

Leninism, Scientific Socialism, and Democracy

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Abstract

During the twentieth century a number of accounts of Lenin's theory and practice argued that Leninism is incompatible with democracy. In doing so, various scholars advanced the now popular belief, that the theory of scientific socialism defended by Lenin and prevalent in the Third International is undemocratic. Liberal and conservative critics of socialism are not the only proponents of this argument. Leninism has been criticised on this basis within the currents of Russian Bolshevism, Left Communism and Western Marxism. It is for this reason that the Marxism of Lenin and the Third International has been rejected as dogmatic, vulgar, and positivist: few contemporary Marxists condone dogmatism, vulgarity, or positivism. This dissertation examines and rejects the claim that Lenin's theory of scientific socialism is anti-democratic. It argues that the Leninist conception of Marxism as a science is compatible with democratic practice, and promotes a democratic conception of socialism.

Abbreviations

The abbreviation CW refers to Lenin's *Collected Works*. The number following CW refers to the specific volume.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

2017 marks the hundredth year anniversary of the Russian October revolution, during which the Bolshevik party seized state power and began the construction of the world's first communist state. Historians and political scientists are still discussing the causes and consequences of this momentous event, and a great many many controversies still surround interpretations of it. Despite this multitude of disagreements, scholars of the October revolution and the Soviet Union tend to agree that the Bolshevik party would not have been victorious if it were not for the visionary leadership provided by the communist revolutionary, politician, and political theorist Vladimir Lenin, for he alone thought that the objective conditions had matured sufficiently for a revolutionary upheaval. By combining sheer rhetorical force with theoretical ingenuity, Lenin singlehandedly convinced his party and the working class that the time for talking was over, and that the time for revolutionary action had arrived. In doing so, he changed the course of modern world history.

Lenin's influence upon political developments did not end after his death in 1924, however, for his ideas continued to provide the theoretical, organisational and strategic basis for much of the worldwide socialist movement over the course of the twentieth century. This movement succeeded in bringing a third of the world's population under the rule of

Marxism, and many of these Marxist states proclaimed themselves to be Leninist. Even today Lenin's ideas continue to influence world politics, for the ruling communist parties of the remaining Marxist countries are still organised upon the Leninist principle of democratic centralism. It is precisely because Lenin's political thought had and continues to have such a large impact upon politics, that an elucidation of its principles remains as relevant, as important, and as necessary now as it ever did. A fine-grained textual analysis is made even more pressing due to the fact that many of Lenin's core concepts and ideas have been both misconstrued or consciously distorted by his supporters and critics alike.

Although there are various ways of understanding Leninism, the most concise and succinct definition is provided by Joseph Stalin, whose lucid presentation of its fundamentals remains unsurpassed. In *The Foundations of Leninism* Stalin states that:

Leninism is Marxism of the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution. To be more exact, Leninism is the theory and tactics of the proletarian revolution in general, the theory and tactics of the dictatorship of the proletariat in particular (Stalin 1953: 73).

The first point Stalin makes is that Leninism is the direct continuation of Marxism, that is, the philosophical, political and economic ideas of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. The second point he makes is that Leninism developed during the era of imperialism, a historical phase in the development of

capitalism when the western European nations colonised vast sections of the globe, resulting in world war. The third point he makes is that Leninism is the revolutionary theory of the working class. It describes how the workers will organise themselves into a revolutionary vanguard party, abolish capitalism, and establish the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', which is a transitory stage that precedes the attainment of socialism and communism.

As Stalin (1953: 91) rightly points out, Leninism is not just the continuation of Marxism, for 'Lenin's method is not only the restoration of, but also the concretisation and further development of the critical and revolutionary method of Marx, of his materialist dialectics'. Indeed, Lenin made important philosophical, political, and economic contributions to the foundations that were established by Marx and Engels. This dissertation focuses upon one contribution in particular, that is, his theory of scientific socialism.

Like most of Lenin's political ideas, the term 'scientific socialism' has its origins in the works of Marx and Engels, who coined the concept in order to distinguish their own ideas from those of the utopian socialists. Marx and Engels developed the theory of scientific socialism at a late stage in their intellectual development, and as a result, the concept remained in many ways obscure and underdeveloped. Whilst Marx made various references to his own scientific method, he never used the term 'scientific socialism', and Engels only provided a very general overview in his famous pamphlet, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*.

Lenin, however, never became acquainted with the 'humanist' writings of the 'young' Marx, which were published for the first time after his death. The classical works that Lenin knew and studied were the scientific writings of the 'mature' Marx, which were in turn interpreted and codified by Engels. This meant that the theory of scientific socialism took on a high level of significance from the very beginning of Lenin's intellectual development. It gave him the conviction that 'Social-Democracy bases its whole world-outlook on scientific socialism, i.e., Marxism' (CW 15: 402).

Lenin's theory of scientific socialism is based upon two interconnected doctrines, one philosophical and one sociological. In the first place, he states that 'the philosophical basis of Marxism...is dialectical materialism', the components of which are derived from the philosophy of science and nature expounded by Engels in his influential work, *Anti-Duhring* (CW 15: 402; CW 14: 15, 19). Dialectical materialism states that the universe is governed by 'definite laws' of nature, established by the natural sciences. Lenin argues that dialectics also includes 'what is now called the theory of knowledge, or epistemology', which focuses upon 'studying and generalising the origin and development of knowledge, the transition from non-knowledge to knowledge' (CW 21: 54).

Lenin argues that the sociological basis of scientific socialism is historical materialism. He states that the core components of this doctrine can be found within Marx's magnum opus, *Capital*, which is 'the chief and basic work in which scientific socialism is expounded' (CW 1: 185). In this work Marx

applied the cosmic laws of dialectical materialism to an analysis of social phenomena. In doing so, he argued that the development of society is a law-governed process that can be 'determined with the precision of natural science' (Marx cited in CW 21: 56). In Lenin's view, 'historical materialism was a great achievement in scientific thinking', for it 'made it possible for the first time to study with scientific accuracy the social conditions of the life of the masses, and the changes in those conditions' (CW 21: 56). 'The chaos and arbitrariness that had previously reigned in views on history and politics were replaced by a strikingly integral and harmonious scientific theory' (CW 19: 25).

'Since the appearance of *Capital*', states Lenin, 'the materialist conception of history is no longer a hypothesis, but a scientifically proven proposition'. He goes on to argue that until another thinker comes up with a theory of comparative scientific rigour, 'the materialist conception of history will be a synonym for social science'. The conclusion that Lenin draws from this is that Marxism is not only a scientific conception of history, but 'the only scientific conception of it' (CW 1: 142).

Not only does Lenin believe that Marx was 'the first to elevate sociology to the level of a science' (CW 1: 140). He also argues that 'Marxism was the first to transform socialism from a utopia into a science' (CW 4: 210-11). In Lenin's view, scientific socialism rejects the utopian notion that socialism can be established through rational argumentation and human will power alone, for 'In their scientific works, Marx and Engels were the first to explain that socialism is not the invention of dreamers, but the final aim and necessary

result of the development of the productive forces in modern society' (CW 2: 19). They showed socialism to be the inevitable outcome of an objective historical process, one that cannot be affected by the human will. Capitalism will collapse not due to the arguments and actions of a few well-meaning reformers, but due to its own internal economic contradictions. This means, according to Lenin, that the socialist movement should base itself not upon utopian blueprints and wishful thinking, but upon a scientific understanding of the objective laws of economic development. The conviction that science alone provides the key to human emancipation is what distinguished 'the representatives of scientific socialism, Marx and his followers, from the utopian socialists, from the petty bourgeois socialists, from the socialist intellectuals and from the socialist dreamers' (CW 27: 465). The rejection of utopian socialism and the defence of scientific socialism is therefore a central theme running throughout Lenin's works on politics, science and philosophy.

Not only does Lenin view scientific socialism as a tool for outlining the trajectory of the socialist movement. It also informs his ideas, arguments and decisions during every political situation. It would therefore not be an exaggeration to suggest that the doctrine of scientific socialism defines Leninism as a political theory. It should also come to no surprise that this doctrine is also one of the most controversial aspects of Lenin's thought.

During the twentieth century a number of accounts of Lenin's theory and practice argued that Leninism is incompatible with democracy. In doing so, various scholars advanced the now popular belief, that the theory of scientific socialism defended by Lenin and prevalent in the Third International is

undemocratic. The most recent and sophisticated defence of this argument is provided by Neil Harding in his book *Leninism* (1996). In a chapter ominously entitled 'A Philosophy of Certainty: Dialectical Materialism', Harding outlines two commonly held conditions for democratic decision-making, and he then shows that Leninism violates both of these conditions.

In the first place, it is generally thought that the correct solutions to political problems are uncertain in democracies. Policy decisions require ethical judgements, which means that there are no objectively correct answers. People therefore have differing views of what the best solution to a political problem is. Even if the ends of policy decisions can be agreed upon, there is usually uncertainty and conflict over how the end may best be achieved. This epistemic uncertainty is therefore a necessary condition for democratic debate, deliberation, and compromise (Dahl 1998: 71-72).

In Harding's view, Lenin's theory of scientific socialism violates epistemic uncertainty because it is a monistic 'philosophy of certainty'. Leninism claims to have found the objective truth through the use of science, and it therefore does not tolerate alternative political viewpoints. 'Science, Leninism concluded, is not advanced by taking straw polls, counting heads or conducting elections...all problems are amenable to scientific resolution' (Harding 1996: 241).

A second generally accepted condition for democratic decision-making is political equality. In its broadest philosophical sense, political equality means

that all people are viewed to be intrinsically equal, and that they are treated with the same degree of respect (Christiano 1990: 151). In its application to government, political equality means that all citizens should be considered to be sufficiently well qualified to participate in the democratic process of governing the state. It also means that in the decision making process, the government must give equal consideration to the interests of every person bound by those decisions (Dahl 1998: 76, 79).

According to Harding, Lenin's theory of scientific socialism violates political equality because it makes an epistemic distinction between the Marxian intellectuals who can comprehend the scientific laws of history, and the rest of the population, who lack this capacity. 'This is an ideology created wholly by intellectuals and...not only by them, but for them and in their interests' (Harding 1996: 239). Harding argues that Leninism is committed to the dictatorship of an elite intellectual vanguard, which will rule during both the revolutionary upheaval of capitalist society, and the post-revolutionary period of socialist construction (Harding 1996: 241-42). This view is one that Harding shares with the commentators who argue that Lenin's positivism, like any positivist political science, reduces politics to problems of technical efficiency and the dictatorship of scientific experts.

Harding claims then, that Leninism rejects two conditions for democratic decision making- political equality and epistemic uncertainty. In doing so, he specifically reiterates provides the now widely held belief, that 'the Leninist

metaphysic of science was, from first to last, radically at odds with democratic theory or practice' (Harding 1996: 170).

Liberals and conservatives are not the only proponents of this argument. Leninism has also been criticised on this basis within the currents of Russian Bolshevism, left communism, and western Marxism, among others. As Lenin's interpretation of scientific socialism provided the supreme source of authority in the Third International and much of the communist world, his ideas are often blamed for prompting the decline of Marxism into dogmatism and dictatorship during the twentieth century. This is a major reason as to why the democratic left has rejected the Marxism of Lenin and the Third International as dogmatic, vulgar, and positivist: few contemporary Marxists condone dogmatism, vulgarity, or positivism.

Argument

This dissertation does not question whether or not epistemic uncertainty or political equality are necessary conditions for democratic decision-making. It is intentionally entitled 'Leninism, scientific socialism and democracy' in that order, for the reason that it focuses upon establishing the correct interpretation of Leninism and scientific socialism, rather than democracy. This dissertation does, however, argue that Leninism violates neither condition. Lenin defends a fallibilist conception of science, the claims of which are uncertain. His view that Marxism is a proletarian science does not violate, but affirms the political equality of all who participate in the process of political

change. Lenin's commitment to scientific socialism is also a commitment to democracy.

Structure

In order to pursue this argument, Chapter two situates the question within the literature and establishes the unique contribution of this dissertation. Chapter three examines and refutes Harding's argument that Leninism violates the first necessary condition for democracy, epistemic uncertainty, whilst Chapter four examines and refutes his charge that it violates the second condition, that of political equality. Chapter five summarises the argument.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Introduction

Within the voluminous literature on Leninism, only a few studies focus upon its relationship with democracy. However, almost all commentaries address this relation to some extent, as it is virtually unavoidable in any discussion of Leninism as a political theory. This chapter outlines the various interpretations of Leninism, and shows that these interpretations determine how scholars assess the relationship between Leninism and democracy. These are ideal types only, and many interpreters of Leninism would have good reason to disassociate themselves in various respects from one or the other. Nevertheless, the general tendencies of interpretation characterised here are fundamental, and grasping them will make it easier to orientate this dissertation amongst the multitude of controversies surrounding the interpretation of Lenin's writings, and their relation to democracy.

I. Leninism as opportunism

The most popular reading, which Lih (2008: 14-18; 2003: 5-49) calls the 'textbook interpretation', argues that Lenin was primarily a shrewd pragmatist and a revolutionary practitioner, who could assess the concrete situation and identify its potentialities (Wilson 1972: 390). As a theorist, he was inconsistent and often changed his mind on many issues (Hunt 1950: 171). The scholars in this tradition therefore argue that theory was unimportant to Lenin, and that

it did not influence his political ideas (Mayo 1955: 290). It is thought that Lenin typically adopted a tactic without regard for the theory, and only then supported this tactic by referencing the Marxist classics (Plamenatz 1954: 221; Besancon 1981: 212-42)

This interpretation constructs Lenin as a skilful yet power hungry opportunist, and Leninism is defined as an organisational structure, one that is ruled by a centralised and disciplined vanguard party (Agursky 1987: 71-80). These commentaries argue that Leninism was one of the first ideologies of the modern era to recognise and harness the potential of the new means of mobilising and manipulating the masses (Lichtheim 1961: 325-51; Claudin-Urondo 1975: 61-81). The grievances of all social classes were to be exploited and galvanised by the party's frontline organisations (Valentinov 1968: 64-76). This conception of Leninism supports the widespread view that Leninist regimes were totalitarian (Sayer 1978: 29-37). These accounts emphasise the states use of control mechanisms granted to them by modern technology, to shape and determine the ideas of the population, as well as to control, guide, and mobilise their activities (Conquest 1972: 34-42). Leninism is seen as synonymous with totalitarianism, and these accounts typically rely upon Lenin's theory of party organisation outlined in *What is to be Done?* (Service 1985: 88-93). Here Lenin famously states that the workers cannot develop the necessary revolutionary consciousness, and that they therefore need to be directed by the vanguard party.

II. Leninism as Jacobinism

A supportive and parallel reading to the 'opportunist' interpretation is that the Leninist conception of the party and revolutionary mobilisation was the product of the Russian revolutionary tradition, which gave Lenin his method for transforming the political landscape (Ulam 1969: 108-9; Payne 1964: 30; Weeks 1968: 3-7; Baron 1963: 239). This tradition drew upon Jacobinism, a form of elitism which argued that the process of history could be shaped and determined by the conscious intervention of a ruthless, dedicated and disciplined minority, which should use terror if necessary, to accomplish their aims (Schapiro 1970: 4; Utechin 1964: 217; Pipes 1968: 49; Volkogonov 1994: 5; Hook 1964: 166). Unlike contemporary European political practice, which had for a long time accepted the ideas and procedures of democracy, the Russian revolutionary tradition had no knowledge of democracy, and thus had no commitment to it (De George 1968: 28; Haimson 1955: 132-8; Mason 1929: 527). In these studies, it is Russian Jacobinism, rather than Marxism, which defines Leninism as a theory (Daniels 1962: 86; Possony 1964: 11).

III. Lenin as a democrat

On the opposite end of the spectrum, a small literature has challenged the prevailing view of Leninism as a form of opportunism/ Russian Jacobinism, by arguing that Lenin was a democrat. Liebman and Colletti (1972: 219-229) argue that Lenin outlined an essentially democratic vision of socialism in his famous work *The State and Revolution*. They point out that Lenin envisioned

a system of universal suffrage and mass, voluntary participation in state governance that sought to emulate the Paris commune. The daily affairs of society were to be organised and controlled by the workers themselves, and the standing army would be replaced by a people's militia. Elected representatives would be subject to direct recall, and all major political decisions would first require extensive deliberation. Liebman (1975: 191-96) goes so far as to suggest that the theory of democracy presented in this text is essentially anarchist and libertarian in nature.

Other scholars have argued that Lenin's democratic credentials can be seen in his theory of inner party democracy, which was itself a microcosm of the soviet state. In his article 'Leninism and Democracy' Nash (1990: 19-32) refutes the opportunist interpretation of the vanguard party as a monolithic and hierarchical organisation by showing that Lenin supported voting and deliberation on all political issues, including those issues that concerned the theoretical foundations of Marxism itself. In Nash's view, Lenin's infamous 1921 ban on party factions was an emergency response to the civil war, rather than a timeless aspect of his doctrine.

Other commentators refute the opportunist argument that Lenin sought to repress the spontaneous initiatives of the masses and impose the leadership of the vanguard party (Nistad 2010: 148). In the opinion of Trotskyists such as Cliff (1975: 69), Molyneux (1978: 59-60) and Le Blanc (1990: 62), Lenin wanted the vanguard party to lead, rather than to quash the spontaneous working class movement. However, as Lih points out, their defence of Lenin's

democratic credentials is inconsistent, as they do not question the opportunist interpretation of *What is to be Done?* as an elitist text. They instead dismiss this text by arguing that it was an anomaly in Lenin's writings, which signified a distinct yet temporary break from his otherwise consistently democratic thought. These authors ascribe to what Lih (2008: 19) calls the 'bending the stick' interpretation, the notion that Lenin held contradictory ideas that changed along with the political environment. Due to the fact that these scholars do not dispute the elitist implications of *What is to be Done?*, Lih is right in arguing that they share more in common with those who view Leninism as a strand of anti-democratic opportunism. To write off *What is to be Done?* as an anomaly is hardly a convincing way of showing Lenin's commitment to democracy.

In contrast to the Trotskyist approach, Lih's *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is To Be Done? In Context* (2008) is a more convincing attempt to repudiate the textbook interpretation of *What is to be Done?*. The central thrust of Lih's argument is that the vast majority of scholars have fundamentally misinterpreted *What is to be Done?* because they fail to situate it within the historical context of Russian social democracy. Lih argues that this text was written not in order to denigrate the spontaneous activities of the masses, but instead, to celebrate it (2008: 20-21). Lenin relished in the revolutionary outbursts of the working class, however, he realised that a successful class required revolutionary leadership. Lih argues that it was actually Lenin's opponents who underestimated the level of proletarian consciousness. Lih also analyses Lenin's other political writings within the same period as *What is*

to be Done?, and he finds that between 1900-1903 Lenin repeatedly spoke of how the socialist movement was lagging behind the spontaneous proletarian movement. As for Lenin's statement about the need to 'divert' the workers' movement from its spontaneous path, Lih (2008: 346-53) convincingly argues that this was principally a rhetorical turn of phrase based on a response to formulations made by Lenin's opponents.

Whilst the scholars outlined above defend Lenin's democratic credentials, they do so predominantly at the organisational level, in the sense that they focus upon Lenin's writings on party organisation, tactics and strategy. They all (with Lih as a notable exception) define Leninism primarily in terms of its strategic aspects, and they therefore overlook its underlying theoretical and philosophical aspects. This has meant that some of the more fundamental criticisms of the relationship between Leninism and democracy remain mostly unquestioned.

IV. Leninism as a philosophical doctrine

The more sophisticated studies of Lenin's political thought acknowledge that he was not only an intelligent strategist, organiser and leader, but a doctrinaire, whose ideas and actions were dictated by his commitment to Marxism. By applying a rigorous historical materialist analysis to Russia in works such as *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* and *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin sought to create an analytical framework with which to both understand the world and devise his political strategy (Harding 1977: 5; 1983: 3-5; 1976: 366-383; Lane 1981: 3-4). Marxist

philosophy therefore provided Lenin with his general world outlook and informed every decision that he made. This means that the relationship between Leninism and democracy can be only if his underlying philosophy is understood, and it is precisely this philosophical core that provides the focus of this dissertation.

