

**FREEDOM RISING:  
A RECONSTRUCTION OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM**

by

Debra M. Satz  
B.A., City College of New York  
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Signature of Author....

.....  
Department of Linguistics and Philosophy  
February 1987

Certified by.....

.....  
Professor Joshua Cohen  
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by.....

.....  
Professor George Boolos  
Committee on Graduate Studies  
Department of Philosophy

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Freedom Rising: A Reconstruction of Historical Materialism

by

Debra Satz

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to solve a fundamental problem in Marx's theory of history, historical materialism. Marx depicts historical development as a process of increasing productive power and as a process by which human beings take control over the conditions of their social life, a process of increasing social freedom. The problem is that he presents no argument as to how these two processes relate. In particular, he presents no argument as to whether or not the increase of productive power itself entails greater social freedom. This thesis contends that the growth of social freedom is the result of a separate process. I offer an account of this process based on a specific doctrine about values, namely, that there are "objective" values (values which are in true human interests), and that their objectivity is a crucial reason for why these values are realized in history. It is the pursuit of these values which results in the expansion of human control over the conditions of social life.

The first two chapters of this thesis offer an exposition and criticism of two recent attempts to clarify the theory of historical materialism, those of G.A. Cohen and Allen Wood. I argue that both attempts fail to account for the process whereby social freedom is expanded. In chapter three, I turn to Marx's own writings and contrast the Grundrisse with The German Ideology. I argue that while The German Ideology depicts historical development solely in terms of the growth of productive forces, the Grundrisse emphasizes the importance of the recognition by social actors of the conditions required for their freedom. Marx, however, gives no explanation for how this growing awareness emerges.

The remainder of the thesis attempts to provide such an explanation. In chapter four, I argue that, for Marx, autonomy is an objective value. Autonomy is the exercise of collective control over social practices and institutions, primarily the system of production. The interest which human beings have in autonomy gives them reasons for desiring it and acting to realize it. I also provide a new interpretation of Marx's view of morality. Marx's condemnation of morality must be understood in the same terms as his condemnation of religion: morality both distorts and expresses true human interests. Finally, in chapter five, I argue for the existence of a "collective learning process," a process by which human beings gain an increasing awareness of their interest in autonomy and of the existing social constraints on their ability to realize that interest. Through their struggles, human beings learn that the moral norms of their society are not an accurate representation of their true interests. Progress in realizing

autonomy results from the fact that people have the capacity to recognize the requirements of autonomy, that they learn about these requirements through social interactions and struggles, and that their increasing recognition of these requirements motivates them to act to achieve autonomy.

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Title: Associate Professor of Philosophy

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## Introduction

Marx left no clear and unambiguous statement of his theory of history, historical materialism. Within Marx's own writings there are two major strands of analysis of historical change. The first strand emphasizes the growth of human productive power and explains changes in social forms as the product of this growth. Social forms adapt themselves to the requirements of productive development. The second strand focuses on a second process, the growth of freedom in social life. According to this strand, social forms change in order to enable the expansion of freedom. The problem is how to construe the relationship between these different trends. Marx depicts history as a process of emancipation from both the constraints of external nature and those imposed by social relations of dependence and domination. However, he never clarifies the relationship between these two lines of development.

Recent work has given primacy to the first strand, the growth of productive power; as a result, Marx's argument for productive growth has been substantially clarified. This work is flawed, however, by its inadequate treatment of the second strand of Marx's theory, the expansion of social freedom. It treats this second strand as a necessary product of the first: the expansion of productive power and the expansion of social freedom are understood as the products of a single historical process. This thesis argues that these two strands represent independent processes and shows that an explanation of both processes is necessary for the construction of a theory of history which is in broad accord with Marx's writings taken as a whole.

In the Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Marx states that historical development is the product of changes in the material forces of production. Recently, the position of the Preface has been strengthened by the work of American and British analytic philosophers.<sup>1</sup> According to the prevailing interpretation, historical materialism is a theory which explains the "survival value" of different forms of society in terms of their contribution to the development of human productive power. In G.A. Cohen's words, "social forms rise and fall according as they enable or impede that growth."<sup>2</sup>

If this now-dominant interpretation of historical materialism were correct, the level of productive development would determine the form of society. This, however, contradicts not only historical experience, but also Marx's own denial of the unilinearity of history. In his writings to Russian socialists in the 1870s, Marx stresses the widely divergent historical paths available for Russian development: Russia could "incorporate the positive achievements of the capitalist system without having to pass under its harsh tribute."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, this interpretation fails to account for a central feature of Marx's view of historical progress: the expansion of freedom in social life. In addition to the development of productive forces, Marx argues that human beings emancipate themselves from social relationships based on dependence and force. There is no necessary reason why productive progress in itself should produce this result. If we accept Marx's premise for the purposes of argument -- that is, if we accept that there has been progress in realizing freedom in social life -- can historical materialism explain this without relying on the false assumption of



historical unilinearity?

This thesis attempts to provide such an explanation by relying on a specific doctrine about values. It claims that there are "objective values," values which satisfy objective human interests and, furthermore, that the objectivity of these values is a crucial reason for why these values are realized. I argue that, for Marx, autonomy is an objective value.

Autonomy requires the exercise of collective control over social practices and institutions, primarily the system of production. The interest which human beings have in autonomy gives them reasons for desiring it and acting to promote it. Progress in realizing autonomy results from the fact that agents have the capacity to recognize their interest in autonomy, that they learn about the requirements of autonomy through social interactions and struggles, and that their increasing recognition of both their interests and these requirements motivates them to act to realize autonomy.

The first two chapters of this thesis offer an exposition and criticism of two recent attempts to clarify the argument of historical materialism. Both G.A. Cohen and Allen Wood defend an interpretation of historical materialism in which the development of the forces of production is accorded primacy in explaining social change. In particular, G.A. Cohen makes a substantial effort at clarifying the nature of this primacy and Marx's related argument for the tendency to productive growth. Cohen demonstrates that Marx's argument relies on premises about human nature acting under conditions of scarcity. Human beings, driven by their intelligence and rationality, will tend to develop the productive forces and choose social relations that enhance further productive development and

reject relations which inhibit it.

Cohen's argument is only partially successful, however, for it cannot account for the nature of the social relationships which result from revolutionary transformations. A specific set of social relations does not automatically follow from a given level of productive development because there may be "functionally equivalent" relations which are also optimal for productive development. Cohen cannot explain, then, why one set of social relations rather than another obtains. This is crucial because social relations vary in the nature and degree of the constraints they set on human freedom. There is no reason to suppose that all the functionally equivalent social relations will represent advances in social freedom. To the extent that there is a direction in the ability of these relations to realize freedom, Cohen's theory does not account for it.

Allen Wood makes a similar argument about productive development. He focuses, however, on an issue which Cohen does not examine: Marx's criticism of morality. Wood argues that Marx held a functional view of justice, according to which a mode of production always satisfies the standards of justice applicable to it, and a view of morality as an "ideology," a world view which benefits the socially dominant class. Morality deceives individuals about their interests and needs; it is positively harmful to those who follow it. Wood concludes that Marx's condemnation of capitalism does not rest on moral considerations. I argue, however, that Wood does not adequately account for the reason why Marx does condemn capitalism, its constraint on human freedom.

Chapter three begins the process of tying together the two issues raised in the first two chapters: the process of historical development which explains the expansion of freedom in social life and the basis for Marx's condemnation of capitalism. In this chapter I examine Marx's writings in the Grundrisse and The German Ideology. My aim is to separate out those strands in Marx's argument which focus on the social interaction of different classes and the development of particular human capacities. I argue that these two works present different views about historical progress and about its relation to the stated endpoint of history, communism. I argue that while The German Ideology depicts historical development solely in terms of the growth of the productive forces, the Grundrisse emphasizes the importance of the recognition by social actors of the conditions required for their autonomy. This recognition is not recognition of the requirements for the growth of the forces of production. However, Marx gives no explanation in the Grundrisse for how this growing awareness emerges.

The remainder of the thesis is an attempt to provide such an explanation. In chapter four, I address two issues which emerged earlier in my discussion of Wood's views: the nature of autonomy as an objective value and the nature of moral values. I argue that the process of the increasing emancipation of human beings from relations based on domination can be explained if we interpret autonomy as an objective value, a value which satisfies true human interests. Furthermore, I argue that morality expresses the human desire for autonomy insofar as moral practices and standards represent a certain degree of knowledge about the requirements of autonomy. Marx's condemnation of morality must be understood in the

same terms as his condemnation of religion: morality both distorts and expresses true human interests. All true human interests are universal, or in Marx's words, "general interests." Morality partially represents a "general interest" even as it distorts some of our knowledge about the conditions required to realize that general interest. This is because it represents a general interest under circumstances in which there exists, in fact, no real community of interests. The disparity between this standpoint of a general interest and the actual conflict of particular interests in society undercuts the particular moral norms of a society. These norms are challenged to live up to their claims.

My new interpretation of Marx's view of morality is undoubtedly controversial. I try to support it by (a) comparing it to Marx's criticism of religion. Marx views religion as a form of distorted consciousness which emerges in conditions of social misery. The appeal of religion, however, is really the appeal of each person's self-affirmation: religion is the "soul of soulless conditions."<sup>4</sup> I develop my interpretation of Marx's view of morality along these lines; (b) I show that Marx explicitly recognizes progress in moral systems. Moral systems evolve in a direction which more closely approximates true human interests.

Chapter five completes the argument of the thesis. I argue for the existence of a "collective learning process," a process by which social agents gain an increasing awareness of their true interest in autonomy and of the existing social constraints on their ability to realize that interest. The most reliable source of this learning lies in the desires of the oppressed to be free

of their oppression. Through their struggles over the subordination of their interests to the interests of other classes, agents learn that the moral norms of their society are an inadequate expression of their true human interests. I illustrate this process of collective learning through a discussion of Marx's view of the transition to communism.

I conclude by criticizing Marx's belief that under full communism morality would be sublimated into new norms which would no longer be moral in form. I argue that moral consciousness will not "wither away" and that, therefore, Marx's criticism of capitalist society cannot be as radical as he intended. The "general ideas" of freedom and justice will not "completely vanish...with the total disappearance of class antagonisms."<sup>5</sup>

A "reconstructed" historical materialism bears obvious similarities to Hegelian idealism. Hegel too saw in history a movement to the expansion of human freedom. Marx's criticism is more radical, however, than Hegel's views. Hegel stresses the need for "internal criticism," criticism that begins from a society's norms and conventional beliefs. Marx shares the view of internal criticism, but he rejects the idea that everything necessary for criticism is immediately available to everyday social consciousness. Marx stresses the existence of false consciousness and the need for a critical theory to facilitate the dispelling of illusions. While collective learning is a tendency, it is not inevitable.

This thesis is a reconstruction of Marx's materialist theory of history. My reconstruction departs from Marx in two major ways. First, I maintain that morality is not simply ideology, but a distorted representation of true

human interests. This is consistent with Marx's view only to the extent that while he condemns morality, he never tells us what exactly he takes it to be. However, the sense of his remarks do suggest a more negative conception than is adopted here.

Second, I reject the idea that communist society will be a society "beyond good and evil." That is, I reject the idea of a society in which there are no conflicts of interest and no need for moral norms.

Yet, my reconstruction remains plausibly Marxist. In particular, I accept what I see as the core theses of historical materialism:

- (1) progress in realizing autonomy is materially conditioned;
- (2) the frustration of material interests is an important impetus to the recognition of one's interest in autonomy;
- (3) there can be no full realization of autonomy in a class based society; and
- (4) classes are the subjects of collective learning and the agents of historical transformation.

I have tried to reconstruct historical materialism in a manner which remains faithful to Marx's intention for it to be a critical theory, a theory aimed at revealing true human interests. To do so, I have emphasized a strand in Marx's thought which he often underplays: the growth of consciousness about the conditions for social freedom. I have emphasized this strand because I believe it makes the argument of historical materialism more plausible. For, without some account of how human beings can learn about their true interests and the social constraints which

prevent their attainment, there is no connection between the process of history (i.e., material development) and the endpoint of history, communism. That is, if historical development is conceived of as the process of increasing productivity alone, there is no necessary reason for communism to be the endpoint of history, and not some other social form equally suited to further productive growth.

Notes to Introduction

1. In particular, see the recent work of G.A. Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense, (1978), Princeton University Press; William Shaw, Karl Marx's Theory of History, (1978), Stanford University Press; Allen Wood, Karl Marx, (1981), Routledge and Kegan Paul; and Jon Elster, Making Sense of Marx, (1985), Cambridge University Press.
2. G.A. Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History, p. x.
3. Karl Marx, "First Draft to Vera Zasulich," in (ed.) Teodor Shanin, Late Marx and the Russian Road, (1983), Monthly Review Press, p. 110.
4. Karl Marx, "Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, (ed.) Joseph O' Malley, (1972), Cambridge University Press.
5. Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto, (1971), International Publishers, p. 29.



## Chapter One: History and the Value Of Material Progress

### 1.1 Introduction.

In the 1859 Preface to A Contribution to A Critique of Political Economy, Marx calls the materialist conception of history the "guiding thread"<sup>1</sup> of his work. Since then, students of Marx have struggled to define the central propositions of "historical materialism." There are two major areas of ambiguity. The first concerns the relationship, in Marx's thought, between science and criticism. Is historical materialism a "science of history" that predicts the rise and fall of social forms? If so, is the course of history inevitable? Or, is Marx's thought a form of critical theory whose understanding is necessary for human agents to take rational and conscious control of social life? What is the relationship between these two aspects of his thought?<sup>2</sup>

The second and related ambiguity concerns Marx's lack of clarity as to which factors in history he gives explanatory primacy. Is social change explained by the requisites of the material forces of production, as Marx maintains in the 1859 Preface, or does class struggle have explanatory primacy, as the Communist Manifesto<sup>3</sup> seems to suggest? Do the conditions for the growth of the productive forces and those for revolution necessarily go together?

In this chapter, I will focus on one unusually clear and cogent reconstruction of historical materialism that succeeds in resolving some of the dilemmas and ambiguities which the theory faced in its original form. In particular, this reconstruction makes a substantial contribution to clarifying

the nature of Marxist causation. In Karl Marx's Theory of History, (KMTH) Gerald Cohen asserts the primacy of the productive forces, subordinating the role of class struggles to the requirements of productive development, and argues that historical materialism is a science. The criticism of false consciousness and ideology, while an essential component of Marx's theory, is not seen by Cohen as playing an explanatory role in historical materialism. For the version of historical materialism which Cohen defends, the central feature of history is "the growth of human productive power, and forms of society rise and fall according as they enable or impede that growth."<sup>4</sup> Cohen attempts to formulate this feature in a rigorous way, to specify the conditions under which social forms<sup>5</sup> change. In outline, Cohen argues that social forms will continually be transformed because: (1) the existence of a particular social form depends on its contribution to material progress; and, (2) no social form can accommodate more than a certain amount of productive growth. Cohen claims that when a given social form is no longer suitable for further productive growth, it is replaced by a new social form which is. The result is a sequence of social forms which is "progressive"; each ranks higher than its predecessor in productive capacity. Ultimately, a stage is reached (i.e., communism) when social forms are no longer necessary for productive progress, and they "subside."<sup>6</sup>

A Marxist theory of history, that makes progress (which Cohen defines as the growth of human productive power) the central tendency, "requires some extra-social factor...controlling historical change."<sup>7</sup> There must be some extra-social factor or factors capable of overcoming recalcitrant social structures so that productive power can continually advance. According to KMTH, the extra-social factors are material

scarcity and the features of human rationality and intelligence. The latter are extra-social in that they are given in human biology. Cohen claims that it is a fact for all historical periods characterized by scarcity that human beings driven by their intelligence and rationality will tend to develop the productive forces, and select for each historical period sets of production relations that enhance further productive development and reject relations that inhibit it.<sup>8</sup> The level of productive development achieved by a society "selects" for the new social production relations most optimal for further material progress.

Above, I referred to Cohen's view as a "reconstruction" of historical materialism. Habermas defines a reconstruction as "taking a theory apart and putting it back together again in a new form in order to attain more fully the goal it has set for itself."<sup>9</sup> Because of Marx's own vagueness and imprecision in his scattered exposition of historical materialism, reconstruction may indeed be necessary to clarify Marxism's basic theoretical commitments. It can rework the theory to resolve or at least lessen the tensions of the original theory and to discard other elements that prevent the construction of a consistent argument (while remaining faithful to Marx's intent and to the themes of the theory). Cohen's work makes a substantial contribution to this endeavor, explicating the nature of a process which Marx surely did see as fundamental for historical change: the process of the growth of human productive power.

Cohen's reconstruction of historical materialism, however, does not provide an adequate account of a second fundamental aspect of historical development: the particular social forms that result from revolutionary transformations. Because there may be

"functionally equivalent" relations of production optimal for the development of the productive forces, no particular production relations automatically follow from a given level of productive development. Cohen, however, cannot explain why one set of production relations rather than another obtains. And this is crucial because production relations vary in the nature and degree of constraints they set on human freedom. These constraints have an important bearing on Marx's theory of history. In Marx's description of the historical process, not only is there the productive progress that Cohen emphasizes, but there are also changing justifications given for social practices, an increasing equalization of social conditions, and the growing political recognition of human beings as free and equal agents.

Marx's writings depict evolutionary changes in the development of social forms. At one end of the spectrum are societies based on slavery or caste distinctions in which a person's life prospects are determined by birth, and justified by tradition or religion:

In the relations of slavery and serfdom...one part of society is treated by the other as itself merely an inorganic and natural condition of its own reproduction...classified, along with the other natural beings, such as cattle, as an accessory of the earth.<sup>10</sup>

Towards the other end of the spectrum lie capitalist societies in which every self conceives itself reciprocally, as one among others, each of whom are accorded formal rights and freedoms. For all of its shortcomings, Marx considered capitalist political democracy a "great progress...the final form of human emancipation within the prevailing social order."<sup>11</sup> Like material production, the equalization of basic conditions and the changes in social norms have an evolutionary direction (the replacement of tradition by

reason, the universalization of norms), converging on a social form in which the conditions for substantive human freedom will be realized.

Insofar as Cohen's explanation of historical change cannot adequately indicate the particular nature of the outcomes of social revolutions, it cannot account for the movement toward substantive human freedom. Cohen's reconstruction of Marx therefore tends to regard this historical development as either fortuitous or of no consequence for historical materialism. I will argue that Cohen's neglect of the processes by which social norms change, leads him to give inadequate accounts of the social forms which result from historical change, the role of criticism, and the role of social classes as understood by historical materialism. Cohen's refinement of historical materialism constitutes a first step which is of great value, but is in need of further elaboration. Historical materialism relies on more assumptions about human nature than are explicitly present in Cohen's reconstruction of it.

## 1.2 Cohen's view: exposition.

Marx's 1859 Preface to the Critique of Political Economy contains the authoritative text for Cohen's reconstruction of historical materialism:

In the social production of their life men enter into definite relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of the productive forces...At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production... From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution.<sup>12</sup>

Cohen attempts to build from this terse and somewhat enigmatic formulation a defensible Marxist theory of history. The Preface provides evidence that Marx acknowledges the "primacy of the productive forces,"

that is, that Marx believes that the level of productive development determines the relations of production. The relations are as they are because the level of productive development requires that they be so. It is this claim which Cohen wishes to defend. In order to succeed, he must respond to a major criticism to which the Preface argument has been subjected, a paradox which Philippe Van Parijs has called Marxism's "central puzzle."<sup>13</sup>

The puzzle is as follows. The 1859 Preface holds that the relations of production are causally dependent upon the forces of production; the former are said to "correspond" to the latter. In this clause, the explanatory primacy of the forces is maintained. Yet the Preface also indicates that the forces of production are themselves causally dependent on the relations of production since, at a certain stage, the relations "fetter" the forces. Here the primacy of the forces is threatened. "Fettering" indicates that the relations can have significant causal effect on the forces. For, if the forces of production constrain the relations of production, then, as Cohen notes, "the constraint is symmetrical. If high technology rules out slavery, then slavery rules out high technology."<sup>14</sup> How can Marx claim, as he clearly does, that the productive forces are at once primary over and causally dependent on the form taken by the relations of production? If the constraint of the forces and relations is mutual, how can one of them have explanatory primacy?

In order to resolve this paradox, Cohen introduces a general thesis about human history: "The productive forces tend to develop throughout history."<sup>15</sup> He argues that both the explanatory primacy of the forces over the relations of production, and the causal dependence of the forces on the

relations of production can be sustained if (1) the tendency to productive growth is based on exclusively asocial premises about human nature and (2) the relations of production are explained functionally by the forces of production. Briefly, functional arguments seek to explain the existence or nature of something by virtue of its effects. Cohen argues that it is because a given set of production relations is required for optimal productive growth, that these relations obtain:

The productive relations are of kind R at time t because relations of kind R are suitable to the use and development of the productive forces at t, given the level of development of the latter at t.<sup>16</sup>

A functionalist interpretation of the explanatory primacy of the forces of production would enable Cohen to preserve the coherence in maintaining both the explanatory primacy of the forces over the relations of production and the substantial control of the latter over the former. The relations of production obtain precisely because of their impact on the productive forces:

The forces would not develop as they do were the relations different, but that is why the relations are not different - because relations of the given kind suit the development of the forces.<sup>17</sup>

In order to achieve this correspondence, Cohen's functionalist argument depends on the existence of an underlying asocial tendency to which social forms must adapt. For only if there is such a tendency, can we understand why it is the social relations, and not the productive forces which give way.

Cohen and Kymlicka summarize the argument, in which an asocial tendency for productive growth is used to derive the functionalist explanation of production relations, as follows:<sup>18</sup>

(1) The productive forces tend to develop throughout history.

Since this tendency is supposed to be independent of facts about social structure, it may be rewritten as:

(2) There is an autonomous tendency for the productive forces to develop.

If there is an autonomous tendency for the productive relations to develop, then social relations must be such as to serve it. Hence:

(3) Social structures have, by and large, been propitious for the development of the productive forces.

The derivations of (3) from (2) is thus:

(4) Because there is an autonomous tendency for the productive forces to develop in history, social structures are so shaped or selected to allow for that development.

Since the particular relations selected for at a given stage depend on the level of productive development at that stage:

(5) The nature of productive relations of a society is explained by the level of development of the productive forces.

In KMTH, (1) is called the Development Thesis, and (5) the Primacy Thesis. The argument states that if the Development Thesis can be defended on asocial grounds (in other words, if (2) is true and the tendency to productive growth is not dependent on any facts about social structures) it can sustain the functionalist interpretation of the Primacy Thesis.

However, this argument will work only if premise (2) is true. Only if there is an autonomous tendency to productive development can (5) be non-circularly derived from (1). For, if (2) is false, then, if (1) is true, (3) is part of its explanation. Consequently (5) would not be derived from (1) since, the fact that social relations are beneficial for productive development is part



of the explanation for that productive development itself. In other words, the Primacy Thesis cannot both follow from the Development Thesis and be, at the same time, presupposed by it. If the Development Thesis cannot be defended on asocial grounds, then the functionalist argument is irrelevant. Without it, the primacy of the productive forces could not be established and the constraint of the forces and relations would be symmetrical.

Cohen's defense of the explanatory primacy of the productive forces rests on his ability to provide an explanation for the Development Thesis which is independent of facts about social structure. How can productive growth occur independent of society? Cohen distinguishes between the fact of productive growth which is dependent on particular relations of production (e.g., feudal relations are less good at promoting productive development than capitalist ones), and the tendency of productive development. It is the latter that must be rooted in socially unspecific circumstances. These circumstances, Cohen argues, are certain asocial characteristics of human nature, and the general historical situation of scarcity.

According to Cohen's argument, the circumstances in which people find themselves are ones of relative scarcity, in which few wants can be satisfied without individuals "doing what they would rather not do,"<sup>19</sup> engage in burdensome labor. In as much as human beings "possess intelligence of a kind and degree which enables them to improve their material situation,"<sup>20</sup> they will know how to develop tools and skills which enhance productivity. Finally, being rational, they will tend to use the innovations that their capacities create in order to lessen scarcity. Cohen's argument is that human beings, in a situation of scarcity, will seek and

succeed in finding ways of easing their situation by improving the forces of production. This leads to a continual improvement in the forces of production:

Given their rationality, and their naturally inclement situation, people will not endlessly forego the opportunity to expand productive power recurrently presented to them, and productive power will, consequently, tend, if not always continuously, then at least sporadically, to expand.<sup>21</sup>

At this point, it might reasonable be asked whether the Development Thesis really solves the primacy puzzle. The above characterization of the Development Thesis suggests an image of human rationality operating on the productive forces, through individual producers introducing innovations to conserve their own effort. The impulse to progress is located outside the relations of production. In this picture, production relations can only slow down or speed up a pre-existing trend. Yet, if interpreted in this way, the Development Thesis contradicts Cohen's claim that the production relations "profoundly affect productive forces,"<sup>22</sup> (i.e., that the forces are causally dependent on the relations). A correct solution to the primacy puzzle would capture that fact. Cohen's response is that the image above is misleading: human rationality also operates directly and independently on the relations of production. "Being rational, people retain and reject relations of production as the latter do and do not allow productive development to continue."<sup>23</sup> That is, people choose productive relations that, in turn, select for the optimal development of the productive forces. It can be true therefore that the social relations are a direct, or sometimes an indirect, source of material progress without contradicting the fact that there is an autonomous tendency towards productive development. Because people are rational, they will choose those relations with the greatest

propensity to further material progress.

Even with the autonomy which the Development Thesis possesses clearly located, the premises of human nature do not, on their own, establish it. Cohen notes two reasons why the premises, as stated, fail. In the first place, the argument assumes the priority of the interest in material progress over other kinds of interests,<sup>24</sup> so that when non-material interests conflict with material interests, the latter override them. But, "perhaps certain cultural and social possessions are worth a great deal of material sacrifice in the calculus of human welfare."<sup>25</sup>

This is a non-trivial problem, because while Cohen maintains that the interest in material progress is the effective historical interest,<sup>26</sup> he does not believe that this interest constitutes Marx's full conception of human nature. Nowhere in KMTH does Cohen argue that human beings are by nature solely or primarily productive beings, even though certain characteristics of human nature are involved in his argument. There is a disjunction between the full conception (which he refers to as Marx's "philosophical anthropology") and the premises about human nature which are relevant to historical materialism:

In the anthropology, people are by nature creative beings. They flourish only in the cultivation and exercise of their manifold powers...But in the theory of history people produce not freely but because they have to, because nature does not otherwise satisfy their wants; and the development in history of the productive power of man (as such, as a species) occurs at the expense of the creative capacity of the men who are the agents and victims of that development.<sup>27</sup>

The production that is an expression of human nature and the production that results from the interaction of human beings with inclement historical circumstances is not the same.

The second reason why the premises of human nature fail to establish

the Development Thesis is that human nature operates through individuals, but social transformation depends on the actions of groups. As Cohen points out,

It is not evident that societies are disposed to bring about what rationality would lead men to choose. There is some shadow between what reason suggests and society does.<sup>28</sup>

There are many reasons why such a "shadow" might exist (for example, nature might be "too lavish"<sup>29</sup> to induce the tendency to productive growth), but the most important reason is that history is an arena of conflict. Functional explanations generally have difficulty dealing with situations where desires and interests are heterogeneous across individuals and groups. For then not everyone will be acting to promote productive progress. It might be, in virtue of their social position, that a powerful group has an interest against productive progress. What insures that any other group or groups who do have an interest in enhancing productivity will have the power to realize their goals?<sup>30</sup>

These gaps must be closed if the asocial basis of the Development Thesis is to be established. Human rationality must have the ability to overpower its obstacles, or at least, to find a way to circumvent them. That is, the interests of human beings in material growth must actually be strong enough to control historical change.

Cohen introduces a "sub-argument" to provide some evidence that the premises of human nature have more weight than both of the objections allow. The sub-argument claims that in fact there has been productive progress and that unless one supposed that the asocial premises of human nature were "weighty," it would not be possible to explain why this has been the case. Only if we accept the weight of the assumptions about human

nature can we have a "superior account of the marked lack of regression in productive power."<sup>31</sup>

The sub-argument attempts to show that human rationality succeeds despite the fact of real obstacles before it. It provides evidence that material interests are primary for people, or that their other interests, if not secondary "tend not to conflict with their material interests in progress-defeating ways."<sup>32</sup> This latter qualification is important to note, as it is easy to mistake Cohen's focus on the role of material interests as implying a narrow materialism. It does not; Cohen is explicitly aware that people want many kinds of goods. They may, in fact, want some of these goods more than material goods. Although he never explicitly develops an argument about the relative weights of different goods, Cohen might be interpreted as suggesting that most of the goods people want can be acquired only when their more basic material needs are met. The ability of human beings to acquire non-material goods, including moral goods, (e.g., justice) would then be, according to Cohen, materially conditioned. The sub-argument also responds to the objection which pointed to the diverse motivations of social groups by showing that societies have not, in fact, been blocked by the types of social and political structures it imagines. The interests of groups opposed to material progress do not win out over those groups with an interest in promoting that progress.

