1894, where he pointed to such “Pan-Slavist” tendencies of writers such as M. Tkachov, Alexander Herzen – dubbed the “father of Russian socialism”, and the utopian socialist philosopher Nikolai Chernyshevsky. For Engels (1894) their pan-slavism was rooted in a “childish view” of a “holy” mission for Russia to rejuvenate a rotten and decrepit Western Europe. Like Tkachov and Herzen, Chernyshevsky had believed the Russians peasants to be closer to socialism than the Western European proletariat- the latter existing in societies marked by individuality, private rights and class antagonisms (Engels, 1894).

---

<sup>406</sup> For reference, Engels includes an excerpt from Mr. Tkachov: “Our people...in its great majority...is permeated with the principles of common ownership; it is, if one may use the terms instinctively, traditionally communist. The idea of collective property is so closely interwoven with the whole world outlook of the Russian people that today, when the government begins to understand that this idea is incompatible with the principles of a ‘well-ordered’ society, and in the name of these principles wishes to impress the idea of individual property on the consciousness and life of the people, it can succeed in doing so only with the help of the bayonet and the knout. It is clear from this that our people, despite its ignorance, is much nearer to socialism than the peoples of Western Europe, although the latter are more educated”.

It is from this context that the questions would arise concerning the fate of the Russian form of peasant communism, and whether or not its destruction was first necessitated in order for that society to proceed to modern socialist common ownership:

Now, if in the West the resolution of the contradictions by reorganization of society is conditional on the conversion of all the means of production, hence of the land too, into common property of society, how does the already, or rather still, existing common property in Russia relate to this common property in the West, which still has to be created? Can it not serve as a point of departure for a national campaign which, skipping the entire capitalist period, will convert Russian peasant communism straight into modern socialist common ownership of the means of production by enriching it with all the technical achievements of the capitalist era? Or, to use the words with which Marx sums up the views of Chernyshevsky in a letter to be quoted below: 'Should Russia first destroy the rural commune, as demanded by the liberals, in order to go over to the capitalist system, or can it on the contrary acquire all the fruits of this system, without suffering its torments, by developing its own historical conditions?

Engels responds in a number of ways, all of which lend to clarifying his and Marx's position concerning the fate of the Russian commune. In the 1875 publication, in responding to Tkachov's positive assessment of there being no established bourgeois class in Russia, and so paving a less resistant way to socialism, Engels (1974, pg.666) re-emphasizes the requisite material conditions that would be required for a modern socialist revolution; of the important role to be played by both proletariat and bourgeoisie. On this he would write that socialist revolution:

...requires not only a proletariat that carries out this revolution, but also a bourgeoisie in whose hands the productive forces of society have developed so far that they allow of the final destruction of class distinctions. Among savages and semi-savages there likewise often exist no class distinctions, and every people has passed through such a state. It could not occur to us to re-establish this state, for the simple reason that class distinctions necessarily emerge out of it as the productive forces of society develop. Only at a certain level of development of the productive forces of society, an even very high level for our modern conditions, does it become possible to raise production to such an extent that the abolition of class distinctions can be a real progress, can be lasting without bringing about stagnation or even decline in the mode of social production. But the productive forces have reached this level of development only in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

It was only at a certain level of development of the productive forces that the kind of finality associated with the abolition of class distinctions could be achieved<sup>407</sup>. This ties into the other dimension of Engels' response which is to highlight how no society with primitive communistic institutions has ever – in human pre-history – developed toward a higher form of communal ownership. Instead, argues Engels (1985), all communal forms, whether the German Mark system, the Celtic clans, or the Indian communal villages, have more or less “in the course of time” gradually lost their communal character, dissolving into “communities of mutually independent landowners”, whether under the influence of commodity production surrounding them or as arising out of conditions specific to them. Part of Engels' (1985) intention in raising this point is to 1.) highlight the prevalence of communal ownership of land beyond Russia – “a form of ownership which was, in fact, common to all peoples at a certain stage of development” – and thus responding to the pan-Slavism of the Russian populists and utopian socialists that painted the Russian peasant with a kind of unique and instinctive communism; and 2.) to Segway into pointing out the already “considerable disintegration” of common ownership in Russia itself. Just as with the German, Celt and Indian forms, Russia's forms of common property – as with all forms of primitive common property – was being steadily undermined in a number of ways: there was the increasing flight of the peasantry from the land and into the circuit of migrant labour (Engels, 1974, pg.673); the establishment of a railway network across the Russian occupied lands which worked to revolutionize primitive agriculture - bringing it in contact with the world market – and thus also hasten the transition to capitalist industry through the introduction of secondary industries and

---

<sup>407</sup> As part of this note on requisite conditions for the abolition of all classes Engels (1974, pg.672) also remarks on the relative isolation of the Russian peasant and the related, and limited, “world outlook” of the peasant for whom “the world exists ...only in so far as it interferes with his village community”. The result is the creation across the country of similar but hardly “common” interests; something that has only otherwise been achieved by the mass of immiserated proletarians.

technologies (Engels, 1894); the increased freedom of movement that resulted from the 1861 emancipation of peasants from serfdom; and the steady rise of a fledgling bourgeoisie who had been able to take greater control over the state (partly the result of railways concessions; subsidies and premiums for industrial enterprise; protective tariffs that favoured domestic industry; and a mounting debt held by the Russian state). With these, Engels (1894) notes the transformation of Russia into a “capitalist industrial nation” which was proceeding “at an ever quickening pace”.

This steady decay of the “old communistic commune” and of its place in Russian society was not only an observation suggested in the 1894 “afterword”, but recognized by Engels in the 1875 pamphlet itself. There, despite suggesting the decline of the commune, Engels (1974, pg. 673) still nonetheless expressed hope in the potential of the commune in bypassing the stage of capitalism on the road to socialism, writing:

It is clear that communal ownership in Russia is long past its period of florescence and to all appearances it is moving towards its disintegration. Nevertheless, the possibility undeniably exists of it raising this form of society to a higher one, if it should last until circumstances are ripe for that, and if it shows itself capable of development in such manner that the peasants no longer cultivate the land separately, but collectively; of raising it to this higher form without it being necessary for the Russian peasants to go through the intermediate stage of bourgeois small holdings.