The scholars who recognise the philosophical character of Leninism are predominantly critical of Lenin, though, as chapters three and four make clear, not all of them are critics of Marxism. Philosophical commentaries highlight three theoretical/philosophical aspects of Leninism that are incompatible with democratic practice. The first aspect is Lenin's interpretation of historical materialism, which argues that the political superstructure of society is determined by the economic base. If democracy requires require political equality (as most people think that it does), and if the source of power resides within the economic domain, then genuine democracy can only be made possible once the disparities in economic power have been eliminated. This means that the particular political system is irrelevant. What matters is not the political form of society, but the class that controls the means of production. In Leninist theory, democracy is guaranteed once the means of production are taken into socialist ownership. This means that the political system that presides over this new mode of production will be deemed to be democratic, no matter what form it takes. This economic reductionism is hostile to democracy, as all political problems are reduced to economics (Harding 1996: 151-8; Femia 1993: 123; Hindess 1980: 40-41).

A second theoretical feature of Leninism that violates democracy is its reduction of all systemic conflicts to the class struggle. According to this line of thought, once the means of production are under common ownership, classes cease to exist. There is no longer a capitalist class that owns the means of production, or a subservient class of wage labourers who own only their labour power. In place of this antagonism there develops a homogeneity of interests in society and politics. Since Leninism believes that parties represent the irreconcilably opposed interests of different classes, the necessity for a multi party system disappears once socialism is attained. The popular will can henceforth be expressed by a single party. The end of parties is the end of the pluralism, which is vital for democracy (Harding 1996: 152, 166-67; Femia 1993: 123-4; Pierson 1986: 80-83).

VI. Leninism, scientific socialism and democracy

Given the limited scope of this dissertation, the two allegedly anti-democratic philosophical aspects of Leninism outlined above are not addressed. It instead focuses upon what commentators view to be the third philosophical aspect of Leninism that violates democracy, that is, Lenin's theory of scientific socialism.

Epistemic uncertainty

The first chapter of this dissertation analyses the claim that Lenin's theory of scientific socialism violates the democratic condition of epistemic uncertainty. Some commentators argue that it was not Lenin, but Marx and Engels who

were the first to violate this condition. Popper (1962: 269; 1961: 3; 1963: 338-339), for instance, accuses Marx of creating an infallible historical prophecy that cannot be falsified. Femia (1985), on the other hand, argues that Marx's commitment to science is by definition a commitment to objective truth. The problem with their arguments is that they provide little textual evidence in support of their claim, for there is none. As Blakeley points out in his book *Soviet Theory of Knowledge*, Marx 'wrote no work which can properly be called epistemological'. Aside from a few irrelevant passages in *Capital*, the 'sole comment by Marx' on epistemology is his second thesis on Feuerbach, which provides an ambivalent attitude towards objective truth (Blakeley 1964: 14). Whilst Blakeley (1964: 15) states that Engels wrote three works 'which touch on questions of theory of knowledge', the fallibilist conception of science put forward in these texts rejects the possibility of obtaining certain knowledge. Blakeley therefore argues that Lenin alone 'must be considered the actual founder of the Marxist-Leninist theory of knowledge. His *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1909) is the only 'classic' work which is completely devoted to theory of knowledge' (Blakeley 1964: 16). Accordingly, the claim that scientific socialism is committed to objective truth can only be levelled at Lenin's version of it, rather than that of Marx and Engels.

The association of Lenin's philosophy with epistemic certainty has been challenged, albeit indirectly, by scholars within the Trotskyist and Hegelian-Marxist traditions (THM), who distinguish between two distinct phases of Lenin's philosophical development. The first phase is the pre-1914 Lenin who wrote *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. In this work Lenin is accused of

defending a 'copy theory of reflection', which states that human knowledge is a direct and accurate reflection of the real external world. Lenin's crude, non-dialectical conception of knowledge saw objective truth as being obtainable, and it gives credence to the claim that scientific socialism violates epistemic uncertainty. However, after 'rediscovering Hegel' by reading his *Science of Logic* in 1914, Lenin developed a dialectical understanding of the world and human knowledge. Lenin allegedly discarded the copy theory of reflection in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, where he states that human knowledge reflects nature only approximately (Anderson 1995: 71-72; Dunayevskaya 1971: 168, 171; 1973: Ch. 3; Sheehan 1993: 135; Joseph 2002: 45).

The THM interpretation analyses Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* mainly in terms of its effect upon Lenin's political practice. It argues that whereas the vulgar Lenin of the pre-war period accepted the quietest evolutionary politics of the second international, the post war Hegelian Lenin adopted an activist politics of revolutionary action (Anderson 1995: xiv). This dissertation contributes to this literature by instead linking Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* to a defence of epistemic uncertainty.

One problem with THM interpretation is that its distinction between a dogmatic pre 1914 Lenin and a non-dogmatic post 1914 is both unsatisfactory and unconvincing. It is unsatisfactory because it agrees with Lenin's critics that his pre-1914 works were dogmatic, and it therefore condemns a large proportion of his works. Chapter three argues that this concession is unnecessary.

The THM interpretation is unconvincing because it erroneously claims that Lenin discarded the vulgar materialism of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* after 1914. This view is evidently wrong, as Lenin chose to publish a second edition of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in 1920, six years after he wrote his *Philosophical Notebooks*, which was not published until five years after his death. In the preface to the second edition Lenin states that this work was re-published in order to provide the definitive outline of Marxist philosophy:

With the exception of a few corrections in the text, the present edition does not differ from the previous one. I hope that...it will prove useful as an aid to an acquaintance with the philosophy of Marxism, dialectical materialism (CW 14: 21).

Contrary to the THM interpretation, the textual evidence suggests that Lenin never rejected the ideas of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. On the contrary, he always believed that this work provided the definitive account of his philosophy. This dissertation deals with this problem by arguing that *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in fact defends a fallibilist conception of science. This text is not the quintessential work of 'vulgar Marxism' that the THM interpretation makes it out to be.

Another problem with the THM interpretation is recognised by one of its more sophisticated proponents, John Rees. Whilst Rees (1998: 189) believes that Lenin did deepen his understanding of Marxism during the war, he argues that the THM approach underestimates the extent of continuity in Lenin's ideas.

Although Rees rightly highlights the continuity between Lenin's pre and post 1914 philosophical works, he still ascribes to the notion that there are two distinct phases of Lenin's philosophical development.

The THM attempt to set up the dogmatic Lenin of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* against the anti-dogmatic Lenin of his *Philosophical Notebooks*, for the purposes of criticising the former and praising the latter, is a sterile pursuit. It sheds light neither on an understanding of the development of Lenin's writings, nor the vices and virtues. This dissertation dismisses the notion of a pre and post 1914 Lenin. It instead argues that Lenin's fallibilist and anti-dogmatic conception of science can be found not just in his post 1914 works, but in many of his works on science and philosophy. Lenin did not in fact 'deepen' his understanding of Marxism and become less dogmatic in 1914, as this 'understanding' in fact existed from the very beginning of his intellectual development.

Political equality

Chapter two of this dissertation analyses the claim that Lenin's theory of scientific socialism violates political equality. The scholarship on scientific socialism and political equality draws many of its ideas from the literature that discusses the relationship between technocracy and democracy. A political system is technocratic if it involves governance by un-elected and unaccountable experts known as technocrats (Meynaud 1968: 31). These are

individuals with technical training and occupations who exercise governmental authority by virtue of their scientific knowledge (Gunnar 2006: 56-81).

Most scholars see the relationship between technocracy and democracy as a zero sum game. Whilst democracy means rule by the people (demos), technocracy means rule by an elite of (technical) experts. Whilst democracy is committed to political equality, technocracy is committed to political inequality. It is therefore generally thought that higher levels of technocracy mean lower levels of democracy, and vice versa (Fischer 1990). However, It is also generally acknowledged that most democratic systems do contain some form of technocratic expertise, as the term 'technocratic' is often used to describe democracies that include non-elected professionals at the ministerial level (Fischer 2000). Furthermore, the theoretical literature suggests that some degree of technocratic expertise is necessary in modern democracies, not only due to the size of modern societies, but also due to the increasingly complex problems that political leaders face (Dahl 1998: 78-9). However, most scholars recognise that an important distinction can be made between democracies with technocratic elements on the one hand, and technocracies with few or no democratic elements on the other (Dahl 1998: 71). The latter system is usually associated with the classical positivist philosophy of science developed by Comte and Saint-Simon (Ball 1984: 239-40). Classical positivism proclaims that both the natural and social worlds are governed by ahistorical causal laws. Knowledge of these laws also grants the ability to predict events. The reason for this is that to explain a phenomenon is to cite the causal antecedents required to produce or prevent it. The ability to predict

events therefore grants the power to control events. It is not a democratic citizenry, however, which is to direct these affairs, for they lack the requisite scientific knowledge. Only the technocratic experts who understand the laws of society can rule. The classical positivist conception of technocracy therefore entails a non-democratic system of governance in which decision makers are selected on the basis of their technological knowledge. Scientists, engineers, technologists, or any experts in any field, would compose the governing body, instead of elected representatives. Leadership skills would be selected on the basis of specialised knowledge and performance, rather than parliamentary skills. Diversity of opinion and criticism cannot be allowed in the positivist technocracy, for it may allow people who lack the necessary knowledge to change society, with disastrous results. In order to prevent this from happening, all criticism must be suppressed (Fay 1975: Ch. 1-3).

Much of the controversy in the literature on classical scientific socialism and democracy concerns its relationship with positivism. On the one hand, some scholars argue that Marx was a positivist, and that he is therefore responsible for the authoritarianism of Lenin (Habermas 1971: 102-112; 1972: 36; Wellmer 1974: 67- 87; Hayek 1955). Others argue that it was not Marx, but Engels, who developed the positivist version of scientific socialism that led to dogmatism and dictatorship (Thomas 1976: 2; Ball 1984: 241; Farr 1984: 223-24). Others yet argue that Engels defends a sophisticated version of scientific socialism that rejects positivism (O'Neill 1986; 1996; Sheehan 1993: 45-6).

Although the relationship between classical scientific socialism and positivism is contested, chapter four shows that there is little disagreement when it comes to Lenin, whose unique epistemological contributions to the doctrine are often described as positivist. This dissertation contributes to the literature by arguing that Lenin rejects positivism. He does not think that only the expert few can understand science, and he does not think that scientific knowledge grants control over events.

This dissertation is framed as a response to Harding not because his arguments are unknown, non-representative, and therefore easy to refute. On the contrary, Harding occupies an authoritative position in the literature on Leninism, not only because he has written voraciously on the subject, but because he also provides one of the most charitable and sympathetic interpretations of Lenin's thought. In one of his earlier articles, 'Lenin and his critics: Some problems of interpretation', Harding (1976) rejects the deluge of ideologically prejudiced and hostile interpretations of Leninism that had emerged since the beginning of the cold war. Harding instead argues that Lenin was in many ways an original, intelligent and rational doctrinaire who made valuable contributions to the Marxist tradition. Harding expands upon this theme in his subsequent two-volume study, *Lenin's Political Thought*, (1977, 1983) which gives a detailed account of Lenin's intellectual development. The first volume (1977) deals with Lenin's political thought in the pre 1914 period, which is a period that other scholars tend to neglect or skip through. Harding correctly recognises that some of Lenin's most important theoretical contributions to Marxism were made during this time.

Useful insights in this volume include a detailed analysis of Lenin's largely understudied text, the *Development of Capitalism in Russia*, which Harding convincingly views to be his magnum opus. In both of these volumes Harding convincingly argues that Lenin was an orthodox Marxist, whose thought was informed by a sophisticated Marxist analysis.

Harding's most recent work, *Leninism* (1996), provides an overview of the Leninist doctrine, and is essentially the synthesis and culmination of his prior ideas on Lenin. Whilst this book is more critical than his previous work, it provides the definitive account of Lenin's political thought, and his theory of scientific socialism in particular. Since Harding's arguments against scientific socialism are comprehensive, they deserve to be answered in detail by a focused study.

The second reason for focusing upon Harding's account is that of the few commentaries that recognise the importance of philosophy in Leninism, few have found it necessary to undertake a detailed exegesis of the relevant texts. Harding's book, on the other hand, dedicates an entire chapter to an analysis of Lenin's philosophy of science, dialectical materialism, which is unparalleled in terms of its detail and sophistication. This factor makes Harding's book particularly relevant to this dissertation. His arguments for the epistemic certainty and elitism of Leninism provide a ready-made peg on which to hang the argument that Lenin's conception of science is committed to epistemic uncertainty and political equality.

Finally, Harding provides the most recent, sophisticated and comprehensive analysis of Leninism, which manages to synthesise all of the main points that have been made against it by prior studies. By focusing upon Harding's arguments, this dissertation can avoid becoming unnecessarily cumbersome by making too many detailed references to the writings of others who have put forward the same points before him.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation refutes Harding's specific arguments against Lenin's theory of scientific socialism. In doing so, it does not refute everything that Harding has to say on Leninism. On the contrary, many of Harding's arguments, such as his belief in the centrality of Marxist philosophy in Leninism, are convincing. This dissertation is therefore not a polemic against Harding, but an answer to his polemic against Lenin's doctrine of scientific socialism. The purpose is to make it clear what Lenin actually argues, in order to show that his conception of Marxism as a science supports a democratic understanding of socialism.

Chapter 3: Leninism, scientific socialism, and epistemic uncertainty

Do not debase our revolutionary science to the level of mere book dogma, do not vulgarise it.

- Lenin, *New Tasks and New Forces* (CW 8: 218).

Introduction

Democratic systems are founded upon the belief that the correct solutions to political problems are uncertain (Hazenberg 2015: 45). This uncertainty arises because decisions about policies require ethical, rather than scientific judgements, which means that there are no objectively correct answers in politics (Przeworski 1991: 13; Innerarity 2013: 10). People therefore have differing views of what the best solution to a political problem is (Estlund 1993: 75). Even if the ends of policy decisions can be agreed upon, there is usually uncertainty and conflict over how the end may best be achieved (Kelsen 1948: 911; 1964: 65-66). This epistemic uncertainty is therefore a necessary condition for democratic debate, deliberation, and compromise (Dahl 1998: 71-72).

Harding argues that Lenin's theory of scientific socialism violates epistemic uncertainty because it is a monistic 'philosophy of certainty'. Leninism claims to have established objective truth through the use of science, and it therefore does not tolerate alternative political views. There is no need for deliberation,

voting, or a multi-party system, if one thinks that science provides objectively 'correct' answers to political questions.

The first section of this chapter outlines Harding's argument for the epistemic certainty of Leninism. It shows that this argument has been put forward not only by Lenin's liberal critics, as it has its origins in the currents of Russian bolshevism, left communism and western Marxism. Section two rejects this charge by arguing that Lenin's fallibilist conception of science dismisses the possibility of obtaining certain knowledge. Section three highlights Lenin's belief that philosophical ideas must be continually revised in light of new discoveries in the natural sciences. It then shows that Lenin highlights the particular fallibilism of the social sciences, with the purpose of opposing dogmatism in socialist debate. Section four argues that Lenin's attitude towards the utopian socialists can be misunderstood if it is interpreted as the total rejection of their views. Lenin advocates utopian dreaming as a remedy to dogmatic tendencies in Marxism.

This chapter concludes by arguing that Lenin's scientific socialism is wrongly conflated with 'scientistic' socialism. This association sustains the mistaken belief that that people must choose between either 'humanist' socialism, which is committed to democratic values, or scientific socialism, which rejects the validity of ethical values altogether. This is a false choice that does not have to be made. Lenin's theory of scientific socialism does not entail a scientistic outlook. It is compatible with the democratic principle of epistemic

uncertainty. Lenin's writings on the philosophy of science are not the founding documents of Marxist dogmatism that they are often portrayed to be.

I. Dialectical materialism as a 'philosophy of certainty'

In Harding's view, one of Lenin's most influential contributions to the doctrine of scientific socialism was his attempt to 'vindicate the contention of materialism that objective truth was attainable- that it was indeed the one essential condition of human progress' (Harding 1996: 222). Whilst Harding provides little textual evidence for his argument, he claims that Lenin distinguishes between subjective knowledge, which is public opinion, and objective knowledge, which is the domain of science. Lenin supposedly argues that subjective knowledge is incomplete and inadequate. It can only grasp the appearance of things, it is disjointed, and it cannot not generalise. The scientific dialectical method, on the other hand, can delve beneath the surface appearance of all phenomena and uncover their internal contradictions. This ability to penetrate into the true nature of objects facilitates the transition from subjective to objective knowledge. Lenin therefore believes that the dialectical method transcends mere opinion and provides absolute truth. 'Lenin insisted that objective truth, indeed absolute truth, was attainable' (Harding 1996: 224, 231).

Harding highlights the anti-democratic implications of Lenin's philosophy of science by first considering the democratic implications of its obverse, epistemic uncertainty. He argues that if the existence of objective truth were denied, people would have varying views of nature, society and politics.

People would not oppose debate and deliberation about these matters, and they would likely encourage the proliferation of divergent views. People would demand democratic procedures and institutions that respect and protect the diversity of opinion. These rules would likely apply to a wide range of areas, including electoral procedures, political parties, and parliament. This democratic system would allow a plurality of groups to propose different aims, policies and goals that society should pursue, as well as the manner in which they are pursued (Harding 1996: 240-41).

According to Harding, Lenin's belief that objective truths can be discovered in political affairs violates epistemic uncertainty. Those who disagreed with Lenin's infallible scientific proclamations would not be protected, but would instead be viewed as enemies of the state, for 'there is only one proletarian philosophy and one bourgeois philosophy'. Allowing mistaken views to be expressed in public debate would be too dangerous, as the undue credence they may receive would in turn undermine the 'authority of science and the integrity of the proletarian idea'. According to Harding (1996: 241), 'this conception of truth, and the path to its attainment, not only has no need for the dense network of rules, conventions and forbearances regarding toleration and protection of dissenting voices', for it 'must see them as being misguided, if not actually harmful. Science, Leninism concluded, is not advanced by taking straw polls, counting heads or conducting elections' On the contrary, 'all problems are amenable to scientific resolution' (Harding 1996: 241).

What is meant by this, according to Harding, is that in the same way that a mathematical formula provides the correct answer to a scientific question, Leninism believes that the dialectical method can correctly answer all political questions, for if people correctly apply dialectical method to an analysis of any question, they will all arrive at the same answer. According to Harding, Lenin argues that the laws of the dialectic highlight the correct path to take during both the revolutionary struggle and the post revolutionary period of socialist construction. This all embracing philosophy can provide objectively correct answers to any and all questions, whether they are of a scientific or a political nature. In this way, Leninism seeks to eliminate the 'anarchy of opinion' that characterises the democratic process (Harding 1996: 241).

In Harding's view, Lenin's claim to have discovered objective truth explains his increasing intolerance of inner party debate and his 'contempt for "politics"' in general: 'For Leninists, proper science speaks with one voice. Its status and repute are diminished by dispute. It is a body of demonstrable truths' (Harding 1996: 241):

The contention that all phenomena of the natural and social worlds are amenable to scientific exploration that would yield objective and verifiable propositions about their nature, led easily to the conclusion that for any given problem, only one solution was scientifically possible...Science...would be devalued and discredited by permanent debate and dissension. The monolithic nature of the party,

therefore...derived from, and was certainty sustained by, the bogus certainties of dialectical science (Harding 1996: 274).

Harding argues that Lenin's belief in objective truth has dire consequences not only for inner party democracy, but also for democracy in general, for 'since that truth was a single and unique truth, procedural means had to be arrived at whereby unanimity of outcome could be guaranteed' (Harding 1996: 170-71). Factions would be banned, no rival platforms would be tolerated, and contested elections would be seen as counterproductive (Harding 1996: 214). Keepers of the orthodoxy would make their decisions seem as if they were taken unanimously, and supported unanimously by all who it affected. Decisions made by the leading bodies, such as the state and party, would be unanimously adopted, and these decisions would be binding upon all lower bodies. Harding believes that 'the whole justification for...the pervasive Leninist style of unanimity in decision-making, derives from its philosophical starting point' (Harding 1996: 242).

Harding argues that when Leninist states encourage or permit open debate outside and inside the party, and when they defend or tolerate the rights of dissenting voices, they thereby begin to undermine the 'Leninist conception of the party as the bearer of science and truth'. Such actions could only take place if they ascribed to a relativist conception of truth, which would contradict and undermine the metaphysical foundations upon which the party's claim to power is founded. It was this gradual acceptance of open debate, according to Harding, which explains the collapse of the Soviet Union. 'In no other modern

ideology was the relationship between metaphysical principle and actual power relations so intimate' (Harding 1996: 242). He argues that 'there was never any room within Lenin's world-view for a genuine principled and *continuing* debate between different, but equally authentic, formulations of the proletarian mission' (Harding 1996: 169). Leninism, in Harding's view, is a monistic science, and has but one voice. Its status would only be diminished by democratic dispute. It is a 'philosophy of certainty', a body of absolute truths (Harding 1996: 241).