Three important consequences follow from Cohen's reconstruction of historical materialism:

1. The central explanations of historical materialism are functional. New social relations arise when and because they are optimal for the

development of the productive forces. The level of productive development selects for the set of social relations required for productive growth. Not only social relations, but morality and legal structures (property relations, rights, etc.) have the character they do "because the productive relations" which are suitable for the development of the productive forces "require that they have it."<sup>33</sup>

2. The productive forces progress from one class society to another, and ultimately to communism. Each new social form ranks higher than its predecessor, judged by the criteria of productivity. The index of productivity is the amount of surplus generated by that society, the amount produced over and above what is needed to reproduce the direct producers. Cohen correlates the major historical epochs with distinct levels of productive development:<sup>34</sup>

<b>Form of Economic Structure</b>	<b>Level of Productive Development</b>
1. Pre-class society	No Surplus
2. Pre-capitalist class society	Some surplus, but less than
3. Capitalist society	Moderately high surplus, but less than
4. Post-capitalist society	Massive surplus

Cohen identifies progress with material progress. To those who would argue that this equation is "demeaning to humanity" he retorts that there is "an extensive coincidence in fact and in Marx's perception between the growth of the productive forces and the growth of human powers."<sup>35</sup> The development of the forces of production is itself the development of human powers, through the continual growth of human independence from nature.

3. Rather than constituting an alternative source of causation, Cohen argues that class victories are explained by the conduciveness of the rule of a given class to further productive expansion. In Cohen's words, "Marx holds that a class gains and possesses power because it marches in step with the

productive forces."<sup>36</sup> Cohen denies that this removes class struggle from the center of historical explanation. Rather, class conflicts are part of the answer to the question "how does the fact that a new economic structure would benefit the productive forces explain its actualization?"<sup>37</sup>

### 1.3 Cohen's view: three difficulties.

#### i. insufficient constraints on outcomes.

Cohen's reconstruction captures a major part of Marx's theory of history. Its central insight is, as we saw, that a theory of history in which progress is the main tendency needs an extra-social factor (e.g., premises about intelligence, rationality and scarcity) which will overcome social obstacles. Cohen claims that the rationality of human beings and the existence of scarcity set constraints on social structures which are strong enough to induce change when their interests require it. Social forms will change when and because the further development of human productive power requires it. The new social form selected for will be just that form which is optimal for the growth of the productive forces. As it stands, however, this claim offers insufficient constraints on the outcome of social transformations. There is more than one set of tracks along which the productive forces can run. This means that material constraints alone cannot determine which optimal social relations will obtain.

What was Marx's view on this issue? Is Marx's theory of history unilinear: does Marx think that there is a unique path of historical development?

While many of Marx's writings suggest a linear theory of history, in which successive social forms rank "higher" than their predecessors with

respect to productive development, on the issue of unilinearity, he is less clear. In the Preface to Capital he writes,

Intrinsically it is not a question of the higher or lower degree of development of the social antagonisms that result from the natural laws of capitalist production. It is a question of these laws themselves, of these tendencies working with an iron necessity to inevitable results. The country that it most developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.<sup>38</sup>

While Jon Elster reads this passage as endorsing a unique path of universal development,<sup>39</sup> the passage applies only to countries which are already more or less capitalist. (In this passage, Marx was referring to Germany.)

In both his early and late writings, Marx explicitly considers the possibility of alternative paths of development. For example, in his commentary on Friedrich List's book, Marx refers to the rise of the great workshops of industry in England:

To hold that every nation goes through this development internally would be as absurd as the idea that every nation is bound to go through the political development of France or the philosophical development of Germany. What the nations have done as nations they have done for human society; their whole value consists only in the fact that each single nation has accomplished for the benefit of other nations one of the main historical aspects.<sup>40</sup>

In this early writing, Marx indicates that other nations can spare themselves the conditions of their contemporaries, by learning from them. Each country builds on the highest level attained by another. If one country is the first to arrive at a stage  $n$ , then another country may skip stage  $n$  and go directly to stage  $n+1$ . Thus, in this passage, what England has done (develop capitalist industry) has been done for the whole world. Of course, this is a youthful writing and such writings can always be dismissed as products of a "pre-scientific" Marx. Without intending to endorse such a view, I move to consider some evidence from the "later" Marx.



During the 1870s, Marx wrestled with the question of historical unilinearity when Russian socialists posed the question of whether or not Russia could bypass the capitalist stage and base socialist development on the peasant communes. In letters and drafts of letters to Vera Zasulich, Marx considered the possibility of a "Russian road." He decided that since the Russian communes were based on territory rather than kinship and included elements of individual ownership, they were less susceptible to dissolution than were earlier forms of communal property. Because of their "flexibility" and the existence of capitalism in the West, the communes might become the starting point for a socialist transformation:

The historical situation of the Russian 'rural commune' is without parallel!...While it has in common land ownership the (natural) basis of collective appropriation, its historical context - the contemporaneity of capitalist production - provides it with ready-made material conditions for huge scale common labor. It is therefore able to incorporate the positive achievements of the capitalist system without having to pass under its harsh tribute...It may thus become the direct starting point of the economic system towards which modern society is tending. 41

Marx qualified this by adding that should Russia become isolated from the capitalist world, it would be unable to obtain the benefits of capitalism's advanced methods, and would be forced to undergo all the stages of capitalist development. However, nowhere in his drafts to Zasulich does Marx indicate that the "Russian road" would be suboptimal with respect to capitalist productive development. To the contrary, Russia could "incorporate the positive achievements of the capitalist system without having to pass under its harsh tribute." (emphasis added). Not only could Russia industrialize under relations which were the "functional equivalents" of capitalist relations, but she could do so under conditions which were significantly freer and more humane.

How might Cohen respond to an objection that his theory cannot explain why industrialization occurs under one set of relations (capitalism) or another (socialism) given that both are "optimal" for productive development? In KMTH, Cohen responds to a similar objection brought against functional explanation by Hempel.<sup>42</sup> In "The Logic of Functional Analysis," Hempel argued that there might be more than one candidate which fulfills a given function. Why, then, should the fact that social relations of type A are optimal for productive development suffice for its actualization, when other social relations of type B with similar productive potentials are not actualized?

Cohen offers two major responses to this objection. First, he counters that there might be other reasons why social relations of type B don't obtain. It may be that (1) relations are optimal only under the condition that they are "part of the repertoire of" (i.e., historical options for) the predecessor society. No social relations which are not part of the repertoire can be optimal; this is a condition for optimality. But (2) suppose that social relations which are not part of the repertoire are optimal. Then, it might be argued that being part of the repertoire is also required to obtain a sufficient condition: only if a set of social relations is optimal for productive development and part of the repertoire of the existing social relations, will it occur. Cohen might use (2) to argue that, given the absence of anything like the Russian commune (and the also absent "material conditions for huge scale labor"), socialist relations of production were not available for English industrialization.<sup>43</sup>

Cohen's second response to this objection (if the first objection doesn't disqualify all of the potential functional equivalents) is to point out that

"every explanation fails to account for innumerable properties of the explanandum phenomenon."<sup>44</sup> Whether or not this failure is important depends on our interests. Perhaps we cannot show which functional equivalent obtains, but we can show why some equivalent must obtain.

Cohen's two answers do not take us very far. His first line of defense is to historicize the explanation of a given outcome, making it contingent on the specific social institutions of the predecessor society. He can then claim that there are not as many functional equivalents available as the objection to linearity suggests. While this is a plausible line of argument, it still fails to explain what I am contending is a basic feature of Marx's account of history. As Marx describes it, history is not only characterized by productive growth, but also by changes in agents' normative beliefs, their motives for action, and the prevailing social norms. Successive societies incorporate greater numbers of people on an increasingly free and equal basis. While the ability to incorporate people as free and equal members of a community may be materially conditioned, (i.e., incorporation has material costs) the existence of alternative routes of development shows that the ability is not materially determined. There can be no doubt that Marx saw in the possibility of socialism in Russia, a freer and more humane path of industrial development than that of capitalism. Historicizing the explanation of why one set of social relations as opposed to another obtains, makes the progressive contributions of social relations to actualize greater amounts of freedom appear as a fortuitous accident. Given the existence of many functional equivalents at every stage, why, should the norms of successive societies display a direction?

Cohen might grant the existence of a directional logic in the

development of social norms, and admit that there are greater degrees of freedom obtained at the higher material levels of development. He notes that it is a "banal but important truth that human beings on the whole prefer freedom to its opposite."<sup>45</sup> Yet this does not make this development causally relevant as Cohen's second response above to the objection about functional equivalents implies. Cohen seems to think that it is ultimately insignificant to historical materialism that there happens to exist a direction in the changing justifications for social norms, for there equally could have been no direction to them.

But this assertion denies something essential in Marx. It is obviously very significant, from the standpoint of human well-being and Marx's theory, that historical options exist which, although equally optimal for material development, promote varying degrees of human freedom. The structure of Marxist explanation is not simply functionalist, with everything which is not functionally explained being uninteresting. It is significant that there is a direction in the bases of social norms (e.g., greater universality, changes in the type of justification given for social practices), and in the equalization of fundamental social conditions. For example, a society based on a traditional justification of norms, would not, in Marx's view, historically follow a society based on their formal rational justification.

In order to account for this direction in social norms, historical materialism needs more theoretical structure than Cohen has provided. Functional argument alone cannot account for it. While Cohen has shown us that, at a given point, an old social form needs to be changed, he has not told us enough about the new social form which will replace it.

ii. insufficient account of the role of criticism in Marx's theory.

In the introduction to this chapter, I raised the problem of the relationship between Marxism as a science, and as a form of social criticism. With respect to Marxism as a science, in Capital, Marx claims to represent the "economic law of motion of modern society" as a "natural law."<sup>46</sup> Marx thus purports to give knowledge about the necessity of the transformation of the present social order into a classless society. This knowledge is of "objective conditions"; it is knowledge of the constraints which capitalist social relations imposes on the further development of the productive forces. With respect to Marxism as a critical social theory, the aims are somewhat different. As a critical theory, Marxism seeks to expose the false beliefs and illusions that keep social agents from grasping their true interests in the world. While these true interests must be in some sense "already ours" (i.e., they cannot be implanted in us by well-meaning revolutionaries), they need to be revealed. We do not really know what is in our interest.

Both of these aspects - criticism and science - are central to Marx's thought, and a variety of positions have been taken within the Marxist movement regarding their relationship. Some Marxists, for example Lukacs, have even equated them, arguing that Marxism is a non-standard form of science which is identical to criticism. For Lukacs, the proletariat transforms the world in the process by which it arrives at an understanding of the world.<sup>47</sup> Despite Lukacs, however, it is clear that science and criticism are not identical. The exposure of illusions does not change the conditions which create them:

The belated scientific discovery that the products of labor, in so far as they

are values, are merely the material expressions of the human labor expended to produce them...by no means banishes the semblance of objectivity possessed by the social characteristics of labor.<sup>48</sup>

The situation of criticism is therefore frustrating. Since critical consciousness need not change the conditions which create illusions, its effects must, invariably, be evanescent. And this makes it easy (and even tempting) to lose sight of the central role which criticism plays in Marx's theory.

Cohen's view makes the mistake of neglecting the centrality of criticism for Marx's theory. For Cohen, Marxism really is a science, enabling us to see behind the appearances "the natural law" dictating the rise and fall of social forms. It would be wrong to conclude, however, that Cohen believes that Marxism is not without a critical or moral dimension. Cohen certainly believes that capitalism is unjust, and that it deserves to be condemned as such:

The main indictment of capitalism is that it crushes people's creative potentials, and that the chief good of communism is that it permits a prodigious flowering of human talent."<sup>49</sup>

But, capitalism's condemnation is of little use to its critics. For Cohen, capitalism's injustice has nothing to do with the fact that it will be replaced or with the kind of society that will replace it. The constraints on capitalist social relations which induce its demise, are not social, but "material." Human rationality, intelligence and scarcity and not the human desire for freedom are the factors which make socialist transformation inevitable.<sup>50</sup> The problem for Cohen is that it is not clear that the extra-social premises lead to socialism (and not some despotic functional equivalent). As we saw with respect to Marx's writings on Russia, legal structures and property relations are not simply given in the level of

productive development. And Cohen's reconstruction of Marx's theory gives us no good reason to suppose Marx wrong on this point.

Given Cohen's belief in the inevitability of socialism, what is his account of revolutionary agency? Cohen's own account is very similar to one given by Marx in *Capital*:<sup>51</sup>

(1) While there is no final crisis, at a certain point capitalism undergoes a series of worsening crises. Between each breakdown, the forces of production continue to grow, making socialism more and more feasible. The growing "contradiction" between the socialized forces and the capitalist relations of production is the quantitative presupposition for socialism.<sup>52</sup>

(2) However, Cohen recognizes that socialism has qualitative presuppositions as well.<sup>53</sup> These are: (a) the collectivization of the working class within large scale production; (b) the homogenization of the wage levels of the working class through deskilling; (c) universal education; and, (d) the class unity which arises as a result of working class struggle. At a given point, the working class acts to overthrow capitalism: "The maladies of capitalism and the development of the productive forces stimulate proletarian militancy."<sup>54</sup>

This argument is not complete for it does not specify how working class militancy is supposed to generate socialist consciousness. The organization of capitalist production conceals the role of human beings in the production process. In KMTH, the sections where Cohen speaks of the overturning of the concealment have no human subjects. Typical sentences are, "socialist revolution suppresses fetishism,"<sup>55</sup> "capitalism reveals itself a merely historical necessity."<sup>56</sup> But in the absence of self-conscious subjects -- who know not only how to run production but also that the social evils of

capitalism are avoidable -- it is not clear that socialism (i.e., democratic producers' control) would be established.

Cohen argues that one reason workers have failed to revolt is that "they lack the power because they do not know that they have it."<sup>57</sup> Knowledge and belief are important for the exercise of collective power. But, what kind of knowledge and belief? And, what are their sources? Cohen would probably respond that if knowledge is the only thing which people lack to realize their interest in material progress, they will ultimately obtain it. However this answer is not satisfactory because, again, the material interest people have can be realized in different social forms. If the interest in material progress leads the proletariat to knowledge about the shortcomings of existing conditions, this does not explain the full nature of the knowledge the proletariat obtains. The interest in material progress on its own cannot inform the proletariat of the potential alternative forms of social organization. The interests which Marxism as a critical theory reveals are not only those interests people have in overcoming nature, but those having to do with human social ideals. The uncovering of these ideals involves more than showing that actual circumstances do not optimally develop the productive forces. The evils of capitalist society have to be shown to be avoidable.

First stage communism, as Marx describes it in The Critique of the Gotha Program involves a new form of social relations and new distributive principles. These principles represent "higher" principles than those of capitalism, not because of their bearing on productivity, but because they substantively realize the formal freedom and equality of capitalist society. In fact, when Marx criticizes the principles of first stage communism, it is



precisely in terms of their limitations with respect to human self-determination and autonomy:

It is therefore a right of inequality, in its content, like every right. Right by its very nature can consist only in the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) are only measurable by an equal standard in so far as they are brought under an equal point of view... everything else being ignored. Further, one worker is married, another not; one has more children than another and so on and so forth. Thus with an equal performance of labor...one will be richer than another...To avoid all these defects right, instead of being equal, would have to be unequal."<sup>58</sup>

The development of the productive forces was no Marx's only argument for communism. He placed great stress on the development of the free development of the individual (of which the growth of the forces of production is but one aspect) as the main reason for preferring communism. How then do the values realized in communism relate to the interests and desires which individuals have now?

Cohen presents Marxism solely as a theory about productive development and the social conditions that facilitate it. If there are equally good ways (from the standpoint of the productive forces) to move beyond capitalism, then, according to Cohen, Marxism doesn't predict which path will be taken, nor can knowledge of Marx's theory by the working class help to push things one way or another. Thus, Cohen's Marxism does not necessarily lead to socialism, nor can it help human beings select socialism from competing functional equivalents.

### iii. Insufficient account of processes

Finally, Cohen's discussion of social transformation fails to capture the importance of classes in Marx's theory. Recall that Cohen denies that his account of historical materialism removes classes from the center of

historical change, arguing that the fact that the coincidence between the interests of a particular class and humanity at large is part of the explanation of why that class is successful. Class struggle, Cohen holds, is an important part of the answer to the question "how does the fact that a new structure would benefit the productive forces explain its actualization?"<sup>59</sup>

While this response may defend Cohen against charges that adherence to the primacy of the productive forces is incompatible with a role for class agency, it is an inadequate response to my criticism, which has to do with the centrality of classes in Marx's theory.

It is not clear why, in Cohen's reconstruction, classes should be privileged agents in the explanation of social change. There is no reason in principle why other non-class agents (the state or state bureaucrats/planners, for example) could not be the vehicles of social transformations. In KMTH, Cohen explains the limitation of the working day as the outcome of an intervention by the state to protect the interests of the capitalist class as a whole. Individual capitalists, acting to maximize their profits, continually extended the working day. Eventually, they reached a point where they threatened the physical health of the laborers. By endangering the ability of the working class to reproduce itself, individual capitalists threatened their collective interest, the survival of capitalism. In order to enforce this collective interest, the state intervened: The capitalist state, Legislator of the Factory Acts, is then the eye of the otherwise blind capitalist, the stabilizer of a system that capitalist activity itself endangers. The needs of the system cannot be attended to by dispersed entrepreneurs severally driven to maximize individual profit.<sup>60</sup>

The capitalist state acts to overcome what would otherwise take the form

of a prisoner's dilemma. In a prisoner's dilemma, everyone acts in his own interest, but because of the lack of cooperation, the aggregate outcome is not collectively rational. The limitation of the working day is explained in terms of its effect on the continuance of capitalism, an effect which in principle could have been brought about by any actor (e.g., an enlightened group of capitalists).

Returning to a problem which arose during the exposition of Cohen's own position, recall that, by themselves, the asocial premises of human nature failed to establish the Development Thesis. There remained a "shadow" between what "rationality" demanded and what "a society does."<sup>61</sup> In particular, there was no reason to believe that a class with an interest in material progress would have the power to enforce that interest.

Cohen's response to this dilemma was to introduce a sub-argument. The sub-argument claimed that the fact that social relations have generally been propitious for development can be taken as evidence that the interest in material progress wins out. But the sub-argument in KMTH did not indicate specifically in what way the asocial premises make recalcitrant social structures materially unlikely. In a subsequent manuscript,<sup>62</sup> Cohen addresses this issue, emphasizing the interdependency and uncertainty imposed by material scarcity. Appealing to recent work in the problems of collective action, Cohen contends that interdependency "tends to make (what would otherwise be) prisoners' dilemmas occur in indefinitely long series, and it is well known that such seriality facilitates their solution. Material solutions might also help 'political entrepreneurs' beat the decision environment into such a shape that the the free-rider quandry is transcended."<sup>63</sup>

Cohen's response is revealing. He appeals to "political entrepreneurs" who can "beat the environment into shape," thus solving the free-rider problem. Cohen does not specify that these entrepreneurs need be classes and in many of the illustrations that he gives they are not classes. For example, Cohen appeals to the role of the state in insuring favorable conditions for capitalist reproduction. Yet Marx always centered his explanations of social transformations on the struggles of social classes. Even in the example Cohen cites, the limitation of the working day, Marx's own explanation is in terms of classes and their alliances. While Marx does state that the results of this limitation were functional for capitalism, he explains the limit as the product of an alliance between the working class and a fraction of the capitalist class.<sup>64</sup> Marx's characteristic explanations of social changes appeal to classes and their interests.

In fact, while Cohen is correct that serially structured games are more likely to produce cooperation than games which are not serially structured, it does not follow from this that within a repetitive game cooperation is more likely than not to prevail.<sup>65</sup> Cooperative behavior depends on other factors besides the learning which results from rational action in serially structured games. For example, it depends on the conceptions which individuals have about each others' beliefs. Without knowledge of what is in the collective interest of the working class, for example, black and white workers might not perceive their common interests in cooperation.

Socialism, in Marx's conception, is not simply the result of the problems in capitalist production, but of self-conscious working class action. Cohen does not adequately capture the centrality of the working class in socialist transformation. A view which sees classes as central to social

change must explain why only classes are capable of producing the conditions required for social transformation. Cohen does not do this, and thus classes lose their privileged position in Marx's theory.

#### 1.4 conclusion.

To sum up what Cohen has accomplished and what he has failed to achieve:

(1) In several of his writings, Marx denies the existence of an individual human nature. Many contemporary Marxists have followed his lead, maintaining that there is no constant of "human nature."<sup>66</sup> Against this tradition, Cohen has shown, rightly, that the reconstruction of a successful argument for the primacy of the productive forces and their role in furthering historical progress depends on facts about human nature. Without the existence of some "permanent facts"<sup>67</sup> of human nature, not dependent on specific social structures, there can be no underlying tendency to productive progress. Marxism would have to dispense with the idea that progress is the central tendency of history. The function of the premises of human nature in Cohen's argument is to provide the foundation of a Marxist theory of history in which history is progressive; in which subsequent social forms represent not only a change, but an advance. As there can be no doubt that Marx saw history as progressive, Cohen's reconstruction here is successful.

2.(a) Cohen's functional argument attempts to capture the relationship between the asocial tendency for productive development and the particular social forms which emerge from major historical transformations. But the functional argument cannot produce an adequate account of the outcomes of

social transformations. At best, Cohen has shown why there is a need for the destruction of the old social form but he has not shown what new social form will replace it. This is significant because Marxism is not an unambiguous theory of unilinear development.

(b) Cohen's functional argument fails to adequately capture Marx's conception of the agents of social change. Marx saw classes, and their interests as the agents of social change. However, in Cohen's theory there is no reason why classes should be privileged, as opposed to the state, "political entrepreneurs," or non-class social movements.

(c) Finally, because Cohen believes that the outcomes of social transformations are determined by the level of productive development, there is no independent contribution to be made by Marxism as a critical theory. Changes in capitalist production (de-skilling, collectivization of the work process, etc), in Cohen's analysis, render the interests of workers manifest. There is no need for social criticism to expose their illusions. Rather, Cohen implies that the knowledge which is involved in furthering the technical mastery over nature by itself yields the knowledge which enables human beings to achieve freedom in social life.

In sum, Cohen fails to see in Marx's theory of history a normative dimension of progress outside of production which itself needs to be explained. Because of this he fails to build enough theoretical structure into his account of outcomes, agents and critical consciousness.

Cohen admits the possibility that other interests besides material ones are at work in history, although he suggests that these interests are materially conditioned. This leaves open the question of what these other

interests are, and whether or not they have any contribution to make to our understanding of the outcomes, processes and motivations involved in revolutions. In the following chapters, I will be concerned with the nature of the changes which Marx sees in social forms. I will examine whether an account of these changes can be given which allows for a reconstruction of historical materialism which retains a central role for classes and criticism. For example, socially subordinate classes which contest the norms and power distribution of a given society are in a better position to recognize the source of the social constraints on their freedom than classes which benefit from those constraints. Class struggles could be defended as central to the social transformation process if it could be shown that only they could produce the conditions (including the knowledge of a new form of social organization) needed for productive advance.

The existence of an independent process through which social forms evolve does not necessarily undercut Cohen's reconstructive project. Cohen's contribution in identifying problems in material production as the source of the impetus for social change is not invalidated by the realization that he has shown only that change must occur, but not the social form it will take. To know that, we must turn our attention to the other interests Marxism says people have, beyond their interest in material progress.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. (ed ) Robert Tucker, Marx-Engels Reader, (M-E R), (New York, 1978) p. 4.
2. On the issue of Marxism as a theory of human interests, cf. J. Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, trans. J.Shapiro (Boston, 1971), ch.3.
3. cf. "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." in M-E R, p. 473.
4. G.A. Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense (KMT H) (Princeton, 1978), p. x.
5. A social form is characterized primarily by its economic structure, and the production relations dominant within it.
6. KMT H, p. 131.
7. Joshua Cohen, review of KMT H, in Journal of Philosophy, v.79, no. 5 (1982), p. 273.
8. Cohen takes great care in explicating and differentiating the forces and relations of production. Roughly, the forces of production include anything which adds to the productivity of the labor process. Cohen's list includes human labor power (strength, skill and knowledge), instruments of production, spaces, means of production and raw materials. (These do not constitute productive forces in all circumstances.) The relations of production are the forms of ownership and control of productive forces characteristic of a society. They include relations between persons and between persons and productive forces. The important point with regard to production relations is that they have differing capacities to advance the productive forces.
9. J. Habermas, Communication and the Evolution of Society, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston, 1979), p. 95.
10. Karl Marx, Grundrisse, trans. M. Nicolaus (NY 1973) p. 489.
11. M-E R, p. 56.
12. M-E R, p. 6.
13. Philippe Van Parijs, "Marxism's Central Puzzle" in T. Ball and J. Farr (ed) After Marx (Cambridge 1984), p. 88-104.
14. Cohen, KMT H, p. 158.



15. Cohen, KMTH, p. 134.
16. Cohen, KMTH, p. 160.
17. Cohen, KMTH, p. 161.
18. Summarized in G.A. Cohen and W. Kymlicka, "Human Nature and Social Change in the Marxist Conception of History," unpubl. ms., (1985), p. 1-2.
19. Cohen, KMTH, p. 152.
20. Cohen, KMTH, p. 152.
21. Cohen and Kymlicka, p. 3.
22. Cohen, KMTH, p. 278.
23. Cohen and Kymlicka, p. 8.
24. Cohen later qualifies this, claiming that the argument need not imply "anything definite about the priorities among" people's "different goals." cf. Cohen and Kymlicka, p. 21.
25. Cohen, KMTH, p. 153.
26. Although people may be interested in material progress because it enables them to get non-material goods. See footnote 24 above.
27. Cohen, "Reconsidering Historical Materialism," Nomos, (1983), v. xxvi. p. 242.
28. Cohen, KMTH, p. 153.
29. Cohen, KMTH, p. 23.
30. This is a point made by several critics of Cohen, among them: J. Cohen (1982), Levine and Wright (1980) and Van Parijs (1982).
31. Cohen, KMTH, p. 153.
32. Cohen and Kymlicka, p. 21.
33. KMTH, p. 231.
34. KMTH, p. 198.
35. KMTH, p. 147.
36. KMTH, p. 160.

37. KMTH, p. 285.
38. Karl Marx, Capital v. I, trans B. Fowkes (NY 1977) p. 90-91.
39. As does Elster in "Historical Materialism and Economic Backwardness" in After Marx, p. 44.
40. Quoted in Elster, Making Sense of Marx, (Cambridge, 1985), p. 305.
41. Karl Marx, "First Draft to V. Zasulich," in (ed.) T. Shanin, Late Marx and the Russian Road (NY, 1983), p. 111.
42. The discussion occurs on p 274-277 of KMTH. I have changed the example (from Hopi rain dances) in the light of the specific issue under consideration.
43. Josh Cohen pointed out this example to me in conversation.
44. Cohen, KMTH, 276.
45. Cohen, KMTH, 204.
46. Capital, v. I, p. 92.
47. cf. Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness, (Mass., 1968) p. 178:  
"since consciousness here is not the knowledge of an opposed object but is the self-consciousness of the object, the act of consciousness overthrows the objective form of its object." (emphasis in original)
48. Capital, v. I, p. 167.
49. Cohen, "Reconsidering Historical Materialism," p.232.
50. Socialism is inevitable "not despite what men do, but because of what men, being rational, are bound predictably to do." KMTH, p. 147.
51. cf. Capital, ch. 32.
52. KMTH, p. 202ff.
53. KMTH, p. 215ff.
54. KMTH, p. 204.
55. KMTH, p. 129.
56. KMTH, p. 201.
57. KMTH, p. 244.

58. Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program, (N.Y., 1970), p. 9.
59. KMTH, p. 285.
60. KMTH, p. 295.
61. KMTH, p. 153.
62. Cohen and Kymlicka, op cit.
63. Cohen and Kymlicka, p. 20-21.
64. Capital, v. I, 393.
65. cf. Russell Hardin, Collective Action, (Baltimore, 1982).
66. cf. Louis Althusser, For Marx, (N.Y., 1970), esp. Part Seven.
67. KMTH, p. 150.

## Chapter Two: History, and the Value of Non-Moral Goods

### 2.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I assessed Gerald Cohen's reconstruction of historical materialism and found that it was inadequate in several respects. In particular, Cohen could not account for (1) the basis of Marx's insistence that classes are the characteristic agents of social change, (2) the importance of critical consciousness in the movement for socialism, and (3) the specific nature of the outcomes of historical transformations. Cohen's says very little about the nature of the motivations involved in social transformations other than that if people's non-material interests do play a role, they "do not conflict with their material interests in progress defeating ways."<sup>1</sup> Thus, in Karl Marx's Theory of History, there is no consideration of the question as to whether or not capitalism is unjust.<sup>2</sup> This is because, for Cohen's reconstruction of historical materialism, the question is irrelevant: its answer cannot tell you when or in what manner capitalism (or any other social form) will be transformed. For example, while living in a more just society might in fact be preferred by workers, this desire cannot bring about such a society (e.g., socialism). Rather, for Cohen, the possibility for and form of social change is "dictated and permitted...by the existing productive forces."<sup>3</sup>

Cohen's functional argument, however, does not adequately specify the constraints on the social relations which result from revolutionary transformations. Although Cohen's account does not deny that there are

reasons to prefer socialism to capitalism apart from its contribution to productive development, he neither specifies what they are nor does he indicate that they are causally relevant to his reconstruction of historical materialism. Cohen's emphasis on productive expansion tells us little about the principles of social organization which "higher" social forms will embody since, as we saw, productive development can occur under varying social forms. The emergence of new principles of social organization depends upon agents' knowledge not only of the constraints that a given set of social relations pose for productive development, but also of how these constraints prevent real human interests from being realized. When Marxism reveals the illusions which cloak social life in class societies, it enlightens agents simultaneously about their real condition and their true interests. What needs to be understood is the nature of those interests: are they historically specific, or are they universal? Why does Marx predict that workers will struggle not only against capitalism, but also for socialism? What is the relationship between the workers' interest in material progress, and their other characteristic (class specific or human) interests?