By 1894 when he wrote the “afterword” Engels had undoubtedly become more pessimistic concerning the survival of the communal form in Russia, but nonetheless concluded with a rather ambiguous remark about the potential it continued to hold, and yet also a maintained sense of significance concerning the implications of a Russian revolution for the movement of workers in Western Europe:

Whether enough of this commune has been saved so that, if the occasion arises, as Marx and I still hoped in 1882, it could become the points of departure for communist development in harmony with a sudden change of direction in Europe, I do not presume to say. But this much is certain: if a remnant of this commune is to be preserved, the first condition is the fall of tsarist despotism – revolution in Russia. This will not only tear the great mass of the nation, the peasants, away from the isolation of their villages, which

comprise their “*mir*”, their “world”, and lead them out onto the great stage, where they will get to know the outside world and thus themselves, their own situation and the means of salvation from their present distress; it will also give the labour movement of the West fresh impetus and create new, better conditions in which to carry on the struggle thus hastening the victory of the modern industrial proletariat, without which present-day Russia can never achieve a socialist transformation, whether proceeding from the commune or from capitalism.

What is noteworthy from the above excerpt is also the emphasis on the victory of the modern industrial proletariat as a precondition for socialist transformation in Russia – “whether proceeding from commune or capitalism”. Engels (1894) clarifies that this was what he and Marx meant in the 1882 “preface” of the *Manifesto* when they spoke of the complementary relation between the revolutions; that

Only when the capitalist economy has been relegated to the history books in its homeland and in the countries where it flourished, only when the backward countries see from this example ‘how it’s done’, how the productive forces of modern industry are placed in the service of all as social property – only then can they tackle this shortened process of development.

For Engels (1894) countries which had “only just succumbed to capitalist production” and which had managed to salvage or preserve “gentile institutions”, had in these “remnants of common ownership” a “powerful means of appreciably shortening the process of development into a socialist society and sparing themselves most of the suffering and struggles through which ‘we’ in Western Europe must work out way”. Nevertheless, the active assistance and leadership of “the hitherto capitalist West” was to be an “indispensable condition for this”<sup>408</sup>. This position was noted by us earlier in Chapter 8 when we referenced Engels’ 1882 letter to Karl Kautsky where he privileged the reorganization of Europe and North America along socialist lines as both the

---

<sup>408</sup> See also Engels (1974, pg. 673) from “On Social Relations in Russia”: This, however, can only happen if, before the complete break-up of communal ownership, a proletarian revolution is successfully carried out in Western Europe, creating for the Russian peasant the preconditions requisite for such a transition, particularly the material conditions which he needs if only to carry through the revolution necessarily connected therewith of his whole agricultural system....If anything can still save Russian communal ownership and give it a chance growing into a new, really viable form, it is a proletarian revolution in Western Europe. (Engels, 1974, pg.673)

prerequisite and impetus for transformation in the semi-civilized countries of the world – by example, by economic need, or even through their temporary take over by the Western proletariat.

The late writings on Russia, then, do not necessarily signify the alteration of Marxist theory, nor the extension of revolutionary agency beyond the European proletariat. When read in their context, we retrieve both a contingent and instrumental position that remains consistent with the bounds of Marx and Engels' theory of liberation – a scientific theory premised on the specific material conditions that were brought about through the capitalist mode of production. Russia, and the communal form was both studied and privileged not only because of the potential for revolutionary activity that was fermenting there – activity which would have serious consequences for a movement of workers in Western Europe given the European bourgeoisies reliance on Russia as a reactionary force on the continent – but also because of the unique situation of Russia *viz* modern, capitalist Europe. It was there that pre-capitalist communal forms had sustained themselves – although in steady deterioration – and it was there that “an indigenous population ha[d] already assimilated the intellectual results of capitalist development” (Engels, 1894). A short-cut to socialism was possible there, but certainly not “on the basis of indigenous communal forms” as Anderson (2010, pg236) puts it; it was possible only consequent to a proletarian victory in Western Europe and given very certain and specific external conditions. If anything, the late writings on Russia only further demonstrate the maintained Eurocentricity of Marx and Engels' theory of liberation; of their privileging of the capitalist mode of production whose centre they located in Western Europe (and North America) and of privileging the express world historic role of the European proletariat – whose victory remained the condition for the salvation of all others.

There is further nothing unilinear in the sense of being supra-historical, teleological or determinist in this account of historical development. Nor was there ever imagined to be for Marx



and Engels. Their unilinearity rests more in their account of human liberation than of human history – of a requisite path of development and progress that -for them – just so happened to be realized in Western Europe and among Western Europeans.

#### ***9.4: Some Closing Remarks to Section Three***

The intention of Section Three of this dissertation was to respond to alternative readings of Marxist theory that have sought to absolve Marx – even if not Engels – from the charge of Eurocentrism. What I have termed here as the “multilinear argument” was engaged with, primarily as collated and expressed in the work of Kevin Anderson (2010). Though Anderson (2010) was our primary interlocutor, the multilinear argument is by no means reducible to just his work, and instead is incorporated through a slew *apologia*’s of Marx and Marxism, some of which have also been cited and referenced above. Nonetheless, it is my belief that even though the extensive literature incorporating the multilinear argument has not been engaged with here, the general frames of the arguments – and the evidence - has. The responses to these positions and the criticisms of them thus carry far beyond Anderson’s text.

The crux of the response to the multilinear argument, as evidenced above, is captured rather succinctly in the third draft of Marx’s letters to Zasulich when he wrote: “everything depends on the historical environment in which it occurs”. No more fitting words from Marx himself could best capture his and Engels instrumental position<sup>409</sup> on global politics and the struggles of oppressed people outside the centres of capital. Whether with respect to colonialism, abolition, or national liberation, a movement or revolution was either recognized or supported relative to the imperative movement of the Western European Proletariat. Remembering this – an instrumentality

---

<sup>409</sup> Though as we have also noted, their instrumentality was nonetheless informed by unconscious racial biases. Nonetheless, for sake of argument we will leave the characterisation here to what Marx and Engels themselves imagined.

that fits with the concrete rather than abstract politics of Marx and Engels – also allows one to better account for the variations in their political positions; variations which are best understood and explained relevant to context rather than explained in terms of shifts in their general principles or even their theoretical positions. Likewise, the position that Marx and Engels took toward Russia in the late 1870's and early 80's is less an alteration in their politics, and more reflective of a political analysis based on existing conditions – an analysis nonetheless always grounded in the sought for socialist revolution in Europe. In this way, part of the critique against the multilinear argument is not to deny that Marx and Engels changed positions; arguing that they did not would be to treat them as abstract revolutionaries functioning beyond historical reality. Rather, it is to clarify the meaning behind those changes, and to explain them relative to some of the foundational logics to their theory of liberation.