Harding provides the latest and most sophisticated reiteration of an argument that has been put forward more bluntly by the various cold war critics of Leninism. The sovietologist Bochenski, for instance, (1963: 30) argues that Lenin created an original epistemology that 'affirms the existence of absolute truth'. As a result of this, 'Lenin does not seek to understand whether Marxism is true; he would rather find out wherein lies the disloyalty of those whom he attacks; i.e. wherein they deviate from established truth' (Bochenski 1963: 49).

In agreement, the sovietologist Boselager argues that Lenin's philosophy is characterised by a 'supercilious and dogmatic self-assurance', which holds that his own proofs and assertions are 'irrefutable and uniquely true'. He rejects the arguments of his critics without attempting to see how their positions can be interpreted, understood and criticised objectively and soberly. Boselager concludes that Lenin's philosophy of science is to blame for the development of party dogmatism (Boselager 1975: 32-33).

Kolakowski echoes the same line of argument. In his view, Lenin's belief that Marxism provides 'ready-made' answers to all major questions rejects the utopian socialist notion that dreaming about the future is an integral component of politics. Fantastical visions of the future society are subjective and therefore false, in Lenin's view. Real science is objective, which means that the structure of socialist society and the means of obtaining it can be discovered scientifically, rather than through debate. In Kolakowski's (1978: 728) view, Lenin's vision of a totalitarian regime that would engulf all aspects of political, economic and social life is served well by his philosophy, for it is 'not concerned with investigating and solving problems but with imposing a dogmatic intellectual system on the socialist movement'.

In agreement, Jordan (1967: 357) argues that Lenin was 'bound to present the fundamental assumptions of the Marxian doctrines as incontrovertible truths, as clear as noonday, as self-evident as one's own existence'. Lenin views Marxism to be 'the foundation of truth, the basis of certainty' (Jordan 1967: 361).

The Marxologist Wolfe states that Lenin's thought is so dogmatic that his ideas bear more of a similarity to religion than to science. He states that Leninism is a 'deeply emotional faith...the party born of that *ism* makes its dogmas the test of truth' (Wolfe 1965: 357, 358). Meyer (1957: 298) takes the same line by insisting that Leninism is 'a secular religion; and the social scientist should criticise it not for being secular, but for being a religion'.

Liberals and conservatives are not the only thinkers who accuse Lenin's theory of scientific socialism of violating epistemic uncertainty. This claim has its origins in the Marxist tradition. The earliest to criticise Lenin were his immediate opponents within his own Bolshevik party, Bogdanov, Bazarov and Yushkevich, who published their views of Lenin's philosophy in their jointly written work, *Pillars of Philosophical Orthodoxy*. Yuskevitch in particular accuses Lenin of a dogmatic self-assurance and an inability to understand anyone's views except his own. Yushvekitch also criticises Lenin's ignorance of science, the coarseness of his language, his inability to write, and his factual errors (1910 cited in Sheehan 1993: 141).

The left communist Pannekoek also criticises Lenin's dogmatism in his book *Lenin and Philosophy*. Pannekoek argues that Lenin misrepresented and unfairly dismissed the ideas of his philosophical opponents in a bid to establish his own interpretation of Marxism as an infallible creed (1975: 8).

One of the principle founders of western Marxism, Karl Korsch, echoes the same argument as Pannekoek in an even harsher form. Korsch argues that Lenin's philosophy is corrupted by his partisan politics. Lenin supposedly views dialectical materialism to be the only genuine revolutionary theory, which can be protected against the weakening influences of other theoretical tendencies only by excluding the revisions made necessary by scientific research and criticism. Lenin avoids discussing the merits of new scientific theories and concepts on the basis that they endanger the militant character

of his revolutionary materialist philosophy. Leninism therefore not only promotes the instant dismissal of rival theories, for it also supports their active suppression (Korsch 1975: 117). In a later article, 'An anti-critique', Korsch defends his earlier criticisms of Lenin and restates them in a more explicit form. He argues that Lenin's theory of dialectical materialism stands above the sciences as a kind of absolute legal authority for judging the latest discoveries of the individual sciences, past, present and future. He claims that this procedure was taken to absurd lengths by subsequent Leninists, who created a special kind of intellectual domination over all the sciences, as well as over the arts (Korsch 1970: 137).

In this narrative of Lenin's scientific socialism as the foundation stone of dogmatism and totalitarianism, the text that is most often cited as evidence is *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Kolakowski provides a typical summary, stating that In this 'crude and amateurish' book, in which Lenin subjects his opponents to 'unbridled abuse', 'cheap mockery and invective', 'Engels's arguments are vulgarised and turned into cut-and-dried catechetical forms' (Kolakowski 1978: 721-27). In Kolakowski's view, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is important not for its philosophical contributions, for which it made none, but for its role in promoting a dogmatic politics. When writing it, Lenin had no intention of reforming, supplementing, or enriching Marxism. Nor was he attempting to answer any profound philosophical questions, as in his view, these had already been solved by Marx and Engels. Lenin instead thought that pluralism was a direct political danger, and so the book was necessary in

giving the revolutionary movement a uniform, clear-cut 'Weltanschauung' (world view) (Kolakowski 1978: 723).

The western Marxists of the Frankfurt school also criticise the dogmatism of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. In an unpublished article Horkheimer (1987: 184) argues that Lenin makes the same mistake as the Machian philosophers he criticises, namely, he juxtaposes his own inadequately justified and dogmatic views against the ungrounded dogmatic views of his opponents, instead of taking up an elevated position, and overlooking these dogmatic views from elevated heights. Horkheimer's view is shared by his collaborator Adorno (2008: 37), who states that *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* 'remains a thoroughly dogmatic work which simply presents a specific thesis with a torrent of abuse and in endless variations, without at all attempting a fundamental explanation'.

In the opinion of Lenin's critics, it was not just in the theoretical realm that *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* fostered dogmatism. Kolakowski points out that after the October revolution this text became an obligatory subject of study in the Soviet Union. In doing so, it had a decisive influence upon the rise of dogmatism and authoritarianism within the Marxist movement. Kolakowski (1978: 727) emphasises the practical impact of this text, stating that 'It had a deplorable effect in furnishing pretexts for the stifling of all independent thought and in establishing the party's dictatorship over science'. The same argument is put forward by Hunt (1950: 212), who states that *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* swiftly became 'the standard of intellectual orthodoxy' within

the Third International, any departure from which was seen as a betrayal of the revolutionary movement, as were divergences on questions of party tactics and strategy.

Wolfe states that *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* claims to give the correct answers to all philosophical, scientific and political questions, and that it therefore became the bible of the communist movement. Its infallible proclamations were used as a form of 'quotational shock treatment and chain reaction' to link up and destroy all forms of oppositional, dissenting and independent thought. It was used as a 'thread to guide the faithful through the labyrinth of modern science and philosophy'. Lenin's proclamations promoted a 'quasi-religious fanaticism', and it eventually created a 'state philosophy or a state faith, the faith of a state relentless, irreconcilable and omnipotent in enforcing the answers' (Wolfe 2001: 516-17).

This affirmation of both the theoretical and practical importance of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is also confirmed by various soviet sources. The editors preface to the *Collected Works* edition proudly proclaims that 'this work has become a model of irreconcilable, party struggle against the enemies of dialectical and historical materialism' (CW 14: 11), and in the introduction to the German and English standalone editions, the soviet philosopher Deborin, who was briefly the official interpreter of Lenin's philosophy, exalts the importance of this work for the final victory of true Marxism over all reformist, anti-Marxist trends. In Deborin's view, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* not only made important philosophical contributions, for it also settled the inner

party struggle, strengthened the ideological basis of Marxism-Leninism, and determined the subsequent development of philosophical ideas in Russia (Deborin cited in Pannekoek 1975: 8). The Stalinist politician Zdanov is even more blunt, arguing that the Russian Communist Party's 'violence and intolerance' towards dissenting ideas was directly inspired by 'Lenin's book, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, where every word hits the enemy like an annihilating sword stroke' (Zdanov cited in Bochenski 1963: 48).

The popular claim reiterated by Harding then, is that Lenin's theory of scientific socialism violates the epistemic uncertainty of the democratic process. This argument has become well established despite the fact that its proponents often provide little to no textual evidence in support of it. This suggests that it was probably the historical practice of Leninist regimes, rather than Lenin's actual writings, which has convinced commentators that Lenin's ideas entail a dogmatic and intolerant politics. In any case, the supposed epistemic certainty of Leninism is one of the main reasons as to why it has been disregarded as vulgar and dogmatic by the democratic left: No modern Marxist endorses dogmatism or vulgarity. The remainder of this chapter submits these arguments to the test of a fine-grained textual analysis, and it finds that they have no basis.

II. Lenin, Popper, and fallibilism

A popular myth in the philosophy of science is that fallibilism began with Popper. Prior to Popper's contributions, the philosophy of science was blemished by dogmatism and inductivism. According to the inductivist view of

science, scientific knowledge began with observations, followed by the proposal of a modest law that generalised the observed pattern. For example, the singular observation that the sun rose on Sunday morning would support the universal claim that the sun will rise every morning. This meant that a single observation could establish the existence of universal laws in nature. Inductivism led to dogmatism, since it was seemingly capable of showing that scientific theories could be proven true. Popper then solved the problem of induction by arguing that whilst there are no valid arguments that can extrapolate singular observations into universal laws, there are ways to reject these laws by showing examples that contradict them. Whilst no arguments can show that single statements can become universal laws, there are valid arguments that can falsify such statements. This solution to the problem of induction became known as the fallibilist account of science, and it became the foundation of the best introductory texts to the philosophy of science (O'Neill 1996: 51-2). Fallibilism argues that the scientific process entails the development of a hypothesis, which is then refuted by subsequent findings. Contemplate the following description of the growth of scientific knowledge:

Cognition is the eternal, endless approach of thought to the object. The reflection of nature in man's thought should not be conceived as being 'dead', as being 'abstract', without movement, without contradictions, but as in an eternal process of movement, the inception of contradictions and their solution (CW 38: 195).

This Popperian sounding passage is from Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*. It was written in 1914, long before Popper wrote his first work. Whilst Harding acknowledges Lenin's fallibilist pronouncements in his *Philosophical Notebooks*, he gives three reasons as to why they should be dismissed. In the first place, he points out that Lenin's '1914 reflections were private ruminations, not intended for publication; they did not see the light of day until 1928-9. Until that time, they were simply not in the public domain'. Harding (1996: 234) concludes from this that they 'can therefore hardly count as elements of Leninism as ideology'. The problem with this argument is clear: the fact that Lenin never published his *Philosophical Notebooks* provides no proof that he rejected the ideas contained within them, nor does it justify dismissing them as irrelevant. Many works by famous political thinkers were unpublished during their time, yet they are still held to be important by modern scholars. Lenin's 'private ruminations' should be treated no differently.

Harding's second argument targets the content of the text itself, which consists of a set of scattered pronouncements and telegraphic one-liners. He degrades their value by claiming that Lenin's remarks are discontinuous, that they are hard to 'disentangle' from those of Hegel, and that they take the form of either 'summaries or cryptic comments at a high level of abstraction'. Harding supports his argument by pointing out that there are only five pages of continuous narrative in the *Philosophical Notebooks*- Lenin's essay *On the Question of Dialectics*, which was intended to be part of a larger study on dialectical materialism (Harding 1996: 234). Again, however, the argument that the structure of a text is disjointed provides no compelling reason to reject

the ideas within it. Historians and political scientists regularly analyse documents of various types with jumbled structures. They are often held to be no less important than published material.

Harding's third argument is that Lenin intentionally chose not to publish the fallibilist ideas contained in the *Philosophical Notebooks* for political reasons. They were 'too explosive...too critical of his own 'vulgar-materialist' standpoint of five years previously'. The ideas contained in this work threatened the notion of objective truth and introduced a relativist element into Marxism that could undermine its claim to certainty. For these reasons, Harding argues, Lenin suppressed them (Harding 1996: 237). The problem with this argument is that the political reasons that Harding outlines are purely speculative, and they cannot be proven via a textual analysis.

Even though Harding provides no convincing arguments as to why the pronouncements contained within Lenin *Philosophical Notebooks* do not provide compelling evidence of his fallibilism, this text is in fact unnecessary, for Lenin defends a fallibilist conception of science in many of his other major writings on the philosophy of science. As Žižek points out, this fallibilism permeates the book that is widely thought to showcase the epistemic certainty, theoretical orthodoxy and dogmatism of scientific socialism, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*:

in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*...what are Lenin's basic theses?...the infamous "theory of reflection"...coupled with the

insistence of the precarious nature of our knowledge (which is always limited, relative, and “reflects” external reality only in the infinite process of approximation). Does this not sound familiar? Is this, in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of analytical philosophy, not the basic position of Karl Popper, the archetypal anti-Hegelian? (Zizek 1997).

Zizek unfortunately offers no argument or textual evidence in support of this claim. Zizek’s stance is also inconsistent, as in a later article, ‘A plea for Leninist intolerance’, he contradicts his earlier position by suggesting that Lenin’s belief in objective truth is incompatible with democratic values:

Lenin's wager...is that...its universal truth can only be articulated from a thoroughly partisan position; truth is by definition one-sided. This, of course, goes against the predominant doxa of compromise, of finding a middle path among the multitude of conflicting interests (Zizek 2002: 550).

Although Zizek’s contradictory interpretation of Lenin’s philosophy undermines his overall position, he correctly identifies the Popperian content of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Lenin’s Engelsian conception of science in this infamous text does in fact defend a critical and open enquiry:

“Now we come to the question,” Engels writes in *Anti-Dühring*...“whether any, and if so which, products of human knowledge ever can have sovereign validity and an unconditional claim to truth”.

And Engels answers the question thus: “The sovereignty of thought is realised in a number of extremely unsovereignly-thinking human beings; the knowledge which has an unconditional claim to truth is realised in a number of relative errors; neither the one nor the other [i.e., neither absolutely true knowledge, nor sovereign thought] can be fully realised except through an endless eternity of human existence” (CW 14: 134).

Whilst Lenin’s fallibilist conception of science is certainly similar to that of Popper, Zizek is mistaken in thinking that they are identical. In the first place, Lenin and Popper develop their ideas from different philosophical starting points. In the second place, Lenin’s account is more convincing than Popper’s. A comparative analysis of their respective doctrines can show why this is the case.

Although Popper was not the first to establish fallibilism, he did create the version of the doctrine that became hegemonic within the philosophy of science during the later decades of the twentieth century. Thus, to reiterate in more detail the account told earlier, Popper’s fallibilism is distinguished by his philosophical scepticism, which informs his account of the problem of induction. According to this account, a single observation of nature taken at a specific time and place cannot establish the existence of a universal law, as if the same observation were taken at a different time or place, the results could be different. For instance, a single observation of the sun rising on Monday does not prove the universal statement that the sun will rise every morning.

This is because there may be no uniformity in nature. The laws of the natural world may change across time and space. Popper concludes that single observations cannot establish the existence of causal laws (Popper 1972: 7).

Popper claimed to have solved the problem of induction by arguing that science requires not induction, but deduction, according to which a single observation can falsify a universal statement. For instance, the observation of a black swan would disprove the universal statement that all swans are white. Popper's fallibilism argues that science proceeds via the formation of a hypothesis, which is then subjected to rigorous tests. If the test falsifies the hypothesis, then it must be replaced by a new hypothesis, which will itself be subjected to tests. According to this account, scientific knowledge develops not through successful predictions, but through failed predictions (Popper 1972: 27).

Various scholars in the philosophy of science have shown that Popper's sceptical account of the problem of induction is fatally flawed, for whilst Popper claims to reject the uniformity of nature, he actually presupposes it for two reasons (Keuth 2005: 114). In the first place, Popper believes that repeating the same test indefinitely is not a valid way of falsifying a law. Once a theory passes the same test so many times, there is little value in continually repeating these tests. His belief that repeated tests give 'diminishing returns' must, however, assume that nature is uniform. If Popper did believe that changes in time and space influence the truth of a theory, then there would be no reasons for him to believe that repeated tests give

diminishing returns, and it would be a rational strategy to repeat the same test indefinitely (O'Neill 1989: 124).

Secondly, If Popper did not believe that nature is uniform, then if theory a (Ta) passes tests that theory b (Tb) fails, then there would be no reason to believe that Ta should be preferred over Tb in the future. However, scientists do prefer Ta over Tb precisely because the success of Ta in it's given place and time is presumed to carry over to other places and times. If the uniformity of nature is denied, then there are no reasons to believe that an un-falsified theory should be preferred over falsified theories in future events (Salmon 1967: 26).

If scientists strictly adhered to Popper's deductivist methodology, then every generally accepted scientific theory existing today would have been rejected in their infancy. All of the best scientific theories encountered observational claims that were inconsistent with them. Nevertheless, those theories were not rejected, and it is fortunate for science that they were not. Science, understood as a fallible, critical and rational mode of enquiry, therefore requires and does assume a degree of uniformity in nature (Chalmers 1982: 66).

Not only does Popper fail to solve the problem of induction. His belief that the problem is at the core of the rational nature of scientific enquiry contributed to the rise of postmodernist relativism and scepticism in the philosophy of science, in addition to the irrational modes of argument they foster (Stove

1982: 52; O'Neill 1996: 54). Science cannot and does not develop according to the philosophical principle of sceptical relativism any more than people do in their daily lives. Popper fails to identify the important distinction between his own abstract philosophical scepticism, which employs a set of criteria that no claim can meet, and really existing practical scepticism, which evaluates particular scientific propositions according to the widely agreed-upon views of the scientific community. It is for these reasons that Popper's fallibilism has been widely discredited.

Lenin's philosophy of science is founded not upon Popper's irrational philosophical scepticism, but upon his theory of dialectics, which is, in his own words, 'the doctrine of the relativity of the human knowledge' (CW 19: 24). Lenin's account of dialectics is dispersed throughout his political and philosophical writings, and as such, its primary components cannot be discerned in a straightforward manner. An examination of this theory is, however, worth the effort, for whilst dialectical materialism is often characterised as a dogmatic pseudo science, it in fact contains a rational core that sheds light on the fallible nature of the sciences.

Like Popper, Lenin rejects the inductivist approach to science, for he points out that the development of scientific knowledge is characterised by 'the abrupt break-down of old established concepts' (CW 14: 305). Thus, Lenin argues, theories in biology, chemistry and physics are constantly falsified, 'for with each step in the development of science new aspects are discovered'

(CW 14: 129). He believes that 'both this world and these laws are fully knowable to man but can never be known to him *with finality*' (CW 14: 189).

Lenin's critique of inductivist accounts of science is not, however, based upon Popper's scepticism concerning the uniformity of nature. He criticises 'fashionable bourgeois scepticism' for its 'tendency to despise generalisations' and 'hide from the "laws" of historical development'. Lenin instead believes that there is a degree of uniformity in nature, and that some truths are therefore beyond reasonable doubt (CW 14: 155). He points to the success of Darwin's evolutionary theory in order to show that a few single observations do not provide sufficient grounds for rejecting a universal law out of hand:

Take, for example, the law of the variation of species and of the formation of higher species from lower ones. It would be very cheap to designate as a phantom the generalisations of natural science, the already discovered laws (accepted by all despite the host of seeming contraventions and deviations shown in the medley of individual cases), and the search for corrections and supplements to them. In the field of natural science, anyone who said that the laws governing phenomena in the natural world were phantoms would be put into a lunatic asylum, or simply laughed out of court (CW 20: 201).

Whilst Lenin therefore recognises a degree of uniformity in nature, he rejects the notion that human knowledge can be certain, for he states that 'in the theory of knowledge, as in every other sphere of science, we must think

dialectically'. This means that 'we must not regard our knowledge as ready-made and unalterable'. Lenin instead views the growth of knowledge to be an endless process, in which people gradually gain a more accurate picture of the world. People 'must determine how knowledge emerges from ignorance, how incomplete, inexact knowledge becomes more complete and more exact' (CW 14: 103).