In this chapter, I examine an interpretation of historical materialism which recognizes the importance of these issues. In his book Karl Marx,<sup>4</sup> Allen Wood offers an interpretation of historical materialism in which, like Cohen, he identifies the growth of productive powers as the central tendency of history. Wood writes, "Marx postulates certain basic tendencies in social behavior: the tendency of society's productive powers to increase; the tendency of social relations to adjust themselves to the efficient employment of these powers, and to change in response to them."<sup>5</sup> Many of

Wood's positions, though far less clear and consistent, are similar to Cohen's. Like Cohen, Wood reconstructs historical materialism in a manner which gives explanatory primacy to the development of the productive forces. He seeks to defend his interpretation against the "humanistic interpretation of Marxist philosophy."<sup>6</sup> He also presents a functionalist argument for why particular social forms rise and fall: the fate of a given social form is determined by its contribution to further productive progress.

Wood's interpretation, however, provides a better understanding of the role of interests in the theory of historical materialism and the reasons for which Marx condemns capitalism. While Cohen leaves open the nature of and role that various interests beyond material interests play in historical transitions, Wood's argument attempts to clarify these interests and their relation to the critical intentions of Marx's theory. Wood makes two points in this regard. His first point is that the specific content of moral and juridical concepts is dependent upon and bound to particular social forms and cannot transcend them. Moral criticism cannot motivate social change: "Changes in the prevailing standards of right and justice do not cause social revolutions but only accompany them."<sup>7</sup> Wood argues, that for Marx, all moral standards are determined by the requirements of production and have no validity independent of the function they serve for a particular social form. Accordingly, these standards in themselves cannot be the reason for Marx's condemnation of capitalism or advocacy of socialism.

Marx did of course condemn capitalism, so the question naturally arises: on what grounds did he condemn it? Wood's second point, his central

innovation, is introduced in response to this question. He proposes, as an exegetical hypothesis, that Marx distinguishes between moral and non-moral goods. A good is anything people desire or value. Non-moral goods are goods which are valued and pursued by people because they satisfy their conceptions of what is desirable and not because any moral merit attaches to the possession of these goods. Non-moral goods include such things as pleasure and happiness, goods which people would want irrespective of whether or not there is any duty to have them. According to Wood, when Marx advocates socialism because it enhances freedom, human development, community, etc., he does not do so on moral grounds. These are, Wood argues, non-moral goods. When workers prefer socialism to capitalism they do so in order to secure greater amounts of the non-moral goods they desire. Marx's criticism, then, is directed not only to the constraints imposed by capitalist property relations on the level of the development of the productive forces, but also to the degree to which capitalist relations frustrate the realization of these non-moral goods. The judgement that socialism is better than capitalism does not simply rest on the fact that it enables the continual expansion of the productive forces. Socialism provides other (non-moral) goods which human beings want.

Wood not only offers an explication of many of Marx's pronouncements condemning morality, he also develops an explicit account of the human interests which motivate people to choose socialist relations over capitalist ones. While this account is compatible with Cohen's view in many respects,<sup>8</sup> it focuses clearly on what Cohen leaves, at best, implicit.

In this chapter, I shall critically examine Wood's argument. I will

claim that while Wood builds on Cohen in the right direction, developing Marx's account of the motivations which people have and which are crucial for the establishment of socialism, his reconstruction has several problems. First, Wood's functional argument for justice does not explain why a particular standard of justice prevails. Wood's view of justice as functional ideology preempts substantive questions. While justice may serve a function for productive development, it may also serve other interests which people have. Second, Wood's account of the non-moral goods does not give a satisfactory explanation of their origin, of how these goods escape having the ideological character of moral goods, or of how agents know which non-moral goods are in their interest. Third, Wood cannot account for the intrinsic value which Marx assigns these goods. He too narrowly construes these goods in terms of particular class interests and not as, what I will argue they were for Marx, human interests.

## 2.2 Wood's view: exposition

Wood's view of history and the driving force of historical movement is similar to that offered by Cohen. Wood, like Cohen, sees the growth of human productive power as providing the fundamental impetus to social change. There is, in history, a basic tendency for the productive forces to expand, "whether or not this expansion is encouraged by the existing set of relations."<sup>9</sup>

While Wood calls the characteristic explanations of Marxism "teleological"<sup>10</sup> rather than "functional," his view of what constitutes the explanation is the same as Cohen's. To give a teleological explanation of an



aspect of a system is to show how it contributes to the persistent tendencies characteristic of that system and to provide reasons for believing that the aspect exists because it contributes to those tendencies. Wood argues that the typical explanations of historical materialism are teleological in this sense. Thus, social relations are what they are because the productive forces require them to be that way. A set of relations obtains when and because it furthers productive expansion:

Historical materialism proposes to account for large scale changes in social relations either by showing how they serve to adapt these relations to new productive powers or by showing how they contribute (at that stage of history) to the persistent expansive tendency of humanity's productive powers. Social relations change because of the development of productive powers, that is, in order to accommodate or effect that development.<sup>11</sup>

Wood also follows Cohen in basing the tendency to productive growth on features of human rationality: "the human race eventually tends to do...what its deepest and most long term interests demand."<sup>12</sup> We should note, however, two differences between Cohen and Wood implicit in this comment. First, Cohen was careful to base the features of rationality which support historical materialism in individual human nature, whereas Wood is unclear as to whether or not the interest in productive growth is characteristic of individuals or of "humanity" as a whole. Since elsewhere Wood denies the existence of an intentional collective subject underlying historical development,<sup>13</sup> it would be best to construe him as basing his argument on features of individual rationality, while noting that he never clearly states this assumption and, moreover, it does not always seem to inform his analysis.

Second, Cohen draws a distinction between the features of human

nature which operate throughout history to secure the tendency for productive development and those which are always present in humans but only find expression under communism. In contrast, Wood seems to suggest that humanity actually develops its "essential powers"<sup>14</sup> in history. Unfortunately, Wood never specifies exactly what he means by "essential powers," and, as noted above, he follows Cohen in assigning explanatory primacy to the expansion of productive powers. Although Cohen is surely right in distinguishing between the aspects of human nature which are important for productive growth in history and the additional ones which flourish only under communism, this does not rule out the possibility that these other features of human nature are also important for historical change. So, Wood may be right that there are other powers or capacities developed in history, but he does not specify what they are or what their role is.

Finally, Wood argues, like Cohen, that the rise and fall of social classes is determined by their ability to "establish and defend"<sup>15</sup> a set of production relations. Classes are the "chief mechanism"<sup>16</sup> through which production relations are adjusted to the requirements of the growing productive forces.

Although the forces of production represent the key causal factors in social change, the requisites of productive development do not constitute the full basis of Marx's criticism of existing property relations. Marx certainly condemns capitalism, as opposed to simply analyzing and describing its tendencies. When Marxism reveals the nature of human interests hidden beneath the illusions which individuals have, what it

uncovers is more than an interest in further productive expansion. For, if socialism develops the forces of production, it simultaneously liberates individuals from exploitation and the imperatives of the capitalist accumulation process which are driven only by the necessity of increasing surplus value.

It is therefore important to have a more precise understanding of the way in which socialism develops the productive forces, in order to disassociate it from the logic of capitalist accumulation. Socialism changes the objectives of accumulation, not only the owners. Socialist production is organized not for the purpose of increasing surplus value, but in order to allow for the realization of freedom in social life. The connection between freedom and the organization of socialist production is central to the Marxist project of human emancipation.

It would be natural to conclude from this that Marx's belief that socialism is superior to capitalism rests on a moral theory in which freedom is a central value. Yet it would be difficult to find support for this interpretation in Marx's texts. Throughout his writings, Marx explicitly denies that his argument for socialism<sup>17</sup> is derived from, or part of, a larger moral theory. In The Communist Manifesto, he accepts the charge that "communism ...abolishes all morality, instead of constituting it on a new basis."<sup>18</sup> In Critique of the Gotha Program he refers to the demand for "equal rights" as "a crime" and "obsolete verbal rubbish."<sup>19</sup> Finally, nowhere in any of Marx's writings is there any direct statement that capitalism is unjust. But how then are we to understand Marx's attack on morality; what exactly is he attacking? If not for justice's sake, then for what values and

ends does Marx think that workers will be inspired to struggle against the capitalist system (as opposed to limiting their demands to only partial grievances)? Most importantly, how can Marx claim that socialism is better than capitalism, if he rejects morality?

Wood has proposed an interpretation of Marx's anti-moral view which gives an answer to these questions. While Wood's primary concern is with justice and the allied concepts of rights and fairness, he has also developed an account of Marx's critique of morality as such. Before considering this general account, I will first consider Wood's interpretation of Marx's criticism of justice.

Wood argues that Marx viewed justice as a juridical-legal concept. Justice is not, for Marx, some neutral standpoint, but a set of standards which arise out of an existing social order. The laws and distributional arrangements of a given society are ones appropriate to its production relations. For Marx, justice is not "determined by the universal compatibility of acts and interests" as liberalism would have it, but by "the concrete requirements of a historically conditioned mode of production."<sup>20</sup> Systems of justice have no standing independent of their role in a given society. Like social relations, they exist in order to fulfill a particular functional need, specifically, they exist because social relations which are functional for productive development require them. In Wood's words,

Legal and political structures...owe their existence and their form of thought to the mode of production within which they operate, to the specific manner in which they regulate existing production relations and serve the needs of individuals.<sup>21</sup>

The standards of right and justice appropriate to a given society are

precisely those standards which do "fulfill a function in social production."<sup>22</sup> The function Wood seems to have in mind is a regulating one; rights and obligations are distributed in a manner which is determined by the existing social relations. Thus, for example, in a capitalist society, formal equality facilitates exchange in the market, removing the feudal barriers (e.g., serf labor) to capitalist production.

Wood supports his claim, that Marx viewed justice as functionally determined by the existing production relations, by considering Marx's views on the "injustice" of exploitation. Once the purchase of labor power<sup>23</sup> has occurred, Marx holds that it belongs to the capitalist "with full right."<sup>24</sup> The capitalist has paid for the value of the worker's labor power, and the fact that this labor power now creates a greater value than its worth "is a piece of good luck for the buyer, but by no means an injustice towards the seller."<sup>25</sup> Marx here parts company with those socialists who argued that the capitalists' exploitation of the working class (i.e., the capitalists' appropriation of surplus value) violated the principle of equality of exchange. According to Marx, the capitalist pays the worker the full value of his labor power, an amount determined like that of any other commodity, by the amount of socially necessary labor time needed to produce it. Thus, in response to the Gotha Program's Lassalleian demand for a "just distribution of the proceeds of labor," Marx asks,

What is a 'just' distribution? Do not the bourgeoisie assert that the present distribution is 'just'? And isn't it in fact the only 'just' distribution based on the present mode of production? Are economic relations ruled by juridical relations or do not juridical relations arise, on the contrary, out of economic ones?<sup>26</sup>

Wood's interpretation of the Marxian critique of justice has two

striking consequences. First, not only does Marx not condemn capitalism as unjust, but he also believes that its characteristic institutions are just. Of course, Marx does not thereby approve of capitalist institutions and his taking them to be just is "worthless to its apologists."<sup>27</sup> Rather, Marx's belief in the justice of many of capitalism's institutions and arrangements reflects his view that justice is simply a standard of social regulation, and not a rational standard of judgement.

Second, the concept of justice, for Marx, cannot be a genuine impetus to revolutionary action. The revolutionary motivated by a desire for justice misunderstands the causal dependence of juridical institutions on the level of productive development. This revolutionary,

views his revolutionary aspirations as a kind of ideal juridical structure underlying the existing society, an ideal or hypothetical contract or set of natural rights...which are being violated...by the rampant 'abuses' and 'injustices' of the present society. He thus treats the essence of the actual production relations as arbitrary and inessential, as a set of mere 'abuses'...His 'revolutionary' aim is therefore not really to overthrow the existing society, it is only to correct the abuses prevalent in it, to rectify its tragic and irrational injustices, and to make it live up to those ideals of right and justice which are, or ought to be, its genuine foundation. <sup>28</sup>

For Wood's Marx, there is no criteria for justice other than its suitability for productive growth. There is no "genuine" concept of justice which a would-be revolutionary can seek to impose: justice must be compatible with the productive foundation of its society. Each social system has its own form of justice; democracy is no more or less "just" than is slavery, each is just on the basis of its relationship to its respective social form.

If justice cannot be a rational standard for criticism of a social form, the question arises whether other moral concepts could play this role. For

example, perhaps Marx condemns capitalism because it is a system which institutionalizes unequal freedom. While there is equal freedom on the level of the capitalist market --since each is free to buy and sell what he has -- there is an underlying structure in which workers and capitalists are not, in fact, equally free. This interpretation would be consistent with what Marx writes in Capital:

The sphere of circulation of commodity exchange, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labor power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. It is the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. Freedom because both buyer and seller of a commodity, let us say labor power, are determined only by their own free will. They contract as free persons, who are equal before the law...

When we leave this sphere of simple circulation or the exchange of commodities which provides the 'free trader vulgaris' with his views, his concepts and the standard by which he judges the society of capital and wage labor, a certain change takes place...in the physiogamy of our dramatis personae. He who was previously the money owner now strides out in front as a capitalist; the possessor of labor power follows as his worker. The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing to expect -- but a hiding.<sup>29</sup>

This passage suggests that beneath its appearance, the worker in capitalist society is neither free nor equal. Perhaps this reality is the basis of Marx's criticism. Wood, however, does not think that Marx condemned capitalism on any moral basis. He points out that Marx frequently attacks not only "justice" but also "equality" and "all morality." Wood, therefore, puts forward a proposal about Marx's views on morality in general, and not simply justice and rights. According to Wood, Marx attacks all moral concepts; like Nietzsche, Marx is not a reformer but a critic of morality.

Yet, if Marx follows Nietzsche in condemning morality, the problem is

that, unlike Nietzsche, he never tells us exactly what he thinks morality is. Therefore, Wood introduces a hypothesis which while never stated explicitly by Marx would, if Marx held such a view, explain his criticism of morality. Wood suggests that Marx conceived morality along Hegelian lines. Hegel, of course, distinguished between morality as Moralitaet and morality as Sittlichkeit. Moralitaet is the capacity of a rational individual to act autonomously, in a manner which does not depend on inclination.<sup>30</sup> Moralitaet places an individual under a formal obligation to realize what is acceptable to reason; autonomous action is action done because reason requires it. If reason is to be the determining ground of action, however, it clearly must have some content. Where does the content of what is acceptable to reason come from? Hegel argued that Sittlichkeit provides the content for the moral individual. Sittlichkeit is the set of institutions and objective norms through which the members of a social order fulfill the demands of their society. It refers to the moral obligations people have simply by being members of their community. Without the social content derived from the norms of a rational community, Hegel argued that morality would be reduced to an empty formalism, as was the case with Kant's moral theory.<sup>31</sup>

Assuming Marx adopts a Hegelian conception of morality, Wood argues we can make sense of why he condemns it. It would mean that Marx, like Hegel, rejects a purely formal conception of morality (Moralitaet). But, unlike Hegel, Marx believes that the objective moral norms of Sittlichkeit represent, not the demands of a rational community, but the economic needs of the prevailing order. Consequently these norms "enjoin conduct from



each individual which is harmonious or functional in relation"<sup>32</sup> to that order. The Sittlichkeit of capitalist society is merely a facade concealing bourgeois interests.

If this is the case, then morality "necessarily subverts the self-understanding of every individual who follows it."<sup>33</sup> For morality claims to represent a universal interest, when in fact it represents interests which are beneficial to the ruling classes. By deceiving individuals about the real nature of its imperatives, morality is harmful for those who follow it. To workers it "represents as rationally fulfilling a course of conduct which is in fact directly opposed to their interests."<sup>34</sup> Morality even deceives the capitalists, since it claims to represent not their class interests but a universal interest. Morality conceals its role in sanctioning a particular social form. Yet its acceptance stems precisely from that role. Consequently, Wood argues, morality is an ideological system.

Marx cannot, therefore, offer an alternative morality to that of the prevailing social order. The very idea of a "universal interest" such as morality claims to represent is unreal. If by a moral point of view we mean a standpoint which takes the interests of each equally into account, then Wood holds that Marx must reject such a standpoint. For Wood's Marx, interests are historically effective only insofar as they take the form of class interests (which are not universal interests but particular interests). Wood writes,

As Marx depicts it, the proletarian movement furthers the interests of other classes (such as the peasantry or the petty bourgeoisie) only to the extent that they are temporarily coincident with...the interests of the proletariat.<sup>35</sup>

Disinterested or impartial considerations are, Wood contends, incompatible with Marx's understanding of the centrality of class interests. Once we recognize the historical role of class interests, we cannot consider impartially grounded principles of any primary concern.

Yet Marx does condemn capitalism -- even if not on moral grounds -- and the question remains as to why he condemns it. In response to this question, Wood draws the following distinction between moral goods and non-moral goods:

In a narrower and I think more proper sense of 'moral'...we distinguish moral goods and evils from non-moral ones. We all know the difference between valuing or doing something because conscience or the 'moral law' tells us we 'ought' to, and valuing or doing something because it satisfies our needs, our wants, or our conceptions of what is good for us (or for someone else whose welfare we want to promote--desires for non-moral goods are not necessarily selfish desires).<sup>36</sup>

Non-moral goods are things that we would want even if we received no moral credit for obtaining them. Unlike moral goods whose only justification lies in their functionality for specific and transient social forms, the content of these goods is independent of the needs of any particular social order:

The fact that people are free or unfree, self-actualized or alienated depends on the degree to which they understand and control the conditions of their existence and to the degree to which they understand and control their "essential human powers"...Social relations may promote or inhibit freedom, community or self-actualization, but the content of these three is not determined by the correspondence to prevailing social relations of what people are or do.<sup>37</sup>

According to Wood, while Marx avoids social criticism based on moral goods or values, he repeatedly condemns capitalism for frustrating certain non-moral goods, among which he includes self-actualization, security, health and freedom. The pursuit of these goods does not contradict the

thesis that only class interests are historically effective which Wood argues Marx is committed to. These goods neither represent a "universal interest" nor is their pursuit motivated out of an impartial concern with the good of humanity as such. In pursuing these goods, workers are pursuing their interests, which will be furthered at the expense of the interests of others (e.g., the capitalists.) If we ask why workers find these goods appealing rather than others, Wood suggests "we might give various sorts of answers, including answers which make reference to the historical materialist account of our situation. (Workers might particularly care about security and self-development because they are so totally deprived of these particular goods.)"<sup>38</sup>

Now it might seem that Marx's advocacy of the non-moral goods still commits him to some kind of moral theory. For example, Mill holds that what is morally good consists in what is conducive to the greatest amount of non-moral good (i.e., happiness). For Mill, what is morally required of each individual is defined in terms of what maximizes the non-moral good of the totality of individuals. While it may be tempting to see Marx as a utilitarian,<sup>39</sup> his position (as interpreted by Wood) departs from Mill's in crucial respects. According to Wood, Marx never claims that there is a systematic relationship between the moral and the non-moral goods. There is no indication in his writings that Marx adopts the view that the non-moral goods should be maximized. Nor does he ever argue that individuals have a right to the non-moral goods, or that justice requires a certain distribution of these goods. Nor does Marx agree with the utilitarians about morality, since he regards moral norms as determined by their correspondence to the

prevailing social form and not by what is conducive to the greatest non-moral good. Although Marx condemns capitalism as a form of servitude, Wood contends that Marx never argues that this fact alone mandates that capitalism be overthrown. This will occur only when capitalism no longer contributes to further productive expansion:

It is not Marx's belief that servitude as such is an unqualified wrong, an evil to be abolished at all cost, with an attitude of fiat justita, pereat mundi. The servitude of capitalism according to Marx, and even the direct slavery involved in capitalist colonies, have been necessary conditions for the development of modern productive forces. To condemn this servitude unqualifiedly would be to condemn all the productive advances of modern society, which Marx was not about to do."<sup>40</sup>

So Wood maintains that the desire for the non-moral values can become historically potent only under certain conditions. These conditions cannot be chosen; they are, as Marx says, "directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."<sup>41</sup> Wood does not say that Marx's critique of capitalism derives from a "principle" based on some non-moral good such as self-realization which always ought to be realized. Social forms and their juridical systems and moral norms are succeeded when this is required by the productive forces.

In summation, Wood has--through the introduction of an hypothesis distinguishing moral from non-moral goods--shown that a particular charge of inconsistency against Marx--that he cannot repudiate morality and at the same time advocate socialism--is not well taken. Marx can reject morality as functional to the prevailing social order, and still advocate socialism as "better" than capitalism. Socialism not only furthers productive capacity, but also provides greater amounts of the non-moral goods which the working

class desires.

### 2.3 Criticisms of Wood's view.

#### i. inadequate account of justice, and moral goods generally.

Wood's central innovation is his use of the distinction between moral goods or values, and other types of goods, namely, non-moral goods in explaining Marx's views about morality and justice.<sup>42</sup> In this section, I examine the first part of this distinction: Wood's account of moral goods, and especially Wood's interpretation of Marx's conception of justice.

Wood's argument strongly suggests that there is at most one system of justice functional for any particular set of production relations. He writes,

In any given society, the actual account of juridical relations, and hence of the juridical norms that regulate them, is determined by the society's production relations, which in turn correspond to the stage of development of its 'productive powers.'<sup>43</sup>

The problem here is that not all societies with an equal level of productive development have the same juridical systems. There are different juridical institutions consistent with the same social form. For example, there are democratic capitalist societies and non-democratic ones. These latter societies -- while still based on capitalist accumulation -- deny what are, in democratic capitalist societies, moral goods: freedom of speech, freedom of association, the right to political representation, etc. The fact that the juridical institutions of capitalist societies can diverge suggests that, like production relations, moral goods do not immediately follow from a given level of productive development, or automatically change to accommodate productive growth.

Wood characterizes justice in terms of its functional role in stabilizing class divided societies. But, to say that a moral rule or institution is required if a given society's economy is to function is to say something about the appropriate level of needs and desires at which it functions. But what level of satisfaction, and what needs and desires is a particular economy to provide for? As we have seen, different capitalist societies answer this question in different ways.

Wood might respond that historical materialism cannot explain every feature of a social system. If we need to cite other factors to explain why one or another standard of justice prevails, this only shows that the program of historical materialism needs to be carried out in conjunction with a detailed analysis of historical facts. But this response is inadequate because Wood does indeed claim to explain justice functionally. A central feature of Wood's argument is its denial of any relevance for social choice regarding the principles of justice. Revolutionaries cannot use justice as a motivation because there is a correct and unique set of juridical institutions which are compatible with a given mode of production. Yet, if, for example, a socialist mode of production is compatible with more than one set of juridical (and political) institutions --perhaps, one set based on state owned property with no democratic input and another based on democratic producers' control -- social and political choices might have more of a point than Wood's account allows.

There is a second problem with Wood's account of justice and other moral concepts. It is not clear in Wood's discussion exactly what functions he thinks justice serves. Primarily, he thinks that justice regulates the

actions of groups and individuals in a manner which "helps to stabilize a social system and promote class interests."<sup>44</sup> As Raymond Geuss has pointed out, however, one must distinguish between the function of stabilizing a social form and the function of legitimating that form:

Any set of beliefs which legitimizes or justifies a social practice will thereby tend to support it, but the converse is not always the case; a belief that a given ruling class is strong and ruthless, so that any resistance to the dominant order is futile, may well be a belief, the acceptance of which by large segments of the population will have the effect of stabilizing the existing relations of dominance, but it is unlikely that such a belief could be used to justify those relations.<sup>45</sup>

Wood's analysis applies more appropriately to the stabilizing function of justice and morality than their legitimating function. Though both functions may be implicit in Wood's discussion, for his analysis of the legitimating function to be adequate, he must say more -- specifically why legitimation matters at all. Wood ignores the fact that some social practices require legitimation for their reproduction, while others do not. This being the case, Wood does not discuss the justificatory aspect of moral systems, the types of reasons different systems give for different social practices, their specific manner of forging consent. He naturally fails, therefore, to work through the consequences of different types of legitimation. A given morality may serve a function which benefits the dominant social class and still serve other interests, including those of subordinate groups. A moral system may be shaped by particular interests and still serve more general interests. Different moral systems may in varying degrees recognize the interests of the oppressed classes. These differences would be relevant -- if the point above about the existence of "functionally equivalent" juridical systems stands -- to situations in which choice is a possibility.

Wood's functional argument of moral goods, then, fails adequately to specify the constraints on the forms of justice of particular social forms or the interests which justice serves. He thus leaves open the possibility that forms of justice change in accordance with a process which does not simply "reflect" the level of productive development.

ii. Inadequate account of why people value the non-moral goods

The account of non-moral goods which Wood gives is excessively empirical. He treats it as an unproblematic fact about people that they desire certain non-moral goods, a desire explicable with reference to "the historical materialist account of their situation."<sup>46</sup> This formulation, however, is clearly inadequate as an interpretation of Marx's views. In the first place, Marx (and Wood) believe that in capitalist society individuals suffer from illusions about the nature of the social world and their interests within it. These illusions, moreover, are not simply the product of subjective deficiencies, attributable to a failure of perceptiveness on the part of social agents. The illusions are widespread because they have a "reality." For example, in a capitalist society relations between people do take the form of relations between things, which is how they appear. But this raises a difficulty since justice does regulate the varying interests of all social classes, even if it does so in a manner which clearly privileges the ruling class. How then do agents recognize the ideological character of capitalist justice, as presumably they must if they are to obtain revolutionary consciousness?

The problem is more significant for Wood's analysis than it might



appear. I have thus far followed Wood's own account, taking desires and interests as interchangeable. Wood characterizes the non-moral goods as the goods people actually desire, based on their conception of what is good for them. But his discussion of the non-moral goods tacitly moves from conceiving of them as desires (what people want) to thinking of them as interests, (what people think that they should want, given their conception of their own good).<sup>47</sup> Desires are extremely variable, and agents can have desires of which they are unaware. People can desire what is harmful for them, as in the case of alcoholics. It follows that agents may or may not have an "interest" in the satisfaction of their desires, as in the case of the reformed alcoholic who craves a drink.<sup>48</sup> To say that an agent has an interest in doing something is to show that the agent has reason to believe that a given desire "ought" to be satisfied. Not all desires, clearly, will be such that their satisfaction could be considered of interest to the agents.

Furthermore, agents can be mistaken about their interests, as presumably Wood thinks that they are when they act out of allegiance to moral principles. What are the real interests of a group of agents and how do they come to know them? This is an important question, for, as I have noted, Marx thinks that agents are generally deceived about their interests. For example, in The Eighteenth Brumaire, Marx poses a philosophical riddle: that men make their own history and everywhere they are in chains to the past. That is, everywhere human beings have acted for reasons which they have only partly understood. They have remained misconceived about the nature of their interests. Yet Marx insisted that unlike previous revolutionary classes, the proletariat could disabuse itself of illusion:

The social revolution of the 19th century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself, before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past.<sup>49</sup>

Marx thinks that in their struggles workers achieve the self-clarification necessary to obtain knowledge of their real interests. Any reconstruction of Marx's view of these interests, then, must explain how knowledge of them is possible. How do agents come to know their real interests?

There is no mechanism provided for in Wood's account to link the proletariat's desires to its 'true' interests. Why should workers' desires for higher wages, for example, lead them to see the need to overthrow capitalism as a system? Wood's failure to provide a mechanism here may reflect the fact that he equivocates as to whether these interests have causal importance. On the one hand, the form of the socialist society which realizes the non-moral goods is "dictated" by the development of the productive forces.

On the other hand, Wood says that the non-moral values are a lever for proletarian action:

to create a 'proletarian morality' or 'proletarian conception of justice'...would strike Marx as a short-sighted and self-defeating course for the movement to adopt. It is safer to rely simply on the genuine (non-moral) reasons people have for wanting an obsolete and inhuman social form to be overthrown and replaced by a higher form of society.<sup>50</sup>

Given that different social relations and juridical institutions are compatible with the same level of productive development, the non-moral goods people want might explain why one set of relations rather than another obtains.

But even if Wood wants to deny that the workers' desire for the non-moral goods constrains the institutional form of socialism, he must provide some

further explanation of their status. How can workers' desires for the non-moral goods escape the ideological character of their other desires and interests?

Wood writes that the content of the non-moral goods is "not determined by their correspondence to social relations." But this does not tell us of what their content actually consists. In particular, what makes the non-moral values legitimate, not themselves a product of false consciousness? Furthermore, how do these values point us beyond capitalism? In answering these questions, Wood's simple observation that they are what workers desire is of no help, since there is the problem of false consciousness. A full account of the role of the non-moral values in Marx's thought must provide some reasons for why they are true, as well as clarify whether or not they have any causal role in social change.