Incidentally, part of the criticism of the multilinear argument involved a clarification of Marxist theory that avoided reducing Marx and Engels' earlier work to a kind of abstract, determinist and supra-historical project. As we have seen, Marxist theory is often characterized this way in order to provide a solution or alternative that is then framed as novel or distinct from what has been discredited. For example, the *Manifesto* as a text is dismissed as a polemical, supra-historical, and naïve text. Insightful passages from there are thus equally discredited as expressions of something different than what Marx's beliefs actually were or what they became. What we have partially shown in Section Three is that such discredited dimensions as their determinism and abstract universalism were never at part and parcel of the Marxian project; that when Marx was responding to his Russian interlocutors, he was not correcting his previously erroneous positions but providing clarifications: "But I beg his pardon. He does me too much honor and too much shame at the same time".

And so we ask: Was Marx multilinear in the sense of not having a deterministic or fatalistic model of development? Yes. Was he multilinear in the sense of acknowledging not only divergent paths of development that could possibly lead to socialist transformation, as well as add signification to revolutions outside of Europe – absent of conditions of capitalist development? Yes. Does this absolve Marx of developing a Eurocentric theory of liberation and subsequent construction of history that privileged the Western European experience and the vanguard role of the European proletariat? No.

It is in this last aspect of Marx that we find a maintained unilinearity – a unilinearity coexistent with a humanistic and non-deterministic theory. Part of conceptualizing the nuance involved in this seemingly antagonistic characterization comes with understanding Marx and Engels' project not so much as a theory of history but a theory of liberation. The historical aspects of which are both central and incidental to their intended project. History is utilized as a means to inform the construction of their socialism as scientific whether by demonstrating the relative impermanence of bourgeois private property, or accounting for the inevitable downfall of capitalism through conditions of its own making. Thus, the late Marx, as we have demonstrated, very much held the same position as he did in 1847 when in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, he described the liberation of the working class the “final denouement”.

Now, Anderson (2010, pg.244) concludes his construction of a multilinear and multicultural Marx with a question: Do Marx's multilinear perspectives on social development have any direct relevance in our present day; in an era of globalized capitalism? For Anderson (2010) despite having gone through lengths to characterize Marx this way, he concludes that it has relevance “only to a limited degree”. That capitalism has so successfully traversed the globe and undermined pre-capitalist communal forms – as Marx and Engels nonetheless predicted in the

*Manifesto*, and in their accounts of colonial expansion- that the peasant or commune question is of less significance. For Anderson (2010, pg.245) an account of Marx's "multilinear approach" carries today "a general theoretical or methodological" relevance, serving "an important heuristic purpose, as a major example of his dialectical theory of society". Anderson (2010, pg.245) also, - resting on his misconstrued reading of Marx's position on the Polish question, on abolition and on Ireland - finds relevance in this reading of Marx for today when it comes to theorizing the intersectionality of race, class and gender and of their relation to the working classes. In a sense, if one read's Marx's writings not as informed by an instrumental politics that was in the service of the working-class movement, but as principled calls for solidarity between the European working-class movement and the movement of oppressed people on the margins, then there is something important to gain in terms of utilizing Marx to critique contemporary issues of racism without collapsing them into class.

To this conclusion made by Anderson (2010) there are two ways to respond: 1.) With respect to Marx's multilinear perspective on social development and his *apparent* recognition of the potential contained within the rural commune as the fulcrum for social regeneration –nay, of socialist regeneration – Anderson's (2010) remarks noted above undermines the implications that this multilinear position holds with respect to the location of revolutionary agency outside the logic of capitalist development and the strictures of the proletariat. If Marx was in reality willing to place the Russian peasant on an equal footing with the Western European worker on the road to socialism, then surely this would carry an enormous significance in today's world with respect to an array of ongoing struggles at the peripheries of, or outside of the official dimensions of the "workers movement". It would also carry further relevance given that all nations within the net of global capitalism and all sections of their populations have not necessarily developed along lines

of the kind of capitalist development envisioned by Marx and Engels; nor have they been ‘socialized’ as imagined to be. Nonetheless, as we have demonstrated, Marx and Engels were willing to suggest no equal footing at all. Only the proletariat and both the imperative and focus of their struggle held the keys to human emancipation.

Response 2.) concerns the character of the working class today; of the myriad of intersectional and overlapping relations and hierarchies that frame and form it in ways contrary to the supposed general mass that for Marx and Engels the working class was supposed to develop as. When as the mouthpieces of this mass of “general men” Marx and Engels supported abolition or Irish independence, they did so not out of a humanistic sense of solidarity or righteousness on behalf of an oppressed ethnic or racial group; a sort of anti-racist working class politics that refrained from focusing on just ‘class-relations’. As has been demonstrated in the chapters above, they did so only as a means for adding fuel and momentum to the workers movement itself, with everything else taking only a secondary position. See these scathing remarks made in an 1882 letter from Engels to Eduard Bernstein when discussing support for the national liberation of oppressed peoples relative to the workers movement:

Again, I do not propose to go into the question of how the smaller Slav nations have come to look to the Tsar as their only liberator. Let it suffice that they do so; we cannot alter the fact and it will rest at that until Tsarism has been smashed; if there's a war, all these interesting little nations will be on the side of Tsarism, the enemy of all bourgeois progress in the West. So long as this remains the case, I can take no interest in their immediate liberation here and now; they are as much our declared enemies as their ally and patron, the Tsar. We must co-operate in the work of setting the West European proletariat free and subordinate everything else to that goal. No matter how interesting the Balkan Slavs, etc., might be, the moment their desire for liberation clashes with the interests of the proletariat they can go hang for all I care. The Alsations, too, are oppressed, and I shall be glad when we are once more quit of them. But if, on what is patently the very eve of a revolution, they were to try and provoke a war between France and Germany, once more goading on those two countries and thereby postponing the revolution, I should tell them: Hold hard! Surely you can have as much patience as the European proletariat. When they have liberated themselves, you will automatically be free; but till then, we shan't allow you to put a spoke in the wheel of the militant proletariat. The same applies to the Slavs. The victory of the

proletariat will liberate them in reality and of necessity and not, like the Tsar, apparently and temporarily. And that's why they, who have hitherto not only failed to contribute anything to Europe and European progress, but have actually retarded it, should have at least as much patience as our proletarians.

In the face of its Eurocentrism, its abstract revolutionary subject, and its instrumental support for oppressed groups, it is no wonder that in his resignation from the Communist Party Césaire wrote in 1956:

What I demand from Marxism and Communism is that they serve the black peoples, not that the black peoples serve Marxism and Communism. Philosophies and movements must serve the people, not the people the doctrine and the movement.... A doctrine is of value only if it is conceived by us and for us, and revised through us... We consider it our duty to make common cause with all who cherish truth and justice, in order to form organizations able to support effectively the black peoples in their present and future struggle – their struggle for justice, for culture, for dignity, for liberty...Because of this, please accept my resignation from the Party<sup>410</sup>.