Although Lenin believes that human knowledge is forever relative and incomplete, he still argues that it is important to recognise the existence of objective truths, which exist independently of human knowledge. His purpose is not, however, to establish the epistemic certainty of Marxism. Lenin's argument is that if the existence of objective truth were denied, then there would be no commonly accepted standards by which to judge the validity of scientific theories by. This could in turn lead to the resurgence of old, absurd and potentially reactionary beliefs. Relativism would therefore make the socialist movement vulnerable to forms of dogmatic assertion and religious irrationalism, the propositions of which are immune from the principles of rational debate. 'From the standpoint of naked relativism one can justify any sophistry; one may regard it as "conditional" whether Napoleon died on May 5, 1821, or not'. It would endorse the 'tolerance...of the dogmas regarding sprites, hobgoblins, Catholic saints, and the like' (CW 14: 137, 128). By rejecting Popper's sceptical relativism in favour of dialectics, Lenin (CW 14: 136) instead argues that 'the *limits* of approximation of our knowledge to objective, absolute truth are historically conditional'. That is, 'each step in the development of science adds new grains to the sum of absolute truth, but the

limits of the truth of each scientific proposition are relative, now expanding, now shrinking with the growth of knowledge' (CW 14: 135). This position acknowledges the generally progressive character of scientific knowledge, whilst keeping it open to future revisions and modification: 'by following the path of Marxian theory we shall draw closer and closer to objective truth (without ever exhausting it)' (CW 14: 143). The purpose of this dialectical conception of relative and absolute truth is, in Lenin's view, to safeguard the socialist movement against claims to certainty. It aims to 'prevent science from becoming a dogma in the bad sense of the term, from becoming something dead, frozen, ossified' (CW 14: 136).

What Lenin grants to Popper's critique of induction is that the observation of regularities is insufficient in proving the existence of causal relationships: 'the simplest truth obtained in the simplest inductive way is always incomplete, for experience is always unfinished. Ergo: the connection of induction with...the relativity of all knowledge' (CW 38: 180). However, Lenin's concession to Popper's scepticism forms part of his attack on empiricist accounts of science. It does not rule out the existence of universal laws in nature or the possibility of knowing them. His purpose is to show that the existence of causal relationships cannot be proven through the observation of regularities. Lenin argues that causal relations and the scientific knowledge resulting from them can be established only by 'practice, experiment and industry' (CW 14: 170). Moreover, it is 'precisely (and only)' by repeating these activities 'a thousand million times' that objective knowledge can be established (CW 38: 216).

Lenin's critique of induction has been reiterated by the critical realism of Roy Bhaskar (1989). Scientific knowledge does not develop by observing regularities in nature. The natural world is an open system, which means that the majority of events that take place within it are not naturally occurring regularities, nor are they always available for observation. Almost every event in the natural world is created by a combination of multiple causal mechanisms, and they are characterised by hardly any regularities (CW 21: 54). Only the controlled conditions created by experiments can attempt to investigate and isolate the particular causal relationships that operate in nature. Experiments do this by constructing closed systems that try to remove or minimise the influence of unwanted external factors. The problem of establishing a completely closed system through experimentation provides the foundation of Lenin's fallibilist account of science.

Lenin proceeds from the assumption that the universe is a single interconnected totality, in which all objects are connected with other objects. He argues that 'if we are to have a true knowledge of an object we must look at and examine all its facets, its connections and "mediacies"'. Lenin introduces his fallibilism by arguing that a complete examination of all these connections 'is something we cannot ever hope to achieve completely, but the rule of comprehensiveness is a safeguard against mistakes and rigidity' (CW 32: 94).

One reason as to why the interconnectedness of nature prohibits the discovery of objective truths, in Lenin's view, is that it is impossible to ensure

experimental closure. He argues that experiments are able to establish regularities only under specific controlled conditions. The moment a scientific truth established through an experiment is applied to more general phenomena, this truth loses its objective status, and will likely be falsified. Accordingly, Lenin argues that the notion of 'truth' in science can never become a universal concept. He illustrates this point by drawing upon Engels' discussion of experiments in *Anti-Duhring*:

“Truth and error, like all thought-concepts which move in polar opposites, have absolute validity only in an extremely limited field...As soon as we apply the antithesis between truth and error outside of that narrow field which has been referred to above it becomes relative and therefore unserviceable for exact scientific modes of expression; and if we attempt to apply it as absolutely valid outside that field we really find ourselves altogether beaten: both poles of the antithesis become transformed into their opposites, truth becomes error and error truth”. Here follows the example of Boyle's law (the volume of a gas is inversely proportional to its pressure). The “grain of truth” contained in this law is only absolute truth within certain limits. The law, it appears, is a truth “only approximately” (CW 14: 134-35).

Lenin refers to Boyle's law in order to show the limited applicability that any law has outside specific controlled conditions. It states that the pressure and volume of a gas have an inverse relationship. If the volume of gas increases, then its pressure decreases, and vice versa. However, this law only holds

when the temperature is held at a constant. The law therefore only holds true under specific controlled conditions, wherein the temperature remains the same, and wherein the external variables can be controlled. Lenin uses this example in order to show that no laws can be established as universal truths for all time and spaces. The causes and effects at work in small-scale experiments and observations cannot be directly transferred to larger environments, where the interconnections are innumerable and even harder to establish:

Engels particularly emphasises the dialectical view of cause and effect: “And we find, in like manner, that cause and effect are conceptions which only hold good in their application to individual cases, but as soon as we consider the individual cases in their general connection with the universe as a whole, they run into each other, and they become confounded when we contemplate that universal action and reaction in which causes and effects are eternally changing places, so that what is effect here and now will be cause there and then, and *vice versa*”. Hence, the human conception of cause and effect always somewhat simplifies the objective connection of the phenomena of nature, reflecting it only approximately, artificially isolating one or another aspect of a single world process (CW 14: 156).

The problems involved in obtaining non-revisable knowledge through experimentation are not, for Lenin, of a purely practical nature. He argues that it is impossible in principle. The various conditions that can influence the

result of an experiment cannot be controlled because they are infinite in nature. The kind of infinity that Lenin has in mind is the infinite number of properties in nature, which can never be exhausted by scientific knowledge. 'Nature is infinite, just as its smallest particle (including the electron) is infinite' (CW 14: 312).

Lenin argues that the infinity of the variety of properties in nature takes two forms. In first place is a qualitative infinity, in the sense that all objects contain an infinite number of qualities: 'A tumbler is assuredly both a glass cylinder and a drinking vessel. But there are more than these two properties, qualities or facets to it; there are an infinite number of them' (CW 32: 93). In the second place, he argues that there is a quantitative infinity. All objects can be divided an infinite number of times, hence his belief that 'the atom can be explained as resembling an infinitely small solar system' (CW 14: 260). In Lenin's view, every particle in nature is inexhaustible in the sense that there is always another level of understanding to obtain. This infinite diversity of properties in nature prohibits infallible knowledge of the natural world: 'Human thought goes endlessly deeper from appearance to essence, from essence of the first order, as it were, to essence of the second order, and so on without end' (CW 38: 251-2).

For Lenin, the process of experimentation can never obtain final knowledge of any phenomena, and it contains no guarantees against error. The sorts of tests that people can devise are not final tests. The claim to know about something is not to say that this knowledge is finally certified as either true or

complete, for the methods of investigation and test generally preclude such finality. This means that any proposition put forward regarding the 'laws' governing nature and society, are always open to criticism, modification and rejection. Lenin's conception of dialectics prohibits any theoretical proposition from ossifying into dogmatic assertions. Lashing out against mistakes in this regard, Lenin states that 'The criterion of practice', i.e. scientific empirical study and investigation, 'can never, in the nature of things, either confirm or refute any human idea completely. This criterion too is sufficiently "indefinite" not to allow human knowledge to become "absolute"' (CW 14: 142-43)

Lenin's critique of scientific inductivism is a variant of what Popper calls the logical problem. It concerns the problems associated with attempting to use a fixed number of single observations in order to prove a universally valid claim, when the quantifier ranges across a domain of infinite size. However, whilst Popper views the infinity of the realm of natural processes, objects and events only in terms of their spatial and temporal location, Lenin understands it in terms of their infinite number of properties.

Although Lenin's belief in the infinite properties of the natural world may be challenged on scientific grounds, his basic argument, that the impossibility of obtaining experimental closure provides the origins of fallibilism in science, is convincing, and is certainly more convincing than Popper's. The problem of induction in science is not Popper's scepticism regarding the uniformity of nature, but the interconnectedness and variety of the natural world that Lenin identifies. Lenin's account of the problem of induction also provides a more convincing explanation than Popper as to why experiments are undertaken

and repeated. Efforts to limit the variety of properties in nature constitute the rational for controlling and repeating experiments. Scientists attempt to achieve experimental control not in order to check the effects of place and time, but in order to limit the amount of external variables that can affect the results. Scientists repeat experiments not in order to obtain more cases for inductive inference, but to ensure that previous experiments were adequately controlled. Scientists conduct new experiments in order to investigate scientific hypotheses in untested conditions, rather than in different places and times. The problem of induction in science is the interconnectedness and variety of the natural world that Lenin identifies. Interestingly enough, in his short article 'Lenin and Popper', Colletti (1996: 51) recalls how, in a private letter from 1970, Popper wrote that 'Lenin's book on empiriocriticism is, in my opinion, truly excellent.'

III. Lenin's fallibilist conception of philosophy and social science

Harding is not unaware of Lenin's fallibilism, for he admits that Lenin's theory of dialectics 'reminds ourselves that knowledge is always incomplete and, dare one say it, relative' (Harding 1996: 224). Harding is, however, unwilling to admit that this undermines his argument, for he asserts that Lenin's pronouncements on the relativity of scientific knowledge are 'confusing qualifications' that have no bearing upon his philosophy. It is therefore only by rejecting the relevance of Lenin's fallibilism that Harding is able to maintain his argument that dialectical materialism is a dogmatic 'philosophy of certainty'. Harding's entire argument depends upon a single passage from *Materialism*

and Empirio-Criticism that supposedly showcases Lenin's intolerance in philosophical matters:

From this Marxist Philosophy, which is case from a single piece of steel, you cannot eliminate one basic premise, one essential part, without departing from objective truth, without falling prey to bourgeois-reactionary falsehood (CW 14: 326)

Even if Harding is right in his assertion that Lenin's fallibilist conception of science is not related to his philosophy, his argument is still unconvincing on its own terms. In the first place, if the above quotation is analysed in isolation, it can be interpreted in a way that supports Harding's claim. If it is analysed in its textual surrounding, however, then it becomes clear that it is not compelling evidence. Directly before this passage Lenin outlines what he views to be the sole 'objective truth' underlying Marxist philosophy, namely, the materialist proposition that matter existed prior to, and independent of human thought, which provides 'at best an approximately true' reflection of developing matter (CW 14: 326). This objective truth is, however, little more than a general common-sense truism, rather than a specific political platform. Lenin's philosophy purposefully leaves room for a variety of different points of view, and it can hardly provide the basis for a dogmatic politics.

Aside from the fact that Harding's only piece of textual evidence is unconvincing, he also overlooks other passages in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* that explicitly defend a fallibilist conception of philosophical

knowledge. In chapter four for instance, Lenin argues that 'Marx, Engels and J. Dietzgen did not worry about the elementary truths of materialism, which had been cried by the hucksters in dozens of books'. During the historical period in which the founders of scientific socialism developed their philosophical ideas, they were principally concerned with keeping their own theories open to further revision and modification. They 'devoted all their attention to ensuring that these elementary truths should not be vulgarised, should not be over-simplified, should not lead to stagnation of thought' (CW 14: 243).

Lenin's philosophy is particularly influenced by the ideas of Joseph Dietzgen, a working class autodidact who 'arrived at dialectical materialism, i.e., Marx's philosophy, independently' (CW 19: 80). Dietzgen's work is generally recognised for defending the epistemic uncertainty of dialectical materialism (Pannekoek 1906: 28). It is therefore significant that in an article commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death, Lenin praises Dietzgen's emphasis on the fallibilism of materialist philosophy and the relativity of human knowledge. During a time when 'simplified, vulgarized materialism was most widespread', Dietzgen 'laid his greatest stress on the historical changes that had taken place in materialism, on the dialectical character of materialism'. He emphasised 'the need to support the point of view of development, to understand that all human knowledge is relative' (CW 19: 80).

The fatal flaw of Harding's argument, however, is his unsubstantiated assertion that Lenin's theory of scientific knowledge is unrelated to his philosophy. This claim is simply incorrect, for in the preface to the second edition of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* Lenin (CW 14: 21) states that the purpose of his book is to elucidate 'the philosophical conclusions from the recent discoveries in natural science'. Like Marx, Engels and Dietzgen before him, Lenin believes that a genuinely scientific philosophy should base its propositions not upon metaphysical speculation, but upon the findings in the natural sciences. Since Lenin's (CW 14: 185) fallibilism recognises that 'the teachings of science on the structure of matter, on the chemical composition of food, on the atom and the electron, may and constantly do become obsolete', he argues that the propositions of dialectical materialism should be revised in accordance with these new discoveries: 'Engels says explicitly "with each epoch making discovery even in the sphere of natural science ["not to speak of the history of mankind"], materialism has to change its form"'. Accordingly, 'a revision of the "form" of Engels' materialism, a revision of his natural-philosophical propositions is not only not "revisionism," in the accepted meaning of the term, but, on the contrary, is demanded by Marxism' (CW 14: 251).

As Stalin (1953: 93) rightly points out, 'it is well known that none other than Lenin accomplished this task (That is, the task of updating materialism) for his own time in his remarkable work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*'. In Chapter five Lenin analyses what he calls 'The recent revolution in natural science', which was a historical period in the late 19th and early 20th century in

which the discovery of x-rays, electrons, and the beginning of quantum mechanics, challenged not only the scientific conception of matter, but the philosophical conception as well. Many scientists during this period thought that matter was disappearing, and that this in turn undermined the foundations of philosophical materialism.

In Lenin's view, the 'crisis in modern physics' did mean a crisis for the old 'mechanical' materialism. The belief that the universe consisted of an immutable material substance formed the basis of the mechanistic view of the world, and the foundations of this view had been undermined by these new discoveries (CW 21: 54). However, whilst Lenin maintained that mechanical definitions of matter were becoming obsolete, the dialectical concept of matter was not, it was simply expanding. For dialectics held that 'the only immutability is the reflection by the human mind...of an external world existing and developing independently of the mind.' In Lenin's view, 'no other "immutability," no other "essence," no other "absolute substance," in the sense in which these concepts were depicted by the empty professorial philosophy, exist for Marx and Engels.' He argues that the "essence" of things, or "substance," is *also* relative; it expresses only the degree of profundity of man's knowledge of objects'. Thus, in Lenin's view, certain properties of matter that were thought to be absolute, immutable, and primary, had now been proven to be relative, mutable, and characteristic only for particular forms of matter. What was happening, was that human knowledge was penetrating more deeply into the structure of matter and discovering new forms of matter in the process, and would continue to do so. Mechanical

materialism had been superseded, but dialectical materialism had not; it was developing to a higher stage (CW 14: 260-61; CW 19: 24). Thus whilst he notes that 'yesterday the profundity of this knowledge did not go beyond the atom, and today does not go beyond the electron and ether', the new materialism, incomparably richer than the old, recognised the 'temporary, relative, approximate character of all these milestones in the knowledge of nature gained by the progressing science of man' (CW 14: 262).

By arguing that even the natural sciences are fallible, and by then stressing the dependency of Marxist philosophy upon findings in the natural sciences, Lenin undermines the strategy of proclaiming absolute truths in the philosophical sciences by appealing to such truths in the natural sciences. His emphasis upon the inseparability of natural science and philosophy therefore reinforces the epistemic uncertainty of Marxism.

Lenin also highlights the unique obstacles to objective truth in the social sciences, which make them more fallible than the exact natural sciences. The purpose of his argument is to emphasise the inevitability of error in socio-political analysis, and to therefore oppose dogmatic tendencies in the Marxist movement.

Whilst Lenin acknowledges that the exact natural sciences deal with predominantly non-sentient matter, he recognises that the social sciences deal with conscious beings who make their own history (CW 1: 159). He therefore believes that the degree of uniformity within the social world is lower

than in the natural world. In contrast to the laws of physics and chemistry, which display a significant degree of uniformity over time and space, Lenin argues that economic laws change in accordance with the development of history: 'Marx rejects the very idea that the laws of economic life are one and the same for the past and the present. On the contrary, every historical period has its own laws' (CW 1: 167). Lenin also believes that 'earlier economists misunderstood the nature of economic laws when they likened them to the laws of physics and chemistry'. In his view, 'a more thorough analysis shows that social organisms differ among themselves as fundamentally as plants or animals'. This high degree of variation in social phenomena makes the social sciences significantly more fallible than the natural sciences (CW 1: 167).

Lenin argues that the historical sciences are particularly fallible, as whilst 'the development of world history as a whole follows general laws', the events under observation rarely repeat themselves with the same consistency as natural phenomena. This means that 'it is by no means precluded, but, on the contrary, presumed, that certain periods of development may display peculiarities in either the form or the sequence of this development' (CW 33: 477).

In Lenin's view, another insurmountable obstacle to certain knowledge in the historical sciences is that the evidence on past social structures and events is often non-existent, inaccessible, or limited. He argues that this poses unique problems for the materialist conception of history, which relies upon empirical economic evidence in order to prove the relation between base and

superstructure. 'Lack of factual material made it impossible to apply this method to an analysis of certain very important phenomena in ancient European history—for instance, that of gentile organization', which, as a result, 'remained a riddle' (CW 1: 150).

Even when the historical data is available, Lenin argues that its sheer volume cannot be assimilated by a single mind, and the historian is often forced to limit the scope of their argument. In his review of Kautsky's book, *A Short Course of Economic Science*, Lenin mentions the authors considerable yet non-exhaustive use of references, before commenting that 'It would be impossible to outline, in any course, no matter how extensive, all the data of modern science on all periods of economic development and on the history of economic views from Aristotle to Wagner' (CW 4: 50).

In Lenin's view, the unique epistemological problems of the historical sciences prohibit the attainment of non-revisable knowledge in this sphere. He therefore rejects 'that most banal and vulgar accusation', that 'The Marxists profess the immutability of an abstract historical scheme'. In Lenin's view, 'no Marxist has ever regarded Marx's theory as some universally compulsory philosophical scheme of history' (CW 1: 192). Like Engels before him, Lenin opposes the socialist Duhring, who, 'on the most complex questions of science in general, and of historical science in particular...scattered words right and left: ultimate, final and eternal truth' (CW 14: 133). In Lenin's view, the only truths that can be established in the historical sciences are mundane facts and trivialities that cannot be used in the service of a dogmatic politics:

“Napoleon died on May 5, 1821,” says Engels...explaining to Duhring what one who claims to discover eternal truths in the historical sciences has to confine himself to, what “platitudes” he has to be satisfied with’ (CW 14: 132).

Lenin believes that it is political science, however, that exhibits the greatest level of fallibilism. Political science inherits all of the problems of the other social and natural sciences, whilst possessing unique problems of its own. In the first place, whereas natural scientists can predict when natural events will occur with a high level of precision and accuracy, Lenin argues that such predictions are impossible in the more ‘difficult and complex science’ of revolutionary politics, where the complexity of events precludes the possibility of accurate forecasting (CW 27: 198). In his view, anyone who attempts to predict the fall of capitalism radically overestimates their level of knowledge, for whilst ‘It is natural for children to “understand” science to mean something that can determine in what year, spring, summer, autumn or winter the “collapse must begin”’, he states that these are ‘ridiculous, vain attempts to ascertain what cannot be ascertained’ (CW 27: 327).

Secondly, whilst various natural phenomena occur through a predictable and regular sequence of events, Lenin argues that the same degree of uniformity cannot be achieved in politics, where the sequence of future events cannot be known in advance. He argues that this is especially the case during revolutionary periods, which are particularly hard to discern and predict: ‘To say “a revolution has taken place in one country, so now it must take place in Germany”—is false reasoning. There is a tendency to form an order of

sequence, but this cannot be done'. In Lenin's view, it is impossible to know 'whose turn it will be, when it will take place, and with what degree of success' (CW 24: 267).

Lenin's clearest expression of his epistemic uncertainty regarding the trajectory of political development can be found in the preface to the second edition of *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*. Here he states that societies are complex organisms that can develop in an innumerable number of potential directions: 'infinitely diverse combinations of elements of this or that type of capitalist evolution are possible'. He concludes from this uncertainty that it is impossible to predict with certainty which direction society will take:

In a revolutionary epoch, life in a country proceeds with such speed and impetuosity that it is impossible to define the major results of economic evolution in the heat of political struggle...How this struggle will end, what the final result of the first onset of the Russian Revolution will be—it is at present impossible to say (CW 3: 34).

Lenin concludes from this that he did not want to update his work with any rash assertions that overstepped the boundaries of the historical period, stating that 'the time has not yet come...for a thorough revision of this essay' (CW 3: 34).