### iii. inadequate account of the relation between the non-moral goods and socialism.

Finally, Wood's examination of the non-moral goods fails to apprehend the intrinsic value which Marx, in all of his writings, assigns to them. We have seen that, for Wood, the fact that workers value these goods can be explained in terms of their situation; e.g., because they are deprived of security and self-development, they come to value these particular goods deeply. Wood never indicates that these goods are valued for their own sake. Wood's socialist man might find a social structure which expanded everyone's freedom desirable, perhaps because this feature promotes

stability, by ending class or group conflicts. He might value the freedom of other people as instrumental to the realization of his other ends, whatever those ends might be. It is not even inconceivable that collective freedom would be generally valued by human beings. However, it would not be, according to Wood, valued as an end in itself.

Here, Wood departs substantially from Marx's treatment of these goods as intrinsically valuable. The establishment of these values, the free expression of human capacities, and the subjugation of production to the conscious regulation of the social agents, marks the beginning of truly human history.<sup>51</sup> For Marx, communism, is the realization of the potentials given to human beings as part of their nature, which are restricted by previous social forms:

Communism is the positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus the real appropriation of human nature through and for man. It is therefore the return of man to himself as a social, i.e., really human being, a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth of previous development.<sup>52</sup>

In Capital v.III, Marx provides us with a list of the values which socialism realizes. The passage reads in full:

The realm of freedom actually only begins when labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, by bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity.

Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite.<sup>53</sup>

Communism emancipates human beings from the narrowness imposed on them by the circumstances of alienated labor; it attenuates the division of labor and ends man's loss of control over his own social relations. Self-realization<sup>54</sup> through creative work and collectively exercised freedom are the essence of Marx's view of communism. To make the value of these goods contingent on the desires of specific groups in specific circumstances is to deny their central place in Marx's project. Socialism, as Wood notes, means more to Marx than the abolition of competition and want through the removal of the capitalist barriers to productive rationality. It means, above all, the abolition of man's dependence on social conditions of life which escape his control. The importance of the non-moral values for socialism is not captured by Wood's description of them as things people want because they happen to satisfy their "conception of what is good for them."

The centrality of these values is the reason why socialism cannot result from any process which functionally adjusts production relations to changing productive forces. It requires the conscious struggle of the proletariat to gain the knowledge necessary to take control over their social relations. The achievement of self-realization and freedom, while materially conditioned, are not materially determined.

There is another reason why Wood's view of the non-moral goods tends to undermine the status which Marx gives to them. Wood denies not only the universality and neutrality of moral goods, but also that of the non-

moral goods. The desire for the non-moral goods which motivates the proletariat bear no necessary relation to the interests of other classes.

Wood writes,

As Marx depicts it, the proletarian movement furthers the interests of other classes (such as the peasantry or the petty bourgeoisie) only to the extent that they are temporarily coincident with...the interests of the proletariat.<sup>55</sup>

According to Wood, Marx holds that actions are historically effective only insofar as they involve the pursuit of class interests. The proletarian movement gives primacy to the interests of the proletarian class, and if it happens to further the interests of other classes this is only because their interests are "coincident" with its own. Of course, Wood acknowledges that the proletariat consists of the "vast majority," so that the promotion of its interests furthers almost everyone's. But this should not lead us to think, Wood warns, that Marx has any "impartial concern with the good of humanity as such."<sup>56</sup> In a class society a universal interest must be an illusion.

Wood's argument seems to rest on the following inference: since the agency of socialist revolution is particular (e.g., the working class), the aim must also be particular. What are we to make of Wood's claim? Is it an adequate interpretation of Marx?

There is no question that in the class struggle under capitalism Marx unequivocally took sides with the proletariat. Furthermore, he quite openly discounted many of the interests of the opposing classes. The capitalists' interest in exploitation, for example, provides them with no legitimate argument against socialism. Nor does Marx expect many capitalists

(although individuals may raise themselves up above their class positions<sup>57</sup>) to recognize that socialism represents their real interests. Marx locates the point from which capitalism can be overturned in a particular social agency, the industrial working class. This is the truth in Wood's view.

But Wood overlooks the fact that, in Marx's formulations about revolution, the relationship between agency and aim is disjunctive. Marx maintains that revolutions always carry the banner of universal interest, not class interest, and this universalism is not simply ideological mystification. Social transformations only occur when the ascending class really represents a universal interest against the old society. In The German Ideology Marx writes,

For each new class which puts itself in the place of the one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality and represent them as the only rational universally valid ones. The class making a revolution appears from the very start, if only because it is opposed to a class, not as a class but as the representative of the whole society...It can do this because, to start with, its interest really is more connected with the common interest of all other non-ruling classes...Every new class, therefore, achieves its hegemony only on a broader basis than that of the class ruling previously.<sup>58</sup>

Now Wood might grant that Marx thinks that each succeeding class represents itself as a universal interest. He would nevertheless argue that this does not mean that Marx thinks that these classes really bear universal interests. Marx might still believe that there are in fact no universal interests, only class interests. So he might still agree with Wood that universal interests, at least in class divided societies, are "illusory."<sup>59</sup>

Leaving aside for now the nature of revolutionary movements before

the proletarian movement,<sup>60</sup> Marx is quite explicit that a successful workers' revolution realizes an aim which is in the interests of all: the abolition of class society.

The emancipation of the oppressed class necessarily involves the creation of a new society...Does this mean that after the fall of the old society there will be a new class domination, expressing itself in a new political power? No. The conditions for the emancipation of the working class is the abolition of all classes.<sup>61</sup>

The abolition of classes and the freedom from exploitation, are central to the Marxist project. Capitalism is a pre-condition for socialism, not merely because it develops the forces of production, but because it creates a class whose specific interests are also interests of all human beings. It is only because Marx sees in the proletariat the lever for the emancipation of humanity, that he gives it historical significance. This is especially true in the sense that his initial ascription of this role to the proletariat is not based on an empirical analysis of its role in capitalist society, but on a philosophical hypothesis. The proletariat are a class with "radical chains":

A class in civil society which ...has a universal character because its sufferings are universal, and which does not claim a particular redress because the wrong which is done it is not a particular wrong, but wrong in general... which is, in short, a total loss of humanity, and which can only redeem itself by a total redemption of humanity.<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps Wood wants to argue that Marx was wrong or that these views stem from a younger Marx, still under the influence of moral ideology. But while Marx's later writings focus on the historical emergence of the proletariat, his argument about their universalist character remains. In the Communist Manifesto, Marx writes, "The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung in the air."<sup>63</sup>



Despite his claims, in fact, it is difficult to see how Wood's own argument can avoid dependence on a universal interest, namely, the interest in material progress. Wood, in fact, writes that, "Marx...believes the development and exercise of productive powers is man's most basic aspiration because it shows itself in history to be such."<sup>64</sup> As with Cohen, Wood's "teleological" interpretation requires an extra-social factor controlling social change. Without such a factor it is not clear why some classes, whose particular interests are opposed to material progress, will not succeed in blocking it. Cohen attempts to answer this objection by appealing to human rationality and the historical situation of scarcity which he believes generate an interest in material progress capable of overcoming social obstacles. As we have seen in the last chapter, this attempt has its failings. Cohen had difficulty accounting for the specific outcomes of revolutions, the privileged position Marx gives classes in historical change, and the role of critical consciousness in the transition to socialism. Upon examination, it is evident that Wood's theory like Cohen's requires a foundation in some universal interest, although he seems to deny this. At the very least, his argument must rely on similar assumptions to Cohen's about human rationality. Moreover, his distinction between moral and non-moral values, if properly elaborated might generate an interest in addition to the interest in material progress elaborated by Cohen, while at the same time avoiding the problems that Cohen's view cannot surmount.

#### 2.4 Conclusion.

Wood's point of departure is a paradox: Marx condemns morality, and

the moral point of view, while simultaneously advocating socialism as "better" than capitalism. Wood's hypothesis -- that Marx condemns capitalism on non-moral grounds attempts to resolve this paradox. The key is to see the desires people have for the non-moral goods as the impetus for their revolutionary action. Moral goods, by contrast, exist only in order to fulfill a function for transient class-divided societies. Wood's accomplishment lies in his applying to Marx the distinction between two types of goods (or values) and then showing that one type of good, non-moral good, will be realized by socialism.

Wood's incorporation of this distinction builds on Cohen's account, because it explicitly examines the motivations which historical materialism ascribes to the proletariat, and because it deepens our understanding of what socialism is by connecting it with certain goods, especially freedom and self-realization.

However, drawing the distinction between moral and non-moral goods is only the skeleton of a theory; the salient remaining question is how these different goods are characterized. I have argued that neither Wood's discussion of moral goods nor his discussion of non-moral goods is particularly compelling as an interpretation of Marx. There are three major problems. The first problem concerns the functional argument for justice, which could not explain why one standard of justice rather than another prevailed. While Wood might not see this as an important problem (since historical materialism cannot explain everything), it is central to the aspect of historical materialism which I am examining in this thesis: the changes

displayed in successive social forms. Most commentators, including those sympathetic to Marx, ignore this aspect of his theory of history. In their view, historical materialism is solely explained in terms of the growth of technical knowledge, the knowledge which subordinates nature to human productive capacities. But, the growth of productive capacity is not the only process of concern to Marx; and, in terms of the transition to socialism, Marx delineates another process to which he gives at least equal weight: the consciousness of the working class of the need to re-establish control over its own creations, its knowledge of its real interests. Of course, it is very difficult to explain clearly what this process involves. But once we are struck by its centrality we cannot, I think, accept as complete any reconstruction of Marx which fails to account for it.

This brings us to the second major problem with Wood's reconstruction. The theory of "ideology" poses a major issue for Marxist scholarship. Marx must demonstrate that his own standpoint is not also a product of ideological distortion. In his exposition, Wood attacks moral goods (values) as false, a powerful assertion. Yet the force of this claim derives from its implicit contrast with values which are not false, which are true. Wood, however, provides no account of the sense in which the non-moral goods are not false. Given that human beings desire a wide range of goods, what distinguishes these goods from other desired goods? How do these goods connect with interests? Wood does not say very much which bears on an answer to these questions.

Third and finally, I have argued that Wood's discussion of the non-moral goods fails to grant them the intrinsic importance which Marx gives

to them in his writings. While Wood does not explicitly reject this importance he denies it by implication, when he assumes that the foundation of why workers value these goods lies in the fact that they happen to suit their conceptions of what is good for them. There is no reason to believe that their conceptions will stay the same across major changes in circumstances. If so, then the non-moral values cannot be primary in the way that socialism requires.

Wood's position is useful not only because of the fact that it incorporates a distinction between moral and non-moral goods but also because its failings indicate some questions which any reconstruction of Marx must answer: How are we to understand the values which socialism realizes? Why are these values different than "ideological" moral values? How do social agents, suffering from illusion and delusion, come to know that these values are in their interests? Do these values play any role in the outcomes of revolutionary transformations? That is, do they constrain the social forms which are the result of major change? Are they historically specific or are they interests which human beings have as part of their nature? Finally, if these goods are in the universal interest of all, why is it that Marx thinks that the agents capable of realizing them constitute a particular class? This thesis sets itself the task of clarifying and "reconstructing" Marx's answers to these questions, in a manner which remains faithful to the critical intent of his theory.

## Notes to Chapter Two

1. G.A. Cohen and W. Klymicka, "Human Nature and Social Change in the Marxist Conception of History" unpubl. ms., (1985) p. 21
2. Cohen does take this issue up in "Freedom, Justice and Capitalism," New Left Review, v.26, 1981
3. G.A. Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History, (Princeton, 1978) p.204
4. Allen Wood, Karl Marx (KM), (London, 1984)
5. KM, p. 101
6. HM, p.x
7. Allen Wood, "Marx on Right and Justice" in M. Cohen, T. Nagel and T. Scanlon (eds.) Marx, Justice and History (Princeton, 1980) p. 133
8. Although in "Freedom, Justice and Capitalism," Cohen explicitly maintains that capitalism is an unjust society even though it contributes to the advancement of productive power. While its injustice cannot explain why it changes, it is an important factor motivating people against it.
9. KM, p. 76
10. KM, p. 107
11. KM, p. 105
12. KM, p. 101
13. KM, p. 107
14. KM, p. 79
15. KM, p. 94
16. KM, p. 98
17. Here, and elsewhere in this chapter, I am using the term "socialism" as the equivalent of first stage communism. See K. Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program, (New York, 1970) for Marx's contrast between the first stage of communism and its "higher" stage.
18. Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto in R. Tucker (ed.) The Marx-Engels Reader, (New York, 1978) p. 489

19. Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program, (New York, 1970) p. 10
20. Allen Wood, "The Marxian Critique of Justice," in M.Cohen, op. cit., p. 16
21. "The Marxian Critique of Justice," p. 10-11
22. "Marx on Right and Justice," p. 107
23. Marx draws a distinction between "labor" and "labor power."  
According to Marx, labor creates things which have value, but cannot be said to have value itself. The capitalist does not pay the worker for the value of the things that his labor creates. Rather, the capitalist buys in the form of a commodity, the worker's capacity to produce commodities. Marx calls this capacity "labor power." The value of labor power is determined in the same way as every other commodity: by the amount of socially necessary labor time needed to produce it. In this case it is determined by the quantity of labor necessary to reproduce the worker, to keep him alive and working. Marx assumes that labor power, like any other commodity, is bought at its value. Hence, the exchange between the worker and capitalist is an exchange of equal values.
24. "Marx on Right and Justice," p. 115
25. K. Marx, Capital, v. I, trans. B. Fowkes, (New York, 1977) p. 301
26. Critique of the Gotha Program, p. 6
27. "Marx on Right and Justice," p. 108
28. "The Marxian Critique of Justice," p. 30
29. Capital, v. I, pp. 279-280
30. G.W.F. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, trans. T. Knox, (London, 1973) sections 105-107
31. Philosophy of Right, section 135
32. Allen Wood, "Marx's immorality," in B. Chavance (ed.) Marx en Perspective, (Paris, 1985) p. 687
33. "Marx's Immorality," p. 687
34. "Marx's Immorality," p. 687
35. "Marx's Immorality," p. 693

36. KM, p. 126
37. "Marx on Right and Justice," p. 122
38. Allen Wood, private correspondence, March 26, 1986, p. 3
39. For a utilitarian interpretation of Marx, cf. Derek Allen, "The Utilitarianism of Marx and Engels," American Philosophical Quarterly, x,3(1973) pp.189-199
40. "The Marxian Critique of Justice," pp. 37-37
41. Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, (New York, 1969) p. 15
42. The distinction between moral and non-moral goods is a familiar one to philosophy, although, as far as I know, Allen Wood is the first person to use this distinction with reference to Marx. For some recent expositions which defend variants of the view Wood attributes to Marx, i.e, that morality is harmful to the non-moral good of those who possess it, see Bernard Williams, Moral Luck (Cambridge, 1981) and Philippa Foot, Virtues and Vices (Berkeley, 1978)
43. "Marx on Right and Justice," p. 107
44. KM, p. 130
45. Raymond Geuss, The Idea of a Critical Theory, (Cambridge, 1984) p. 15
46. Wood, correspondence, p. 3
47. For a discussion of desires and interests, see Geuss, op cit., chapter 2
48. This example is from Geuss, p. 46
49. The Eighteenth Brumaire, p. 18
50. "Marx on Right and Justice," p. 132
51. Communism brings "the prehistory of human society to a close." cf. K. Marx, Preface to Critique of Political Economy, in Tucker, p. 5
52. K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844)" in L. Easton and K. Guddat (eds.) Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, p. 304
53. K. Marx, Capital, v. III, (New York, 1981) p. 820

54. I will discuss the nature of self-realization in Chapter 3
55. "Marx's Immoralism," p. 693
56. "Marx's Immoralism," p. 693
57. cf. The Preface to the first edition of Capital where Marx writes, "My standpoint...can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains, socially speaking, however much he may raise himself above them." p. 92, my emphasis
58. K. Marx, The German Ideology, (New York, 1973) pp. 65-66
59. "Marx's Immoralism," p. 694
60. I will return to this issue in Chapter 4
61. K. Marx, Poverty of Philosophy, (New York, 1973) p. 174
62. K. Marx, Introduction to the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, in Tucker, p. 64
63. K. Marx, Communist Manifesto, in Tucker, p. 482
64. KM, p. 29



### Chapter Three: Labor and the Process of Historical Development: The German Ideology and the Grundrisse

#### 3.1 Introduction.

In this chapter I explore Marx's two major discussions of historical development, one given in The German Ideology and the second in the Grundrisse. I want to show that these discussions are importantly different. In particular, I will argue that they present two distinct views of the historical process and of the endpoint of that process, communism.

In The German Ideology, Marx depicts historical development in terms of the growth of human productive power. He presents the form of social relations as determined by the level of development of the forces of production. In the Grundrisse, by contrast, Marx does not focus on the growth of productive power. Instead, he correlates forms of social organization with the development of distinct capacities which allow human beings to achieve not simply control over nature, but also social freedom. Through history, according to the Grundrisse, human beings gain more consciousness of the requirements for their freedom; they learn about the constraints posed by specific forms of social organization. This consciousness leads them to act to abolish these constraints:

The (worker's) recognition of the products as its own, and the judgement that its separation from the conditions of its realization is improper -- forcibly imposed -- is an enormous advance in awareness, itself the product of the mode of production resting on capital, and as much the knell to its doom as, with the slave's awareness that he cannot be the property of another, with his consciousness of himself as a person, the existence of slavery becomes a merely artificial, vegetative existence, and ceases to be able to prevail as the basis of

production.<sup>1</sup>

This passage focuses on the importance of the growing awareness of the social conditions which limit human freedom. The achievement of this awareness by social actors is said to be the "knell" to the demise of a particular form of social domination.

Not only do the two works differ in terms of their respective discussions of the process of historical development, but they also offer diverse conceptions of the endpoint of that development. The German Ideology describes communism as a society which completely overturns past social conditions:<sup>2</sup> whereas all previous societies are organized around a division of labor, communist society abolishes the division of labor. The Grundrisse presents an alternative conception in which the distinguishing feature of communism is not the abolition of the division of labor, but the fact that communism allows for collective control over social institutions, central of which are the institutions of production.

I will argue that the Grundrisse presents a more plausible conception of communism and a more adequate conception of its relationship to the process of historical development. The argument in The German Ideology fails to explain why a particular set of social relations results from historical transformations, as opposed to some other set equally optimal for productive development. History might conceivably lead to a form of social organization which is a "functional equivalent" of communism with respect to its effect on productive growth. There is no reason, then, to see historical development as leading to communism. That is, there is no relation between the freedom which even according to The German Ideology

communism is supposed to realize, and the process leading up to it. There is no intrinsic relationship between the capacity of human beings to increase the productive forces and their capacity to achieve social freedom. In contrast, the Grundrisse explicitly calls attention to the development of human awareness of the conditions for social freedom. Human beings act on this awareness to expand this freedom. Thus, communism, as the complete realization of social freedom, is intrinsically related to the historical process of increasing human awareness of its conditions.

A problem remains, however, with the discussion of historical development in the Grundrisse. Marx does not specify the means by which human beings achieve their growing awareness of the constraints on their freedom. His discussion suggests that this growing consciousness is a direct result of changes in the condition of labor, of the growing emancipation of labor from its dependence on "preconditions." The phrases "preconditions of labor" and "presuppositions of labor" appear frequently in the pages of the Grundrisse. Marx includes among the preconditions of labor both natural and social factors: scarcity and specific relations of society. As productivity expands, human beings become less dependent on these preconditions in the reproduction of society. As labor's capacities develop, human beings are able to control more of their circumstances.

Yet Marx never explains why the ability to master nature should also be the ability to consciously exercise control over social relations; why the knowledge used in production should also be the knowledge which allows human beings to regulate their social life under conditions which expand their collective freedom. The Grundrisse never provides an explanation for

the process it depicts. I will argue in this thesis that the growing awareness of the social constraints on human freedom is achieved not through labor, but through the interaction and contestation of social classes over the distribution of obligations and rewards in society. Nevertheless, while Marx's discussion of historical development in the Grundrisse is incomplete, it provides evidence that another development, besides the increase of productive power, is important for the argument of historical materialism: the growth of human knowledge about the conditions for social freedom.

### 3.2 The German Ideology.

#### i. The premises of history.

The German Ideology is one of the few places where Marx explicitly directs his attention to the materialist conception of history.<sup>3</sup> The project of The German Ideology is to turn to history in order to defeat the philosophical views of the Young Hegelians, as well as Feuerbach and Stirner.<sup>4</sup> Marx attacks the Young Hegelians as idealists who believe that social misery is caused by false consciousness, that is, by the errors or illusions that people have about themselves, their relation to the world, and other human beings. For the Young Hegelians, the paradigm of false consciousness is religion. Religion is the "self-alienation of man, the division of man from himself."<sup>5</sup> The criticism of religion will thus free people of the misery which accompanies their religious illusions. The mistake of these "ideologists" <sup>6</sup> according to Marx, is that they mistake "conceptions, thoughts, ideas" as "the real chains of men."<sup>7</sup>

Marx rejects the view that social misery is caused by false

consciousness. He views false consciousness as the "phenomenon," but not the basis of social misery. In order to understand social misery -- in fact, to understand why there are illusions -- we have to look to the material circumstances in which individuals actually live. Marx begins The German Ideology with "premises" which, he claims, can be "empirically verified."<sup>8</sup> To establish their validity all that is required is to look to experience. All the "proof" they require is furnished by the individual "as he comes and goes, eats, drinks and clothes himself."<sup>9</sup> Marx wants to use these premises in an argument which will undercut the views of the Young Hegelians. Marx intends to show that the social misery people suffer has been historically (and not ideologically) produced.

The argument of The German Ideology relies on three premises:

1. Human beings have "natural" needs directed to individual preservation. As Marx argues, "men must be in a position to live in order to 'make history'."<sup>10</sup> To understand the composition of these natural needs we need to know certain facts: the relationship between individuals and nature, what the physical organization of these individuals is and what they need to survive. These needs are defined relative to the functioning of an organism.<sup>11</sup> As organisms, the basic needs of individuals are physical needs. Marx writes, "Life involves before all else eating and drinking, a habituation, clothing and many other things."<sup>12</sup> "Natural needs" are thus biological in origin and directed initially to the maintenance of the original conditions of life, to self-preservation. Such needs are shared between human beings and animals; they themselves do not yield history.

2. In order to satisfy their natural needs (premise 1), individuals must

produce and this production produces new needs. These needs are different than those which are directed to physical survival. These new needs depend on the exercise of developed capacities. Thus, while "hunger is hunger," as Marx writes in the Grundrisse, the hunger "gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger than that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail and tooth."<sup>13</sup> The "need" for cooked meat, then, is no longer a need understood relative to the survival of human beings. Rather these needs are mediated by "consciousness instead of instinct."<sup>14</sup> What constitutes a need will vary from one society to another, as the case of hunger illustrated above. The new needs contain a "historical" element: as a society's productive powers expand, so does its conception of "need." While Marx intends these new needs to be something other than mere desires, they are clearly different than the "natural needs" of the first premise.<sup>15</sup>

3. Finally, there are "social relationships."<sup>16</sup> History depends on a continuity in human existence; there must be propagation. This requires a social relationship: the family. At first, this is the only social relationship. Later, under the pressure of new needs (brought on in part by "rising population")<sup>17</sup> new social relationships arise.

While Marx refers to these as "premises," it should be clear that they are not simple assumptions. There is a lot built into these premises, much of which requires justification on its own. In particular, the second premise, the creation of new needs in production is not at all simple or obvious. Marx does not elaborate on precisely how the new needs are generated through production. He simply presents this as a "premise" about history in his

argument against the Young Hegelians. But built into this premise is a view about human labor in general and not simply as it is manifested in a particular society. Marx is arguing that, in all societies, production leads to new needs.

The premises of history are the preconditions for history's existence. Yet, while as such they state the conditions without which there is no history, they do not tell us much about what the movement of history will look like. What form will the continuous generation of needs take? Furthermore, how does Marx derive from the premises of history his understanding of the character of historical change: why must the social forms in which needs are satisfied (premise 3) undergo "periodically recurring revolutionary convulsions?"<sup>18</sup> How is the expansion of new needs linked to the process of historical development?

These are questions which The German Ideology must answer if it is to accomplish its self-proclaimed task of debunking the views of the Young Hegelians. Thus far, Marx has only given the premises of his argument about historical development, i.e., that human beings must satisfy their needs in a social framework, and that in satisfying these needs through production they create new needs (of a different kind). Marx now must show that through this activity of production which even the Young Hegelians will acknowledge, social relations change. Marx must demonstrate that this production of new needs and not "criticism is the driving force of history."<sup>19</sup> That is, Marx must show that the premises of history yield an argument which is not compatible with the contention of the Young Hegelians that the criticism of "conceptions, thoughts, ideas, the products of consciousness"<sup>20</sup>

are the source of social misery. Marx must use the premises of history in an argument about historical development.

ii. historical development.

The German Ideology is a frustrating work to read. In Part One of this work, Marx makes no less than three attempts to move from the premises of history to his actual conception of history.<sup>21</sup> All three attempts break off before an explicit link is made. Nowhere is there a clear elaboration of the precise nature of their relationship. In the first two attempts, Marx focuses on the division of labor; in the third, on the development of the forces of production.

Marx's effort to develop the consequences of the premises of history is, at first, constructed entirely in terms of the category of the "division of labor." He gives no consistent meaning, however, to this term. At times, he uses it to refer to the fact that in order to meet their needs individuals cooperate in each performing a separate productive task, e.g., bricklaying, cooking, hunting. (In Capital, Marx refers to this as the "social division of labor.") At other times, it signifies the division of certain specific tasks among different individuals, as in a modern assembly line).<sup>22</sup> (Marx refers to this in Capital as the "technical division of labor.") At other times, Marx identifies the division of labor with ownership relations:

The various stages of development are just so many different forms of ownership; i.e., the existing stage in the division of labor determines also the relation of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument and product of labor. <sup>23</sup>

The entire discussion of what comprises the division of labor is confused.



This makes the task of elucidating its link with the premises of history an arduous one. In what follows, I will use the term "division of labor" as referring to both the social division of labor and the technical division of labor, unless otherwise noted. I will not identify it with ownership relations.<sup>24</sup>

Marx uses the division of labor as the category according to which social forms are both individuated and ranked in a sequential ordering. He distinguishes five forms of social ownership: tribal, communal or state, feudal, capitalist and communist, each of which is identified as a "stage of development in the division of labor."<sup>25</sup>

The division of labor plays an important role in Marx's argument against the Young Hegelians. To refute the Young Hegelians, Marx needs to show (1) how the division of labor relates to the premises of history, (2) why it tends to grow and, (3) how -- as a consequence of its "natural" course of development, it produces social misery and conflict.

Marx locates the earliest stages of the division of labor in the "natural," physical inequality of men and women. This natural inequality, however, is not very significant. Few tasks are divided. However, the division of labor receives an important impetus from the forces of production. Marx argues that changes in the division of labor are the immediate consequence of changes in the productive forces:

Each new productive force, insofar as it is not merely a quantitative extension of productive forces already known, causes a further development of the division of labor.<sup>26</sup>

One crucial fact to be explained, therefore, is why the productive forces grow. Marx needs to provide an argument for why there is productive

growth, to specify the relationship of that growth to the division of labor and social forms, and to address the role of classes in social change.

Earlier we saw that Marx holds that new needs are always created in production. If the satisfaction of new needs could be linked directly to expanding productive power, then the production of new needs itself would cause productive growth. One manner of forging this link is through Cohen's device which was discussed in Chapter I, individual rationality. The fact that people are rational and that they desire to avoid work experienced as burdensome will lead them to satisfy their increasing wants through increasing their powers. Alternatively, it could be argued:

1. In producing to satisfy their needs, human beings develop their capacities, including their cognitive capacities.
2. Production leads to new needs whose satisfaction requires an even further development of capacities.
3. Other things being equal, human beings prefer to exercise their developed capacities, and this preference increases the more that the capacities are realized.<sup>40</sup>
4. The exercise of their developed capacities requires (a) less time spent in mundane labor for the satisfaction of their natural needs and (b) innovations in the labor process which make labor an arena of exercised capacities.

Neither argument is made explicitly in The German Ideology and the move to an ahistorical factor, such as individual rationality, to provide the motor for productive growth is only implicit in Marx's text. Yet, given the

way in which Marx sets up the relationship between the division of labor, the productive forces, and the premises of history, this way of closing the gaps is a plausible solution. It allows Marx to argue from the fact that human beings produce new needs in a social context to the growth of the productive forces and the division of labor, and to the alteration of the social context itself.