Nonetheless it is not without saying that Marx and Engels have made a tremendous contribution to anti-racist and feminist politics today. The inheritances from Hegel concerning the determination of consciousness, the critique of ideology and the exposition of the crimes of capitalism all carry themselves into the struggles and everyday lived experiences of Black and Brown people in our contemporary period. The question, however, is whether as a project of liberation – a theory of liberation – Marx and Engels had in fact devised an account relevant to – and in the service of – the realities of all people, or whether as a theory of liberation their project functions only to silence and undermine? As Robinson (1980) would argue, it is through their very attempt to construct an account for all people that Marx and Engels failed.

---

<sup>410</sup> As cited in Robinson (2000, pg.184)

## Section Four: Conclusion

### Chapter 10: Conclusion

I had the privilege of speaking with Elizabeth Robinson who shared an anecdote with me that she believed framed Cedric Robinson's interest and critique of Marxist theory; one which speaks to the limitations that come with Marxism's reduction of human (revolutionary) potential to conditions historically specific to European economic development:

So the anecdote, this is one from Cedric and it's surely part of what framed his interest...it was when we were in Binghamton, and Cedric was sitting a PhD exam, and there was a Haitian student who was defending his dissertation that talked about the Haitian revolutions, talked about the removal of the Indigenous population, the Tainos. And in the midst of his defense, another committee member said to him, something to the effect of, well, Haiti wasn't really a revolution because they had never developed a working class, so they had never advanced through the proper stages of economic development for them to have a revolution. Of course, that is an appalling notion of how one sees the world because it really does make it a very narrow notion... And Cedric and I talked about that incident more than once, and he told that story to people.

From the above anecdote we sense the kind of limitations that come through with a Marxian formula for revolution and social justice. One can surely suggest that the dissertation committee member in question was reductionist, or even describe him as economistic or determinist, but what we have demonstrated in the pages above it that the limiting of revolutionary agency to a working class that exists relative to a certain degree of economic development is part and parcel of Marxism; it is in fact one of the organizational logics of the Marxian theory of liberation that lends it a presumed degree of rationality or Science.

The implications of the Marxian position however carry beyond only a reference to the historical and resonate into our current moment. Aside from the fact that whole people and civilizations are read in the present through reference to the meaningfulness afforded to their past, the framing of revolutionary activity with singular reference to a conflict between the proletariat in opposition to the bourgeoisie continues to sideline or minimize the importance and potential of

movements that do not so clearly conform to such an antagonism. Further, as Robinson (2000) has argued in his most well-known intervention concerning the limitations of Marxist theory- *Black Marxism* – a characteristic feature of capitalist development – in reality- has been the entrenchment of distinctions, hierarchies and divisions that have complicated the assumed simplification of class conflict that was supposed to frame the industrial age and which was supposed to be the source and means for a kind of totalizing human liberation. This text, where Robinson (2000) most clearly forwards his oppositional characterization of a much more complex and multilayered system of “racial capitalism” is only one piece of a larger tapestry of works that Robinson developed in resistance to not only Marxism, but the prevailing philosophical and theoretical foundations of Western social and political thought.

The critique of these foundations would first find their articulation in Robinson’s (1980) first book, *Terms of Order: Politics Science and the Myth of Leadership* which in many ways would signal his epistemological rupture with the Western canon; one which would resonate throughout his later theoretical and historiographic engagements. No discipline was spared.

Developed out of his doctoral dissertation, in *Terms of Order* Robinson (1980) sought to critique the illusions of social and political order which have continually informed intellectual traditions in Western thought, whether conservative, liberal or radical. This “myth of social order” would come to frame his critique of the mythical ordering paradigms of Marxian philosophy which had ineffectively imposed onto the “fundamental nature of social disorder” an alien and imagined construction. As noted above with reference to the articulation of a racial capitalism, the mythical social order of Marxism would prove itself unable to account for the otherwise complicated continuance of pre-capitalist social formations into an otherwise signified age of capitalism. Thus and so, Marxism was unable to apprehend – or admit - the non-objective character of capitalist



development, only further blinding the Marxist imagination with respect to the experiences and histories of people that fell out of its racially-biased parameters.

These parameters that framed the mythical Marxian narrative are further explored and unearthed through a detailed taxonomy of Marxism and socialist discourse in Robinson's *Anthropology of Marxism*. Here he would extend his historiographic critique of Marxism, declaring his intention to be one of exposing the antecedents of socialist and Marxist thought, not as products of a specific era such as the industrial revolution, but as "elements of a general discourse which resulted from the clash and ruptures of beliefs, structures and previous discourses fashioned in the cultures and historical societies comprising Western civilization" (Robinson, 2019, pg.2).

For example, one of the central means of intervention taken by Robinson (2019) in his *Anthropology* is to disrupt the standard "3 pillars of Marxism" thesis that was suggested by Engels and more popularized by Lenin. Rather than the tripartite, temporal and geographic (national) outcome of British Political Economy<sup>411</sup>, French Socialism and German Philosophy, Robinson utilizes a critical historiography to account for the deeper and more diverse array of precedents that went into forming Marxism: Platonic thought, Christian messianism, Protestant pietism, Eurocentrism, a cultural intoxication with industrialism and the mantle of science, Jesuit missionary activity, and a long historical tradition of socialistic and heretical discourse among

---

<sup>411</sup> This is not to discount the influence that for example Adam Smith or David Ricardo had on the development of Marxian philosophy, particularly as regards the value theory of labour which Marx utilized to demystify the commodity. Marx would admit that Adam Smith – owing to the conditions that had developed by the 18<sup>th</sup> century – was perhaps the first to conceive of the category of labour in general – indifferent to its particularisms – and thus able to locate its role in the determination of value. Ricardo would play an equally significant role establishing that labour behaved "as the foundation of all value". Nevertheless, what we have been emphasizing in this dissertation has been the role of an adopted Hegelian system that undergirded the Marxian theory of liberation; providing it with a means to account for an end to human suffering. This system may very well be informed by and utilize concepts developed elsewhere, but only always in the service of it; always only in the service of the Marxian mythical narrative.

peasants and heretical groups that in large part shaped future European theories of liberation. For Robinson (2019) Marxist historiography, and its intention to account for its own world historical significance and scientific stature, required it to distort or negate its own history; a distortion that only functioned to limit the radical imagination.