Lenin's arguments for the particular fallibilism of the political and historical

sciences should be emphasised for two reasons. In the first place, the challenges he highlights impose significant epistemic limitations on claims to certainty in the social sciences. The degree of experimental closure obtainable in the natural sciences cannot be achieved in the political and historical sciences. Furthermore, the transient character of social events and structures makes it impossible to investigate them with the techniques of non-experimental science. The problems that Lenin highlights are genuine obstacles to certainty in the historical and political sciences that make them inherently more contentious than the more precise exact sciences.

In the second place, the political conclusions that Lenin draws from the unique epistemological problems of the social sciences highlights how far his theory of scientific socialism is opposed to the epistemic certainty, dogmatism, and intellectual orthodoxy that it is commonly accused of generating. The aim of his hierarchy of epistemic certainty is to undermine the strategy of applying the uniform laws of the natural sciences to the non-uniform, complex and changeable laws of the social sciences. Lenin argues that 'the whole attempt is worthless from beginning to end', for he states that 'the concepts "selection", "assimilation and dissimilation" of energy, the energetic balance, and so on and so forth, when applied to the sphere of the social sciences, are empty phrases'. In Lenin's view, 'an *enquiry* into social phenomena and an elucidation of the *method* of the social sciences *cannot* be undertaken with the aid of these concepts'. Whilst he recognises that 'nothing is easier than to tack an "energeticist" or "biologico-sociological" label on to such phenomena as crises, revolutions, the class struggle and so forth', he argues that there is

nothing 'more sterile, more scholastic and lifeless than such an occupation' (CW 14: 328).

Lenin's purpose in stressing the epistemic uncertainty of the historical and political sciences is to emphasise the importance of openness and tolerance in political debate. The impossibility of gaining final knowledge of economic and historical laws guards against the adoption of a non-revisable political programme. Thus whilst he believes that 'history as a whole, and the history of revolutions in Particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more Multiform, more lively and ingenious than is imagined by even the best parties', he believes that 'In politics it is even harder to know in advance which methods of struggle will be applicable and to our advantage in certain future conditions' (CW 31: 95-6). During revolutionary periods in particular Lenin argues that it is 'natural and inevitable that there should emerge "a revaluation of all values", a new study of fundamental problems, a new interest in theory, in elementals, in the ABC of politics' (CW 17: 42-43).

Whilst Lenin's fallibilist conception of political science opposes dogmatism, it would be wrong to go further and argue that the political programme of scientific socialism contains no fundamental principles. In his article *Our Programme*, for instance, Lenin rejects the 'revisionist' politics of Bernstein and his followers on the basis that they violated these principles. He argues that their ideas contributed '*absolutely nothing*. Not by a single step have they advanced the science which Marx and Engels enjoined us to develop' (CW 4: 211). Lenin is aware of the political implications of this position, for he

immediately anticipates the ‘flood of accusations’ that it could bring. ‘The shouts will rise that we want to convert the socialist party into an order of “true believers” that persecutes “heretics” for deviations from “dogma,” for every independent opinion’ (CW 4: 211). Lenin’s summary of these ‘trenchant phrases’ is that ‘there is not a grain of truth or sense in them’, for he argues that a successful revolutionary movement requires a unified revolutionary theory. The most persuasive point that he makes, however, is that ‘to defend such a theory, which to the best of your knowledge you consider to be true, against unfounded attacks and attempts to corrupt it is not to imply that you are an enemy of all criticism’. He goes on to state that:

We do not regard Marx’s theory as some thing completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we are convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists must develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life (CW 4: 211).

Lenin goes on to argue that ‘an independent elaboration of Marx’s theory is especially essential’ for all socialists, for ‘this theory provides only general *guiding* principles’, which must be applied differently in accordance with the peculiar characteristics of each particular country (CW 4: 212). Lenin puts forward a similar argument in his article *Uncritical Criticism*. Here he states that the commitment to fundamental principles should not mean a commitment to dogmatism. ‘Let us not believe that orthodoxy means taking things on trust, that orthodoxy precludes critical application and further development, that it permits historical problems to be obscured by abstract

schemes.’ In Lenin’s view, Marxists are not required to subscribe to any belief without reason, and they should not accept any formulation as so authoritative that it cannot be modified or rejected as the result of discussion. ‘If there are orthodox disciples who are guilty of these truly grievous sins’, says Lenin, then ‘the blame must rest entirely with those disciples and not by any means with orthodoxy, which is distinguished by diametrically opposite qualities’. He goes on to say that ‘to accept anything on trust, to preclude critical application and development, is a grievous sin; and in order to apply and develop, “simple interpretation” is obviously not enough’ (CW 3: 630).

Lenin repeatedly states that Marxism is not a body of ready-made answers, but a scientific method that should be used to inform an independent and subjective analysis of society (CW 13: 427; CW 12: 363; CW 31: 71; CW 28: 217; CW 24: 43). In his view, the dialectical method highlights the complex, unpredictable and non-linear character of historical development, and this means that Marxism must revise itself in accordance with this development. Lenin argues that the propositions of scientific socialism therefore need to be as temporary as the social phenomena it reflects. This fallibilism forms the introduction of his article, *Certain Features of the Development of Marxism*:

Our doctrine—said Engels, referring to himself and his famous friend—is not a dogma, but a guide to action. This classical statement stresses with remarkable force and expressiveness that aspect of Marxism which is very often lost sight of. And by losing sight of it, we turn Marxism into something one-sided, distorted and lifeless; we deprive it

of its life blood; we undermine its basic theoretical foundations—dialectics, the doctrine of historical development, all-embracing and full of contradictions; we undermine its connection with the definite practical tasks of the epoch, which may change with every new turn of history...It is precisely because Marxism is not a lifeless dogma, not a completed, ready-made, immutable doctrine, but a living guide to action, that it was bound to reflect the astonishingly abrupt change in the conditions of social life (CW 17: 39-42).

Lenin argues that Marxism, like any political science, must change in accordance with the changing political situation. Accordingly, he is willing to say that ‘Engels was not infallible. Marx was not infallible’, for some of their ideas had been made antiquated by historical developments (CW 35: 269; CW 20: 433; CW 35: 272). It is for this reason that Lenin warns against uncritically relying upon the classics for contemporary political solutions, as ‘only hopeless pedants could set about solving the peculiar and complex problems arising merely by quoting this or that opinion of Marx about a different historical epoch’ (CW 3: 33).

One of Lenin’s biggest criticisms of the pre-revolutionary period was that large sections of the population had interpreted Marxism too dogmatically, and they therefore failed to understand the necessity of theoretical development. They had ‘assimilated that doctrine in an extremely one-sided and mutilated fashion. They had learnt by rote certain “slogans”, certain answers to tactical questions, *without having understood* the Marxist criteria for these answers’

(CW 17: 42-3). Whilst Lenin thought that the Bolshevik political programme had been vindicated in practice by revolutionary developments, he also acknowledged that these developments produced some unexpected and surprising results: 'Things have worked out differently; they are more original, more peculiar, more variegated than anyone could have expected' (CW 24: 44). Thus he rejoiced at the novel results of the revolution, which was 'developing in scope and depth with such splendid rapidity, with such a wonderful variety of changing forms, with such an instructive practical refutation of all doctrinarism' (CW 31: 104). A positive consequence of this period, in Lenin's view, was that the refutation of political values compelled Marxists to update their old ideas, which had become out-dated: 'The "reevaluation of all values" in the various spheres of social life led to a "revision" of the most abstract and general philosophical fundamentals of Marxism' (CW 17: 42-43).

It was not only during the pre-revolutionary period that Lenin expressed a fallibilist conception of Marxist political science. In his view, this fallibilism posed particular challenges for the construction of socialism long after the communist party had consolidated its rule. The main problem was that whilst there had been various bourgeois revolutions before, there had been no socialist revolutions, and as such, there were no textbooks to refer to. History was being made, and mistakes were therefore inevitable. He thus states that the problem of organisation 'will inevitably entail a vast number of experiments, a vast number of steps, a vast number of alterations, a vast number of difficulties...because we have no experience of this' (CW 27: 410-

11). Accordingly, in the course of outlining the founding principles of scientific socialism in *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*, Lenin reaffirms the constantly changing character of Marxist theory in both the philosophical and social spheres: 'the history of philosophy and the history of social science show with perfect clarity that there is nothing resembling "sectarianism" in Marxism, in the sense of its being a hidebound, petrified doctrine' (CW 19: 23).

Lenin criticises all dogmatic Marxists who 'ignore or overlook' the fact that the political programme of scientific socialism needs to be modified in accordance with the changing material conditions. In the first place, he chastises the 'old Bolsheviks', who 'played so regrettable a role in the history of our Party by reiterating formulas senselessly learned by rote instead of studying the specific features of the new and living reality' (CW 24: 44).

Lenin also criticises the Left Communists, who themselves attacked the Bolsheviks for their temporary participation in the Russian parliament. In the view of the Left Communists, it is a timeless principle that Marxist parties should never engage in parliamentary politics when capitalism is breaking down. Lenin rejects this position by arguing that there are no eternal truths in politics. All principles must change in accordance with the changing historical conditions of each particular country. Thus in "*Left-Wing" Communism: an Infantile Disorder* Lenin reminds the leftists that 'any truth, if "overdone" (as Dietzgen Senior put it), if exaggerated, or if carried beyond the limits of its actual applicability, can be reduced to an absurdity, and is even bound to

become an absurdity under these conditions' (CW 31: 62).

It is the orthodox Marxists of the Second International, however, who receive the brunt of Lenin's criticism. For although they 'fully appreciated the need for flexible tactics', and whilst he believes their teachings on dialectics 'will always remain a valuable contribution to socialist literature', they 'proved to be so *undialectical* in practice, so incapable of taking into account the rapid change of forms and the rapid acquisition of new content by the old forms'. 'The principal reason for their bankruptcy', in Lenin's view, was that they were 'hypnotised by a definite form of growth of the working-class movement and socialism, forgot all about the one-sidedness of that form', and 'were afraid to see the break-up which objective conditions made inevitable'. Due to their refusal to acknowledge the theoretical changes made necessary by historical development, the orthodox Marxists 'continued to repeat simple and, at first glance, incontestable axioms that had been learned by rote, like: "three is more than two"'. In doing so, Lenin argues that they underestimated the problems involved in obtaining certain knowledge in the political sphere, for 'politics is more like algebra than arithmetic, and still more like higher than elementary mathematics'. Thus he argues that 'all the old forms of the socialist movement have acquired a new content', and whilst 'a new symbol, the "minus" sign, has appeared in front of all the figures', the orthodox Marxists 'stubbornly continued (and still continue) to persuade themselves and others that "minus three" is more than "minus two"' (CW 31: 102).

By showing that even the exact natural sciences are fallible, and by then

highlighting the unique epistemological challenges that face the social sciences, Lenin seeks to undermine dogmatic tendencies within political discussion, and to instead replace this dogmatism with a rational and critical analysis. Lenin's defence of scientific socialism therefore rejects epistemic certainty and the forms of intellectual orthodoxy that it fosters. His fallibilist conception of science serves a democratic purpose.

IV. Socialism: utopian and scientific

The central theme of Lenin's philosophy of science is its explicit rejection of the dogmatic and orthodox tendencies in political discussion that other Marxists represented. The central purpose of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is to reject epistemic certainty and its consequent theoretical orthodoxy. In this respect it is worth noting that Lenin's rejection of utopian socialism should not be seen as a straightforward repudiation of their views, for he argues that 'Utopian socialism was right from the point of view of world history (CW 18: 358). Their fantastical visions of the future socialist society gave the infant proletariat hope during a time when there was none. This hope was crucial in motivating the workers, and in aiding their transformation into a revolutionary force. Thus whilst Lenin (CW 18: 358; CW 22: 304) admires the founders of utopian socialism, Saint-Simon, Fourier and Owen, he reserves most of his praise for the Russian Utopian Chernyshevsky. He even named his most infamous work after Chernyshevsky's novel *What is to be Done?*, which is primarily a piece of socialist and feminist utopianism. The female protagonist creates an advanced cooperative workshop, reminiscent of the work of Robert Owen (who was an important influence on Chernyshevsky),

and in a series of dreams, has visions of a better world which bear the distinct hallmark of Fourier.

Chernyshevsky was, for Lenin, 'a utopian socialist, who dreamed of a transition to socialism through the old, semi-feudal peasant village commune', and which 'owing to the backwardness of Russian life, was unable to rise to the level of the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels' (CW 17: 123; CW 14: 361). However, like Marx and Engels with their utopian predecessors, Lenin does not conceal the enthusiasm he feels for his. In the first place, Lenin commends 'the greatest exponent of utopian socialism in Russia...a materialist', for his critique of tsarist society. Chernyshevsky was a 'consistent and militant democrat, his writings breathing the spirit of the class struggle...He was a remarkably profound critic of capitalism despite his utopian socialism' (CW 20: 246).

In the second place, Lenin commends Chernyshevsky for his 'brilliant predictions' concerning the development of Russia and his rejection of an inflexible, dogmatic politics (CW 2: 481; CW 20: 118; CW 14: 360). Chernyshevsky did not believe that objective truths could be discovered in the sphere of political science, and as such, he argued that politics would always be characterised by a plurality of opinions. It is for this reason that Lenin employs an aphorism of Chernyshevsky's against the dogmatism of the Second International:

Our theory is not a dogma, but a guide to action, said Marx and Engels.

The greatest blunder, the greatest crime, committed by such "out-and-

out” Marxists as Karl Kautsky, Otto Bauer, etc., is that they have not understood this and have been unable to apply it at crucial moments of the proletarian revolution. “Political activity is not like the pavement of Nevsky Prospekt” (the well-kept, broad and level pavement of the perfectly straight principal thoroughfare of St. Petersburg), N. G. Chernyshevsky, the great Russian socialist of the pre-Marxist period, used to say (CW 31: 71).

It is therefore no surprise that Lenin’s greatest defence of dreaming bears the title of Chernyshevsky’s utopian novel. In *What is to be Done?* Lenin supports the value of dreaming as an integral part of the working class struggle. After outlining what he considers to be the best way forward for the movement, he concludes by saying ‘that is what we should dream of!’ He then approvingly quotes the Russian literary critic Pisarev, another admirer of Chernyshevsky, who argues that dreaming is an integral component of the human condition. According to Pisarev, dreams that have no chance of ever being realised are necessary for any political programme, for it is precisely these unrealistic dreams that motivate people to undertake momentous tasks:

My dream may run ahead of the natural march of events or may fly off at a tangent in a direction in which no natural march of events will ever proceed. In the first case my dream will not cause any harm; it may even support and augment the energy of the working men.... if man were completely deprived of the ability to dream in this way, if he could not from time to time run ahead and mentally conceive, in an entire and completed picture, the product to which his hands are only just beginning to lend shape, then I cannot at all imagine what stimulus

there would be to induce man to undertake and complete extensive and strenuous work in the sphere of art, science, and practical endeavour (CW 5: 509-10).

In conclusion, Lenin pits this positive assessment of dreaming against revisionist and economistic 'realism'. 'Of this kind of dreaming there is unfortunately too little in our movement. And the people most responsible for this are those who boast of their sober views, their "closeness" to the "concrete"' (CW 5: 510). This defence of utopianism can be found not only in Lenin's early works. In his *Philosophical Notebooks*, in the course of discussing the role of fantasy in idealist thought, Lenin asserts the value of fantasy in science: 'It would be stupid to deny the role of fantasy, even in the strictest science: cf Pisarev on useful dreaming, as an impulse to work, and on empty-day dreaming' (CW 38: 371). For Lenin, fantasy, and by extension, a democratic inquiry into the good life is in Marxism as of right.

Lenin's defence of scientific socialism is based upon a fallibilist conception of science, which defends a spirit of toleration in political debate. In opposition to the claims that Marxism works according to eternal truths, Lenin provides a revisable and open philosophy of science. Lenin's defence of scientific socialism opposes dogmatism and encourages the maintenance of open discussion amongst Marxists.

Conclusion

One of the great myths about Lenin's philosophical thought is that his theory of scientific socialism is committed to epistemic certainty. It is commonly thought that Leninism enforced a rigid theoretical orthodoxy upon the international socialist movement that closed down the avenues of democratic deliberation. This chapter has shown that this claim has no textual or philosophical basis. Lenin's fallibilist account of science explicitly rejects the possibility of obtaining certain knowledge. This fallibilism resides at the core of the text that is often accused of prompting the decline of Marxism into dogmatism, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. Lenin's conviction that Marxism is a science means that Marxism itself is incomplete and conjectural. It does not provide certain, infallible knowledge. Leninism therefore affirms the democratic condition of epistemic uncertainty.

One of the reasons for both the democratic left's widespread abandonment of Leninism, as well as the generally anti-scientific tenor of the socialist movement, is the erroneous conflation of science with scientism, the doctrine that only the natural sciences provide valid knowledge, and that all ethical, intentional and philosophical statements should be rejected. Both critics and supporters of Leninism do not sufficiently distinguish between scientistic and scientific socialism. Lenin's theory of socialism is scientific. It is based upon an analysis of social relations and economic structures that adhere to the principles of rational enquiry exhibited in the natural sciences. Scientistic

socialism dismisses the validity of democratic debate and the rational discussion of values. It asserts that socialism requires no moral or ethical commitment. The scientific conception of socialism is, like all other kinds of scientism, incompatible with democracy (O'Neill 1996: 64). Unfortunately, on rare occasions Lenin does show an opposition to excessive ethical and moral commitments, which can be interpreted in a scientific fashion. Furthermore, by silencing entire modes of intentional and ethical discourse on the grounds that they are illegitimate, scientism can generate a dogmatic outlook. It can lead to the proposition that society should be run according to the dictates of science, and that the institutions and values of democracy should be disregarded. Lenin's fallibilist account of science should not, however, be conflated with scientism. All criticisms of scientific trends in socialism can and must be separated from evaluations of Leninism.

Chapter 4: Leninism, scientific socialism, and political equality

Introduction

A second generally accepted condition for democratic decision-making is political equality. In its broadest philosophical sense, political equality means that all people are viewed to be intrinsically equal, and that they are treated with the same degree of respect. In its application to government, political equality means that every adult citizen should be considered to be sufficiently well qualified to participate in the democratic process of governing the state. It also means that in the decision making process, the government must give equal consideration to the interests of every person bound by those decisions (Dahl 1998: 76, 79).

In his book chapter 'A Philosophy of Certainty: Dialectical Materialism', Harding argues that Lenin's theory of scientific socialism violates political equality. It does so by creating an epistemic distinction between the Marxian intellectuals who understand the scientific laws of history, and the rest of society, who lack this knowledge. Leninism advocates the dictatorship of an intellectual elite, during both the revolutionary upheaval and the subsequent construction of socialism. Harding divides his argument into two parts:

(i) Leninism believes that only the few can understand science, as it necessitates a high level of education, knowledge and expertise. Lenin views

Marxism to be a science, and he therefore argues that it can only be understood by a few intellectual experts.

(ii) Lenin defines science by its ability to predict and control events. Accordingly, just as natural science grants control over nature, scientific socialism grants control over society. Political questions are no longer discussed through democratic deliberation. They instead become technical questions that attempt to scientifically establish the policies that can most efficiently achieve the chosen aims of society. Accordingly, If Leninism views Marxism as a scientific theory, then in the interests of maximising efficiency, politics would be governed by applying that science.

Given Lenin's first assumption, that science can only be understood by the educated few, and his second assumption, that science grants control over events, he supposedly argued that in order to maximise efficiency, society had to be governed by the elite intellectual experts who alone understood the classical scientific socialism of Marx and Engels. Harding's critique constitutes the latest reiteration of the now common claim, that Lenin's positivist conception of science, like all positivist theories, necessarily reduces political issues to technical problems of efficiency, and the dictatorship of scientific policy experts.

Section one of this chapter outlines Harding's claim that in Leninism only the educated few can understand science. Section two rejects this claim by arguing that Lenin views Marxism to be a proletarian science. According to

this theory, the workers will educate and emancipate themselves. Section three outlines Harding's second claim, that Lenin's conception of science grants control over events. Section four rejects this claim by arguing that not all predicative scientific theories grant control over the events that they predict. Determinist scientific theories predict events without allowing control over them. Lenin's theory of scientific socialism is determinist in this sense.

I. Lenin's intellectual elitism

According to Harding's interpretation, Lenin views Marxism to be a scientific theory of the highest order. Attaining mastery over a science requires rigorous theoretical training, education, and study. This is something that the masses can never achieve, for they are 'restricted to the narrow confines of unreflective and undemonstratable subjective knowledge' (Harding 1996: 238-9). Lenin supposedly believes that only a select group of intellectual experts understand scientific socialism, and only they therefore possess the necessary knowledge that is required to rule over society:

Lenin, in both his political and philosophical writings, was clear that the vehicle of science cannot be the proletariat. Only the intelligentsia that has undergone an arduous apprenticeship in philosophical practice was capable of acquiring and extending objective or scientific knowledge (Harding 1996: 238-9).