Of course, Marx does not always argue in a manner which is consistent with this conclusion. There are indications that Marx recognized that historical development is not always linear and that social forms can diverge from the logic of development implied by the expansion of the productive forces. Marx thinks, for example, that feudalism was founded on a destruction of productive forces of its historical predecessor, the slave mode of production. The conquest of the declining Roman empire by barbarian tribes, destroyed a number of productive forces and decreased trade and industry.<sup>28</sup> At times, Marx explicitly denies that any premises about human nature play a role in his argument about historical development. That development is

nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which exploits the materials, the capital funds and thus... continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances, and on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity. This can be speculatively distorted so that later history is made the goal of earlier history.<sup>29</sup>

There are however significant problems with Marx's attempt to explain productive growth in terms of the inheritance of the productive forces. In the passage just cited, for example, it is not clear what the relationship is between the inheritance of productive forces and their "modification," i.e.,

the expansion of the productive forces. The simple fact that a society inherits a set of productive forces does not imply that these forces will be expanded. In order to sustain that inference, a mechanism of growth must be specified. This makes it more likely that Marx does in fact rely on an argument similar to Cohen's for linking the premises of history to the tendency for the productive forces to grow. As needs increase, productivity must also increase or men would have to engage in doing what they would rather not so: perform burdensome labor.

Once the division of labor is established, the community of interests which characterized primitive societies shatters, and human beings lose control of the conditions of their social cooperation. The division of labor constitutes, in Marx's view, the primary source of conflict, leading to private property,<sup>30</sup> the opposition between individual and general interests,<sup>31</sup> and inequality.<sup>32</sup> The division of labor becomes an independent power dominating individuals.

Marx's view of social change follows from his view of this process of growing productive power. The level of productive development determines the social form in which the individuals live. Every level of productive development correlates with a specific social form. Each social form is, moreover, compatible with only a fixed amount of productive growth. As the forces of production grow, they reach a point at which they are no longer compatible with the existing social form.<sup>33</sup> This is the conjuncture of revolutionary transformation. Contrary to the Young Hegelians, change is only possible to the extent that it is permitted by the level of development of the productive forces: "slavery cannot be abolished without the steam

engine and the mule and the spinning jenny..."<sup>34</sup>

Classes play a subordinate role in The German Ideology's explanation for historical change. The success or failure of class struggle in producing social transformation is dependent on the requisites of productive development which

decide also whether or not the periodically recurring revolutionary convulsions will be strong enough to overthrow the basis of the entire existing system.<sup>35</sup>

There is no indication in The German Ideology as to how classes and their characteristic interests relate to the growth of the forces of production and there is no independent treatment of class struggles as such. Instead, the logic of class action is simply secured to that of productive development and Marx proclaims that: "'all collisions in history have their origin...in the contradiction between the productive forces and the form of intercourse."<sup>36</sup>

To summarize, in his polemic against the Young Hegelians, Marx has contended that not ideas but material conditions are the source of human misery. Changing material conditions are associated with a growing division of labor which shatters the social community into separate interests. These changes are a "natural" outgrowth; they do not result from the intentional actions of individuals. However, while this "natural" process of the growing division of labor creates social misery, it is also necessary if human beings are to achieve social freedom.

Marx refers to the development of the forces of production as the process through which man transcends his "embeddedness in nature" (Naturwuchsigkeit, formed from the words Natur, nature, and wachsen, to

grow, meaning literally that growing out of nature).<sup>37</sup> Human beings are "embedded in nature" insofar as they are subordinated to circumstances which they cannot control. By increasing their powers of production, individuals create the material foundation on which to reappropriate control over their social life. Without this foundation it would not be possible, Marx believes, for society to function and reproduce itself under conditions of collective freedom. Furthermore, without this foundation, communism would be no more than another utopian fantasy, a social ideal which might not even be possible. Marx wants to show that communism is the result of a "real historical movement."

However, in depicting the process of man's emergence from embeddedness solely in terms of the mastery of nature through an increasing division of labor, Marx can not successfully completed this self-appointed task. The scheme of The German Ideology, while partially adequate, cannot account for the transition to communism precisely because communism requires a break with the entire process of historical development. As we shall see below, communism requires that people master not only nature but their own social relations.

### iii. Communism: the endpoint of history.

Marx conceives of communism as the endpoint of the historical process. It marks the culmination of man's battle to master nature and an end to class divisions in society. Communism is a society in which the conditions of production are subjected to "the power of the united individuals"<sup>38</sup> (i.e., in which the producers democratically administer all

social institutions in accordance with their needs). Individuals exercise collective control over their cooperative activities:

a mass of instruments of production must be made subject to each individual, and property to all. Modern universal intercourse can be controlled by individuals, therefore, only when controlled by all.<sup>39</sup>

The control and mastery of their activities requires that the conditions which caused those activities to govern individuals are abolished, i.e., that private ownership of the means of production be ended. The system of private ownership subjects the interests of one class of persons to those of another. Whereas all previous social transformations were "restricted"<sup>40</sup> insofar as particular social classes appropriated their gains, communism ends the private appropriation of productive power.

Marx thus sees the goal of communism as the abolition of private property. And, as I noted earlier, Marx identifies the division of labor with the existence of private property. He writes,

Division of labor and private property are, moreover, 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 the activity.<sup>41</sup>

It follows from Marx's equation of the division of labor with private property that, in order to abolish the latter, communism must also abolish the former. Indeed, Marx appears to conceive of communism as a society without a division of labor. He writes,

As soon as the distribution of labor comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. ...while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive branch 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...<sup>42</sup>

Cohen draws on the above passage as evidence that under communism the social structure would subside: "The liberated association of individuals is less a new social structure than freedom from social structure."<sup>43</sup> He based this conclusion on his reading that Marx identified the abolition of the division of labor with the supersession of social structure.

The passage is certainly one of Marx's most utopian characterizations of communist society. There is no reason, however, to share Cohen's extreme interpretation of communism as a society lacking all social form. Earlier in the above passage, Marx draws a more subtle distinction between a "voluntary" and a "natural"<sup>44</sup> division of labor, implying that the latter, but not the former, is to be abolished.

Yet even if Marx does not believe that all social structure ends with communism, he does not explicitly identify freedom with the achievement of control over social structure. Rather, individuals are free insofar as they are able to develop their distinctive human capacities unconstrained by the division of labor. Louis Dumont, for example, argues that Marx is "essentially individualist."<sup>45</sup>

It is hard to give an answer to this charge solely on the basis of The German Ideology. It is true that Marx here portrays communism as a society in which each individual can fully realize his own powers. In contrast to the earlier 1844 Manuscripts in which Marx spoke of individuals as "species beings,"<sup>46</sup> The German Ideology does not make mention of a natural desire for social association. On the other hand, Marx does argue that in communism "there is a necessary solidarity of the free development for all."<sup>47</sup> The value of community is probably much stronger for Marx than



his explicit comments would indicate. What is important to note, however, is that nowhere in The German Ideology does Marx make explicit the social nature of mankind or the institutions which would express this nature. It is elsewhere, particularly to the Grundrisse that we must turn to see Marx's vision of communism elaborated.

I now move from consideration of the goal, communism, to Marx's account of the process which brings it about. Marx's approach to the establishment of communism is self-consciously novel. For Marx, unlike the utopians whose morals and politics he rejects, communism emerges on the basis of a "real movement" and not an ideal:

Communism is not for us 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.<sup>48</sup>

What precipitates the destruction of capitalism and the emergence of communism? The problem for the conception of historical development on which Marx relies is to provide an account for the possibility in history of a process which overturns the domination of human beings by the division of labor.

We have seen that the motor of historical development is the productive forces. Social forms change in order to facilitate the growth of these forces. Communism presupposes a massive growth of productive power "without which want is merely made general, and with destitution the...old filthy business would be reproduced."<sup>49</sup> In The German Ideology Marx does not tell us exactly how the productive forces come into conflict with the capitalist organization of production. There is no theory of

capitalist crises of overproduction which cause unemployment, war and devastation similar to that which Marx provides in The Communist Manifesto.<sup>50</sup>

Instead, Marx focuses on a particular creation of the capitalist division of labor: a mass of propertyless "world-individuals."<sup>51</sup> These "world-individuals" are created by: (1) the rise of a global market which dissolves all their local ties and circumstances and (2) the dominance of machine production which levels the skill and wage differentials between workers, robbing them of their particular characteristics. Marx refers to the workers created by modern industry as "abstract" individuals.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Marx derives the existence of the "agents" of revolution -- the proletariat -- from a materialist argument. It is the existence of these individuals with no particular interests to advance, i.e., no property, which makes communism a possibility.

Marx, however, conceives of communism not merely as a possibility, but as the product of a "real movement." He must therefore give some account of how and why the proletariat carries out a revolution and why such a revolution will have as its result the establishment of communism. In The German Ideology, Marx's attempt to provide such an account is, at best, partial.

Marx links the fate of human liberation to the fate of the division of labor. Yet, to the extent that the proletariat is simply propelled forward by the growth of the productive forces and the division of labor, Marx cannot deduce communism as the outcome of this process. Communism, it will be recalled, requires a severe attenuation of, if not an end to, the division of

labor. How can the division of labor produce a movement which overturns the division of labor? Here, Marx's view runs into the difficulties we saw earlier in our treatment of Cohen's version of historical materialism: it is not clear why the division of labor should lead to communism as opposed to some other social form functionally equivalent for productive development.

In fact, much of Marx's discussion in The German Ideology emphasizes the importance of changes in proletarian consciousness. Workers must reappropriate their self-activity, labor, which under capitalism "only sustains their life by stunting it."<sup>53</sup> Thus, Marx writes of the proletariat that: "In order to assert themselves as individuals they must overthrow the state."<sup>54</sup> Yet Marx nowhere discusses how workers gain an awareness of the relationship between communism and their self-activity. The explicit means by which this awareness is achieved in The Communist Manifesto -- class struggle and political action -- are not discussed.

Marx constantly emphasizes the fact that through most of history human beings are deluded about the nature of their social institutions, as well as about their own powers. Their ideas about themselves are, for the most part, derived from the interests of the ruling class.<sup>55</sup> The Young Hegelians are themselves guilty of inverting being and consciousness, of turning everything upside down. And, under capitalism, everything appears upside down; workers are ruled by the products of their labor. Capitalist production conceals the role of human beings in the production process. How, then, are workers to regain control of their products, a process which requires, in part, the shattering of their delusions? Marx's materialist conception of consciousness does not take us very far in answering these

questions. In particular, if proletarian consciousness is supposed to result from the division of labor, isn't "mass pin-headism" a more likely result than communist consciousness? Marx seems dissatisfied with his own "deduction" of communism from proletarian consciousness, for the final argument for communism in The German Ideology is that it is the only way in which workers can "safeguard their very existence."<sup>56</sup>

Marx's attempt to replace the criticism of the Young Hegelians with a "real movement" in material conditions does not, therefore, succeed. Marx does not link the development of man's material powers of production to the overturning of social domination achieved by communism. In particular, he does not show why the workers' ability to act in accordance with the requisites of productive growth should result in their ability to achieve social freedom. An account must be given of this ability to achieve social freedom if we are to understand why communism, and not some other social form equally functional for productive growth, is the result of historical development.

### 3.3 The Grundrisse.

The Grundrisse was written after Marx had immersed himself in the study of political economy. The project of Marx's critique of political economy, his intention to "reveal the economic laws of motion of modern society,"<sup>57</sup> can be seen as an attempt to answer the unresolved question of The German Ideology: what is the historical process which leads to proletarian revolutionary action?

In the Grundrisse, Marx picks up many of the themes of The German

Ideology. Here too he attempts to clarify his understanding of the historical process. The Grundrisse, however, also treats issues and themes which were neglected in The German Ideology. In the first place, Marx now reflects on the role of his own theory in the historical process, purporting to explain how it was possible for "Marxism" to arise when it did. In the second place, Marx integrates his discussion of history with a detailed analysis of the capitalist labor process. Finally, and most significantly, Marx characterizes successive social forms in terms of the degree to which their structure institutionalizes certain capacities, central of which is the capacity of human beings to act autonomously.<sup>58</sup>

In The German Ideology labor was seen primarily as a vehicle for man's struggle with nature. While new needs were created through production, the process by which these needs were satisfied was connected to a technical rationality which continually expanded the division of labor. Labor was portrayed as a process involving expanding productivity. In the Grundrisse, however, labor is depicted as the process through which human beings not only gain control over nature, but also separate themselves from their "embeddedness" in their given conditions. Their given conditions include the form of their social relations "inherited" from the past. Human beings gain an increasing awareness of the constraints imposed on them by these relations. They come to recognize these constraints as "improper." Human beings thus create, in history, the conditions for their social freedom.

#### i. The movement of history.

The Grundrisse begins, like The German Ideology, with a discussion of

the "premises of history" which Marx now refers to as the conditions of "production in general":

There are characteristics which all stages of production have in common and which are established as general ones by the mind; but the so-called general pre-conditions of all production are nothing more than these abstract moments with which no real historical stage of production can be grasped.<sup>59</sup>

"Production in general" is a logical presupposition, specifying the features which are necessary in order to conceive of production at all. These features are abstract and Marx's interest in setting them out is not to describe any actually existing society but to use them to distinguish what is common to all social forms from what is different in order to see in virtue of what features social forms develop. Historical development in the Grundrisse is portrayed not so much in terms of a growing division of labor but as a process by which human beings separate themselves from their "embeddedness" in nature.<sup>60</sup>

In certain respects, this process of human separation from nature resembles Marx's discussion in The German Ideology. A key component of this process of growing independence from nature is the creation of new needs. I quoted earlier from the following passage in the Grundrisse:

Hunger is hunger, but the hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail and tooth. Production thus produces not only the object, but also the manner of consumption; not only objectively, but subjectively. Production thus creates the consumer.<sup>61</sup>

According to this passage, production creates not only the object, but also the manner of consumption. Consumption becomes a conscious, as opposed to an instinctive activity. The relationship of individuals to their needs becomes a conscious one. Individuals increasingly create their own "needs,"

independently of their natural needs.

The Grundrisse applies this idea of increasing consciousness independent of nature, not only to needs but to the social relations of production. As opposed to accepting these relations as merely given, human beings develop an ability to critically reflect on them. Marx describes this ability as originating in the relationship between labor and its natural conditions. Thus, he writes that in societies in which the productivity of labor is scarcely developed,

the individual related simply to the objective conditions of labor as being his; related to them as the inorganic nature of his subjectivity, in which the latter realizes itself.<sup>62</sup>

In these societies, the relations within which the individuals stand appear as natural, as relations pre-given to individuals and not created by them.

Labor is not developed enough to subjugate nature. The aim of production in these societies is always the reproduction of the individual within his given relationship to the community. These societies are, therefore, traditional.

The relationship of labor to its material conditions thus has consequences for the kind of relationship agents have to their society. As human beings develop their productivity, and hence their ability to subjugate nature, they no longer need to relate to nature in a traditional manner. According to the Grundrisse, this results in increasing awareness, which changes their relationship to society as well. Gradually, in history, human beings emerge from their embeddedness in the conditions which they have inherited from the past, and themselves begin to construct and take control of their social relations themselves.

The Grundrisse distinguishes six major modes of production<sup>63</sup> and two

"intermediary" modes. The six major modes of production are: (1) primitive communal production based on the tribe or clan; (2) the Asiatic mode of production; (3) the ancient (slave) mode of production; (4) the feudal mode of production; (5) the capitalist mode of production; and, finally (6) communism. In addition, two intermediary modes, the Slavonic and the Germanic, are inserted between the ancient and the feudal modes. This particular historical typology marks a change from Marx's previous ones in two respects: it incorporates an Asiatic mode of production and it allows for alternative routes of development issuing out of primitive communal production.

Marx discusses three routes out of the primitive life of communal nomadic tribes:

1. The Asiatic mode of production is described by Marx as the route least susceptible to further historical evolution. It is characterized by direct communal property, in which an individual cannot own property in separation from the community. There is no individual property, but only individual possession<sup>64</sup> i.e., there is individual possession of land which is owned by the state. Marx characterizes the Asiatic community as "a substance of which the individuals are accidents";<sup>65</sup> individuals have identity only as members of the community. There is, accordingly, no personal freedom, no separation of the individual from his social conditions: "The fundamental principle of the Asiatic form is that the individual does not become independent of the community."<sup>66</sup>

2. The ancient mode of production, by contrast, appears as a "more dynamic" form of historical life. In this mode of production, some



individuals do own property, which is a precondition for membership in the community; only citizens can be property owners. There is individual freedom, but only for the property owning citizens. Furthermore, there is a direct appropriation of the labor of one part of society by another in the form of slavery.

3. The Germanic mode is a "mixed mode" in which individual and communal property coexist. Individual property, however, predominates, based on the separate household. Communal life exists only for the purpose of securing common aims -- for example, for conducting wars, settlement of legal disputes, etc.<sup>67</sup>

What is interesting about the presentation of these three modes in the Grundrisse is that they are presented as if they are successive historical stages of development.<sup>68</sup> This, however, cannot be a claim about their chronological order of appearance, as all three modes of production -- Asiatic, Germanic and ancient -- coexist historically, and the Asiatic mode continues to exist long after the other modes of production have been transformed. Nor does Marx indicate that these three forms can be ranked according to the level of surplus they produce. They must therefore be ranked in accordance with another developmental logic, not identical to the growing division of labor: a logic of increasing social freedom. Each social form is depicted as a distinct stage in the development of social freedom. In the Asiatic mode, no one is free; in the ancient mode only the non-slave citizens are free (and birth and other accidental factors determine whether or not an individual will be free); in the Germanic mode, all are (somewhat) free, circumscribed by their narrow localistic social relations based on

traditions.<sup>69</sup> It is important that Marx does not distinguish these modes of production in terms of their level of productivity.

With feudalism, social relations are characterized as relations of personal dependence. Feudal social relations are represented by Marx as an advance over its historical predecessors. Individuals are no longer treated as slaves, as totally inorganic conditions of production. There is a mutual, but unequal, dependence of serfs and lords, vassals and suzerains, laymen and clerics.<sup>70</sup> All social relations assume the form of relations between individuals, who are seen as the bearers of obligations and rights. (These, however, are still tied to their specific social positions: a serf's obligation to his lord is represented by the corvee, the lord's obligation to the peasant is protection.) Production is carried out in a traditional manner: "the chief objective conditions of labor does not appear as a product of labor, but is already there as nature."<sup>71</sup> These relations appear, that is, also as given, and not as the product of human activity (which is in reality continually changing them, using them as raw material for its own ends).

The complete differentiation between labor and its "preconditions," its natural and social circumstances, is the historical innovation of capitalism. "For the first time nature becomes purely an object for mankind."<sup>72</sup> Human beings gain the ability to confront and subjugate nature with no other presuppositions than their own needs. How does capitalism accomplish this?

First, capitalism alienates labor from the material conditions of production. Workers do not own any means of production. They are not tied to any specific job or role.

The worker is thereby formally positioned as a person, who is something

apart from his labor, and who alienates his life-expression only as a means towards his own life.<sup>73</sup>

Whereas in the past, the goal of production was the reproduction of the laborer in terms of a traditional role, capitalism overturns these traditions in its drive to expand surplus value. Every "natural" limit to the full expression of labor's productive capacities appear as obstacles to be overcome. Thus, while in pre-capitalist societies labor was "embedded," i.e., dependent upon natural conditions, under capitalism, labor dominates nature.

Second, capitalism alters the form of social relations. It develops the universality of human capacities by socializing and concentrating the means of production. Machine production and factories increase the social combination of the workers.

Furthermore, a worker in capitalist society has achieved a degree of freedom which was impossible for the slave or serf. Workers have formal control over their capacities and are reciprocally recognized by others as having such control, simply through the process of capitalist exchange. The formal freedom which workers have represents an advance over that held by slaves (none) and serfs (some). Thus Marx writes,

The first presupposition (of capitalist production) is that the relation of slavery and serfdom have been suspended. Living labor belongs to itself, and has disposition over the expenditure of its forces, through exchange...The totality of the free worker's labor capacity appears to him as his property, as one of his moments, over which he, as subject, exercises domination, and which he maintains by expending it.<sup>74</sup>

Capitalism thus is characterized by: (1) a labor which is universal and generic, capable of being directed to any activity, (2) the material prerequisites for the break by human beings from dependence on nature

(through a massive increase in the productivity of labor) and (3) a structure of universal social relations constituted on a basis of formal equality. At the same time, the freedom which capitalist social structure institutionalizes is only formal freedom; in reality, the interests of the working class remain subordinated to those of the capitalist class. If, however, individuals have not yet gained control over their social relations, they have established the objective prerequisites. Capitalist labor, Marx tells us, is "the most extreme form of alienation," but it also marks a turning point; it

already contains in itself, in a still only inverted form, turned on its head, the dissolution of all limited presuppositions of production.<sup>75</sup>

The development of machinery increases abundance and decreases the amount of socially necessary labor time. It also promotes interdependence among people by linking them together through a world market. It does so, however, in a form dominated by capital. Production is expanded not to satisfy the needs and desires of the workers, but to augment surplus value. All that is required to overturn this system, however, is for the working class to recognize the whole system of capital as their own product.

Marx depicts the process of historical development in terms of the growing emergence of human beings from their "presuppositions." This process is discussed primarily in terms of a sequence of distinct stages of social organization which embody increasing degrees of social freedom. Marx does not explicitly characterize these stages as products of the level of the productive forces. In fact, as I noted, he openly describes a part of this sequence for which productivity is not the standard of ranking; his

discussion of the Asiatic, the Ancient and the Germanic modes of production. Each social epoch is depicted as embodying a greater degree of freedom than its predecessor.

Marx's discussion, furthermore, depicts a process of growing human awareness about the constraints imposed on individuals by social relations based on domination: labor's recognition that its "separation from the conditions of its realization is improper." How does Marx explain how human beings gain this awareness?

Like The German Ideology, the Grundrisse has little to say about the role of social agents in bringing about changes in social forms. Marx portrays the changing structural characteristics of these forms, but without detailing precisely how the changes come about. How do human beings learn what social forms are optimal for the realization of their social freedom at given stages of their development?

By not explaining the mechanisms through which this process is carried forward, it might seem that the Grundrisse adds little to the discussion already given in The German Ideology. Yet, while it is true that the Grundrisse is continuous with Marx's earlier work, it is also marked by an important difference.

On the one hand, the Grundrisse does not repudiate the materialist project: to show that "empirical" conditions and not "consciousness" are the primary constraint on the form taken by social life. While for The German Ideology the historical process is one of increasing efficiency which promotes the expansion of the productive forces and the division of labor, the Grundrisse calls attention to labor's emergence from its dependence on

its "preconditions." Both the Grundrisse and The German Ideology root historical development in a process which is identified with labor. It is through labor that human beings create the pre-requisites for communism. Labor is thus the foundation for the process each work treats. By rooting his analysis in labor, Marx obscures the difference between the knowledge which is gained in labor and production, and that which is needed for social freedom. Social freedom requires knowledge of the appropriate distribution of obligations and rewards among the different members of society. This is not knowledge gained in labor.<sup>76</sup>

On the other hand, the Grundrisse does call attention to the importance of the recognition by social agents of the constraints on human freedom, as integral to historical development. This is the strand in Marx's work which I want to focus on. But rather than seeing it as the result of the relationship between labor and its given conditions, I will argue that this knowledge develops in social interactions, in class struggles over the appropriate form of social cooperation.

## ii. The transition to Communism.

Marx's vision of communism has also changed from that given in The German Ideology. In the first place, ending private property is no longer presented as requiring the complete, or nearly complete, end of the division of labor. Differentiation of social functions will remain. Instead, the individual in communist society no longer performs labor as an appendage to machinery, but relates to production as an independent and conscious agent:

The human being comes to relate more as a watchman and regulator to

the production process...steps to the side of the production process, instead of being its chief actor. In this transformation, it is neither the direct human labor he himself performs, nor the time during which he works, but rather the appropriation of his own general productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence in a social body; it is, in a word, the development of the social individual as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth.<sup>77</sup>

In the second place, in the Grundrisse Marx explicitly recognizes the relationship between the the institutional structure of communism and the achievement of human freedom. Communism is the form of social order that encourages the autonomy of the members of that order. Autonomy is the exercise of control by an agent over his or her actions and the circumstances of these actions. Autonomy requires that an agent have the capacity to master his or her desires, actions, etc. The idea here is that to act freely or autonomously is not simply to act on the basis of preferences which are adopted because of one's social position or individual natural endowments. Instead, the preferences are chosen as the product of critical reflection.

The idea of autonomy has often been criticized because of its apparent reliance on a mysterious inward capacity of the will. Autonomous action seems to require that an agent choose his or her ends independently of any empirical conditions. The objection to this conception of autonomy has been well put by Thomas Nagel:

I wish to act not only in light of the external circumstances facing me and the possibilities that they leave open, but in light of the internal circumstances as well: my desires, beliefs, feelings, and impulses. I wish to be able to subject my motives, principles, and habits to critical examination, so that nothing moves me to action against my agreeing to it. In this way, the setting against which I act is gradually enlarged and extended inward, till it includes more and more of myself, considered as one of the contents of the world.

In its earlier stages the process does genuinely seem to increase freedom by making self-knowledge and objectivity part of the basis of action. But the danger is obvious. The more completely the self is swallowed up in the circumstances of action, the less I have to act with. I cannot get completely outside myself.<sup>78</sup>

Marx does not have a solution to the metaphysical dilemma about free action which Nagel poses. But Marx characterizes autonomy in a way which allows him to avoid Nagel's objection. Rather than viewing autonomy as the freedom to act in a manner which is causally undetermined, Marx views autonomy as the collective exercise of control over social institutions and practices, central of which is the system of production.

To bring out what is distinctive about Marx's characterization of autonomy, it may be useful to contrast it with a second view found, among other places, in the writings of John Stuart Mill. For Mill, autonomy consists in the exercise of independent judgement by a rational agent. Thus, he writes:

The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it.<sup>79</sup>

According to Mill, communism is preferable to capitalism if it is the case that communism's institutional structure will better promote "human liberty and spontaneity."<sup>80</sup> Mill holds that a social form is justified to the extent that it promotes and secures the independence and freedom of action of its individual members. These individuals, however, might choose to pursue artistic or hedonistic interests removed from the everyday concerns of collective life. They might, in point of fact, view with apprehension the idea that they should devote a portion of their time to activities which are required for collective self-government. While



collective self-government might be a means to autonomy, it is not, according to Mill, what autonomy consists in.

There are aspects of the Millian view in the Grundrisse. Marx describes communism as a society in which individuals realize their distinctively human capacities in pursuits which take place outside of the realm of material production. Beyond this production, Marx claims, "begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom..."<sup>81</sup> Marx's adherence to the Millian view, however, poses a dilemma: individuals exercising their autonomy may wish to opt out of collective self-government. They may cede control over production to managers, in order to be left alone to carry out their private projects. They may allow despotism to flourish in aspects of social life, so long as they are free to pursue their own interests.

Without wishing to dismiss the possibility of a conflict between individual self-development and collective self-government, (in reality and in Marx's thought), I want to suggest some reasons why Marx did not address this dilemma. For Marx, unlike Mill, autonomy is identified with collective self-government. In this consideration, it is important that Marx premises the existence of social interdependence and holds that individuals have capacities and desires which can only be expressed socially. They desire such goods as friendship, mutual recognition and the expression of their capacities in labor. Most importantly, Marx assumes that individuals desire to be free under the conditions of their social interdependence. That is, they want to regard the practices and institutions of their society as conforming to their own judgements about what is right, and not simply as

an external constraint. I will develop this latter point in Chapter four. In the remainder of this chapter I want to consider the relationship between labor and autonomy which is emphasized in the Grundrisse.

According to the Grundrisse, communism abolishes the specific features of capitalist production which prevent it from being a sphere of autonomy. Under capitalism:

1. The work process is dominated by machinery and/or by repetitious tasks which can develop few of the workers' capacities. Its organization suppresses the development of intellectual capabilities. Human beings excel only in those functions which they share with machines.

2. Work is organized hierarchically. Neither the production process nor the general circumstances of the work environment are controlled by the worker. On the job, workers are told "exactly what to do and how to do it."<sup>82</sup> In the decision making process -- the process of deciding how the work is to be carried out, what its goals are, and how much is to be produced -- workers have no determining role. Workers merely execute the decisions made by others.

Capitalism thus subjects workers to the undemocratic authority of the planners, as well as the capitalists.

Marx mentions several ways of overcoming these obstacles to autonomy in work. The first is to replace as much of human labor as possible in routine work by machinery; so that the human being comes to "relate more as watchman and regulator to the productive process itself."<sup>83</sup> The second way to promote autonomy in work involves reorganizing the labor

process, so that the activities of labor demand the development of a wider range of capacities (especially intellectual ones). In particular, this means an end to the division between mental labor, the labor of planning, and manual labor, the labor of execution. The justification for these changes clearly rests, on Marx's view, in their relation to autonomy. Routine factory work restricts the ability of individuals to exercise many of the capacities involved in controlling their circumstances, e.g., the capacity to imagine.

Capitalism is characterized by Marx as "personal independence founded on objective dependence."<sup>84</sup> By this he means that while capitalism grants the worker the freedom to sell or withhold his labor power, the worker is objectively forced to sell this labor power in order to gain the means of subsistence. The interests of workers are thus dependent on those of the capitalists. If the interests of capitalists are not satisfied (e.g., there are no profits) then factories close down and the workers own interests are unmet.