One of the more inspiring elements of Robinson's (2019) anthropology of Marxism was his privileging – though not exclusively – of the tradition of German philosophy, and not French utopian socialism, in the construction of Marx and Engels' vision of a liberated future. In large part it was this particular exposition of Robinson's that inspired the form and direction of a significant portion of this dissertation – the fruits of the consequent research being made clear in the pages above. There was thus something undoubtably meaningful to gain through an attention to the role and relevance of Kantian and Hegelian thought in the socialism of Marx and Engels; one which ironically exposed some of the deeper issues with Marxist theory rather than liberate it from what was assumed to be its more “scientific” or dogmatic treatment at the hands of the Soviets. Thus, a dialectical, humanistic and Hegelian influenced Marxism emerges not as the dawn of a more reflexive theory of liberation, but a more strictured and Eurocentric account of the ongoing human predicament. A Hegelian- Marxism, as it rightly is, and it's accompanying machinery of history – that bride of the dialectic- further exposes the philosophy of Marx and Engels in ways irredeemable in the face of the demands of meaningful anti-racism and anti-colonialism.

Just as in *Black Marxism*, here socialist discourse and Marxian philosophy in particular were accounted for and explained in relation to the cultural and civilizational contexts from which they developed. They were explained and exposed in relation to the real conditions and real terms of their formation. In many ways one could describe Robinson as turning historical materialism

against itself; utilizing a critical method of historical inquiry that may very well be indebted to the tradition of Marxist thought wherein human conception and consciousness- what we believe, what we think and what we construct- are only ever relative to the conditions we find ourselves in; the very conditions that we ourselves produce. In essence then, what is demonstrated by Robinson is that Marx and Engels were – as conditioned beings – susceptible to these same forces, thus developing a philosophy that was informed by the cultures, economies, and histories of the civilizations of Europe. Marx and Engels would of course not debate this fact, never entertaining the notion that one could step out of determination or history. However, the only way they are able to justify their position, and to frame their perspective as one beyond simply perspective is through the construction of a machinery of history – a dialectical progression of humanity that eventuates in the development of conditions that were to allow for the generation of universality and objectivity through subjectivity. So much Hegel had already devised.

Yet despite what one may criticize of the Hegelian and Marxian projects, their respective interventions were not without merit. Is it not equally true that liberal moral theories of right and wrong continue to fail in informing and furthering meaningful social and political change, just as Hegel had argued? Is it not true, as Charles Mills (1997) would argue in his *The Racial Contract* that abstract moral principles such as the Kantian moral law are both defective and deceptive; unable to inform just political action and at their worst, through their abstract character, justifying racial domination? Is it not also true, historically speaking, that utopian experiments geared toward improving the lot of the workers, such as Robert Owen's socialistic communities, failed to survive given the constant demands of capitalist industry and its steady requirement of surplus value; one that ensured the consistent decline of the conditions of the workers? If not through the Marxian overturning of class conditions, then what other reasonable options are we left with that may allow

us to - without illusion - create meaningful change in our world and put an end to human misery and suffering?

These questions feel even more prescient given the degree of organized theft occurring globally at the hands of multinational corporations. And of the evisceration of whole climates and populations for the sake of production and exchange. What else but the demand and formula for an end to capitalism at the hands of the majority of the human population – the majority who work for a wage - can we turn to?

On these questions we would ask Robinson: If not the Marxist project then what is the alternative? Robinson, both unfortunately and fortunately does not propose or promise a definite alternative political project in place of Marx and Engels' as the solution to the travails of our world. There is in Robinson, no ready formula. There is no eventuality, no set path to a preordained Kingdom of God on Earth<sup>412</sup>. For one, this would be contrary to what he argued in *Terms of Order*, concerning the illusion of social order and the presumption that the chaos and unpredictability of our otherwise complex and multilayered existence can be so easily explained. Any explication of course would leave something out; something meaningful to the experiences of peoples that do not conform to the ordering parameters with which we attempted to construct our theory – our intervention.

But this is not a resignation into pessimism on behalf of Robinson in the sense that any act or project of resistance is essentially futile; always limited. It is with this in mind- the coupling of a critique of exclusive paradigms of resistance and the avoidance of a kind of pessimism when it comes to building and imagining radical political projects - that we are best in a position to

---

<sup>412</sup> The theological antecedents of the Marxist communist and socialist future are explored in Robinson's *An Anthropology of Marxism* (2019).

apprehend what Robinson meant by the Black Radical Tradition. In the Introduction to this dissertation, we noted how Meyerson (2000) criticized Robinson's articulation of a Black Radical Tradition as opposing to Marxism an equally grand narrative; one which falls further short due to it being framed through a kind of ethno-nationalism. This criticism would be true if at any moment Robinson characterized the BRT as such; but in doing so he would at once contradict the critical means through which he intervened into Marxist theory in the first place. Rather, in identifying the BRT, Robinson is not advocating or signifying an exclusive paradigm for resistance. He is at one moment bringing to light the rich histories of resistance in opposition to social injustice among people of African descent that have otherwise been ignored, and at another moment he is moving our imaginations forward when it comes to how we think and conceive of revolutionary struggle. In the "preface" by Elizabeth and Cedric Robinson for the edited collection *Futures of Black Radicalism*, they write:

If we are to move the Black Radical Tradition forward, it is imperative that we understand it is not utopian. Rather it is about questioning for freedom. It is about the necessity of recognizing the importance of struggle regardless of outcomes.

There is meaning to be found in struggles against injustice; whether or not it comes with a utopian promise of a means to an alternative world. Put another way, the revolutionary nature of the slave revolts in Haiti, in Brazil and throughout the Americas, lay in their act of resistance and what that resistance meant for those resisting, despite the question of whether or not they led to the overturning of human enslavement on a global scale, or even in the contexts within which they arose. There is value and importance in struggle, which in itself must be recognized and celebrated, regardless of the outcome.

On this it is worth turning to a joint interview that Cedric Robinson did with his wife Elizabeth, where at one point Elizabeth recalled a two-day seminar at the University of California Irvine when at the end, Cedric was asked “when does it all get better?” Quote:

Cedric said something to them about the struggle being important, regardless of whether or not you are going to win. If its some kind of salvation you’re looking for, I don’t think its going to happen. It’s not like a football game that’s going to end with your team either wining or losing. We have to understand that there is value in trying, not in winning. Its important to recognize small victories and celebrate them and one another. There is not just victory at the end of struggle (Camp & Heatherton, 2017).