Harding argues that the vessel of the Marxist intellectuals is the vanguard party, which, by virtue of its scientific knowledge, is the sole legitimate source

of political initiative. The party knows the real interests of society not because a popular majority agrees that it does, but because the party claims to have scientifically discovered these interests (Harding 1996: 173). The Leninist conviction that a group of intellectuals know the community's interests, needs and desires better than the community itself thereby forms the philosophical basis of a one party dictatorship over society (Harding 1996: 174). These consequences, Harding argues, logically follow from Lenin's conviction that scientific socialism can be understood only by an intellectual expert elite: 'Few other ideologies so clearly and overtly credit the discourse of intellectuals on the grounds that they articulate a moment of truth beyond the grasp of ordinary people, as Leninism does, and in doing so', Harding argues, 'it confers on its theoretical leaders a crucial and unchallengeable authority...this is an ideology created wholly by intellectuals and...not only by them, but for them and in their interests' (Harding 1996: 239).

When Lenin asserted that the proletariat could at best attain a trade union-consciousness, and that it therefore needed to be directed by the vanguard party, he was simply confronting the anti-democratic consequences of scientific socialism. Leninism therefore violates the political equality of participants in the process of revolutionary change (Harding 1996: 172-4):

For Leninism neither the goals of the movement, nor the means appropriate to their realisation, could be advanced by opinion polls or the results of election ballots. As with almost all schemes of thought that distinguished between the wavering and insubstantial opinions of

the mass, and the positive, demonstrable knowledge of trained initiates, it was not merely agnostic but actually hostile to democratic procedures (Harding 1996: 275).

Harding is not the only scholar to claim that Leninism creates an epistemic distinction between intellectuals and workers. According to Kolakowski, Leninism confronts the truism that 'no workingman could have written *Capital* or *Anti-Duhring* or even *What is to be Done?*'. Scientific socialism was created by intellectuals and can only be understood by intellectuals. It follows from this that Lenin's ideal society would be ruled by these intellectuals (Kolakowski 1978: 667).

In his book *Marxism and Democracy* Femia argues that the Leninist party, armed with its objective scientific knowledge, can 'postulate the workers' 'objective' interests without testing their opinion' (Femia 1993: 125). Femia gives the example of a passenger airline in order to illustrate this argument. No one thinks that plane pilots should subject their questions of navigation to the democratic scrutiny of the passengers. These are 'technical' questions that can only be adequately tackled by those who have, through the right education and intense study, attained the appropriate knowledge. Femia (1993: 126) argues that Lenin is so 'captivated by this view of morality as a science, with 'right' and 'wrong' answers', that he and other 'Marxist scientists...set themselves up as arbiters of 'objective truth- not only about how we do actually behave but also about how we ought to behave'. In this sense, Femia identifies the roots of Lenin's elitism in the ideas of Plato, who

argued that where objective truths can be understood by the few, there is no need for democratic deliberation. In the same way as Plato's philosopher Kings, Lenin believes that the revolutionary scientists can discover the real interests of the ignorant mass. He concludes his argument by stating that 'the staples of liberal democracy-competitive elections, majority rule, freedom of expression-would seem to serve little purpose if the monolithic general will, or the people's interests can be objectively defined by a scientific elite' (Femia 1993: 126-7).

In the view of Graham (1986: 223-227), Leninism should be understood as an extreme form of elite theory. Both Lenin and the elite theorists believe that the majority are stupid, that they do not know what is in their best interests, and that they therefore need to be directed by an enlightened minority. However, whereas some of the elite theorists advocate a minimalist procedural democracy, Lenin seeks to institute a new set of non-democratic social relations. For these reasons, Graham (1986: 228) argues that 'the points of divergence between elite theory and Leninism are not flattering to Leninism. It not only has objectionable features in common with elite theory: it has highly objectionable peculiarly its own'.

It is not only liberals and conservatives who ascribe to Lenin the belief that only intellectual experts can understand scientific socialism. This argument has its origins in the currents of Left Communism, Western Marxism, and the Frankfurt school. The Left Communist Pannekoek argues that *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* defends 'middle class materialism', which is, as its

name suggests, a philosophy that is intended not for the workers, but for middle class intellectuals. Lenin's philosophy therefore serves the sole purpose of legitimising the rule of an intellectual elite. 'The fighting working class...will find Lenin's philosophical work a stumbling-block in its way, as the theory of a class that tries to perpetuate its serfdom' (Pannekoek 1971: 108). Mattick, another Left Communist, also believes that Lenin distrusts the masses, who can never obtain a revolutionary consciousness. Leninism instead argues that this consciousness must be "imposed" on the masses by the revolutionary party, which gets its ideas from the intellectuals' (Mattick 1935: 1-5).

The arguments of the Left Communists are echoed by the Frankfurt school theorist Marcuse (1971: 32), who in his book *Soviet Marxism*, argues that Lenin's intellectual elitism is the direct cause of Stalinist totalitarianism: 'a straight road seems to lead from Lenin's "consciousness from without" and his notion of the centralized authoritarian party to Stalin's personal dictatorship' (Marcuse 1971: 145). In agreement, the open Marxist Holloway (2002: 128) argues that Lenin carries the scientific conception of Marxism to its logical, anti-democratic conclusion when by arguing that the privileged party can bestow their scientific knowledge to the workers from on high.

Harding's interpretation is also one that he shares with some of Lenin's most prominent supporters writing within the Leninist tradition. According to the influential interpretation of Leninism developed by the progenitor of Western Marxism, Georg Lukacs, class-consciousness 'by no means develops with

fatalistic inevitability from its economic situation' (Lukacs 1972: 31). In a manner similar to Rousseau, Lukacs argues that Lenin distinguishes between 'empirical consciousness' which is the workers general preferences, and true or 'imputed' consciousness, which is 'the appropriate and rational reactions "imputed" to a particular typical position in the process of production' (Lukacs 1971: 51). If the workers are rational, then they will develop this 'imputed' consciousness. They will view Marxism to be the most rational and appropriate worldview to their class situation. However, Lukacs does not think that the workers are rational. He argues that they are brainwashed by capitalist ideology, which means that most of them only possess an empirical consciousness, which is false, and illusory. Lukacs (1972: 27) argues that the correct 'imputed' consciousness must be brought to the workers from without, by the party that is '*the tangible embodiment of proletarian class-consciousness*'. Lukacs (1972: 35) grants the vanguard party the privilege of knowing in advance when the revolution will arrive, the correct course to take, as well as the correct party line. As Femia (1993: 120-21) points out, Lukacs fails to contemplate the implications that this interpretation has for political equality, which means that attempt to defend 'his Russian hero' only reinforces Lenin's scientific elitism.

Harding argues then, that Leninism violates the democratic condition of political equality because it makes an epistemic distinction between the intellectuals who understand science, and the rest of society, who lack this knowledge. The following section argues that this argument has no textual

basis. Lenin rejects the charge that only an educated minority can gain scientific knowledge, for he views Marxism to be a proletarian science.

II. Marxism as a proletarian science

Lenin distinguishes between two types of scientific knowledge: class-consciousness and theory. Lenin believes that the growth of a revolutionary class-consciousness is a necessary condition for the socialist transformation, and that theory can aid in the development of this consciousness. However, Lenin not only rejects the idea that intellectuals alone can develop either kind of scientific knowledge. He argues that the workers are in a stronger position to develop both kinds of knowledge.

The development of class-consciousness

In classical Marxist theory a person possesses a revolutionary class-consciousness if they recognise that socialism is both possible and necessary, and that the socialist revolution is their task (Schmitt 1987: 145). Where then, does Lenin think this consciousness comes from? He does not think that it develops independently of the objective conditions, for one of Lenin's main objectives in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is to reject the idealist notion that ideas existed prior to, and independent of, the material world. He instead argues for the exact opposite proposition: 'consciousness in general reflects being- that is a general principle of all materialism' (CW 14: 323). A foundational tenet of scientific socialism, in Lenin's view, is that the economic base of society determines the political and ideological

superstructure. Thus, in his article *Karl Marx*, he states that all ideas 'stem from the condition of the material forces of production' (CW 21: 57), and in *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism* he states that:

Just as man's knowledge reflects nature (i.e. developing matter), which exists independently of him, so man's *social knowledge* (i.e. the various views and doctrines- philosophical, religious, political, and so forth) reflects the *economic system* of society (CW 19: 25).

Lenin's thesis that ideas originate in the 'economic system of society' means that ideas have no causal power if they are independent of the economic base, and in particular, the class struggle. This in turn denies the causal power of intellectuals as the bearers of such ideas. (The proposition that ideas have no causal power is one of the features that distinguishes Marxism from classical positivism). The growth of class-consciousness is not the product of the 'right education', but of the economic base of society. This subordination of ideas to objective economic processes has the political effect of denying any epistemic inequality between workers and intellectuals. Lenin argues that class-consciousness develops solely through the class struggle, the spontaneous activities that the working classes themselves organise and participate in. It is not introduced to the workers 'from without'. The working class will educate and liberate itself:

We do not expect the proletariat to mature for power in an atmosphere of cajoling and persuasion, in a school of merely sermons or didactic

declamations, but in the school of life and struggle...The proletariat must do its learning in the struggle, and stubborn, desperate struggle in earnest is the only teacher (CW 26: 402-3).

Lenin's (CW 31: 27) argues that the class struggle teaches 'the fundamentals of political science' to the working class more rapidly and profoundly than years of theoretical education. Revolutionary developments fostered by this struggle will rouse the workers from their individual apathy and concern with their own particular problems. It will confront them with the coercive power of reaction that will teach them the truths of Marxism much better than theory. The workers will arrive at a revolutionary consciousness in and through their immediate activity, and not through abstract theory. In Lenin's view, 'socialist dreams turned into the socialist struggle of the millions only when Marx's scientific socialism had linked up the urge for change with the struggle of a definite class. Outside the class struggle', Lenin argues, 'socialism is either a hollow phrase or a naïve dream' (CW 9: 443).

Thus, to fill out the story just told in more detail, in his successive drafts of the Russian Social Democratic programme, written in 1895-97, Lenin develops a detailed account of the growth of proletarian class-consciousness. He argues that this process follows a dialectical pattern, which is intrinsic to the events the workers participate in. Within each phase of the class struggle, two antagonistic forces are in contestation. On the one hand, the proletariat attempt to achieve higher pay, more control over their work and better conditions, whilst on the other hand, the capitalists try to maximise their profits

by denying these demands. Each successive phase intensifies and clears up the issues involved, whilst strengthening the organisational structure and consciousness of the two opposing classes: 'As this class struggle develops, class consciousness and solidarity will inevitably grow in the ranks of the revolution and in the ranks of the reaction, and sharper and more ruthless forms of struggle will be adopted' (CW 11: 185). The transition from one phase to the next is dictated by the objective economic development of capitalism.

During the first phase of the struggle, the phase of 'agitation' Lenin argues that capitalism is relatively underdeveloped. The class lines are not clear, and as such, the workers will have only a hazy understanding of their economic position and interests. They may lash out against their employers with random and uncoordinated acts of vandalism, but will not know what or whom to aim their anger at. Their collective organisations will be similarly local, disjointed, and weak. As the productive forces develop, however, and as the capitalist relations of production become more defined, the class antagonism between capital and labour will become clear for all to see. As a result of this economic change, the workers will come to understand the meaning and nature of their 'exploitation'. They will 'learn from this struggle, firstly, how to recognise and to examine one by one the methods of capitalist exploitation, to compare them with the law, with their living conditions, and with the interests of the capitalist class'. It is through this struggle that the workers will recognise their exploitation to be an intrinsic feature of the capitalist mode of production. The workers will therefore gain a basic Marxist understanding of the functioning of

capitalism in and through their own experience: 'By examining the different forms and cases of exploitation, the workers learn to understand the social system based upon the exploitation of labour by capital' (CW 2: 113).

During the second phase of development, which Lenin calls the phase of 'industrial action', capitalism matures further, the rate of exploitation increases, and the class divisions become more explicit. The growth of industrial capitalism will concentrate the workers into factories, thereby giving them easy lines of communication. It is in these factories that the workers will discuss and compare their experiences of exploitation, and it is for this reason that the material conditions of the working class provide the ideal conditions for the development of Marxist ideas (CW 2: 103). The concentration of the workers into working units, combined with their miserable living conditions, will compel them to conduct more regular and organised struggles against their employers, in the form of strikes. In Lenin's view, 'strikes, which arise out of the very nature of capitalist society... signify the beginning of the working class struggle against the system of society' (CW 3: 204). He believes that 'proletarians schooled in numerous strikes (to take only this manifestation of the class struggle)... assimilate in admiral fashion the very profound truth (philosophical, historical, political and psychological) expounded by Engels' (CW 31: 67). By developing a sense of purpose and collective class solidarity amongst the workers, 'every strike brings the thoughts of socialism very forcibly to the workers mind, thoughts of the struggle of the entire working class for emancipation from the oppression of capital' (CW 4: 314).

The third and penultimate phase of the development of class-consciousness that Lenin outlines is the 'political struggle', which 'develops the workers political consciousness' (CW 2: 113). During this phase, the increasing economic disparities between the workers and capitalists will intensify the class lines, and the workers will conduct larger and more violent strikes on a more frequent basis. As this turmoil begins to threaten the profit margins of the monopolies and the economic stability of society more generally, the capitalist state will begin to view the strike movement as a threat to its own existence. In order to maintain its economic and political interests the state will try to crush working class industrial action wherever it arises. As each successive strike and factory clash 'necessarily brings the workers into conflict with the laws and representatives of state authority', the class struggle 'automatically and inevitably spurs the workers on to think of state, political questions, questions of how the Russian state is governed, how laws and regulations are issued, and whose interests they serve' (CW 2: 113). Thus as the direct result of their 'struggle against the factory owners for their daily needs', the workers will come to recognise the interdependence of economic and political power under capitalism, which is another fundamental proposition of Marxism (CW 2: 113).

In the process of demanding better conditions, Lenin argues that the workers will become aware of their lack of political freedom under capitalism. Since their demands will be opposed by the state and proscribed by law, their attempts at economic amelioration will be hampered by political and legal constraints. As the workers are harassed and repressed for trying to obtain

the basis necessities of life, they will realise that the civil and political rights that they possess under capitalism are in fact insufficient, for none of these rights extend into the economic sphere of the workplace. They will realise that as long as they lack collective democratic ownership over the means of production, and so long as they are consistently misrepresented in government by the bourgeoisie, all talk of human rights and democracy will remain just that. They will realise that as long as they lack political power, the various laws of the state will be written by the capitalist class, and in the interests of the capitalist class. As a result, 'the political movement of the working class will inevitably lead the workers to realise that their only salvation lies in socialism' (CW 2: 22). The workers will come to recognise that the political struggle is, by necessary extension, a revolutionary struggle, which is the final stage of the process. Thus, Lenin concludes, 'the struggle of the factory workers against the employers inevitably turns into a struggle against the entire capitalist class, against the entire social order based upon the exploitation of labour by capital' (CW 2: 107).

Lenin's account of the growth of class-consciousness rejects the notion that theoretical study is a necessary condition for this growth. In his view, the capacity of any person to develop this consciousness depends not upon their level of theoretical expertise, but upon their position within the economic base, and more specifically, the class struggle. As the working class suffer exploitation on a direct and daily basis, they are, according to Lenin, in the strongest position to develop a revolutionary class-consciousness: 'it is, in fact, the disgraceful economic condition of the proletariat that drives it

irresistibly forward and compels it to fight for its ultimate emancipation. And the fighting proletariat *will help itself*' (CW 2: 22). By the same reasoning, he argues that intellectuals, by virtue of their bourgeois economic position, are actually at a disadvantage when compared to the workers. Indeed, Intellectuals are more likely to develop a reactionary bourgeois consciousness, rather than a revolutionary consciousness. Lenin was therefore not surprised when he observed that the spontaneous working class movement in Russia was outstripping the growth and cohesion of the intellectual revolutionary organisations. In *What is to be Done*, the text that is so often accused of criticising spontaneity, Lenin repeatedly points out that 'the strength of the present day movement lies in the awakening of the masses...and that its weakness lies in the lack of consciousness and initiative among the revolutionary leaders' (CW 5: 373).

In Leninism the principal force that develops revolutionary class-consciousness is the class struggle. Lenin argues that the proletariat will educate, liberate, and govern itself. As revolutionary class-consciousness grows out of the collective experiences of the workers, rather than the 'correct' education, Leninism rejects the notion that only intellectuals can gain this type of scientific knowledge.

Theoretical Knowledge

The second type of scientific knowledge that Lenin identifies is theoretical. In the *Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*, he states that the

theory of scientific socialism constitutes the culmination and unique synthesis of three classical social sciences: 'German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism' (CW 19: 23-4). These sciences can be assimilated only through acquiring knowledge of historical materialism, Marxian economic theory, and the materialist dialectic, in addition to the history of the modern labour movement and modern social revolutions. For Lenin, the notion that this colossal sum of theoretical knowledge can spontaneously emerge from the class struggle is absurd. Marxist theory is not the inevitable product of the class struggle and class experience, but the result of theoretical, scientific production. It is for this reason that 'the theory of socialism...grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals.' Lenin also recognises that 'by their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia' (CW 5: 375).

The belief that the theory of scientific socialism originated in the minds of intellectuals does not mean, however, that this theory, once formed, can only be understood by one group of people rather than another. Lenin rejects the idea that only intellectuals can gain theoretical knowledge, for he argues that Marxism is not only a science, but a 'proletarian science' (CW 16: 205). In Lenin's view, the works of classical scientific socialism were intended to be the theoretical expression of the proletarian class struggle. They sought to reflect, explain and anticipate the spontaneous working class movement. Lenin therefore argues that the working class are in a privileged position to

understand the works of Marx and Engels, because these works explain what the workers face on a daily basis. This is why he states that *Ludwig Feuerbach, Anti-Duhring*, and the *Communist Manifesto* are ‘handbooks for every class-conscious worker’ (CW 19: 24). Accordingly, in *What is to be Done?* Lenin states that ‘socialist theory reveals the causes of the misery of the working class more profoundly and more correctly than any other theory, and for that reason the workers are able to assimilate it so easily’ (CW 5: 386). In a letter to the working class leader Bebel he remarks that ‘the theoretical principles of Marxism have taken deepest root and spread most widely among the masses of the proletariat, illumining with radiant light their struggle for the complete overthrow of capitalism’ (CW 43: 232); and in his address to the Russian Young Communist League Lenin triumphantly proclaims that Marxist theory was no longer the privileged preserve of a sole intellectual, or even a party of intellectuals. It was now, in his view, being understood, utilised and developed by the global working class in their struggle to overthrow the existing order. It had truly become a proletarian science:

Communist theory- the science of communism created in the main by Marx, this doctrine of Marxism—has ceased to be the work of a single socialist of the nineteenth century, even though he was a genius, and it has become the doctrine of millions and tens of millions of proletarians all over the world, who are applying it in their struggle against capitalism (CW 31: 286).

Not only does Lenin reject the belief that a lack of 'right education' prevents the workers from understanding Marxist theory. He argues that the workers are capable of producing theory themselves. Thus in one of his earliest works, *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats*, Lenin states that 'when the doctrine of scientific socialism had definitely taken shape...there emerged numerous talented energetic disseminators of this doctrine among the working class' (CW 1: 320). Lenin singles out the 'advanced workers' in particular, 'who accept socialism consciously, and who even elaborate independent socialist theories' (CW 4: 280). Whilst Lenin thought that Russian intellectuals were 'losing interest' in Marxist literature, he noted that 'an impassioned desire for knowledge and for socialism' was 'growing among the workers'. Despite the fact that these workers lived in squalid conditions, and although they were exploited on a daily basis, Lenin was impressed that they managed to 'study, study study, and turn themselves into conscious Social-Democrats- "the working-class intelligentsia"' (CW 4: 280-81). Lenin argues that 'every viable working-class movement has brought to the fore such working-class leaders, its own Proudhons, Vaillants, Weitlings, and Bebels' (CW 4: 280). He holds the tanner Joseph Dietzgen in particularly high regard, and he frequently counts him alongside Marx and Engels as a founder of scientific socialism: 'In that worker-philosopher, who discovered dialectical materialism in his own way, there is much that is great!' (CW 14: 139, 246-7). Lenin therefore urges socialists to make every effort to ensure that the numbers of the working class intellectuals are 'regularly reinforced, that its lofty mental requirements are met and that leaders of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party come

from its ranks' (CW 4: 280-81).