The concept of the individual developing all of his capacities is a feature of the Grundrisse, like The German Ideology. "Free individuality" is how Marx refers to the "third stage" of historical development, communist society.<sup>85</sup> However, Marx carefully distinguishes his conception of the developed capacities of the many sided individual through labor from Fourier's idea of labor as "play":

Free time - which is both idle time and time for higher activity - has naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject, and he then enters into the direct production process as this different subject. This process is both discipline, as regards the human being in the process of becoming; and at the same time, practice, experimental science,..as the human being in whose head exists the accumulated knowledge of society.<sup>86</sup>

Rather than envisioning communism as the framework within which each individual fully realizes his own powers in "higher activity," this passage suggests that the realized individual also participates in the collective production process, contributing to a wider aim than he or she could have achieved alone.

In the discussion to this point explicit consideration of the immediate process by which communism is established has been avoided. In The German Ideology Marx tries unsuccessfully to deduce communism from the rise of the "world-individual" and the growth of the division of labor. The Grundrisse, by contrast, focuses on a process of human consciousness emerging from its dependence on inherited conditions. What remains is for individuals to recognize in the structure of universal relations created by capitalism their own product. As Marx writes,

When the limited bourgeois form is peeled away, what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces, etc. created through universal exchange? The full development of human mastery over nature, those of so-called nature as well as of humanity's own nature? The absolute working out of his creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development which makes the totality of development, i.e., the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a predetermined yardstick?<sup>87</sup>

This passage and others in the Grundrisse refer to the image of a "limited form" which must be "peeled away" in order to reveal the reality beneath it. In pre-communist societies, the social life process is cloaked in a social "veil" -- the existence of historically accidental or institutionalized delusions -- which prevents individuals from understanding that the social order is their own creation, and can be changed. According to Marx, this

veil cannot be removed until there is "production by freely associated men and stands under their conscious control."<sup>88</sup> This in turn requires a (1) material foundation, i.e., it must be materially possible for society to function and reproduce itself in this proposed state, and (2) the possibility that conditions of a given social structure can become seen as unacceptable to its members, i.e., that they can criticize the features of domination and dependence which characterize it.

With the growth of material productive power, domination becomes less historically necessary for social reproduction. That is, domination is less essential for society to reproduce itself at higher levels of productive development. This fact, by itself, however, can not explain how domination is overturned. We have seen in our discussions of Wood and Cohen that while material progress may condition the expansion of freedom, it does not determine it. That is, there are material preconditions for freedom -- especially an easing of the grip of nature on human beings -- but materially progress does not necessarily imply an expansion of freedom. To explain the achievement of greater freedom, there must be some other process. The Grundrisse, then, provides evidence that Marx saw a separate process in addition to increasing productive power. This process is manifested in the growing awareness by social agents of the constraints social relations set on their freedom. Marx roots this process in the changes in labor's relations to its "given conditions."

#### 3.4 Conclusion.

I have argued that the Grundrisse presents a more adequate conception of the relationship between the process of history and the endpoint of

history than that offered by The German Ideology. The Grundrisse relates the structure of communism to capacities developing within history, in particular, in the capacity of agents to recognize forms of social domination and to reorganize social life in a direction which diminishes that domination.

The act of recognition is presented in the Grundrisse as occurring in labor, in the relationship of the worker to the conditions of his production. At first, nature is scarcely historically modified and appears as a thoroughly alien power. Gradually, human beings raise themselves up out of their dependence on and domination by things over which they have no control. I have argued that in his discussion Marx does not distinguish the knowledge gained in labor from the knowledge which allows for social freedom. He never explains why the knowledge used to master nature should also be the knowledge needed to regulate human social relations. In fact, the two forms of knowledge are different, with no intrinsic relationship to each other. Increasing productive power makes a form of social domination less necessary, but it does not itself abolish it or produce knowledge about what will replace it.

In this thesis, I will argue that this knowledge arises not in the relationship of labor to its conditions, but within the relationship of classes to one another in society, in class conflicts over the appropriate distribution of rewards and obligations in society. I will defend the idea that human beings "learn" in these struggles about their "true interests," their interests as undistorted by conditions based on social domination. I will argue that autonomy is a "true human interest." My argument will begin with the importance of communism in Marx's thought as the endpoint of the

historical process. Communism represents the highest form of historical development because it institutionalizes the capacity for autonomy. It is in virtue of its relation to autonomy, that communism is better than its predecessors, and not simply because it is more productive. It is also, I will claim, in virtue of this relation that historical materialism predicts that communism will tend to be realized.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. Karl Marx, Grundrisse, (G) (New York, 1973) p. 463.
2. Cf. Karl Marx, The German Ideology, (GI) (New York, 1973) p. 52ff.
3. The others are the Grundrisse, The Communist Manifesto, and the Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy. I focus my attention on The German Ideology and the Grundrisse because in these works Marx self-consciously grapples with the presuppositions of historical materialism, while the other works contain only enigmatic and terse formulations.
4. Marx also makes this charge against Proudhon, whom he accuses of treating problems as if they were attributes of thought and not reality. Cf. Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, (New York, 1973), pp.114-115.
5. Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity (New York, 1957) p. 33.
6. Karl Marx, The German Ideology (GI) p. 39 I consider Marx's use of "ideology" in chapter 5.
7. GI, p. 41.
8. GI, p. 42.
9. GI, p. 58.
10. GI, p. 48.
11. see Raymond Geuss, The Idea of a Critical Theory (Cambridge, England, 1981) p. 95ff. for a useful discussion of the concept of need.
12. GI, p. 48.
13. G, p. 92.
14. GI, p. 51.
15. Jon Elster has argued that the production which Marx identifies as an essential human activity -- including tool-making, tool-using and cooperation -- does not uniquely apply to humans. But this objection misses the point of Marx's focus on production. Human production generates new (non-natural) needs, including needs which depend on developed cognitive capacities which are distinctively human. See



Elster, op. cit., p. 65ff.

16. GI, p. 50
17. GI, p. 42.
18. GI, p. 59.
19. GI, p. 59.
20. GI, p. 41.
21. see GI, pp. 42-45, 48-52, 57-60.
22. For a later, more careful rendering of this distinction, see Capital vol. I, p. 471 ff.
23. GI, p. 93.
24. see G.A. Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense, (Princeton, 1978) for a way of interpreting production relations in non-legal terms. GI, p. 43.
25. GI, p. 43.
26. GI, p. 43.
27. compare this with Rawls' interpretation of the "Aristotelian Principle" in John Rawls, A Theory of Justice, (Cambridge, Ma. 1971) p. 426ff.
28. GI, p. 43. Productive regression can be reconciled with an argument based on technical rationality insofar as the deviations from the expansion of the productive forces are seen as temporary setbacks due to factors such as natural disasters and invasions. see G.A. Cohen, op. cit., p. 142.
29. GI, p. 57.
30. GI, p. 53.
31. GI, p. 53.
32. GI, p. 52.
33. Implicit here is the idea that social forms can accommodate only a limited amount of productive growth.
34. GI, P. 61.
35. GI, p. 59.

36. GI, p. 89.
37. This term is taken from Jeremy Shapiro, The Concept of Embeddedness in Nature, Brandeis University dissertation, 1976.
38. GI, p. 86.
39. GI, p. 93.
40. GI, p. 93.
41. GI, p. 53.
42. GI, p. 53.
43. G.A. Cohen, op. cit., p. 131.
44. GI, p. 53.
45. Louis Dumont, From Mandeville to Marx: The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology, (Chicago, 1977), p. 113.
46. cf. Marx's manuscript, "Alienated Labor" in (ed.) Easton and Guddat, Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, especially p. 293ff.
47. GI, p. 118.
48. GI, p. 56-57.
49. GI, p. 56.
50. cf. (ed) Robert Tucker, The Marx-Engels Reader, (New York, 1978) p. 478.
51. GI, p. 56.
52. GI, p. 92.
53. GI, p. 92.
54. GI, p. 85.
55. GI, p. 64.
56. GI, p. 92.
57. Capital, vol. I, p. 92.

58. Despite the fact that the Grundrisse is the notebooks for Capital, it has received little scholarly attention. Its Hegelian framework and language are intimidating and difficult reading, and the work does not sit well with those who see later Marx as a "scientist." For an interesting exception, which has influenced my own thinking, see Carol Gould, Marx's Social Ontology, (Cambridge, Ma. 1980).
59. Grundrisse, (New York, 1973), p. 88.
60. Naturwuchsigkeit is a term of both The German Ideology and the Grundrisse.
61. Grundrisse (G) p. 92
62. G, p. 485
63. In what follows "mode of production" should for all intents be viewed as synonymous with "social form." See GA Cohen, op cit., p. 79-84, for a discussion of the ambiguities in Marx's use of the term "mode of production."
64. (ed.) Eric Hobsbawm, Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, (New York, 1965), p. 79
65. Ibid., p. 71.
66. Ibid., P. 83.
67. Ibid., p. 80.
68. In the Preface to A Contribution to A Critique of Political Economy, Marx explicitly refers to the "Asiatic, the Ancient..." as a sequence of progressive epochs. see (ed.) R. Tucker, Marx-Engels Reader, (New York, 1978) p. 5.
69. It would be interesting to compare Marx's views here with those of Hegel: in the Oriental world only one is free - the despot; in the Greek world some are free. Only with Christianity do we get the view that man as such is free. see GWF Hegel, The Philosophy of History (New York, 1956), p. 18ff.
70. Capital, vol. I, p. 179.
71. G, p. 485.
72. G, p. 410.
73. G, p. 289.

74. G, p. 465. Compare this with Capital Vol. 1, where Marx writes of the free worker that "he learns to control himself, in contrast to the slave who needs a master."
75. G, p. 515.
76. This is a point on which Marx has been correctly attacked by Habermas. See Knowledge and Human Interests, (Boston, 1971), ch. 2 and 3. I have been greatly influenced by Habermas' writings.
77. G, p. 705.
78. Thomas Nagel, The View From Nowhere, (Oxford, 1986) p. 119.
79. John Stuart Mill, On Liberty in (ed.) Richard Wollheim, Three Essays (Oxford, 1975) p. 18.
80. John Stuart Mill, Principles of Political Economy (London, 1970) p. 360.
81. Capital, Vol. 3, pp 799-800.
82. Harry Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital, (New York, 1973) p. 431.
83. G, p. 705.
84. G, p. 164.
85. G, p. 158.
86. G, p. 711.
87. G, p. 488.
88. Capital, vol. 1, p. 173.

## Chapter Four: Autonomy, Morality and Human Interests

We have always revealed the hard kernel of social inequality and lack of freedom hidden under the sweet shell of formal equality and freedom -- not in order to reject the latter but to spur the working class into not being satisfied with the shell.<sup>1</sup>

### 4.1 Introduction.

According to the Grundrisse, human beings emerge through their historical development to master nature and take control of their social relations. In this work, Marx characterizes successive social forms not only in terms of expanding productive power, but also in terms of the increasing autonomy which is institutionalized in their respective political and social structures. There are two distinct processes -- one which produces material progress and another which produces the expansion of human freedom. I have claimed that the latter process is not determined by the former process.

In this chapter, my aim is to develop further an understanding of this latter process, the growing embodiment of autonomy in social life and then to show how this process relates to the process of productive development. Both of these processes are necessary if we are to reconstruct Marx's argument for why communism results from historical development. In what follows, three major issues will be addressed. The first issue concerns the standing of autonomy as a value. Chapter 2 reviewed Wood's account of autonomy as a "non-moral" value. I argued that Wood's characterization of

autonomy is not helpful in understanding Marx's endorsement of communism in terms of its intrinsic value, its value as an end in itself. In this chapter, I argue that autonomy represents for Marx an objective value, a value which satisfies a true human interest.

The second issue concerns the relationship between autonomy and the moral values which Marx criticizes. Marx does not make explicit his conception of morality, but I will argue that his pronouncements can be understood if the moral standpoint is viewed as an imperfect approximation of true human interests. I will argue that Marx's understanding of morality is similar to his view about religion. Marx contends that religion simultaneously distorts and expresses true human interests: it is both an illusion and the "heart of a heartless world."<sup>2</sup> For Marx, religion is more than a product of "false consciousness": it expresses a genuine human aspiration. Analogously, I will show that Marx thinks that morality has a positive content; it is not simply a ruling class "ideology." The interpretation of Marx's view of morality which I will offer is consistent with the fact that Marx does make comparative assessments about different moral systems. He explicitly prefers some moral systems to others. I will argue that (a) his preferences can be understood in terms of the relationship between respective moral systems and autonomy, and (b) that moral systems evolve in history to represent human interests in an increasingly accurate manner.

The third, and final, issue I will examine concerns Marx's belief that under communism, when the antagonism between particular and general interests has been transcended, morality as a specific form of consciousness

will (like the state)<sup>3</sup> wither away. I will argue that this is not a reasonable doctrine.

#### 4.2 Autonomy as an objective value.

In this section, I argue that Marx is committed to the view that autonomy is an objective value. There are two aspects to Marx's belief in the objectivity of values. The first is that Marx thinks that the fact that autonomy is objective contributes to the development of history. That is, the fact that autonomy satisfies a true human interest is part of the reason why people desire it, pursue it and, where possible, choose social systems which promote it. I will develop this aspect of autonomy's objectivity in chapter five. The second aspect is that values are objective in the light of their relationship to true human interests: if a value satisfies a true human interest, then it is an objective value. I will consider this second aspect below.

What does it mean to say that a value is in true human interests? Is there any evidence that Marx thinks that autonomy is in true human interests? Chapter 3 discussed the concept of both natural and non-natural needs. Natural needs were equated with the necessary conditions for the reproduction of individuals. Non-natural needs were defined with respect to the necessary conditions for the reproduction of individuals at a certain level of social and historical development. These latter conditions contain a "historical and moral element."<sup>4</sup> The definition of non-natural needs is therefore dependent on the social perception of the necessary minimum for physical reproduction, and what this minimum consists of changes over time.

Marx writes that "hunger is hunger, but the hunger gratified by cooked meat, eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail and tooth."<sup>5</sup> Production creates needs, in part, by developing the manner in which individuals consume. Whereas individuals can physically survive eating raw meat, cooked meat becomes a socially created need, something individuals consider a necessity (at least in most advanced capitalist societies). Desires are everything that individuals want beyond the scope of needs, for example diamonds and hot cocoa. Some desires may even be impossible like the desire to live eternally.

What are interests? How do interests relate to desires and needs? All needs (natural and non-natural) are interests, only some desires are interests. According to Raymond Geuss, an agent's "interests" corresponds to the manner in which that agent's particular desires "could be rationally integrated into a coherent 'good life.'"<sup>6</sup> Interests are not identical to desires and, moreover, an agent may fail to have an interest in the satisfaction of many of his desires, as in the case of a partly reformed alcoholic who wants a drink. Thus, an individual may have an interest in the non-satisfaction of particular desires. Some desires will be contrary to an agent's interests because they will not be consistent with his conception of how he wishes to live. By contrast, an agent does have an interest in the satisfaction of his needs. As needs expand at different stages of social development, more of an agent's desires become needs, and therefore the satisfaction of these desires are in his true interests.

An agent can be deceived about his interests. When he is we will



speak of his "apparent" interests, which are not the same as his true interests. For example, an agent may fail to realize that it is in his interest to stop drinking because he has mistaken views about the effects of alcohol consumption. The alcoholic who continues to drink because of misinformation acts on the basis of an apparent interest, an interest which derives from some mistaken belief. In the case of the misinformed alcoholic, it is easy to see why his interest is only apparent. It is easy to see what his true interests are not, but not what his true interests are.

Geuss distinguishes between two different approaches to the definition of true interests: the "perfect knowledge" approach and the "optimal conditions" approach.<sup>7</sup> The "perfect knowledge" approach starts from the observation that changes in an agent's knowledge about his situation will often lead him to recognize that one of his desires is not in his interest. Thus, in the case of someone misinformed about the effects of drinking, correct knowledge of the consequences of alcohol consumption would presumably lead that person to acknowledge that it is not in his interest to drink. True interests are interests the agent would have if he had "perfect knowledge," full knowledge about his physical and psychic constitution, capacities, circumstances and history.

It might be objected that the "perfect knowledge" approach does no more than specify a set of interests which are rational for an agent to hold in the light of his other desires. But it fails to define his true interests. The formation of his previous desires may be so constructed that it is rational for him to want something repugnant. Geuss asks:

If the Marquis de Sade had had the final Intergalactic edition of the

Encyclopedia Britannica at his disposal would what he pursued then have been his true interests?<sup>8</sup>

It is conceivable for agents with "perfect knowledge" to have an interest in extremely diverse ends. We might find a set of interests formed under conditions of perfect knowledge "unacceptable,"<sup>9</sup> as in the case where they result from a "pathological" social conditions. Geuss asks us to consider the case of the Ik, a tribe whose members routinely prey on the sick and helpless, display duplicity and in which parents frequently abandon their young children. These characteristics of the Ik might represent a rational response to the conditions of extreme hardship and scarcity under which they live. In other words, it may be that the revolting interests which the Ik have are appropriate for survival under the circumstances they find themselves in.<sup>10</sup>

The move to the "optimal conditions" approach is motivated by a scepticism towards the belief that interests which we strongly disapprove of could in fact be "true." The Ik presumably would not have formed an interest in such behavior had they originally been placed under less horrible conditions. The "optimal conditions" approach takes this insight and argues that an agent can form a conception of his true interests only under circumstances which are undistorted by poverty and physical privation, brutality and coercion. The agent's true interests are defined as the interests which he would choose in a context purified of all the distortions of the present.

How do the two approaches differ? Perfect knowledge is perfect knowledge at any moment in time; perfect knowledge of your needs and

interests under given conditions. But these given conditions may produce systematic distortions of an agent's desires and interests, e.g., in a capitalist society, owners of the means of production have an interest in making a profit. This is, however, not a true human interest: under circumstances in which agents had a choice between capitalist and communist social relations, certainly Marx thinks that they would choose the latter. An agent's perfect knowledge of his circumstances cannot get him beyond systematic social distortions. In contrast, the "optimal conditions" approach demands perfect knowledge, but under conditions in which there are no social distortions of the desires on the basis of which individuals form their interests. The "perfect knowledge" approach gets you the best you can get under a set of given and imperfect conditions. The "optimal conditions" approach gets you the best you can get under ideal conditions.

In Utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill makes an argument which suggests how the "optimal conditions" approach and the "perfect knowledge" approach might converge. Mill argues that if an agent did experience both a life organized around solely lower (bodily) pleasures and one which also included higher (intellectual) pleasures, he would choose the latter over the former. And, if an agent would recognize that he would prefer a life-plan which included the higher pleasures if he experienced it, we can attribute to him an interest in such a life-plan, even where he has no effective desire now to choose it. For, if he did experience both plans of life, he would prefer the one which included the higher pleasures. This is, Mill tells us, the verdict of the "competent judges"<sup>11</sup> namely, those who are acquainted with both life-plans. If an agent, therefore, could have "perfect knowledge,"

including knowledge of all the conditions under which his interests could be formed, and thus including knowledge of the conditions which allow for the higher pleasures, the interests he would choose would be identical to those he would form under "optimal conditions" of non-coercion and distortion. To acquire "perfect knowledge" of one's interests, according to this view, requires the possibility of experiment and the testing of alternative plans of life. Some of these alternatives will involve less distortion than present conditions. In this way, "perfect knowledge" can converge on the optimal conditions. As they gain knowledge and experience, agents will choose those interests which they would, in fact, have formed under optimal conditions.

To bring Mill's view to bear on the issue under discussion: autonomy, on a Millian account, would be an objective interest just in case human beings who could experience both a life-plan which included autonomy and one which did not (but which was in all other respects equal to the first) would always choose a life-plan which included autonomy. Insofar as communism alone among social forms fully embodies autonomy, agents would choose communism over capitalism if they could experience both. Marx, in fact, seems to think of communist society as a set of "optimal conditions." He explicitly argues that communist society alone among social forms does not distort our desires and interests. He writes,

Communist organization has a two-fold effect on the desires produced in the individuals by the present day relations; some of the desires, namely desires which exist in all relations and merely change their form and direction under different social relations -- are merely altered by the communist social system, for they are given the opportunity to develop normally, but others...are totally deprived of their conditions of existence.<sup>12</sup>

If an agent could experience a life characterized by autonomy, he would

always choose it over a life which lacked autonomy. And autonomy satisfies the interests an agent would have if his interests were formed under communism.

Of course, agents cannot now experience communism. How then can they actually recognize their interest in autonomy? This is especially a problem as Marx believes that in class societies, the relations between man and man and man and nature are hidden behind a "social veil." The maintenance of social order in such societies depends upon accidental or institutionalized delusions, in particular, the belief that agents must accept their institutions as relatively unchangeable, motivated by the way the world is.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, this veil is "not removed from the countenance of the social life process until it becomes production by freely associated men and stands under their conscious control."<sup>14</sup> Marx believes that only in communist society can social order be maintained under conditions of full knowledge in which nothing is or need be hidden.<sup>15</sup> So the question of how agents can obtain an awareness of their interest in autonomy is a serious one.

Marx sees labor as providing the basis for both the interest in, and the awareness of, autonomy. Marx's argument that labor is the basis for the human interest in autonomy is relatively straight-forward. According to Marx, the act of labor is itself an expression of autonomy and therefore it is something which always characterizes human beings. Autonomy is thus not something which needs to be produced in human beings, but unleashed -- the constraints imposed by social and material conditions removed. The basis for this interpretation of autonomy as a capacity which always exists, a

capacity which characterizes human nature, is found in Marx's idea of human labor as a "positive activity."

Marx's view of labor differs sharply from that of the classical political economists. In the Grundrisse, Marx criticizes Adam Smith for viewing labor as a negative capacity, as sacrifice, something to be avoided: "And this is labor for Smith, a curse." However, "something which is merely negative creates nothing."<sup>16</sup> Marx goes on to argue that the miser's or the capitalist's abstinence creates nothing. Beyond reiterating one of the conclusions of the labor theory of value -- that capitalists create no value -- Marx's discussion emphasizes the nature of labor as a "positive, creative activity":

Smith is not aware that this overcoming of obstacles is in itself a liberating activity -- and that further, once the external aims become posited as aims which the subject posits -- hence as self-realization, objectification of the subject, hence real freedom, whose action is precisely labor.<sup>17</sup>

This passage calls attention to the nature of labor as the basis for the exercise of autonomy. In labor, regardless of the social form in which it is expressed, agents exercise their own distinctive human powers. Thus, even the labor of capitalist society is, despite its form as "wage-slavery," a manifestation of the capacity to subject external circumstances to human control.

This view of labor as a positive activity can be regarded as the foundation for Marx's labor theory of value.<sup>18</sup> The labor theory of value contends that labor is the "real social cost," that products are to be measured by the amount of labor required to produce them. Moreover, the labor which produces the products which have value is a generic, abstract

labor, a labor capable of being directed to any object. In a letter to Kugelmann, Marx argues that as a cost of production, labor is the underpinning of production and distribution in all social forms:

That this necessity of the distribution of social labor in definite proportions cannot be done away with by a particular form of social production, but can only change the form in which it appears is self-evident. No natural laws can be done away with...Science consists precisely in demonstrating how the law of value operates.<sup>19</sup>

Marx intends the labor theory of value to be an empirical proposition, but one which also indicates the success of man's struggle to conquer nature. As society's productive power increases, the amount of labor required to produce a good decreases.

As a measure of the "real cost of production," labor is the regulator of the distribution of social labor among the various activities required to meet various needs. This is a "law" true of all societies. In capitalism, however, this law expresses itself in terms of value. The magnitude of value is the form taken by the real social cost when the objects produced are commodities, i.e., goods produced to be exchanged. In Volume I of Capital, Marx writes that,

The late scientific discovery that the products of labor, as values are merely the material expressions of the human labor expended in their production marks an epoch in the development of the history of humanity.<sup>20</sup>

In this passage, Marx refers to himself as having "discovered" that under capitalism the "real social cost" takes the form of value. The discovery is taken by Marx to be "scientific" and justified by more or less standard empirical procedures.

Marx contends that even a great thinker like Aristotle was unable to

"decipher" the role played by human labor within slave society, because universal generic labor did not play as such the role of creating social value:

Greek society was founded on the labor of slaves, hence had as its natural basis the inequality of men and of their labor powers. The secret of the expression of value, namely the equality and equivalence of all kinds of labor because and insofar as they are human labor in general, could not be deciphered until the concept of human equality had already acquired the permanence of a fixed popular opinion. This however becomes possible only in a society where the commodity-form is the universal form of the product of labor, hence the dominant social relation is the relation between men as possessors of commodities. Aristotle's genius is displayed precisely by his discovery of a relation of equality in the value-expression of commodities. Only the historical limitation inherent in the society in which he lived prevented him from finding out what "in reality" this relation of equality consisted of.<sup>21</sup>

In this quote, Marx alludes to the "historical limitation" - slavery - which prevented Aristotle from understanding the equality of human labor. But, behind the social form of slavery, there is a "reality": labor is the positive measure of real social cost.

Marx's understanding of the role of labor in production thus forms the key to his understanding of the past. Marx writes that, "human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape."<sup>22</sup> but only insofar as "their essential differences are not obliterated." It is not obvious, however, how human anatomy in itself tells us much about the apes. Rather, it can be the "key" to ape anatomy only because we understand the apes as a developmental stage in human evolution. In other words, we must see labor as developing its capacity to create wealth in general, to be a generic capacity capable of direction to any object, within all social forms.

The labor theory of value gives a measure of the "cost of production," and argues that production in all social forms is consistent with a "law,"



namely, that production is regulated by the distribution of labor among the members of society in definite proportions. The labor theory of value is also consistent with Marx's view of man's self-creation through labor. Labor is the vehicle of man's emergence from "embeddedness" in conditions which he does not control. Thus, the fact that the labor theory of value is put forward by Marx as the underpinning of social production means not only that labor time regulates production in all social forms, but also that labor as a positive activity, as freedom, is also manifested --although in varying degrees -- in each social form.

Moreover, if the distribution of social labor among the members of society is subject to a "law" as Marx's letter to Kugelmann indicates, then communism, in which individuals take conscious and collective control of their production, acting within the limits of this law, is freedom. Communism institutionalizes labor as the capacity of individuals to act consciously and collectively.

Marx's discussion of the human capacity to master and control external conditions -- to be autonomous -- is given in terms of labor. Labor is understood both as the capacity to master nature and as the means through which human beings exercise their essential powers. Regardless of its various expressions in different social forms, labor is always a "positive activity."

But the question remains as to how human beings recognize the relationship between their capacity to labor and their true interests. Marx sees human fulfillment in labor -- how are others, whose labor is far from rewarding, themselves to see it? Marx writes to Kugelmann that "every

child knows"<sup>23</sup> that social labor must be divided proportionally in order to reproduce society. What every child does not know is the relation between that fact and true human interests.

Marx's focus on labor obscures the role of knowledge and critical reflection in the process of history. Why should knowledge of the labor theory of value produce knowledge of true human interests? How can knowledge of the labor theory of value dispell the ideational and institutional forms of social domination tied to capitalist society and also provide knowledge about possible social alternatives? This is important because, as we have seen, Marx thinks that communism will not result without the conscious intervention of human agents who free themselves from the illusions of the past.<sup>24</sup>

Human labor provides a basis for the interest agents have in realizing autonomy. But it does not yet explain the source of their awareness of that interest. Thus, although the labor theory of value provides support for Marx's claim that autonomy is a true human interest, by revealing the role of labor in man's self-creation, it does not account for how agents gain an awareness of their interest in securing a social system which institutionalizes their autonomy.

I will argue that while the development of human capacities takes place in labor, in technical progress in controlling nature, the achievement of social freedom takes place through class struggles and the criticism of institutional and ideational forms of domination. The ability of people to achieve social freedom depends not only on the development of their material powers of production, but also, and most importantly, on their

ability to gain knowledge of and act in virtue of their true interest in that freedom. This knowledge is gained independently of the knowledge which allows human beings to master nature. It is achieved through the interaction of individuals and classes within a given social form. In the course of their social interaction, individuals learn that the dominant morality of a social form as "embodied" in its institutions and laws, is not in their true interests. This knowledge leads them to search for new forms of social organization. I will discuss this process in the next chapter. However, first I must discuss Marx's view of morality.

#### 4.3 Autonomy and the Moral Standpoint.

In this section I explore the relationship between morality and the process by which individuals gain greater knowledge of their true interests. In Chapter 2, I reviewed Allen Wood's argument that morality has no other purpose than its functionality for a given class society. For Wood, there is no link between the moral standpoint and the standpoint of social freedom from which Marx condemns capitalism. In fact, Wood interprets morality as a threat to the self-understanding of every individual who follows it. (see Chapter 2.) In this section I make two arguments against this view. First, I contend that the moral standpoint -- defined as the standpoint that takes the basic interests of each equally into account -- represents an imperfect grasp of true human interests. On the one hand, the moral standpoint allows agents to reflect critically on the institutional framework of their society in terms of their aspiration to the common good. It represents an attempt to grasp their true human interests. On the other hand, when an agent takes

the moral standpoint he must represent his own interests as opposed to the interests of others. Thus, the moral standpoint views the interests of others as a restriction on an agent's action. Second, I show that Marx recognized progress in the moral systems of successive social forms judged in terms of their ability (as embodied in laws and institutions) to realize autonomy.