Robinson’s intervention into Marxist theory challenges not only the basic presumptions of the discipline of Marxism itself, but raises questions regarding the way we think of social justice, of struggle, and of our future. We are encouraged to re-imagine what possibilities we hold with regard to varying social movements and of the relevance we afford them; how we think of ourselves as human beings and of the possibilities that we ourselves carry; what identifications we make with our past and how these carry into our present and future; and what other ways exist for imagining and realizing our unity and oneness. These questions are never wholly answered by Robinson, but as he clarified, “as a scholar it was never my purpose to exhaust a subject, only to suggest that it was there” (Robinson, 2000, p.xxxii). This dissertation has sought to catch a glimpse of that *showing* that Robinson did, and to build on the critical foundation which he laid.

Though, despite what has been built here, and given the questions raised in this conclusion, it is in the fashion of a Socratic dialogue that this dissertation chooses to end with ἀπορία [*Aporia*]. In Plato’s aporetic dialogue *Meno*, Socrates describes the purgative effect of reducing someone to *Aporia* - defined as ‘question’ or ‘lack of passage’ or ‘puzzlement’ -thus having simply revealed to them that what they thought was true was not really the case. There is no alternative resolution that is proposed, and so the purgative effect is also a liberating one; of letting go and encouraging on going exploration and imagination.

## Bibliography

---

- Anders, B. & Anders, B. (2018). *Hegelian Marxism: The Uses of Hegel's Philosophy in Marxist Theory from Georg Lukács to Slavoj Žižek*. Huddinge: Södertörns högskola
- Anderson, P. (1976). *Considerations on Western Marxism*. Verso Books.
- Anderson, K. (2010). *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity and Non-Western Societies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Angus, I. (2018) "The Dissolution of Marxist Humanism" Given at the conference *Then and Now: 1968-2018*, November 2-3, 2018, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. Paper retrieved from: <https://www.sartreonline.com/MarxistHumanism.pdf>
- Araujo, C. (2018). "On the Misappropriation of Marx's Late Writings on Russia: A Critique of Marx at the Margins", *Science & Society*, Vol. 82, No. 1
- Arthur, C.J. (1983). "Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic and the Myth of Marxology" *New Left Review*, pp 67-75. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/subject/marxmyths/chris-arthur/article.htm>
- Arthur, C.J. (1986). *Dialectics of Labour: Marx and his Relation to Hegel*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell
- Avineri, S. (1974). *Hegel's Theory of the Modern State*. Cambridge University Press
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1991). Marxism and Nationalism. *Journal of Contemporary History*. Vol 26, Issue 3.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2012). *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*. Cambridge University Press
- Bakan, A., & Dua, E. (Eds.). (2014). *Theorizing anti-racism: linkages in Marxism and critical race theories*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Banaji, J. (2011). *Theory as history: essays on modes of production and exploitation*. Chicago: Haymarket Books
- Bannerji, H. (1995). *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism*. Toronto: Women's Press
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2006). "Building from Marx: Reflections on race and class. *Social Justice*, Vol. 32, no.4.
- Bernasconi, R. (1998) "Hegel at the Court of Ashanti" In Stuart Barnett (ed.), *Hegel After Derrida*. Routledge. pp. 41--63 (1998)
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2003) "Hegel's Racism: A Reply to McCarney" *Radical Philosophy*, 119.

- Billings, J. (2014). *Genealogy of the Tragic: Greek Tragedy and German Philosophy*. Princeton University Press
- Blunden, A. (2005). "Hegel: The Idea of the Subject". *Philosophical Foundations*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ethicalpolitics.org/ablunden/works/hegel-logic.htm>
- Boggs, G- L. (1998). *Living for Change: An Autobiography*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Brock, P. (1959). "Socialism and Nationalism in Poland, 1840-1846", *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* Vol. 4 (1959), pp. 121-146
- Camp, J. & Heatherton, C. (2017). "The World We Want: An Interview with Cedric and Elizabeth Robinson", *Futures of Black Radicalism* (Johnson & Rubin, Eds.) Verso Books
- Cassirer, E. (1945). *Rousseau, Kant Goethe: Two Essays*. Princeton University Press
- Cesaire, A. (2000). *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press
- Chattopadhyay, P. (2006). "Passage to Socialism: The Dialectic of Progress in Marx" *Historical Materialism*, Vol. 14, No. 3
- Cornu, A. (1948). "German Utopianism: 'True' Socialism". *Science and Society*. 12 (1):97 - 112
- Deutscher, I. (1955). "Marx and Russia", *Heretics and Renegades and Other Essays*. London UK: Hamish and Hamilton.
- Dietzgen, J. (1917). "Scientific Socialism" in *Philosophical Essays*. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/dietzgen/works/1870s/scientific-socialism.htm>
- Engels, F. (1857). "Persia-China". *New York Daily Tribune*. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/06/05.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1875). "On Social Relation in Russia", *Refugee Literature*. MECW, Vol 24. Retrieved from: <https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/marx/works/1874/refugee-literature/ch05.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1932). "Letter to Karl Kautsky, 1882", Marx- Engels Archives, Vol 1 (VI), Moscow Retrieved from: [https://wikirouge.net/texts/en/Letter\\_to\\_Karl\\_Kautsky,\\_February\\_7,\\_1882](https://wikirouge.net/texts/en/Letter_to_Karl_Kautsky,_February_7,_1882)
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1946). Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy. *Moscow: Progress Publishers*. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1886/ludwig-feuerbach/>



- \_\_\_\_\_. (1947) *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*. Progress Publishing. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1877/antiduhring>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1953). "A Polish Proclamation", *The Russian Menace to Europe* (Paul Blackstock and Bert Hoselitz Eds.) London, UK: George Allen & Unwin. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1874/06/11.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1969). "Principles of Communism", in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Collected Works (Volume One)*. Moscow: Progress Publishers. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/11/prin-com.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1978) "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" In Robert C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx – Engels Reader* (pp. 683-717). London: Norton & Company, Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2004). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. NSW, Australia: Resistance Books.
- Fanon, F. (2004). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grover Atlantic
- Feuer, L. S. (1963). "The North American Origin of Marx's Socialism", *The Western Political Quarterly* Vol. 16, No. 1 (Mar., 1963), pp. 53-67
- Feuerbach, L. (1881). *The Essence of Christianity*. (Marian Evans trans.). London: Trubner & Co., Ludgate Hill.
- Findlay, J.N. (1977). "Foreword" in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Fromm, E. (2004). *Marx's Concept of Man*. London: Bloomsbury Academic
- Gardner, S. (2015). Hegel: Glossary. Retrieved from: <http://philosophyfaculty.ucsd.edu/faculty/ewatkins/Phil107S13/Hegel-Glossary.pdf>
- Gouldner, A. (1980) *The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory*. The Seabury Press.
- Haider, A. (2017). "The Shadow of the Plantation". *Viewpoint Magazine*. Retrieved from: <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/02/12/the-shadow-of-the-plantation/>
- Haider, A., Grey, E., & Mabie, B. (Eds.) (2020). *The Black Radical Tradition: A Reader*. Verso
- Hall, S. (1986). Hall, Stuart. 1986. "Gramsci's Relevance to the Study of Race and Ethnicity". *Journal of Communication Inquiry*. Vol. 10(2), pp.5-27.