Lenin does not believe that all workers are equally capable of developing theoretical knowledge. Below the 'advanced workers' are the substratum of 'average workers', who 'will not be able to get a full grasp of an intricate theoretical or practical problem.' Lenin does not, however, conclude that the average workers are forever incapable of developing theoretical knowledge, for he argues that every effort should be made to 'raise their level' and promote them into the ranks of the advanced workers (CW 4: 281).

Behind the average workers comes the 'lower strata of the proletariat', who may be unable to understand even a socialist newspaper, let alone a work of socialist theory. Yet again, however, Lenin does not condemn the lower strata to a state of permanent ignorance, for he argues that 'different forms of agitation and propaganda must be brought to bear on these strata—pamphlets written in more popular language, oral agitation...leaflets on local events...legal educational activities' (CW 4: 282). Whilst Lenin therefore believes that some people are more capable of developing theoretical knowledge than others, he rejects the notion that some people are forever incapable of acquiring this knowledge. He instead believes that the main task of socialists should be to bring everyone up to the level of the intelligentsia.

Whilst Lenin acknowledged that there were not enough working class theoreticians within the Russian socialist movement, he did not blame this shortage upon a lack of formal education on the workers part. He instead

argues that two obstacles prevented workers from accessing the relevant literature (CW 5: 384). In the first place, he argues that books were often too expensive for the workers, who could not afford them with their subsistence wages. After criticising the high price of the newly published four-volume collection of the *Marx-Engels Correspondence*, Lenin insisted that 'a selection of passages most important from the standpoint of principle could and should have been published for wide distribution among workers' (CW 19: 553). Lenin sought to overcome the price barrier by publishing the works of Marx and Engels in the form of cheap 'penny publications', which the workers could more easily access (CW 12: 104; CW 1: 186).

In the second place, Lenin argues that the party intellectuals often denied the workers access to Marxist literature. Many Russian intellectuals believed that only they needed to understand theory, and that the workers could be directed through agitation. Lenin despised this mentality, as it had the effect of sustaining an artificial distinction between workers and intellectuals, a distinction that he sought to destroy. He argues that 'the workers themselves wish to read and do read all that is written for the intelligentsia'. In his view, all they needed was the opportunity to do so: 'only a few (bad) intellectuals believe that it is enough "for workers" to be told a few things about factory conditions and to have repeated to them over and over again what has long been known' (CW 5: 384).

Whilst Lenin believes that all people are capable of understanding theory and becoming theorists, he acknowledges that the acquisition of theoretical

knowledge is an individual enterprise that takes time and conscious effort. For this reason, he recognises that there will for a long time be a division of labour between a minority of communist intellectuals on the one hand, and a majority of class-consciousness workers on the other. The problem with this division is that some intellectuals may begin to think that they know better than the workers, and that they should therefore direct the socialist movement. The fact that many of these intellectuals may come from the working class does not by itself remove the danger of this epistemic distinction from being made. The potentially anti-democratic implications of this problem are not as bad as they seem, however, for whilst Lenin gives intellectuals an important role in the political process, he maintains that they can only serve as the educative auxiliary of the proletarian movement, rather than its governing element. Communist intellectuals should combine their theoretical knowledge of objective historical laws with a social and economic analysis of current affairs, in order to gauge the current political conditions and ascertain the potentialities for a socialist transformation. Lenin argues that this scientific knowledge should be used to guide the workers onto paths of activity that can more efficiently effect this transformation. This is, in his view, the role that Marx, the principal founder of scientific socialism, performed. 'His attitude towards the heaven-storming proletariat was that of a practical adviser, of a participant in the struggle of the masses' (CW 12: 110). It is for this reason that Lenin denounces all 'petty-bourgeois ideologists' who 'seem to think they can manage the whole thing themselves', and that the workers 'need not worry'. These intellectuals 'are reactionary...because they simply cannot

understand the necessity for a struggle, a desperate struggle of the working people themselves for their emancipation' (CW 1: 286).

It is also in these terms that Lenin defines the role of the vanguard party in relation to the working class movement in his most extended discussion of the problem, *What is to be Done?*. In this text, Lenin argues it is both inevitable and necessary that a party will join the militant proletariat and supply it with organisational, theoretical and educative elements (CW 5: 375). He insists, however, that the purpose of the party is not to crush the spontaneous working class, but to instead win it's support. In the second place, he argues that the vanguard party must be a proletarian party, i.e. one that is governed and led by the workers themselves, and not some intellectual elite (CW 8: 146, 196; CW 15: 290; CW 10: 32). Since, according to Lenin (CW 2: 27), the 'the emancipation of the workers must be the act of the working class itself', only the workers themselves can control and direct the party that will affect this transformation. Thus, in his article *The Proletariat and the Bourgeois Democrats* Lenin chastises the Russian intellectuals who thought that they alone should take control of the party and workers movement:

Considering themselves to be Social-Democrats and the true spokesmen of working-class aspirations, these gentlemen do not understand or do not want to understand that the working-class movement will achieve substantial results only if it...realises that its real emancipation lies in its own hands and not in the hands of the bourgeois democrats...These 'strictly-speaking' Social-Democrats,

alleged Marxists, ought to realise the demoralisation they are bringing among the working-class masses by seeking to prove that certain 'democrats' (but not Social-Democrats) consisting exclusively of bourgeois intellectuals are called upon to show the workers the way to freedom and socialism...only the power of the organised proletariat is capable of overthrowing autocratic tyranny and winning political freedom (CW 8: 229).

Throughout Lenin's writings on party organisation one can witness his constant struggle to alter the class composition of the party, from one that was dominated by the intelligentsia, to one that was dominated by the working class. Lenin argued that this could be best achieved by electing as many workers as possible into the principle organs of power, the party committees. Only this would allow the workers themselves to direct the party's activities at the grassroots level, and thereby determine the course of the revolution. Thus during the Party's Third Congress, in his speech 'On the question of the relations between workers and intellectuals within the social-democratic organisations', Lenin states that 'I should be strongly in favour of having eight workers to every two intellectuals on our committees...If this clause constitutes a threat to the committees consisting of intellectuals, then I am all for it'. He then argues that 'one cannot rely on a small periphery of intellectuals, but one can and should rely on hundreds of organised workers' (CW 8: 408-15). In a later article, *The Reorganisation of the Party* Lenin is adamant that the ratio of workers to intellectuals in the party must be balanced even more in favour of the former: 'now we must wish for the party

organizations to have one social-democratic intellectual to several hundred social-democratic workers' (CW 10: 36).

It is not only before the revolution that Lenin emphasises the importance of the working class educating and emancipating themselves through their spontaneous activity. He argues that the construction of socialism and the development of a socialist class-consciousness can proceed only upon the basis of this activity. In doing so, he rejects the 'old, absurd, sentimental and vulgar intellectualist idea of "introducing socialism" from without' (CW 26: 401). Lenin argues that 'these notions, to say nothing of the plans, are alien. We have always known, said and emphasised that socialism cannot be "introduced", that it takes shape in the course of the most intense, the most acute class struggle' (CW 26: 401). Under the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' Lenin argues that the working class will learn to govern themselves on the job, so to speak, by making mistakes and learning from them. This is why Lenin coined the famous slogan 'all power to the soviets', as these were a form of democratic organisation that the Russian workers themselves created in their class struggle. A recurring theme in Lenin's writings on socialism is his support of direct democracy and the rejection of intellectual leadership. Thus, in his article *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?* Lenin asks whether the transition to socialism can be achieved through any form of governance other than mass direct democracy: 'Is there any way other than practice by which the people can learn to govern themselves and to avoid mistakes? Is there any way other than by proceeding immediately to genuine self-government by the people?' His answer to these questions is no. 'The chief thing now', states

Lenin, 'is to abandon the prejudiced bourgeois intellectualist view that only special officials, who by their very social position are entirely dependent upon capital, can administer the state' (CW 26: 114).

Whilst Lenin believes that intellectuals and trained experts are necessary in performing the more complex tasks of state administration, he argues that they should be closely supervised by the workers themselves. Their main role should be to enthuse the working class with the determination to carry out the difficult task of socialist construction, and to remove every obstacle that frustrates their self-activity. Intellectuals should seek to inspire and encourage the working masses to create and govern their own economic and political forms. Lenin rejects the idea that intellectuals should impose rules or enforce standards, norms or procedures for the workers to follow. He also rejects the idea that intellectuals, by virtue of their scientific knowledge, should be given political leadership: 'One of the most important tasks today, if not the most important', states Lenin, 'is to develop this independent initiative of the workers, and of all the working and exploited people generally, develop it as widely as possible in creative *organisational* work':

At all costs we must break the old, absurd, savage, despicable and disgusting prejudice that only the so-called 'upper classes', only the rich and those who have gone through the school of the rich, are capable of administering the state and directing the organisational development of socialist society (CW 26: 409).

Lenin notes that the Russian masses often lacked the determination and confidence to create and direct their own activities under the new conditions, for they had been used to working as wage slaves for most of their lives. In his address to the Third Congress of the Soviets in 1918 he recalls a conversation he had with a delegation of peasants and workers, who asked him for help with regards to various organisational problems. Lenin did not offer an intellectual dictatorship as a solution. 'I said to them: you are the power, do all you want to do...you will make mistakes but you will learn' (CW 26: 468). As for those intellectuals outside and within the party who claimed to know the correct path to socialism, Lenin told them to discard 'the old shabby little book carefully stowed away under the pillow, the unwanted book that serves them as a guide and manual of implementing official socialism'. In his view, 'the minds of tens of millions of those who are doing things create something infinitely loftier than the greatest genius can foresee' (CW 26: 474).

Looking back upon the construction of socialism During the *Sixth Russia Congress of the Soviets*, Lenin remarks that theoretical study and knowledge played a negligible role: 'We cannot say that great sections of workers have laid the foundations in a politically-conscious way in the sense that they have taken to reading books and pamphlets.' He goes on to say that 'by political consciousness we mean that they have tackled this formidable task with their own hands and by their own efforts'. Whilst Lenin acknowledges that the workers made many errors in their attempts to govern themselves, he argues that 'every blunder trained and steeled them in organising industrial administration'. Lenin concludes from this successful experiment in self

governance that 'all workers...know that they themselves, with their own hands, are building socialism and have already laid its foundations, and no force in the country can prevent them from seeing the job through' (CW 28: 140).

If there is a textual basis for the charge that Leninism violates political equality, it is not Harding's claim that Lenin trusts intellectuals over the workers. On the contrary, it is because Lenin trusts the workers over intellectuals. A cursory glance at Lenin's writings shows that whilst his descriptions of the proletariat are mostly complimentary and positive, his descriptions of intellectuals are consistently derogatory and negative. This negativity stemmed from the fact that the majority of intellectuals in Russia were also members of the bourgeoisie, which meant that their commitment to socialism was ambiguous. The following analysis shows that Lenin took an increasingly negative attitude towards intellectuals as revolutionary events developed.

In his works written during the pre-revolutionary period Lenin expresses the view that intellectuals are crucial component of the revolutionary movement. He did, however, find it necessary to criticise what he viewed to be the inherent characteristics of the 'intellectual personality'. Thus in *One step Forward Two Steps Back* Lenin criticises the 'instability and wishy-washiness of the intellectual' (CW 7: 324), in his article on the *Victory of Cadets and Tasks of the Workers' Party*, he speaks of 'the garrulous, boastful, smug, narrow-minded, craven bourgeois intellectual' (CW 10: 221), and in *The*

Election Results in St Petersburg he speaks of 'the spinelessness and political short-sightedness, characteristic of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals' (CW 12: 121).

As the revolutionary movement began to develop, however, and as the class divisions within Russia became more explicit, Lenin started to argue that all ideas were either proletarian or capitalist in nature. There was no middle ground. He therefore started to believe that intellectuals, by virtue of their bourgeois class position, were inherently reactionary in the ideological sphere. This belief is clearly expressed in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, where Lenin states that not a single professor can be '*trusted one iota*' when it comes to philosophy or the general theory of political economy: 'Taken as a whole, the professors of economics are nothing but learned salesmen of the capitalist class, while the professors of philosophy are learned salesmen of the theologians' (CW 14: 342-3).

Lenin's skepticism regarding the personalities and ideas of intellectuals caused him to question their commitment to the socialist cause. Whilst he still thought that some intellectuals could become devoted revolutionaries within the working class movement, he also believed that their class position made them sympathetic to the capitalists. Thus in *The Last Word of Russian Liberalism* he states that 'by the very nature of the case the bourgeois intellectual vacillates between placing hopes in the masses and placing hopes in the Octobrist Bourgeoisie' (CW 16: 136). He expresses the same sentiment in the introduction to his pamphlet *Two Parties*, where he observes that

whilst bourgeois intellectuals were 'joining the proletariat group after group... group after group has again deserted the proletariat, having found out through experience that they cannot live up to revolutionary Marxism' (CW 17: 226).

Lenin's attitude towards intellectuals became increasingly negative and intolerant as time went on, however, as in his view, intellectuals such as Kautsky and Bernstein had betrayed the working class movement with their opportunism and revisionism. Instead of supporting the revolutionary overthrow of their governments they sought a compromise with capital. Kautsky's betrayal in particular supported Lenin's already growing conviction that intellectuals could not be trusted to aid the construction of socialism in post-revolutionary Russia. Thus in his article *How to Organise Competition*, he calls for a 'war to the death against the rich and their hangers-on, the bourgeois Intellectuals...All of them are of the same brood- the spawn of capitalism, the offspring of aristocratic and bourgeois society' (CW 26: 411). He goes on to state that:

This slovenliness, this carelessness, untidiness, unpunctuality, nervous haste, the inclination to substitute discussion for action, talk for work, the inclination to undertake everything under the sun without finishing anything, are characteristics of the "educated" (CW 26: 411).

Lenin then argues that many of the 'mistakes, shortcomings and defects' of the revolution were the direct result of the 'deplorable...characteristics of the intellectuals in our midst, and to the lack of sufficient supervision by the

workers over the organisational work of the intellectuals' (CW 26: 412). In order to solve this problem Lenin calls upon the workers to overcome their 'timidity' and exercise their collective power over the intellectuals in the workplace.

As the fledgling soviet state struggled to survive the opening months of 1918 Lenin began to see intellectuals not only as poor Marxists, but as enemies of the people. During his *Speech Delivered at the First all-Russia Congress of International Teachers*, looking back upon the role of intellectuals during the events leading up to 1918, Lenin concluded that 'the majority of the intellectuals of the old Russia were downright opponents of the Soviet regime' (CW 27: 445). At the *Fourth Conference of Trade Unions* Lenin wrote that the intellectuals working within Russia were sabotaging the construction of socialism: 'the intelligentsia are using their experience and knowledge...in the service of the exploiters, and are doing all they can to prevent our gaining victory over the exploiters' (CW 27: 475). In a *Moscow Party Workers' Meeting* in November of 1918 Lenin expressed his belief that intellectuals were of little value in comparison to the workers (CW 28: 214). He repeats this sentiment during the *Extraordinary Plenary Meeting of the Moscow Soviet of Workers and Red Army Deputies*. Here Lenin tells his proletarian comrades that 'we must rely upon the masses of the workers and not count upon the intellectuals who, although they have come to work for us, have a large number of useless people among them' (CW 29: 259). In a later article, *The Great Beginning*, Lenin appears to reject the value of intellectuals entirely:

‘Not with the assistance of the intellectuals will the proletariat achieve victory, but in spite of their opposition’ (CW 29: 424-25).

Lenin’s opposition to intellectuals reaches its peak in his article *On the Significance of Militant Materialism*, where he emphasises the importance of combatting the ‘philosophical prejudices of so-called educated Society’. He argues that ‘Dietzgen senior...aptly and clearly expressed the fundamental Marxist view’ of the intellectual philosophers in the capitalist countries, when he stated that ‘the professors of philosophy in modern society are in the majority of cases nothing but “graduated flunkeys of clericalism”’ (CW 33: 228).

Although there is clearly much evidence to show that Lenin distrusted intellectuals, it would be wrong to go further and describe his thought as a form of anti-intellectualism. That is, it would be wrong to suggest that Lenin rejects the value of education, philosophy, art, literature and science. For in the first place, Lenin acknowledges the fact that the founders of scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, were themselves intellectuals. It has also been shown that Lenin rejoiced at the increasing numbers of working class intellectuals in Russia, and that he took active steps to both increase their numbers and ensure that they took charge of the socialist movement. In his letter to his friend and writer Maxim Gorky, who was himself an intellectual, Lenin states that he does not oppose intellectualism per se, for ‘It is wrong to confuse the “intellectual forces” of the people with the “forces” of bourgeois

intellectuals'. Lenin then makes it clear that he supports the former and opposes the latter:

The intellectual forces of the workers and peasants are growing and gaining strength in the struggle to overthrow the bourgeoisie and its henchmen, the intellectual lackeys of capital, who imagine they are the brains of the nation. Actually, they are not the brains, but shit (CW 44: 284).

Lenin's theory of scientific socialism is therefore not a form of anti-intellectualism, but a form of workerism, in the sense that it supports the self-emancipation of the working class. Lenin is less concerned with opposing intellectuals than he is with giving all workers the opportunity to become intellectuals. This aspect of his thought militates against any kind of elitism in his writings.

Lenin views Marxism to be a proletarian science, for the principal reason that it represents the proletariat, and because its intended audience is the proletariat. Lenin therefore rejects the first element of Harding's claim, that only an intellectual elite can understand scientific socialism. In doing so, he specifically rejects the notion that there is an epistemic inequality amongst political participants.

III. Lenin's positivism

The second element of Harding's argument is that that Lenin's theory of scientific socialism claims to grant control over events. Dialectical materialism, in Harding's view, 'is a philosophy that consistently maintains that all phenomena of the natural and social worlds are knowable and that they conform, in their evolution and development, to knowable laws' (Harding 1996: 228-9, 13). Lenin supposedly believes that explanation and prediction are symmetrical, in the sense that every explanation can in principle function as a prediction, and vice versa. To explain a phenomenon is to cite the causal antecedents required to produce or prevent it: 'The scientific understanding of society meant the formulation of laws of development with predictive power.' Accordingly, 'to know science was to know the future, or, at the least, to have a prescient awareness of what was coming into being' (Harding 1996: 239).

Lenin supposedly argues that the ability to predict events grants the ability to control these events, for knowledge, understood as the knowledge of causes and effects, is power. Accordingly, in the same way as knowledge of the natural sciences provides the means to control the natural environment, so too does the knowledge gained from social science allow control over the social environment. Just as natural science grants enormous power, which is based on knowledge of how the natural world functions, so too does scientific socialism allow a degree of control over the social arrangements which structure peoples lives. Lenin and his followers created a 'new universal

explanatory system' that transformed 'materialism into a metaphysic and the dialectic into an invariable set of scientific 'laws'. Armed with such weapons, communists could storm any fortress, overcome every obstacle' (Harding 1996: 237).

Harding (1996: 239) argues that 'the practical consequence of this stance is fairly obvious'. Political questions and debates would be reduced to technical questions that seek to discover the most efficient ways of achieving pre-chosen goals. The governance of society would no longer require democratic debate and deliberation over policy, as the answers to all political questions can be discovered and answered with the precision of natural science. When productive efficiency has been maximised in order to guarantee the optimal return, and when technology has advanced to the point where scarcity is a thing of the past, 'politics as disputation and politics as envy about the disputation of scarce resources would wither away. Less politics, as Lenin put it, would be the best politics'. In Harding's (1996: 275) view, 'the displacement and emasculation of politics in Leninism and the whole Leninist tradition is...directly attributable to its fixation with an outmoded metaphysic of science'.

Harding argues that it is not the workers who are to govern this scientifically administered society, for if Lenin's assumption that science grants control over events is combined with his first assumption, that only intellectual experts can understand science, it becomes clear that Leninism advocates the dictatorship of a scientific intellectual elite. Only intellectuals are able to lead

because they alone are 'blessed with thorough knowledge of the laws of development'. Only they therefore 'have privileged access to the truth' (Harding 1996: 239, 241).