(i) Morality as an expression of true human interests

Not everything Marx has to say about morality can be reconciled with the description of morality as merely a "functional ideology" for class oppression. Marx does not endorse the Nietzschean view that morality is psychologically injurious to those who hold it. Marx, of course, condemns morality. But, on the other side of the ledger is his underscoring of the fact that there are moral claims at all, as opposed to simple domination. Morality may not live up to its claims, but it is significant that it makes such claims. I will explore this idea below.

There is ample evidence of Marx's disdain for morality. He explicitly regards "justice" -- a central moral concept -- as a sanction for the productive relations of a society and insists that capitalist exploitation of the working class involves no injustice.<sup>25</sup> He mercilessly exposes the moral pretensions of the bourgeoisie as only the "icy water of egotistical calculation."<sup>26</sup> And he condemns the claims made by socialists in favor of equality and justice as "outdated verbal rubbish."<sup>27</sup>

Although Marx's explicit pronouncements do not give us a complete understanding of his view of morality, there is no doubt that he regards moral consciousness as, at least partially, distorting human understanding. Morality urges individuals to take the standpoint of the common good when

in fact there is no such good -- only the competing interests of social classes.

If morality is a distorted form of self-understanding, why does human consciousness take a moral form? Why do individuals not relate to their needs and interests directly, instead of viewing them from the standpoint of morality?

Marx never directly answers this question, but he does comment extensively on the parallel issue of religion as a distorted form of human consciousness. His view stands in contrast to that of Nietzsche.<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche argues that religion is essentially a rationalization on the part of the poor for the existing unequal distribution of fortunes. Religion is a rationalization used by the weak to defend and exalt themselves: weakness and submission become valued; strength and nobility, condemned. Nietzsche debunks religion by revealing its source in the repressed sentiments for vengeance of the powerless. He argues that religion's positive valuation of brotherliness and mercy stems from weakness, envy and the unacknowledged thirst of the poor for revenge. The man professing religion is thus a sick individual, malicious to himself and others. Nietzsche thus reveals the evil root of religion. Rather than endorse religion's misdirection of human will and vitality, he proclaims the "death of God" and sees the triumph over religion (and morality) as one of the central tasks of his "revaluation of values."

By contrast, Marx argues that religion has a positive content, a root which is not evil:

Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has

either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again.<sup>29</sup>

Religion's appeal is really the appeal of each person's own self-affirmation. At the same time, this self-affirmation as religion is misdirected, projected onto a metaphysical being, beyond man and nature. Religion is thereby associated with false consciousness, with man's illusions about his own nature. But the cause of religion is not false consciousness:

Religion...is the fantastic realization of the human essence, because the human essence has no true reality...Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress.<sup>30</sup>

Religion originates in the misery of real conditions. It gives expression to a social life which really is alienated, empty and degraded. Moreover, according to this passage, religion not only expresses real misery but is a protest against it. It represents a protest against suffering because it asserts the human aspiration to freedom and community against their attenuation in class societies. Religion laments our natural/social conditions and in doing so it tells the truth about those conditions. That is, it correctly portrays man's social conditions as ones of misery. In opposition to this misery, religion holds out the promise of a life in which men are affirmed and respected. Religion is "the sign of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions."<sup>31</sup> The problem with religion, according to Marx, lies in the form of its protest, that it projects human aspirations beyond the secular world. This projection, Marx believes, reconciles us to our miserable conditions on earth.

The criticism of religion is thus for Marx the demand that the promise

of religion be realized. Religion is not simply to be rejected as delusory. Religion is only a symptom and the battle against it cannot be won until life itself is no longer at odds with the human aspiration for freedom. The criticism of religion will not be successful until the "criticism of earth" <sup>32</sup> has been completed, so that the conditions which systematically produce religion as distorted human consciousness are abolished. In communist society, there will be no religion because freedom and community will be realized in the secular world.

What would morality be for Marx if it were similar to religion in the sense of being an expression and a protest with respect to real conditions? In other words, does morality as a form of false consciousness also "tell the truth" despite its distortions?

It is commonly argued that morality provides a framework for our mutual protection. According to this view, the function of morality is to counteract the limits of man's sympathies, his limited resources, his limited knowledge. Hume, for example, writes that

It is only from the selfishness and confined generosity of man, along with the scanty provision nature has made for his wants, that justice derives its origin.<sup>33</sup>

Morality is a device which is beneficial to men because of certain contingent features of their common condition. It restrains their passions and makes possible mutually beneficial cooperation among individuals. Marx accepts this view of morality: he sees morality as providing a framework for societies in which the interests of one group stand in conflict with another:

Whatever form they have taken, one fact is common to all class

societies, viz., the exploitation of one part of society by another. No wonder, then, that the social consciousness of past ages, despite the multiplicity and variety it displays, moves within certain common forms, or general ideas, which cannot completely vanish except with the total disappearance of class antagonisms.<sup>34</sup>

In class societies, the interests of particular groups and individuals are opposed to each other, and most often also opposed to the collective interests of all: "freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stand in constant opposition to one another, carry on an interrupted, now hidden, now open fight."<sup>35</sup> For Marx, this fight ultimately issues in a new social order. But without some basis of agreement the opposition of interests would turn society into a war of all against all and not lead to the supersession of an old order by a higher order. Limits must be placed on the competitive claims between classes or a state of war will result. Marx sees class struggle in societies, not civil war.

In order for the conditions necessary for productive growth to obtain, a state of war must be avoided. Society cannot easily expand productive capacity under circumstances of civil war. A common framework is needed to facilitate production. Marx sees morality as such a framework. The alternatives to morality, such as manipulation and repression, are more costly than if people can be influenced to consent to society's institutional arrangement. If individuals were not susceptible to moral appeals, the possibilities for achieving even a limited social peace would be minimal.

What exactly are human beings susceptible to, when they are susceptible to moral appeals? According to Thomas Scanlon, to be susceptible to moral appeals is to be susceptible to the desire to justify one's



actions (and institutions) to others.<sup>36</sup> It is to be susceptible not simply to heed one's own desires and impulses, but to seek a justification for them which others will not reasonably reject.<sup>37</sup> When an agent takes the standpoint of morality, he evaluates his actions in the light of the interests of everyone and gives equal weight to their interests. His judgement of what is best to do (e.g., right) takes the interests of others into account: he judges his own good with respect to the good of others.

Nietzsche, of course, thinks that this susceptibility is the sign of a defective psychology and that the moral standpoint is injurious to the individual who adopts it. The fact that morality is a framework for productive growth does not undercut the Nietzschean view. It could be the case that morality is harmful to the psychological health of individuals, but functionally necessary if society is to maintain and reproduce itself. The necessary role of morality in insuring survival might weaken some of the force of the Nietzschean objection (since we would not likely choose to abolish morality under these circumstances), yet the objection still stand.

Marx's discussion of morality, however, suggests that he thinks that there is a positive side to the human susceptibility to morality, independent of the fact that morality is necessary for productive growth. I think Marx is best reconstructed by interpreting the human susceptibility to morality as an expression of the human desire for social freedom. In seeking justification for our actions, we seek to give reasons for what we do. Furthermore, the reasons we seek to give in morality are reasons which we want others to accept (or not reject). We seek to reconcile our interests with those of others.

If religion holds out the promise of a human existence without misery, morality's appeal is the appeal of a standpoint from which all interests could be reconciled. For, according to Marx, morality arises in a world in which interests are in conflict, in which the claims of one group oppose the claims of others. The moral standpoint makes a universalistic appeal to a "common good," promising a framework in which the basic interests of each will be weighted equally, and in which no particular group will be privileged. It offers us hope of a reconciliation of interests through balancing, coordinating and integration. The moral standpoint abstracts from the particular differences of individuals and groups and considers only what is in the common interest of each. It thus constructs in terms of an abstract standpoint, a world of social harmony. Morality holds out the promise of a universal good which is in the true interests of everyone: a world of equal freedom.

At the heart of the issue here is whether this universalistic promise can be anything more than self-serving for particular interests. Marx, in fact, argues that particular classes contending for social dominance always represent their interest as a universal interest:

For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it is compelled merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality and represent them as the only rational universally ones.<sup>38</sup>

"Compelled" -- this is clearly compatible with the view that in order to mobilize the support of others, rising classes must mask their particular interests. In other words, classes make universalistic claims, only to

influence others to follow them. Morality is a deception. However, if there were no impulse to a "general interest" then there would be no "compulsion" for the ruling class to represent its aims as such. It might, for example, offer only particular rewards to itself and its allies. Marx, however, argues that each ruling class represents its interests as general interests not only to others but also to itself. The French bourgeoisie, for example, needed to represent their interests as general interests

in order to conceal from themselves the bourgeois limitations of the content of their struggles and to keep their enthusiasm on the high plane of the great historical tragedy.<sup>39</sup>

The desire to justify one's actions to others (and to oneself) is quite strong; even the ruling class is susceptible to moral reasoning and argument.

And, even if the ruling class is insincere in its claims, the attempt to justify themselves has consequences: morality gives hostage to future generations. A claim that an interest is universal has its own entailments: when agents see that the claim is false, the moral appeal loses its force. Insofar as no moral system really reconciles the interests of opposing classes, each moral system contains the seeds for its own destruction: "all the weapons it (the bourgeoisie) had forged against feudalism turned their points against itself."<sup>40</sup> Each moral system is superceded by another in which a greater degree of freedom is institutionalized: "Every ruling class achieves its hegemony on a broader basis than that of the ruling class previously."<sup>41</sup>

Thus far we have seen that Marx's writings on morality, interpreted in the light of his view of religion, yields a conception of morality as a distorted expression of true human interests. On the one hand, morality

arises in circumstances in which the interests of one individual do in fact diverge from the interests of others. The circumstances are those of class societies, in which classes have opposing interests. Morality functions as a framework for common protection and for further productive growth. While morality expresses a standpoint in which there is harmony of interests, in reality one class dominates others. Morality thus deludes individuals about the nature of their institutions and actions.

On the other hand, morality expresses the human aspiration to a world of social harmony and freedom. Morality represents that world abstractly but its abstract depiction tells the truth about the real world in which the interests of each conflict with the interests of all. There is no point of reconciliation between the actual interests agents hold; the reconciliation must be an abstract one. Morality gives expression to the human desire for the common good, a society in which each individual is free. Insofar as morality holds out this promise, each moral system contains the basis for its own supersession when it is seen that it does not live up to its claims.

(ii) progress in moral systems.

The implication of this interpretation of Marx's argument is that moral systems will evolve in a direction which more closely realizes true human interests. Moral systems progress towards communism.

Some actual changes in moral systems which can serve as evidence for Marx's argument are as follows:

1. Greater numbers of people have been incorporated into the standpoint of morality; moral systems increasingly treat kings and

paupers as equal. Individuals are regarded independently from the social positions which they occupy.

2. Social arrangements based on substantive inequality (e.g., slavery, serfdom and caste systems) have been increasingly acknowledged as illegitimate.

3. Moral justification has become distinct from religious justification and mythology, making its appeal on rational grounds.<sup>42</sup>

Each of these changes involves the admittance of greater numbers of individuals into social life on a basis which recognizes (or claims to recognize) their capacity for autonomy.

A central problem for Marx's theory of history is to provide an account of the relationship between this process of increasing freedom and the process of expanding productivity. G.A. Cohen argues, as we saw, that the social relations of successive societies are those relations which are optimally functional for productive growth. Thus, Cohen would have to explain the direction in social relations (and the norms they embody), i.e., the fact that successive social relations embody greater autonomy than their predecessors, by showing that autonomy is necessary to the increase of productive powers. For example, Cohen might argue that free-labor is more productive than slave-labor because the free laborer identifies his work with his self-realization; the free laborer sees himself in his work and assumes responsibility for it. But to so conceive his work as an extension of himself, he must be free; he must not work simply out of fear and coercion.<sup>43</sup> Social relations which allow for greater autonomy are therefore necessary for productive growth.

I have argued, against Cohen, that there may be social relations functionally equivalent for productive growth which differ along the dimension of autonomy. Evidence for this possibility is provided by Marx's own writings, in particular, his letters concerning the possibility of socialist revolution in semi-capitalist Russia. However, my argument about the existence of functionally equivalent social relations does not prove that the process by which social freedom expands is separate from that of growing productivity, because it could be the case that all the available functional equivalents represent progress along the dimension of social freedom.<sup>44</sup> If all the functional equivalents are always better than the social relations of their predecessor, then the process of increasing social freedom is not separate from that of increasing productivity: greater social freedom is functional for productive growth. There is only one historical process, not two. And, therefore, I have no argument against Cohen.

Marx's writings provide little explicit support for the strong claim on which Cohen's view relies, i.e., the claim that all historical options are always better on the value dimension of social freedom. Marx doesn't therefore preclude the weaker and more plausible claim that functionally equivalent social relations can differ widely with respect to the social freedom they embody. This weaker claim is more consonant with historical experience. Capitalist industrialization, for example, seems equally possible under democratic regimes or extremely brutal dictatorships (South Korea, Taiwan, etc.) Neither Marx nor Cohen give any explicit argument for why the theory of historical materialism requires the adoption of the strong claim. In the absence of any such argument, and in the face of some

historical evidence to the contrary, it seems more reasonable to adopt the weaker claim. This weaker claim, however, requires that the process of growing social freedom be accounted for by a mechanism separate from that of growing productivity.

Once the weaker claim is adopted, it becomes unclear why there should even be historical options available for productive growth which also increase social freedom. Why should the two processes which produce productive growth and increasing freedom go together, instead of pulling in opposite directions (e.g., increasing productivity and diminishing freedom)? I am unable to claim any necessity for this parallelism and, indeed, there is always the possibility that the two processes will diverge. This is, of course, not a possibility which Marx explicitly envisions, but it is no less possible for that.

There is one inter-relation between these two processes which I should like to point out. Progress in realizing social freedom is materially conditioned. That is, without material progress, there would be no progress in realizing autonomy. In particular, the exercise of autonomy depends on material factors; it can be fully exercised only under conditions of relative abundance. Only under such conditions, for example, is meaningful work (see Chapter 3) a general possibility. Thus, progress in realizing autonomy is constrained by the level of material development.

I now provide some evidence that Marx explicitly recognizes progress in moral systems judged from the standpoint of autonomy. He endorses certain moral systems over others. In "On the Jewish Question," he endorses the expansion of "rights" within capitalist society. He argues that the

formal recognition of each individual as free and equal represents a "great progress...the final form of human emancipation within the prevailing order."<sup>45</sup> In this essay, Marx advocates extending the vote to Jews in Germany, a position not held by other radicals of his time. These radicals argued against any reform which stopped short of an immediate realization of the general good. Against them, Marx defends political emancipation, the extension of rights and formal liberties to a particular group, as a partial step towards the realization of social freedom. Marx's argument suggests that he judges the morality of capitalist society "progressive" from the standpoint of autonomy. It expands collective control over social circumstances by abolishing the artificial distinctions between groups of individuals. All individuals are recognized as having the capacity for autonomy in capitalist society.

In The Critique of the Gotha Program, Marx distinguishes between two distributional systems: (1) first-stage communism, as it emerges "in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually still stamped" by capitalist society<sup>46</sup> and (2) a higher phase of communist society in which "the productive forces have increased with the all round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly."<sup>47</sup> The first of these societies is characterized by a system of "right," that is, by morality. The second is a system which transcends morality. In what respects does Marx view the moral system of first-stage communism as an advance over that of capitalist society?

In first stage communism, each worker contributes a certain amount of labor time to society and receives in return a certificate for a



proportional number of hours (the hours worked minus a part set aside for the replacement of instruments of production, subsidization of the elderly, etc.) With his certificate, the worker draws from the social stock of available means of consumption. His share is thus proportional to his contribution. As under capitalism, the principle of formal equality is applied -- labor time is exchanged for an equivalent amount of labor hours. But the conditions of communist society are more equal than those of capitalist society as classes have been abolished. Only labor inputs are exchanged for certificates, so that no one can contribute anything but labor: all must work. Further, because nothing can pass to the ownership of individuals except means of consumption, no one can own the labor power of anyone else. So although first-stage communism and capitalism share the principle of equality of exchange, only with the former are "principle and practice no longer at loggerheads."<sup>48</sup>

It is important to note with respect to the issue of progress in moral systems that Marx refers to the communist principle of labor contribution as an advance over the formal equality of capitalism. Moreover, it is an advance in terms of a principle of right, i.e., a principle of distributive justice, a moral concept. The rights and equality of first-stage communism represent a greater fulfillment of the conditions for full and equal freedom promised by the moral standpoint, a greater harmony of interests. Whereas, in capitalist society, rights are formal and procedural, the rights of early communist society take into consideration the social and political inequalities which limit the full expression of human autonomy. No one has a right to own the means of production. Accordingly, the interests of

workers are no longer subordinated to the interests of the capitalists.

First-stage communism, however, is still marked by an imperfection. Full communism, Marx claims, will be a society in which the social consciousness of the general interest will no longer take a moral form, just as social association will no longer take the form of the state. Why is the morality of first-stage communism imperfect? First stage communism achieves both a massive productive surplus and an end to social classes. Why does Marx then postulate a second stage?

#### 4.4 Full Communism.

Marx qualifies his endorsement of first-stage communism's principle of right -- the "contribution principle." Although this principle is incompatible with the existence of classes, it rewards certain natural differences. If one worker can work longer than another (perhaps because he is stronger), then he will earn more. The contribution principle thereby "tacitly recognizes unequal individual endowment and thus productive capacity as natural privileges."<sup>49</sup> It is inequitable because inequalities in intelligence and strength should not justify unequal reward. This is not a particular problem with the contribution principle, but with rights: every right is

a right of inequality, in its content...Right by its very nature can consist only in the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) are measurable by an equal standard only insofar as they are brought under an equal point of view, are taken from one definite side only.<sup>50</sup>

The moral standpoint abstracts from my particular interests; it considers my interests from "one definite side only," based on an abstract norm of equality. Because morality arises when my own interest and the interests of

others conflict, its reconciliation of interests ignores the particular interests of individuals, identifying a set of interests common to each of them. Because it can find these common interests only from a standpoint which abstracts from individual differences, it presupposes the existence of these differences. In other words, it takes these differences as given. The moral standpoint starts from the opposition between my interests and those of others.

But under full communism there is no such distinction: interests are really coherent. That is, Marx views communism as a society in which my judgement about what advances my own good is not distinct from my judgement about what is best taking the interests of others equally into account. What advances my own good is at the same time advancing the good of others.

What could Marx have in mind by this? Full communism is characterized by the needs principle: "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." Marx's assumption (which he shares with Hume) is that in a society beyond scarcity, "justice" will be unnecessary. Both the worker who is stronger and the one who is weak will give what they can and take what they need. Without this assumption, the complete reconciliation of interests would be impossible: distribution would require some criterion.<sup>51</sup> In fact, even the needs principle relies on some criterion of what constitutes a "need." It does not advocate that people get what they want, but only what they need.

Equally important for Marx's conception of communism as a society beyond the moral form of consciousness is the interdependence of the values

which communism realizes: my autonomy is only possible in a system of equal autonomy. Likewise, the values of cooperation, meaningful work and the pursuit of knowledge are values not only good for the individuals who pursue them, but are also likely to enhance the well-being of others. In achieving these ends we thereby contribute to the good of our associates.

With the needs principle, human interests no longer take a moral form, just as under communism spirituality will no longer take a religious form. However, there is a point at which the analogy between morality and religion seems to break down: the needs system of communism will not result in immoralism, but the end of religion will result in atheism. Under communism, individuals are directly motivated by what is collectively good, that is, by what they were attempting to grasp through the moral standpoint.

Marx's endorsement of full communism is direct evidence of his view that communism is a society which realizes true human interests. Full communism is superior to first-stage communism not because it increases productivity, but because it fully realizes autonomy. The desire individuals have for autonomy explains why they eventually reject the distributive system of first-stage communism. First stage-communism is flawed by its abstract treatment of individuals. By rewarding separate unique individuals equally -- by considering them from one side only -- even "communist justice" tacitly reproduces inequalities. Morality is flawed, moreover, because it understands individuals as bound to each other by a mutual system of constraints. Full communism is not an framework in which each person realizes their private ends, but a community of shared final ends in

which individuals participate in "the total sum of the realized assets of others."<sup>52</sup> Under full communism, individuals no longer need the moral form to represent their true interests, because the interests of each are compatible with the interests of all. Under these conditions, individuals dispense with the moral form.

This is, I think, a reasonable reconstruction of Marx's views on the relationship between morality and autonomy. However, even as reconstructed, Marx's view is problematic insofar as it depicts a society totally without the need for a moral framework. The idea of perfect social harmony is a utopia in light of the existence of scarcity even at the stage of material abundance. Collective decisions on the social allocation of labor, the division of labor-time between free and necessary labor, will remain questions of public debate. Even as the abstract standpoint of morality is eroded by explicit consideration of needs, the question of which needs, i.e., the social weighting of needs, will remain. In his grimmer moods, Marx recognizes that society will always be subject to some external constraints, to necessary work which will be a possible source of conflict and deliberation. The realization of autonomy is never "perfect." While human interaction comes to be regulated more and more on the basis of such non-moral values as friendship, association and mutual respect, production remains a realm of necessity, bound by the need to regulate the labor of individuals according to society's needs. It thus remains subject to deliberation and more importantly, to distributive considerations of justice:

Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of

production...Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature.<sup>53</sup>

Communism, contrary to Marx's declaration in The Communist Manifesto, cannot be a society without a moral form of consciousness. And, in this sense, Marx's criticism of existing society cannot be as radical as he intended.

Notes to Chapter Four

1. Rosa Luxemburg, The Russian Revolution (Ann Arbor, 1961) p. 77.
2. Karl Marx, Introduction to A Contributor, to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, (Cambridge, 1970), p. 131.
3. Marx discusses the withering away of the state in The Paris Commune (New York, 1975) p. 70ff. and The Critique of the Gotha Program in (ed.) Robert Tucker, The Marx-Engels Reader (MER) p. 538-9.
4. Marx discusses this in the context of his argument on the determinants of the value of labor power in Capital volume 1, trans. B. Fowkes, (New York, 1977) p. 275.
5. Karl Marx, Grundrisse, trans. M. Nicholas, (New York, 1973) p. 92.
6. Raymond Geuss. The Idea of a Critical Theory, (Cambridge, 1981) p. 48.
7. Geuss, op. cit., p. 48
8. Geuss, p. 49.
9. Of course, it is not clear why the non-acceptability to us of the Ik's interests should constitute an argument against them, particularly if they are rational for the Ik to hold in virtue of their circumstances. We may think, however, that the Ik would prefer even now not to live as they do, under horrible conditions of deprivation. If they would prefer not to live under such circumstances, then presumably they would also prefer not to have their interests formed under them. See Geuss, p. 53ff.
10. Orlando Patterson, in Slavery and Social Death (Mass., 1985) provides another case analogous to the Ik's in his discussions of the motivations for self-enslavement. Cf. p 130ff.
11. John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism in (ed.) Mary Warnock, John Stuart Mill: Selected Writings (New York, 1962) p. 259.
12. quoted in Jon Elster, Making Sense of Marx, (Cambridge, 1984) p. 71
13. Marx discusses the importance of the belief in the unalterability of the social order in Capital, vol. 1, chapter 1, part 4.
14. Capital, vol. 1, p. 173.

15. See John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," Journal of Philosophy, (1980), p. 537ff. for a discussion of the full publicity condition.
16. Grundrisse, p. 612.
17. Grundrisse, p. 611.
18. This suggestion is pursued by Marco Lippi in Value and Naturalism in Marx, (London, 1976)
19. Marx's letter to Kugelmann, 7/11/1868. Quoted in Lippi, op. cit. p. 29
20. Capital, vol. 1, p. 167.
21. Capital, vol. 1, p. 152.
22. Grundrisse, p. 105.
23. Marx's letter to Kugelmann, in Lippi, p. 29.
24. Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (New York, 1969) p. 18.
25. Karl Marx, Capital, vol. 1, p. 301.
26. Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto, in MER, p. 475.
27. Karl Marx, The Critique of the Gotha Program, in MER, p. 531.
28. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power, (New York, 1968) p. 135ff. Josh Cohen has pointed out to me that this contrast might have to be blunted. Nietzsche does think that religion has a positive side, namely, that it is an expression of the will to power. Nonetheless, it is clear that Nietzsche regards religion as dangerous to the well-being of those who adopt it. In this respect, his view of religion remains more critical than that of Marx.
29. Introduction to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, op. cit., p. 131-132.
30. Ibid., p. 131.
31. Ibid., p. 131.
32. Ibid., p. 132.
33. quoted in John Mackie, Inventing Right and Wrong (London, 1971) p. 110



34. Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto in MER, p. 489.
35. MER, p. 474.
36. T.M. Scanlon, "Contractualism and Utilitarianism," in (ed.) A.Sen and B.Williams, Utilitarianism and Beyond, (Cambridge, 1984).
37. see Scanlon op. cit., for a discussion of this justification and how it differs from the justification on grounds we think others will accept.
38. Karl Marx, The German Ideology, (New York, 1973) p. 65-66. My emphasis.
39. Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire, p. 16.
40. Ibid., p. 65-66.
41. The German Ideology, p. 65-66.
42. See Jurgen Habermas, "Toward a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism," in Communication and the Evolution of Society for an excellent discussion of the evolution of normative thinking.
43. See Karl Marx, Capital, vol. 1, p. 1031 for an argument somewhat along these lines.
44. This possibility was suggested to me by Paul Horwich.
45. MER, p. 35.
46. Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program, in MER, p. 529.
47. Ibid., p. 531.
48. Ibid., p. 530.
49. Ibid., p. 530.
50. Ibid., p. 530.
51. See Carmen Cirriani, "Power and Production in a Classless Society," Socialist Review, No. 59, 1981, pp. 36-82 for a discussion of "scarcity" and its complex dimensions.
52. John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Mass., 1971) p. 527.
53. Karl Marx, Capital, vol. 3, (New York, 1971) p. 820.

## Chapter Five: Freedom Rising

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter completes the argument of the thesis. Past chapters have argued for the need to "reconstruct" historical materialism, in order to make explicit the fact that Marx's theory of history must consist of more than a thesis about the development of the productive forces.

"Reconstructed historical materialism" is committed to three other theses: (1) that there has been a growth of autonomy in history (see chapter 3); (2) that autonomy is a "true human interest" (see chapter 4); and (3) that the moral systems of successive social forms are increasingly accurate representations of true human interests (see chapter 4). I now consider what Marx's argument about the conditions for the transformation of one social form to its successor would have looked like, had he consistently held this "reconstructed" view, namely, that progress towards communism depends on two processes: one of increasing productive power and a second process by which true human interests are increasingly realized in history. The most important of these interests is autonomy.

Individual autonomy consists in the actual exercise of control over one's own actions. Chapter three argued that autonomy is realized in a social order when its members exercise collective control over the major social institutions, most crucially those of production. According to Marx, communism is the social form in which this occurs. Communism allows human beings to achieve autonomy under conditions of social interdependence. Furthermore, under communism, autonomy would satisfy

the desires which agents actually have (see Chapter 4). Previous to the attainment of communism, however, agents' awareness of their interest in autonomy is distorted by the illusions associated with class societies. Agents often desire ends which are contrary to their true interest in autonomy.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, we have two questions. First, since agents do not now live under the "optimal conditions" of communist society, how can they gain an awareness of their true interest in autonomy? Second, and related, how can agents develop an understanding of the manner in which their social relations constrain their ability to be autonomous? The answer to these questions is that while agents cannot gain a complete awareness of their interest in autonomy and the social form which institutionalizes autonomy, they can gain some knowledge of them which then enables these agents to abolish some of the constraints from which they suffer. By leading to certain actions, this knowledge thus moves agents closer to the "optimal conditions" under which they can realize their autonomy. What we need, then, is an account of how agents gain this growing awareness. I will argue that the objectivity of autonomy plays an important role in this process of growing awareness. The fact that autonomy satisfies true human interests is part of the explanation for why people come to desire it and pursue it.

In this chapter, I develop an account of a "learning process" by which agents achieve an increasing awareness of their true interest in autonomy and the institutional requirements of autonomy. It is this increasing awareness which leads them to act to bring about autonomy. The "learning process" which I will describe initially takes place among the oppressed and

exploited social classes. The subject of this learning process is not primarily individuals, but groups; in particular, social classes. The idea of a collective learning process is, admittedly, not unproblematic. In what follows, I will try to make it appear more plausible.

## 5.2 Theoretical discussion

Historical materialism attempts to explain the social transformations which have occurred in history and the direction which these transformations have taken. That is, historical materialism, as a theory of history, offers an explanation of the causes and the results of major historical changes. In particular, it attempts to explain the development of the productive forces and the growing autonomy which is realized in social forms, both of which are taken by Marx to be the preconditions for communism.

G.A. Cohen has clarified the argument for why the productive forces tend to grow in history. But historical materialism also maintains that there has been a growing embodiment of autonomy in social forms. Roughly, a society *x* "embodies" a value *y* when the institutions, laws and practices of *x* are generally acceptable to an agent in virtue of his commitment to value *y*. For example, the laws and institutions which characterize feudal society would not be endorsed by an agent committed to the value of equality.

In the world of ancient Athens, slavery was generally accepted. In the modern world, the institution itself is widely condemned as illegitimate. The task of historical materialism is not so much to explain why slavery is condemned after it is abolished but to show how individuals and groups within a slave society come to criticize slavery and replace it with a social

form which allows for a greater achievement of their true human interests. Why is autonomy increasingly realized in social forms? In particular, is there any connection between the fact that autonomy is in true human interests and the fact that it tends to occur?