- Harvey, D. (2007). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press
- Hegel, G.W.F. (1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit*. London: Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1977\*). *Faith & Knowledge*. (Walter Cerf & H.S. Harris Eds.). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1979) *System of Ethical Life* (T.M. Knox trans.). Albany: State University of New York Press. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/se/index.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1988). *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (One Volume Edition: The Lectures of 1827)*. (Peter C. Hodgson Ed.). University of California Press Ltd.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1991). *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. (Allen Wood Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2001). *The Philosophy of History*. (J. Sibree Trans.). Kitchener: Batoche Books.
- Hodgson, P.C. (1988). "Editorial Introduction" in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (One Volume Edition: The Lectures of 1827)*. (Peter C. Hodgson Ed.). University of California Press Ltd.
- Hume, D. (1975). "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding". In P.H. Niddich (Ed.) *David Hume: Enquiries*, Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1983). *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. Hackett Publishing Company.
- Inwood, M (1992). *A Hegel Dictionary: Blackwell Philosophical Dictionaries*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- James, CLR.; Boggs, GL; Dunayevskaya, R. (1986) *State Capitalism and World Revolution*. (Revised Ed.) PM Press.
- Jani, P. (2002). "Karl Marx, Eurocentrism, and the 1857 Revolt in British India." *Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies*. Eds. Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jeannot, T. (2007). "Marx, Capitalism and Race", *Radical Philosophy Today*. 2007:69-92
- Kant, I. (1980). *Lectures on Ethics*. London, UK: Hackett Publishing Company Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1998). *Critique of Practical Reason*, (H.W. Cassirer Trans.) Milwaukee, Wis: Marquette University Press

- \_\_\_\_\_. (1998\*). *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: And Other Writings*. (Allen Wood and George di Giovanni ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1999). *Critique of Pure Reason*. (Allen Wood & Paul Guyer Ed.). Cambridge University Press
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2002). *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. (Allen Wood Trans). Binghamton: Vail-Ballou Press Inc.
- Kelley, R.D.G. (2017). "What did Cedric Robinson mean by Racial Capitalism?". Boston Review: A Political and Literary Forum. Retrieve from: <http://bostonreview.net/race/robin-d-g-kelley-what-did-cedric-robinson-mean-racial-capitalism>
- Knox, T.M. (1946). "Note: hic Rodus, hic salta!" in *Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (trans. T.M. Knox). London, UK: G Bell.
- Krader, L. (1974). "Introduction", *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx* (second edition), Lawrence Krader (Ed.). Netherlands: Van Gorcum & co.
- Leslie, R.F. (1954). "Left Wing Political Tactics in Poland, 1831-1846", *The Slavonic East European Review*, Vol. 33, No. 80. Pp. 120-139
- Lindner, K. (2010). "Marx's Eurocentrism: Postcolonial Studies and Marx Scholarship". *Radical Philosophy*. 161, 27-41.
- Lowy, M. (2000). "Marx's Dialectic of Progress: Closed or Open?" *Socialism and Democracy*. 14 (1): 35-44.
- Lukacs, G. (1971). *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Lukes, S. (1985). *Marxism and Morality*. Oxford University Press.
- Macdonald, M. (1941). "Marx, Engels and the Polish National Movement", *The Journal of Modern History*. Volume 13, No, 3.
- Magee, G.A (2001). *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*. Cornell University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2010). *The Hegel Dictionary*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group
- Marković, M. (1963). "Marxist Humanism and Ethics". *Science and Society*. Vol. 27, No. 1. Pp 1-22.
- Marcuse, Herbert. (1986). *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the rise of Social Theory*. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul.

- Marx, K. (1842). "Proceeding of the Sixth Rhine Provincial Assembly (Third Article).. Rheinische Zeitung. Retrieved from: <https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/marx/works/1842/10/25.htm#n1>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1853). "The Future Results of British Rule in India". *New York Daily Tribune*. Retrieved from: <https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/marx/works/1853/07/22.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1853). "The British Rule in India". *New York Daily Tribune*. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/06/25.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1853). "The Turkish Question". *New York Daily Tribune*. Retrieved from: [https://wikirouge.net/texts/en/The\\_Turkish\\_Question\\_\(March\\_1853\)](https://wikirouge.net/texts/en/The_Turkish_Question_(March_1853))
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1853). "Russian Policy Against Turkey .– Chartism" *New York Daily Tribune*. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/07/14.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1857). "The Indian Revolt". *New York Daily Tribune*. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/09/16.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1859). "The Case of the Lorcha Arrow". *New York Daily Tribune*. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/01/23.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1859). "Another Civilization War". *New York Daily Tribune*. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/10/15.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1861). "The Civil War in the United States" *Die Presse*. MECW Vol. 19: Retrieved from: [https://wikirouge.net/texts/en/The\\_Civil\\_War\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_\(October\\_1861\)](https://wikirouge.net/texts/en/The_Civil_War_in_the_United_States_(October_1861))
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1861). "The Crisis in England" *Die Presse*. MECW Vol. 19: Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1861/11/06.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1865). "Address of the International Working Men's Association to Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America" *The Bee-Hive Newspaper*. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1864/lincoln-letter.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1959). *Economic of Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Progress Publishers. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1969) *The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850. Selected Works, Volume 1*. Moscow: Progress Publishers. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/index.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1970). *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Oxford University Press.