In Harding's view, Lenin's belief that scientific socialism grants control over events is to blame for Stalin's supposed voluntarism, which believed that the human will is the dominant factor in the universe. The Communist party under Stalin therefore thought that it could use its scientific knowledge to accomplish any political objective it chose to set itself. No task was too difficult, and no aim was too high. Anything was possible as long as all the relevant social, political and economic variables were manipulated in the correct way. Harding argues that the totalitarian excesses of Stalin's five-year plans in the Soviet Union are therefore founded upon Lenin's scientific pronouncements: 'The dialectic became...an apologetic for Stalin's ruthless voluntarism in forcing a recalcitrant reality to dress by the requirements of thought'. As a result, 'dialectics became a 'science of sciences', fated to walk hand in hand with socialism as planned economy and planned society, and the party leadership was, of course, its oracle' (Harding 1996: 237). For these reasons Harding (1996: 275) concludes that Leninism is 'hostile, not only to democracy, but also to politics; and science was to be the antidote to both.'

As with Harding's other criticisms of Leninism, this particular charge has its origins in the Marxist tradition. The Left Communist Pannekoek argues that Lenin's 'middle class materialism', when combined with his belief that science grants control, justifies the rule of a scientific intellectual elite, who will rule the

country as one large economic enterprise. In Pannekoek's view, Lenin's determination to realise the 'well-ordered organisation of production for use under the direction of technical and scientific experts' spelled the death of democracy and the rise of totalitarianism in post-revolutionary Russia (Pannekoek 1971: 107, 100).

Harding's argument is one that he also shares with those who identify the positivist character of Lenin's philosophy. These accounts argue that that Lenin's positivism, like any positivist social science, necessarily transforms political questions and democratic procedures into technical questions and the dictatorship of scientific experts (Corrigan, Ramsay and Sayer 1978: 45-6; Santamaria and Manville 1976: 79-96; Fay 1975: 25, 102; Jordan 1967: 358-9). The proponents of this view blame the degeneration of the Russian revolution upon Lenin's positivism, which enforced the methods of capitalist industrial technique and management upon the political and economic system. Even Liebman (1975: 338), who provides one of the most sympathetic interpretations of Lenin's political thought, argues that 'there was positivism indeed in a conception of economic progress and labour relations that was strictly dependent on considerations of output, order and efficiency'. Polan puts forward the same argument in his book *Lenin and the End of Politics*, which draws upon Habermas' critique of instrumental rationality in order to criticise Lenin's positivist politics. According to Polan, the principle of instrumental rationality encourages political actors to utilise the most efficient means to achieve their chosen goals. The problem with this approach, in Polan's view, is that the most efficient means can sometimes contradict the

end goal in question. Polan argues that Lenin's positivism is committed to a technocratic society because it views expert rule to be the most efficient means of obtaining communism. The fact that the political inequalities inherent to the technocratic system contradict the values of communism is therefore unproblematic according to Lenin's logic, as the end justifies the means. In his bid to achieve the most efficient and rationally organised society, Polan argues that Lenin's positivism entails not just the end of democracy, but 'the end of politics' (1984: 91, 109-122).

The technocratic implications of Lenin's positivism have not only been explored in political theory. The Russian author Yevgeny Zamyatin vividly anticipates these implications in his dystopian novel *We* (1972), which he wrote partially in response to political developments taking place within Leninist Russia. The novel describes a world of harmony and conformity within a united totalitarian state. Society is governed according to the scientific principles of Taylorism, a theory of management that analyses and synthesizes workflows. The main objective of Taylorism is the maximisation of economic efficiency, and in particular, the productivity of labour.

Harding and other commentators point out that in the later years of his rule, Lenin increasingly drew upon the insights of Taylorism in order to increase the efficiency of production and economic organisation within the Soviet Union (Harding 1996: 275; Liebman 1975: 338; Traub 1978: 82-92). In these accounts, Lenin's belief that the laws governing society can and should be

directed by an intellectual elite necessarily lends itself to the bleak technocratic society that Zamyatin describes.

IV. Lenin's determinism

The association of Leninism with the positivist belief that science grants control over events has no textual basis. Some scientific theories predict events without granting the power to control them. Prominent examples include seismological and astronomical theories. These theories can be called determinist. Lenin's conception of scientific socialism is a determinist theory. It argues that the development of society is driven by the growth of the productive forces. The level of development of the productive forces determines the social relations between classes, otherwise known as the relations of production. The productive forces and relations of production together constitute the economic base of society. This economic base determines the ideological and political superstructure. A fundamental point of scientific socialism, in Lenin's (CW 1: 159) view, is that these causal antecedents cannot be consciously controlled: 'Determinism...postulates that human acts are necessitated and rejects the absurd tale about free will.' Lenin therefore rejects the notion that societies can be shaped in any fashion by those who are in power. Politics is the arena of the superstructure, and the human activity in this sphere is constrained by the economic base:

Marx put an end to the view of society being a mechanical aggregation of individuals which allows all sorts of modification at the will of the

authorities (or, if you like, at the will of society and the government) and which emerges and changes casually (CW 1: 142).

Lenin's theory of scientific socialism also claims to identify and explain features that are intrinsic to the capitalist mode of production, such as its volatile cycle of periodic economic crises and the maintenance of a 'reserve army of labour'. By analysing these features it is able to predict future long-term trends, which include the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, the concentration of capital, and the gradual immiseration of the working class, which are developments that establish the necessary pre-conditions for the collapse of capitalism. Lenin argues that these events and developments cannot however, be consciously controlled. As both a theory of historical change and capitalist development, Lenin's theory of scientific socialism is determinist. It predicts what will happen in the future, but it does not grant the power to control these events. This subordination of the subjective human will to the objective laws of economic development is what distinguishes scientific socialism from utopian socialism. The utopian socialists thought that it was possible to bring about socialism by creating elaborate blueprints and by then putting them into practice. In Lenin's view, scientific socialism rejects the notion that people can implement any kind of society they want whenever they wish it. He argues that the rise and fall of a mode of production is an objective process that takes place independently of the human will. Thus, whilst 'Marx is concerned with one thing only: to show, by rigid scientific investigation, the necessity of the given order of social relations', he also, 'proves the necessity of another order which must inevitably grow out of the preceding one

regardless of whether men believe in it or not, whether they are conscious of it or not':

Marx treats the social movement as a process of natural history, governed by laws not only independent of human will, consciousness and intentions, but, rather, on the contrary, determining the will, consciousness and intentions of men (CW 1: 166).

Lenin's determinism is informed by an Aristotelian teleology, which describes things in terms of their purpose, principle, or end goal. Aristotle (1924: 9-17) claimed that an acorn's intrinsic telos is to become an oak tree. This means that acorns, if given the proper conditions for growth, will always grow into oak trees. They can take only one path of development, and there is only one possible end form. In a similar manner, Lenin's determinism is committed to a teleological view of capitalist development, in which capitalist society passes through a series of predetermined stages, culminating in communism. Each successive phase is unavoidable in the sense that it necessarily unravels and prepares the elements of the next phase. Although it is human beings who carry out this process, their motivations and actions are determined by objective economic factors that are beyond their individual control.

Lenin's teleological determinism informs the arguments of his three chief works that chart the development of capitalism into socialism and communism. In the first of these texts, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, Lenin rejects the populist belief that it is possible to skip past

capitalism and build socialism straight away, for this is prohibited by the objective laws of history. He instead argues that the transition to socialism will be made only once capitalism has progressed through its usury, merchant, manufacturing and industrial stages of development. In the second of these works, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin argues that the final stage has arrived, and that the transition to socialism is therefore immanent, for he states that 'Capitalism in its imperialist stage drags the capitalists, against their will and consciousness, into some sort of a new social order, a transitional one from complete free competition to complete socialisation' (CW 22: 205). Finally, in the *State and Revolution* Lenin rejects the notion that it is possible to achieve fully-fledged communism straight away. He instead argues that all countries will first pass through a 'lower' socialist phase, which is necessary in order to develop the productive forces. It is only once socialism provides material abundance that the inevitable transition to the 'higher' phase of communism will be made. The main point of this teleological account is that the development of society is a phasal process that cannot be controlled. Thus Lenin concludes that 'the idea that knowledge can "create" universal forms, replace the primeval chaos by order... is the idea of idealist philosophy', as in his view, 'the world is matter moving in conformity to law, and our knowledge, being the highest product of nature, is in a position only to *reflect* this conformity to law' (CW 14: 169). Whilst it is possible to understand the laws governing the development of society, this knowledge does not grant the ability to control these laws.

Of course, the fact that a theory is determinist does not mean that the theory is unable to make any recommendations to the various actors involved. On the contrary, many determinist theories make recommendations. For instance, weather forecasts warn people about the weather, in order that they may take necessary precautions. People cannot control the weather, but they can control the impact that it has upon them. Lenin's theory of scientific socialism is a determinist theory of this kind. It predicts the fall of capitalism, and encourages forms of political activity that will smooth the process. This is what Marx (1954: 20) means when he states that it is both possible and desirable to 'shorten and lessen the birth-pangs' associated with the next phase of historical development. Indeed, a central tenet of Marxism more generally is the unity of theory and practice. Theory is only useful in so far as it aids political practice.

Lenin's belief that people can and should actively intervene in the objective development of history is an important distinction between Leninism and the orthodox Marxism of the second international (Stalin 1953: 83). Kautsky, the chief theoretical proponent of orthodox Marxism, promised that the future arrival of socialism was inevitable. He said nothing, however, about what was to be done. Kautsky's fatalist account of progress entailed a quietist politics. In effect, this meant that the revolutionary proletariat could do nothing except wait for the inexorable developments within the underlying economic structure to deliver the revolutionary transformation (Lichtheim 1961: 259-78). Socialism would eventually fall into the workers hands like a ripe apple from a tree, and it would require no conscious action on their part.

Lenin's determinism is not fatalist in the sense that he thinks socialism will arrive without any conscious activity. Lenin (CW 21: 71) does argue that 'Marx deduces the inevitability of the transformation of capitalist society into socialist society wholly and exclusively from the economic law of the development of contemporary society'. However, he does not believe that the collapse of capitalism inevitably leads straight to socialism. It instead presents a choice: 'either we go back to supreme rule by the capitalists, or forward towards real democracy, towards majority decisions' (CW 27: 365). Lenin argues that the realisation of socialism requires the revolutionary action of the working class (CW 1: 420). If the workers do not participate in the class struggle, then they will not be able to successfully take advantage of the opportunities given to them by the objective conditions. The inevitable arrival of socialism will take much longer, and involve more unnecessary suffering. Lenin's emphasis on the importance of the working class struggle, and on the developments in consciousness that this struggle fosters, defines his arguments with the orthodox Marxists, Mensheviks, and economists. It is highlighted in the debates over the role of the party in which his differences with Kautsky are distinct. This aspect of Lenin's thought militates against the quietist politics that Kautsky's orthodox Marxism promotes. Lenin explicitly rejects that position: 'Far from assuming fatalism, determinism in fact provides a basis for reasonable action' (CW 1: 420).

However, whilst Lenin's promotion of the class struggle rejects the passive fatalism of the second international, the political activism he advocates

remains determinist. Lenin argues that the workers can arrive at a revolutionary class-consciousness only through their self-activity in the class struggle, which cannot be directed by intellectuals (Stalin 1953: 85; CW 9: 52; CW 5: 25; CW 41: 419). Thus whilst he argues that 'our revolution is the great Russian revolution precisely because it has roused vast masses of the people to participation in making history', he maintains that 'It is not within our power either to direct the masses or restrain them to any great extent'. Lenin does, however, believe that intellectuals should attempt to anticipate the path of events. They 'can, after studying the actual situation and the relations between classes, foresee the inevitable trend of their historic activities, the main forms of their movement'. He also argues that that intellectuals should use this scientific knowledge to augment the spontaneous working class, by informing them, aiding their struggle, and by readying them for the impending revolution. They should try their best to 'enlighten the masses and prepare them for forms of the movement which, though imperceptible to the superficial observer... inexorably follow from the whole economic and political situation in the country' (CW 10: 507).

Due to his insistence that the workers will educate themselves through their own struggle, Lenin argues that this struggle cannot not be wilfully directed by the party. This also means that if the workers make bad decisions, then the revolutionary party has to make these bad decisions with them. Lenin's determinist emphasis on the independence of the working class movement compels Marxists to support their activities even when they know beforehand that these activities will not be successful. It was Lenin's determinism that led

to his exile following the disastrous July days uprising, an event that he thought would fail, but which he refused to explicitly oppose.

Lenin's theory of scientific socialism rejects the positivist assumption that science grants the ability to control the events that it predicts. It gives advice as to where people should build their homes, but it does not grant the power to prevent an earthquake. It is this determinism that prevents the theory from being abused by a scientific intellectual elite. It militates precisely against the forms of voluntarism that Leninism is often accused of introducing to the socialist movement.

In this respect it is worth noting that one of Lenin's main objectives in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* is to combat the positivist tendencies encroaching upon Marxism. He argues that 'to drag in' the ideas of Comte, 'is absurd', for he points out Marx 'contemptuously brushed Comtean "positivism" aside' (CW 14: 337). Lenin believes that 'Marxism rejects not what distinguishes one positivist from another, but what they have in common and what makes a philosopher a positivist instead of a materialist' he goes on to argue that the 'essence of the matter is the radical difference between materialism and the broad current of positivism, which *includes* Auguste Comte' (CW 14: 205). These definitive statements make it clear that Lenin's philosophy of science has nothing to do with positivism. The proper criticisms of positivistic currents in socialism can and should therefore be kept distinct from criticisms of Leninism.

The notion that Lenin was infatuated with Taylorist forms of scientific management and production is also a myth, for he wrote only two short articles on the Taylor system, comprising three pages in total. Due to the fact that Lenin's works constitute forty-five volumes, these two sources hardly prove his obsession with Taylorist forms of scientific management. In the second place, Lenin always took a critical view of Taylorism, which he saw to be an essentially capitalist invention. In his first article on the subject, *A "Scientific" System of Sweating*, Lenin criticises Taylorism for being anti-democratic, stating that 'It is not the democratic institutions that the European bourgeoisie is borrowing from America, nor political liberty, nor yet the republican political system, but the latest methods of exploiting the workers' (CW 19: 594). He then reiterates this criticism in his second article on the subject, *The Taylor System—Man's Enslavement by the Machine*, where he states that the increases in efficiency achieved under Taylorism are 'introduced to the detriment of the workers, for they lead to their still greater oppression and exploitation' (CW 20: 153).

After the revolution, however, Lenin does take a less dismissive view of the Taylor system in his article *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*. One of the more convincing explanations for Lenin's change of perspective during this period is provided by Liebman, (1975: 338) who suggests that the severity of the social and economic crisis in post revolutionary Russia, as well as the urgency of the problems that needed to be solved, limited the range of political solutions. The objective conditions did not encourage experimentation with labour techniques that were diametrically opposed to those laid down by

industrial capitalism. Liebman and Harding are mistaken, however, in arguing that Lenin desired the wholesale adoption of Taylorism, for he maintained his original view that many of its features were inhumane: 'the Taylor system, the last word of capitalism in this respect, like all capitalist progress, is a combination of the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements' (CW 27: 259). Due to the fact that Lenin saw Taylorism as a form of capitalism, Lenin argued that socialists should not adopt it wholesale, but that they should instead apply only 'what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system' (CW 27: 258). He called for the workers to combine the democratic form of socialist organisation with the benefits in productive efficiency that Taylorism granted:

The Taylor system —without its initiators knowing or wishing it— is preparing the time when the proletariat will take over all social production and appoint its own workers' committees for the purpose of properly distributing and rationalising all social labour (CW 20: 154).

Lenin argues that science should be utilised in the service of political and economic democracy. He never suggests that the principles of science should actually govern human society. It is for this reason that Leninism has little in common with the Taylorist society outlined in Zamyatin's dystopian novel.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Lenin's theory of scientific socialism does not violate, but affirms the democratic condition of political equality. In the first place, Lenin rejects the notion that science can only be understood by an intellectual elite. He argues that revolutionary consciousness develops through the class struggles in capitalism. The working class will educate, emancipate and rule over itself.

Lenin believes that Marxism is not only a science, but a proletarian science, in the sense that its targeted audience is the working class, and that it can be understood by the working class. Whilst Lenin argues that it is necessary for a party organisation to join the militant proletariat and supply it with organisational, theoretical and educative elements, he argues that it should not seek to suppress their spontaneous activity. Lenin also argues that the party must be controlled and directed by the workers themselves. This in turn denies any political inequality amongst people in the process of political change.

Leninism also rejects the claim that scientific theories grant control over events. Lenin's conception of scientific socialism is determinist theory. It predicts events, but does not grant control over them. Whilst Lenin's political activism encourages revolutionaries to take part in the class struggle, he argues that revolutionaries should not and cannot determine the course of this

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struggle. One of the great virtues of Lenin's scientific socialism is its commitment to political equality.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This dissertation examined Harding's specific reiteration of the now common claim, that Lenin's theory of scientific socialism is anti-democratic. It showed that this argument has been put forward not only by Lenin's liberal critics, as it is also a major criticism of Leninism from within the currents of Russian Bolshevism, Left Communism, and Western Marxism. Harding's arguments were rejected. It was shown that Lenin's theory of scientific socialism is compatible with democratic practice, and supports a democratic conception of socialism.

Chapter Three examined Harding's claim that Lenin's theory of scientific socialism violates epistemic uncertainty. According to Harding, Leninism violates this condition because it views Marxism as a monistic 'philosophy of certainty'. Lenin claimed to have established absolute truths through the use of science, and he therefore tolerated no alternative conceptions of the world.

Harding's claim was shown to be false. In the first place, Lenin defends a fallibilist conception of science in the text that supposedly showcases the epistemic certainty of Leninism, *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*. Lenin recognises that scientific knowledge makes no claim to completeness, but keeps building upon, rearranging, reformulating and modifying its theories and generalisations as new problems emerge.

Secondly, Lenin's fallibilist conception of philosophy argues that the propositions of dialectical materialism must be revised in accordance with new discoveries in the natural sciences. Lenin also highlights peculiar obstacles to certain knowledge in the social sciences that make them more fallible than the natural sciences. Lenin's purpose in stressing the continuity of the natural and social sciences is to stress the particular fallibilism of politics, and Marxist politics in particular.

It was then argued that Lenin's attitude towards the utopian socialists can be misunderstood if it is interpreted as a total rejection of utopianism. Lenin admires the utopian socialists and their lasting impact upon Marxism. Lenin's admiration for the Russian utopian Chernyshevsky promotes utopianism as a remedy to dogmatic tendencies in Marxism. Lenin's defence of dreaming in scientific socialism supports an open democratic enquiry into politics.

Chapter one concluded by arguing that Lenin's theory of scientific socialism is wrongly conflated with 'scientistic' socialism. This creates a choice between either a conception of socialism that is committed to democratic values such as epistemic uncertainty, or a conception of socialism that rejects the validity of democratic values all together. It was argued that this is a false choice that does not have to be made. Lenin's fallibilist conception of science does not entail a scientistic outlook. It is compatible with the democratic principle of epistemic uncertainty.

Chapter Four examined Harding's argument that Lenin's theory of scientific socialism violates a second condition for democratic decision making- political equality. This argument consists of two core elements. The first is that Lenin saw Marxism as a science, and he therefore argued that it could therefore only be understood by a few experts. The second argument is that Lenin's positivist conception of science grants the ability to control and manipulate events. Given both of these assumptions, Lenin argued that in order to maximise efficiency, society had to be governed by the elite intellectual experts who understood the laws of scientific socialism.

Lenin rejects Harding's first argument, that only the educated few can understand scientific socialism. Lenin's materialist theory of ideology argues that human ideas are determined by the economic base of society, and in particular, the class struggle. This denies the causal power of ideas, which in turn rejects the monopoly that intellectuals have over these ideas. The political effect of this is to deny any epistemic inequality between participants in the political process. According to Lenin, class-consciousness develops through the class struggle in capitalism. The workers will educate, liberate, and govern themselves.

In the second place Lenin views Marxism to be a proletarian science, in the sense that it is the product of the class struggle, and that its intended audience is the working class. Lenin therefore believes that the workers are in a special position to understand Marx's theories. This in turn denies any political inequality amongst people in the revolutionary process.

Lenin also rejects Harding's second argument, that scientific socialism grants control over events. Lenin's determinist interpretation of scientific socialism predicts events without granting control over them. Whilst Lenin's emphasis on the importance of the class struggle rejects the quietist politics that Kautsky's passive fatalism encourages, the activist politics that Lenin promotes remains determinist. The party can only aid the working class, rather than attempt to coerce it. It is this determinism that prevents scientific socialism from being abused by a revolutionary scientific elite.

Leninism, which views Marxism to be a science, is not anti-democratic. It does not violate, but affirms epistemic uncertainty and political equality. If the socialist movement of the twentieth century did in fact decline into dogmatism and dictatorship, then this decline cannot be attributed to Lenin's theory of scientific socialism.

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