I will argue that there is a connection. But before I propose an explanation for the realization of autonomy in social forms, I will briefly address a common argument which maintains that there can not be any such connection on philosophical grounds. This argument rules out explanations which rely on values: values, it is claimed, can not enter into the explanation of facts. In response to this argument, Peter Railton gives the following example:

Bobby Shaftoe went to sea because he believed it was the best way to make his fortune, and he wanted above all to make his fortune.<sup>2</sup>

In this example, Bobby Shaftoe's actions are explained by showing that it is rational for him to go to sea, given his beliefs and desires. Norms of rationality, thus, enter into the explanation of behavior. Therefore, this example shows how normative criteria can enter into the explanation of behavior.

Railton shows that values can enter into explanations and that the philosophical objection is unfounded. I now want to turn to the substantive claim that a certain type of value, namely, objective value, can explain behavior and actions in history.

I have argued that autonomy is an objective value. Its goodness for human agents does not, therefore, depend on the conceptions which they hold about their interests. Specifically, its goodness does not depend on its

being recognized as such. At the same time, the objective value of autonomy rests on a relational rather than on an absolute sense of goodness.<sup>3</sup> It depends, that is, on the constitution of human beings. Thus, to return to an earlier example from Chapter 4, it is in the objective interest of an alcoholic to stop drinking, but the truth of this claim is dependent on features of human physiology and psychology. Objective interests are "supervenient" upon natural and social facts.

In what way, then, do the objective interests themselves contribute to the explanation of behavior? In what sense does the fact that an alcoholic has an objective interest in not drinking explain why he stops drinking? Presumably, we can explain this fact in terms of the supervenience basis of this objective interest (i.e., the alcoholic's physiology, etc.) alone. How, then, can explanations using the concept of objective interests be genuinely informative? In what sense does the appeal to objective interests help account for the evidence? There seems to be no need in the case of the alcoholic for the explanation to refer to an independent realm of values. Thus, Gilbert Harman argues,

Observation plays a role in science that it does not seem to play in ethics. The difference is that you need to make assumptions about certain physical facts to explain the occurrence of the observations to support a scientific theory, but you do not seem to need to make assumptions about any moral facts to explain the occurrence of...so-called moral observations...In the moral case, it would seem that you need only make assumptions about the psychology or moral sensibility of the person making the moral observation.<sup>4</sup>

Harman's argument can lead to naturalistic reduction, moral nihilism or non-cognitivism. It questions the place of values in the world of facts.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of where it leads, however, Harman's argument doubts that

values can be genuinely explanatory. The use of values in an explanation, Harman argues, cannot be informative. Harman believes that there is no way of deciding the issue of whether or not objective values (or interests) exist.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, his argument suggests that there is no reason to appeal to values in explanation.

Railton argues that objective interests can serve an explanatory function. In particular, he argues that an agent's objective interests play an explanatory role in the evolution of that agent's desires. Through trial and error, agents can learn that certain desires do not serve their objective interests. If a given desire is not in the interest of an agent, Railton argues, then there will be feedback, operating largely through unreflective experimentation, which will influence the formation of the agent's desires. Railton illustrates this point with a discussion of a traveller with a stomach illness who desires a glass of milk. The effect of drinking hard-to-digest milk only worsens the traveller's condition. After repeated milk drinking and bouts of illness, he happens upon a bottle of 7-Up, drinks it and immediately feels better. The next time he feels sick (or perhaps the time after that) he will have learned through feedback and reinforcement that his desire for milk is not in his interests. A "wants/interests" mechanism,<sup>7</sup> as postulated by this example, allows for objective interest to play a role in the evolution of subjective (i.e., merely perceived) interests and desires.

The question is whether or not an appeal to objective values or interests can provide an account of moral beliefs and social practices which is more useful than that offered by someone who is sceptical about such

values. I will argue that objective interests can have an explanatory function with respect to the direction in which agents' moral beliefs and practices have evolved. This direction is precisely what historical materialism needs to explain: why do moral beliefs and practices and social institutions tend to approximate those which agents would choose if their desires and interests were formed under communism? The alternative to the realist strategy which I will take must be to ascribe this direction to some other process (such as material progress) or to chance.

If we accept the premise that autonomy is an objective interest and that communism alone among social forms embodies autonomy, how can this premise be part of the explanation for the development of agents' beliefs and actions? The argument proceeds as follows. Social forms which depart from the arrangement of institutions and practices which characterize communism will depart from true human interests. The departures of these institutions from true human interests will tend to encourage dissatisfaction, particularly among those whose true interests are least taken into account. Thus, the oppressed social classes who are granted small possibility to exercise control over their lives are in an especially good position to recognize the fact that an existing social order is not in their true interests. Whether or not they will recognize it depends on many factors, but the fact that the social order is not objectively in their interests may help to explain why they come to so recognize it, when they do.

Analogous to the case of Railton's traveller, the discontent of the oppressed may produce an experience feedback as to which social



arrangements better approximate true human interests. As human agents learn more about the sources of their frustrations, their desires will tend to evolve to accord better with their true interests. They will tend to reject those institutions and practices which fail to accord recognition to their interests. And, if communism is a society in which the interests of everyone else are taken equally into account, they will tend to choose those social institutions which increasingly resemble those of communist society.

In the Grundrisse, Marx refers to the growing self-consciousness of the slave and wage-laborer in a manner which is consistent with this account of learning:

The recognition of the products as its own, and the judgement that its separation from the conditions of its realization is improper - forcibly imposed - is an enormous (advance in) awareness, itself the product of the mode of production resting on capital, and as much the knell to its doom as, with the slave's awareness that he cannot be the property of another, with his consciousness of himself as a person, the existence of slavery becomes a merely artificial, vegetative existence, and ceases to be able to prevail as the basis of production.<sup>8</sup>

In this passage, Marx refers to the new awareness of the slave and worker not as a change but as an enormous advance. It is an enormous advance precisely because this growing awareness enables agents to recognize their true human interests as opposed to the interests which they have because of their particular situation in a particular social form. With this new awareness, they reject some aspect of social domination.

The mechanism whereby agents' behavior is brought into congruence with their true interests is not especially direct. It is less direct, for instance, than in the case of the individual traveller. It can tend to push the oppressed in the direction of satisfying their own particular interests -- and

not their true interests. For example, it can push the oppressed to act against the interests of other weak groups.<sup>9</sup> Thus, oppressed groups often turn on other oppressed groups, as when skilled, white male workers seek to deny other groups (e.g., blacks, women and unskilled workers) an equal position in the labor market. The oppressed are often deluded about the causes of their suffering, and there is no guarantee that the learning mechanism will be effective in all cases. This possibility has led some within the Marxist tradition to argue that not the oppressed but intellectuals are the group most likely to correctly identify their true human interests.<sup>10</sup> These Marxists claim that intellectuals, who are not only in a position to read and study, but who also experience greater autonomy than the oppressed, are a more reliable historical lever for moving true human interests forward.

There are two possible responses to this line of argument. In the first place, the argument can be dismissed. Marx thinks, at least in capitalist society, that intellectuals play a subordinate role in collective learning.<sup>11</sup> Working class institutions and political parties are sufficient to ensure that the working class will develop a knowledge of their true interests. Marx repeatedly refers to trade unions as "schools" for socialism.

In the second place, the argument about intellectuals can be accepted, but its significance denied. Marx does not think that all classes are in an equally good position to recognize their true interest or solve their collective action problems (see below). Thus, other groups or individuals may play a role in the learning process. Peasants and slaves, for example, may be in a very poor position to overcome their collective action problems.

However, it is not the origin of knowledge but its widespread dissemination which is important. Regardless of who first recognizes true human interests, the question is which groups will be responsive to this knowledge. Not all groups are equally responsive to a given set of ideas, and a given set of ideas is not equally attractive to all groups. The oppressed may lack knowledge of the social conditions required to expand their autonomy, but they will be more or less aware that their autonomy is inhibited.

Furthermore, there must be institutions and organizations for the diffusion of these ideas, and if intellectuals come to dominate those institutions there is the danger that the intellectuals will promote their own interests and not the knowledge which they have gained. The learning process could, in that case, be easily derailed.

Not all agents, then, will be equally capable of learning even if confronted with the appropriate knowledge and/or experience. The ruling class has material interests which make its learning less likely; it has powerful interests which inhibit its ability either to perceive or to work towards promoting true human interests. Marx undoubtedly has this in mind when he writes that "it is only in an order of things in which there are no more class antagonisms that social evolutions will cease to be political revolutions."<sup>12</sup> The old ruling class often needs to be defeated. Once a new level of social learning is institutionalized, however, it becomes more or less accepted. Marx does not think that agents in a communist society will continually try to re-establish capitalism, as one might expect them to do if capitalism was in their true interests. Rather, agents will recognize that capitalism is not in their true interests. At each historical stage, agents

learn about the connection between their interests and the general interest; they learn that some form of social domination is not really in their interests.

There is an obvious objection to this argument about learning: it assumes that the translation of new knowledge into action is unproblematic. But a group may be too scattered or too weak to mobilize effectively even where it recognizes its interest in overturning a constraint on its freedom. Or it may face overwhelming repression. The most important challenge with regard to the translation of knowledge into action, however, does not concern circumstances of repression and class weakness. Game theorists have argued that even if each member of a group recognizes that a public good --a good whose attainment would benefit everyone -- is in his interest, his acting rationally might mean that the group will not achieve the concerted action necessary to gain that good. This is because, to the extent that each member of the group is rational, he may be tempted by the prospect of a free ride; of benefitting from the successful struggle of others for the public good without having to make the effort of participating in the struggle himself. The result is free-rider egoism: if each group member reasons from his self-interest, the result is that nothing will be accomplished. As Mancur Olson puts it, "class-oriented revolutionary action will not occur if the individuals that make up a class act rationally." <sup>13</sup>

Is there a way out of this paradox? Two features of the situation of oppressed social groups suggest how they will tend to be able to modify their collective action problems. The first feature of their real situation is that it is likely to be one in which problems whose solution requires cooperation

will be recurrently presented to them. Through their repeated failure to enact desired goals by not cooperating, agents often learn that cooperation is necessary. Repeated failure can, for example, lead them to enact sanctions for non-cooperation, as in the case of a closed union shop.<sup>14</sup>

A second feature of the situation of oppressed social groups which will tend to ease their collective action problems is the existence of solidarity among individuals within a class, due to their common values and positions. Through continued interaction, members of an oppressed group become both concerned and informed about one another. This growth in mutual concern and knowledge leads to more solidaristic relations among the agents and these new relations tend to reinforce themselves. In other words, once class solidarity emerges, it tends to become the dominant strategy for agents within that class. Solidarity also can lead to sanctions for transgression. Marx emphasizes the factor of solidarity in his discussion of working class revolutionary action, which I will discuss below.

The above considerations provide reasons for thinking that classes are in an especially good position to solve their collective action problems. Agents in a class have mutual sympathy for one another, they are placed in a situation in which problems involving collective action are serially presented, and their problems occur in a context of struggle and conflict which fosters their adeptness at enacting sanctions.<sup>15</sup>

But even if we conclude that oppressed groups can increasingly perceive their true interests, there is a final objection to the argument about objective values which must be answered. In the case of class societies, the interests of different classes are opposed. What is in the

interests of society as a whole may not be in the interests of each of its different classes (except in the infamous long run). There will be disagreements between social classes as to what best realizes true human interests. Why should the oppressed be sufficiently powerful to enforce their knowledge of what is best?

It is here that the role of morality as an imperfect expression of true human interests is important. As I discussed in Chapter 4, moral claims are addressed to all agents in a society. Morality provides agents with reasons to accept social institutions and practices. The reasons given will differ from one society to another, but at the very least, agents must believe that the institutions and practices which embody these moral values provide a framework in which they can satisfy their basic interests. Moreover, all moral systems claim to give agents motivations for acting and criteria for evaluating which are distinct from considerations of self-interest. Marx explicitly argues that moral systems claim to represent, and to some extent really do represent, the "general interest."<sup>16</sup> That is, because morality is addressed to all members of a society, they will tend to involve more than the particular interests of a particular class. Moral norms must be capable of justification in the eyes of all members of society. Otherwise, class societies might degenerate into civil wars.

But Marx argues that morality is also the form taken by social consciousness when society is divided into opposing particular interests, i.e., when one social class dominates another class. Thus, while a moral system is a framework in which agents collectively achieve a degree of control over social circumstances, it also sanctions the rule of a particular class.

Morality serves, then, as an imperfect expression of the conditions for autonomy: it represents a certain degree of social freedom, at the same time that it contains illusions about the conditions for social freedom.

By claiming to represent a general interest without actually being a general interest, moral norms undercut themselves. The outbreak of social discontent and class struggle shows the partial truth of moral claims. As the conflict mounts, the sense of oppression and injustice becomes greater and the illusory aspects of society's norms more transparent. This enables a shift in values, a shift which can have an important impact on class struggles and social transformations by unleashing the power of the oppressed, while (potentially) making the exploiters more reluctant to use theirs.

Thus, social learning emerges because some agents have the capacity to recognize the human interest in autonomy through their understanding of the social constraints on their freedom, and to act on that recognition. The existence of morality gives these agents potential leverage over the rest of society; moral talk refers to the real world and has consequences. If a society claims to represent the general interest and does not in fact represent it, its claim gives hostage to future generations.

The existence of a wants/interests mechanism which allows agents, under the influence of positive and negative associations, to adjust (more or less consciously) their desires and particular interests to their objective interests allows us to explain the actual evolution in moral systems detailed in Chapter 4. These changes involved (1) the incorporation of greater numbers of persons on a basis of equality; and (2) the shift from justification

based on religion and myth to justification which makes "an intrinsic connection between normative principles and effects on human interests."<sup>17</sup> The wants/interests mechanism allows us retrospectively to explain the actual evolution of human desires. Every major social and political transformation has suffered a moral defeat before these changes took place: the Puritan Revolution, the French Revolution, the American Civil War, and the Russian Revolution. In this process, new standards of condemnation were developed and the new morality claimed to express (and really expressed) the hopes and interests of a wider segment of mankind. Even where universal interests have not been the standard, criticism of authority has made use of the fact that this authority has not lived up to its promises. Although it is not always easy to apply this schema to particular historical developments, the wants/interests mechanism allows us to explain the general direction of moral norms.

### **5.3 Historical Discussion**

The preceding discussion has been abstract. In this section, I present a historical example which supports my argument for collective learning. This example is drawn from capitalist society. In the conclusion to this section, I will argue that this analysis of collective learning can strengthen Marx's argument for the transition from capitalism to communism.

#### **5.31 An example**

One example in modern society of collective learning concerns the decline of racial discrimination and the broad elimination of legal barriers for citizenship. Less than thirty years ago, American blacks were denied



the right to vote, excluded from many jobs and educational opportunities. Racism was a deeply rooted ideology. Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, most whites, North and South, considered blacks their inferiors.<sup>18</sup> The decline of the racial caste system in the United States was the result of changes in the ideology of both blacks and whites. While the existence of quiescence does not show consent, there were certainly many blacks who believed that segregation was "the way the world is" and could not be changed. Rosa Parks, the Montgomery bus boycott, and the Freedom Marches taught people that this was not so.

While the movement against racism has not been totally successful, American society is characterized today by a general equality which was inconceivable forty, or even twenty, years ago. Blacks and whites work side by side in many settings which produced anti-black strikes and riots in the 1940s. Survey data shows marked upturns in white attitudes of support for desegregation. Former white racists have accepted -- many genuinely, some hypocritically -- the equality of blacks and whites. In the words of a recent study on racial attitudes in America,

What has changed is the normative definition of appropriate relations between blacks and whites. Whereas discrimination against, and enforced segregation of, blacks was taken for granted by most white Americans as recently as the 1940s, today the dominant belief is that blacks deserve the same treatment and respect as whites, and that some degree of racial integration is a desirable thing.<sup>19</sup>

This example involves changes in the self-conception of blacks and in the attitudes of those who have benefited from the oppression. Black oppression gave rise to a social movement which explicitly focused on the disjunction between the professed ideals of society and its actual practices.

### 5.32 The transition from capitalism to communism

Capitalist society is the society whose developmental prospects Marx is most concerned with. He sees the emancipatory potential for capitalist society in the condition and experiences of the working class. In capitalist society, moreover, the working class is composed of the vast majority of the population. Because of this, Marx expects that there will be a more direct relation between the workers' consciousness of the constraints on their freedom and the abolition of capitalist society than has occurred at any time in the past. This is both because the working class has greater knowledge about human interests than its predecessors and because in capitalist society, there is no need for workers to convince other social classes before they are to succeed.

In this section, I reconstruct Marx's argument about the transition to communism, using the previous discussion as its basis. I show that communism can be the endpoint of the historical process only if workers recognize capitalism's property relations as a constraint on their true interests. Capitalist society is incompatible with the "general interest" expressed by the moral norms which its members accept.

In Volume I of Capital, Marx makes a series of claims about the tendencies of capitalist economic development: (1) capitalist competition leads to the monopolization of the means of production, its control by a small number of owners; (2) capitalist production tends increasingly to displace the labor component in production by machinery, thus leading to a "reserve army" of unemployed workers; (3) capitalism furthers the development of cooperation among workers by assembling them into large

factories and workshops, thereby concentrating the means of production; and (4) capitalism increases the division of labor.

As a result of these processes, workers are organized, de-skilled<sup>20</sup> and degraded<sup>21</sup> at the same time that the development of large scale industry based on machinery lays the foundation for production which is distinct from labor.<sup>22</sup> The transformation of society becomes materially possible: capitalism creates the wealth and productive machinery to generate an enormous surplus.

According to Marx, the changes in the structure of capitalist production make apparent the common interests of the working class. On the basis of this awareness, workers will see the need to overthrow capitalism and establish communism. But how exactly are they to see this? In particular, how do they see that their "separation from the conditions of their realization is improper?"<sup>23</sup> Why should the recognition of the common position of the working class as a whole generate a movement for communism, rather than for some other form of social organization?

Marx's own explicit discussion of this process focuses on the pursuit of material interests. Through defending the conditions which maintain their own survival, Marx believes that workers will be led to challenge the logic of capitalism itself. Underlying Marx's discussion is his assumption of the fundamental importance of the objective conflict of material interests. At times, Marx presents the abolition of capitalism as necessary if workers are to realize even their immediate material interests.<sup>24</sup> More often, his emphasis is on the growth of working class association in the struggle to defend these interests.<sup>25</sup> In their struggles, workers begin to associate with

one another in a manner which leads them to act in concerted opposition to capitalists: they learn that to oppose capitalists effectively they have to act collectively, and not as isolated individuals. Through this collective action, they come to value their association for its own sake. Their revolt against capitalism stems from their recognition that the structure of capitalist society is an impediment to their collective association.

But what values should the proletarian community adopt? Association is possible on various bases. Not all associations need be egalitarian, for example. And, if we reject Marx's belief that there is a clear trend in the direction of the homogenization of wage levels, then we need some other basis for the workers' "common position."

According to one interpretation of Marx's theory of proletarian revolution, the success of working class struggle depends on the ability of workers to free themselves from the moral standpoint of capitalist society and reject it as a hoax.<sup>26</sup> As I have emphasized in previous chapters, evidence for this view can be found in Marx. Furthermore, Marx often presents communist consciousness as a direct product of changes in the labour process. This is a view which I have tried to debunk in this essay. I have argued that the role of collective knowledge about values is crucial in social transformations. Indeed, without this knowledge communism would not necessarily be the end product of history as opposed to some other social form equally optimal for productive growth. In fact, morality plays a crucial role in motivating working class revolutionary action for communism; namely, workers' attempt to realize the general interest expressed in the morality of capitalist society.

The position of the working class in capitalist society is one of subjugation, exploitation, frustration and delusion, caused by existing social relations. Capitalist relations of production prevent workers from exercising substantive control over their circumstances or from using their realized capacities. Thus, capitalist society, like all class societies, contains a group whose aspirations for freedom are particularly oppressed by the class relations of that society: in a capitalist society, the satisfaction of the interests of the workers are dependent upon the prior satisfaction of the interests of the capitalists.

But this oppression is difficult to sustain because the moral norms of capitalist society contain an element of protest against that oppression. These norms lead to protest against that oppression insofar as they portray a standpoint from which all interests must have equal weighting. In capitalist society, practices and institutions are justified only to the extent that they are applicable to everyone.

The moral norms institutionalized in capitalist society are completely universal, but formal: they do not take into account in their application the fundamental inequalities of social life. These inequalities, however, continue the subordination of the interests of one group of people (workers) to the interests of another group (capitalists). These inequalities produce departures from a society in which there is equal freedom, i.e., communist society.

The workers' dependence on the capitalists leads to conflicts, to struggles over material interests. Through these conflicts, workers learn that the satisfaction of their material interests depends on the will of the

capitalists, who have interests which are opposed to theirs. They thus learn that there can be no "general interest" until the capitalist social relations of production are changed. While many of the practices and institutions of capitalist society institutionalize a greater degree of social freedom than previous societies, there is still no real community of interests. The universality of capitalist morality is merely formal.

#### **5.4 Conclusion.**

This essay has tried to address a central problem in Marx's theory of history: the relationship between the tendency of the forces of production to grow and the tendency for freedom to be realized in social life. It is clear that Marx sees both processes at work in history. However, he never presents any account of their relationship. This relationship is, however, crucial if he is to show why communism and not some other social form equally efficient for productive growth results from the "real movement" of history.

G.A. Cohen argues, as we saw earlier, that the growth of freedom is a necessary consequence of the development of human productive power. Not only does the development of the productive forces, on Cohen's account, establish the material basis for human freedom, but it is itself the exercise of that freedom, since through production human beings develop their essential capacities. I have argued that Cohen has failed to establish this conclusion. There are social forms functionally equivalent for the advancement of human productive power. There is no reason to believe that all the possible functional equivalents also represent progress on the

dimension of social freedom. The growth of freedom must therefore be an independent process.

How can Marx explain that process, which is crucial for his theory of history? I have argued that in order to provide such an explanation, Marx must be "reconstructed" as a value realist, that is, as someone who believes that there are values which are in true human interests. The most important of these values is autonomy. I have tried to show how the objective value of autonomy can play an explanatory role in the evolution of agents' moral beliefs and practices. My argument rests on the postulation of a feedback mechanism through which agents can learn that certain of their desires are not in their true interests. Social forms which depart from the institutional requirements of autonomy encourage the growth of dissatisfaction and unrest, even where agents initially believe that a social form is in their interest. There is a feedback mechanism in which the interests of a group in autonomy leads to a change in the groups actions and beliefs. Objective values can have an explanatory function.

To the extent that my reconstruction is successful, it bears on another problem in the interpretation of Marx. Marx paradoxically condemns moral values but advocates communism as better than capitalism. In virtue of what, then, did Marx condemn capitalism? My thesis builds on a distinction drawn by Allen Wood between moral and non-moral values. However, Wood does not address the nature of the non-moral values which Marx advocates. I argue that these values are in true human interests, whereas the moral standpoint is only a distorted representation of those interests. The moral standpoint represents true human interests in the form of an abstract

reconciliation of interests. When an agent takes the standpoint of morality, he evaluates his actions in the light of the opposing interests of others. But under communism, Marx argues, there will be no need to represent our interests as opposed to those of others.

I claim that while Marx condemns the moral form, he sees the content of morality as a distorted representation of true human interests. The appeal of morality is the misdirected appeal of a standpoint from which all interests could be reconciled, a world of social harmony. While this appeal is mis-directed, and while each moral system sanctions the rule of a particular class, the use of moral argument has consequences. Moral claims give hostage to future generations when it is discovered that they are not what they claim to be. Moral norms evolve in history to more closely approximate true human interests.

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How are we to assess reconstructed historical materialism? I have shown that it presents a superior argument to the interpretation of historical materialism understood solely in terms of the development of the productive forces. G.A. Cohen's interpretation, for example, did not offer any argument for why particular social forms emerged from productive development, instead of other forms equally optimal for productive development.

If we are to assess the power of reconstructed historical materialism understood as a critical theory, then it seems to me that the relevant comparison is to Hegelian idealism, a view to which it bears many similarities. Hegel too saw in history a "real movement" to freedom



unfolding within the moral norms and beliefs of successive societies. In addition, some contemporary political theorists inspired by Hegel have stressed the need for "internal criticism," for criticism which begins from the conventional beliefs of a society. They argue that internal criticism must be seen as a precondition for normative discussion of any kind.

Criticism does not work on the basis on abstract moral theorizing; rather, it is possible, if at all, only because the ideals implied by a society's norms are seldom embodied in its practices and institutions. How does reconstructed historical materialism fare in comparison with the Hegel-inspired program of social criticism?

Reconstructed historical materialism differs from Hegelian views in two respects. First, Hegel sees autonomy as realized in a social form which still contains a state, a market economy and a moral system. Human freedom is realized in all these spheres, although the market economy of civil society is subordinated to the rules and authority of the state. Marx correctly criticizes Hegel for failing to consider that in a capitalist society economic wealth is fungible into political power and that under such conditions the state cannot control civil society but will be controlled by it. To represent the state as the general interest, Hegel is forced to represent it as independent of the needs and interests of individuals.

The solution of reconstructed historical materialism to this problem, however, is utopian insofar as Marx believes that full communism is a society in which no social divisions or disagreements will remain. It is the ideal of a perfectly harmonious community. This is unrealistic, given that even in a society of "superabundance," people will have conflicting interests.

There will be situations in which the realization of the goals of one person will prevent another person or persons from achieving their goals. This may happen over conflicting values (value realism is not committed to the position that all values must be true or false) or over positional goods (not everyone can sit behind home plate at Shea Stadium). Historical materialism's critique of existing society must therefore be less "radical" than Marx intended it to be. Communism will not do away with "moral consciousness."

The second respect in which reconstructed historical materialism differs with Hegel-inspired social theory is over the issue of "false consciousness." While according to reconstructed historical materialism, common-sense consciousness contains a certain degree of knowledge about true human interests, there are also systematic distortions. There is no guarantee that illusions will be dispelled. Rather, learning about human interests depends upon historical experiences, especially class conflicts which reveal the lack of a real community of interests.

There is undoubtedly a tension here between the overall theory of history Marx offers -- the slow emergence of man's consciousness of the conditions required for social freedom -- and his attempt to develop a critical theory which dispels human illusions. If the growth of knowledge about human interests is the characteristic tendency of history, why should there be the need for a special theory to aid in the dispelling of illusions? This tension, however, is not as severe as it might initially seem to be. Collective learning is not inevitable. A critical theory of society can facilitate this learning by demonstrating the mystificatory aspects of social

life contained within existing social structures and ideologies. Marx the critical theorist can offer nothing beyond this act of revelation -- it is the social agents themselves in their struggle against domination who must participate in the creation of their own freedom.

## Notes to Chapter Five

1. For a discussion of the role of illusions in maintaining social domination, see Norman Geras, "Marx and the Critique of Political Economy." In Ideology in Social Science. Edited by Robin Blackburn (New York, 1973).
2. Peter Railton, "Moral Realism" in The Philosophical Review, xciv (number 2) 1986, p. 186.
3. Railton, p. 183.
4. Gilbert Harman, The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics (New York, 1977), p. 6.
5. Gilbert Harman, "Is There a Single True Morality?" in Morality, Reason and Truth. Edited by D. Copp and D. Zimmerman (Totowa, 1984), p. 32.
6. Harman, "True Morality," p. 48.
7. Railton, p. 182.
8. Karl Marx, Grundrisse, trans. M. Nicolaus, (New York, 1973) p. 463.
9. This is a point recognized by Railton.
10. See V.I. Lenin, What is to be Done (Peking, 1973). Michael Walzer suggested this objection to me.
11. Thus, communists have only a limited role in working class revolution. See "The Communist Manifesto," in Robert Tucker (ed.) The Marx-Engels Reader, (New York, 1978) p. 500.
12. Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, (New York, 1973) p. 175.
13. Mancur Olson Jr., The Logic of Collective Action, (New York, 1969) p. 105.
14. see Olson, op. cit., pp. 75-91, and 96-97 for a discussion of such measures.
15. Marx does not think that all classes are in an equally good position to solve their collective action problems. As a case in point, see his discussion of the French peasantry in The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, (New York, 1969) p. 123ff.

16. See, for example, Karl Marx, The German Ideology (New York, 1973) p. 65-66.
17. Railton, p. 198.
18. See, for example, George Frederickson, The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-Americans' Character and Destiny, 1817-1914 (New York, 1971).
19. See H. Schuman, C. Steeh and L. Bobo, Racial Attitudes in America (Cambridge, 1985).
20. Karl Marx, Capital vol. I, (New York, 1977) p. 545.
21. Capital, vol. I, p. 482.
22. Capital, vol. I p. 482.
23. Grundrisse, p. 463.
24. See, for example, Karl, Marx, The Communist Manifesto in The Marx-Engels Reader, p. 483: "The modern laborer ...instead of rising with the progress of industry sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper..."
25. Shlomo Avineri quotes a passage which suggests this line of argument. See The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx (New York, 1968) p. 141.
26. See the discussion in Chapter 2.

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