- \_\_\_\_\_. (1970\*). "Introduction to the French Edition". In Marx/Engels Selected Works, Volume 3. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/soc-utop/index.htm>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1974). *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx* (second edition), Lawrence Krader (Ed.). Netherlands: Van Gorcum & co.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1975). "Letter from Marx to Pavel Vasilyevich Annenkov", *Letters of Marx and Engels 1846*. Retrieved from: [http://hiaw.org/defcon6/works/1846/letters/46\\_12\\_28.html](http://hiaw.org/defcon6/works/1846/letters/46_12_28.html)
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1978). "Preface: A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy". In Robert C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx – Engels Reader* (pp. 3-6). London: Norton & Company, Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1978). "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts". In Robert C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx – Engels Reader* (pp. 66-126). London: Norton & Company, Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1978). "The Holy Family". In Robert C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx – Engels Reader* (pp. 66-126). London: Norton & Company, Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1978). "Theses on Feuerbach". In Robert C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx – Engels Reader* (pp. 143-145). London: Norton & Company, Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1978). "The Poverty of Philosophy". In Robert C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx – Engels Reader* (pp. 218). London: Norton & Company, Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1978). "The Grundrisse". In Robert C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx – Engels Reader* (pp. 21-293). London: Norton & Company, Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1937). *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Moscow: Progress Publishers. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/>
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1976). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy (Volume one)*. New York: Penguin Books
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1999). *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Moscow: Progress Publishers. Retrieved from: [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_Contribution\\_to\\_the\\_Critique\\_of\\_Political\\_Economy.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Contribution_to_the_Critique_of_Political_Economy.pdf)
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1999\*) *Capital Volume Three: A Critique of Political Economy*. Penguin Classics.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1978). "Manifesto of the Communist Party". In Robert C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx – Engels Reader* (pp. 469-500). London: Norton & Company, Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1978). "Alienation and Social Classes". In Robert C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx – Engels Reader* (pp. 133-135). London: Norton & Company, Inc.

- \_\_\_\_\_. (1978). "The German Ideology: Part 1". In Robert C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx – Engels Reader* (pp. 146-202). London: Norton & Company, Inc.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1932). *The German Ideology: Part I*. New York: International Publishers
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1975). *The Holy Family: Or Critique of Critical Criticism (Against Bruno Bauer and Company)*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- McNally, D. (1993). "EP Thompson: Class Struggle and Historical Materialism", *International Socialism*, 2: 61.
- Meszaros, I. (1970). *Marx's Theory of Alienation*. London, UK: Merlin Press. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/meszaros/works/alien/index.htm>
- Meyerson, G. (2000). "Rethinking Black Marxism: Reflections on Cedric Robinson and Others", *Cultural Logic: An Electronic Journal of Marxist Theory and Practice*, 3, No.2
- Michael, M. (1618). *Atalanta Fugiens*. Brown University Digital Repository. Retrieved from: <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:698524/>
- Miller, R.W. (1983). "Marx and Morality". *Nomos*, Vol. 26, pp 3-32
- Mills, C. (2005) "Kant's untermenschen", *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy* (Andrew Valls, Ed.) Cornell University Press.
- Morais, H. (1948). "Marx and Engels on America" in *Science and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 1. Pp 3-21
- Norman, D. (1955). "Marx and Engels and the Russian Revolution", *Marx and Soviet Reality*. London, UK: Batchworth Press
- Novak, G. (2002) *Understanding History*. Resistance Books.
- Ollman, B. (1971). *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*. Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from: <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/ollman/books/a.php>
- O'Neill, O. (1989). *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pinkard, T. (2015). "Tragedy with and without Religion: Hegelian Thoughts", in *Tragedy and the Idea of Modernity* (Joshua Billings & Miriam Leonard Ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Plato. (1997) "Republic" in *Plato: Complete Works* (John M. Cooper Ed.). Hackett Publishing Company

- Rader, M. (1979). *Marx's Interpretation of History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Reses, A. (1970). "Das Kapital Comes to Russia", *Slavic Review* Vol. 29, No. 2 (Jun., 1970), pp. 219-237
- Riley, P. (1983). "Marx and Morality: A Reply to Richard Miller", *Nomos*, Vol. 26, pp. 33-53
- Robinson, C. (1977). "A Critique of W.E.B Dubois' Black Reconstruction" *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 8, No. 7. Pp 44-50
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1980). *Terms of Order: Political Science and the Myth of Leadership*. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1997). *Black Movements in America*. New York: Routledge
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2000). *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of North Carolina Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2007). *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks and the Regimes of Race in American Theater and Film before World War II*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2019). *An Anthropology of Marxism*. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2005). "Bibliography of Publications by Cedric Robinson", *Race & Class*, Vol 47 (2), 115-118
- Rubin, I.I. (2010). *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*. Aakar Books Classics
- Said, E. (1994). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books
- Sayers, S. (2019). "Marx and Teleology". *Science and Society*. Vol 83, No. 1.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2020). "Marx and Progress", *International Critical Thought*, Vol. 10, Issue No. 1
- Scott, J. & Marshall, G. (2007). *A Dictionary of Sociology: 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*. Oxford University Press.
- Shanin, T. (Ed.) (1978). *Late Marx and the Russian Road, Marx and the 'peripheries of capitalism'*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Shaw, W.H. (1980). *Marx's Theory of History*. Stanford University Press.
- Smith, C. (1999). "Marx's Critique of Hegel". Paper presented at Hegel Seminar June 18<sup>th</sup> 1999. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/smith-cyril/works/articles/smith5.htm>

- \_\_\_\_\_. (2005). *Karl Marx and the Future of the Human*. London, UK: Lexington Books.
- Smith, N. & O'Keefe, P. (1980). "Geography, Marx and the Concept of Nature". *Antipode*. Vol. 12, Issue No. 2.
- Soper, K. (1987). "Marxism and Morality", *New Left Review*, 1/163
- Stein, S. & Gledhill, G. (Eds.) (2020) *Hegel and Contemporary Philosophy: Beyond Kantian Constructivism*. Routledge
- Tucker, R.C. (1964). *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*. Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1978). "Introduction", In Robert C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx – Engels Reader* (pp. 469-500). London: Norton & Company, Inc.
- Sherover, E. (1979). "The Virtue of Poverty: Marx's Transformation of Hegel's Concept of the Poor", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory/ Revue canadienne de theorie politique et sociale*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 53-66
- Vallely, P. (2020). *Philanthropy: From Aristotle to Zuckerberg*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Wallace, W. (1894). *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*. Clarendon Press. Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.winthrop.edu/rarebooks/69/>
- West, C. (1988). "Black Radicalism and the Marxist Tradition", *Monthly Review*, Vol 40, No. 4
- White, H. (1975). *Metahistory The Historical Imagination of nineteenth Century Europe*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Wolff, R.P. (1973). *Kant's Theory of Mental Activity: A Commentary on the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason*. P.Smith
- Wood, A. (1999). *Karl Marx*. London, UK: Routledge Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1990). *Hegel's Ethical Thought*. Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1991). "Does Hegel Have an Ethics?" *The Monist*. Vol. 74, No. 3, pp 385-385
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1991) "Introduction" in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. (Allen Wood Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2004). *Karl Marx*. London, UK: Routledge



Wood, A. & di Giovanni, G. (1998\*). "Introduction" in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason: And Other Writings*. (Allen Wood and George di Giovanni ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Wood, E. (1984). "Marxism and the Course of History" *New Left Review*. 1/147. Retrieved